

## The Massey Murder - © 2007

Woodbury Massey, born in New York in 1799, was one of the first of Dubuque's leading citizens, and related by marriage to the Langworthy brothers. In fact, he and James Langworthy carried dispatches between General Dodge and General Scott during the Blackhawk War. Woodbury and his wife and child were one of the first families to cross over from Illinois in 1833 to settle the area. He helped to organize the first Methodist church in Iowa, and served as a church trustee and as a justice of the peace. Woodbury was known as an educated, good-natured, forthright, honest, and popular businessman.

Woodbury bought a mining claim known as the Irish Lot, but found that a William Smith and his son, Bill, Jr., also claimed title. Apparently, the Smiths were not forthright, honest, or popular people. When Woodbury, the Sheriff, and a land agent went to evict the Smiths from the claim on September 7th, 1835, they shot and killed him. Woodbury was buried in the Jackson Graveyard, but was later moved to Linwood Cemetery where he lies today.

But that is not the end of the story. The Smiths were arrested and tried for the murder in the circuit court in Mineral Point, Wisconsin. But the Smiths' lawyer argued successfully that the court had no jurisdiction for any crime committed in Iowa. The Smiths were released on a technicality. Some time after that, the elder Smith happened to walk by the Galena harness shop owned and operated by Woodbury Massey's younger brother, Henry. Henry grabbed his gun, went outside and shot Smith dead. Henry was never arrested or charged with the killing, and would become one of Wisconsin's leading citizens.

When Bill Smith, Jr. heard about his father's murder, he went to Dubuque and vowed to kill the first Massey he met. Unfortunately for him, it was Woodbury's sister, Louisa. She had heard about the threat, and decided to do something about it herself. She wore a heavy cloak and bonnet, and with the help of a young boy tracked down Bill Jr. at Guerin's store, on the northeast corner of 3rd and Main. She challenged Jr., and when he reached for his gun, she pulled out one of her own and shot him in the chest. Thinking that he was dead, Louisa hid in several private homes until she made her escape to Galena, where she would eventually marry S.J. Williamson. However, Bill Jr. was not dead. A wad of papers in his shirt pocket stopped the bullet. But he was so unnerved by the incident, he never again attempted to carry out his revenge.

When the committee was formed to name the counties in Iowa, Louisa County was named in honor of the brave sister of Woodbury Massey.