



Frontier Folklore & Pioneer Prose from Harvey County

by Darren McMannis

Caring for the Children: An 1886 Neighborhood Watch

In 1886, a woman punished her little daughter in what was described simply as being “in a brutal manner” while her husband gave one of her little boys a terrible beating. Both are children from a former husband. It is not known what motivated the punishment - this being a time when physical punishment administered in love was considered a good and normal thing - but this was known throughout the neighborhood as regularly being excessive. It wasn't the first time, and various neighbors had attempted to reason with the parents before. But the neighbors who heard the children's cries this particular evening in July decided it would be the last.

Three neighbor men masked themselves, grabbed baseball bats, and gained an entrance into the home with a view to visiting vengeance upon the husband and wife, to give them a taste of their own medicine, and to remind them that harsh treatment of children would not be tolerated in their neighborhood. The husband, being the courageous man that he was, left his wife and children behind and took off running and was met with a few blows of the clubs before escaping. The wife was attacked with clubs and severely injured about the neck and shoulders, and her right arm was broken in two places.

The neighbors then let it be known that will no longer have any sympathy for the two parents until such time as they take appropriate responsibility and care for their children. They further made it clear that, should the parents impose excessive punishment on the children again, the neighborhood would all together return with clubs, hot tar, and feathers, and take the children away to a proper home once and for all.

If we only knew our neighbors so well today....

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