

Bay Named for Murder Victim

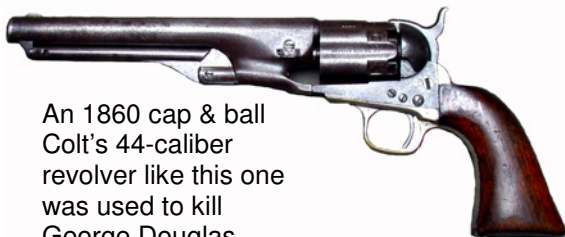
By Dr. James D. Henderson

George C. Douglas or Douglass as he sometimes spelled it, came to Pelican Township around 1900 from Swan Lake Township in Pocahontas County, Iowa. He was granted a homestead in Section 10. It was said that at one time he taught in an Indian school in South Dakota and was also a dean of the pharmacy department of an Iowa university, although neither of these could be confirmed later. It was thought he came to the north woods on account of his failing health. His homestead bordered the southwest part of the body of water now known as Cree Bay, but called Douglas Bay in the 1920s.

Douglas, aged 55, was a well-to-do bachelor farmer in the local area and made a specialty of raising seed corn.

In November 1911 William Pierson, 31 years old and an unemployed bookbinder from Minneapolis, moved into a shack down the lakeshore about three-quarters of a mile away from George Douglas' place. According to the contents in a letter Douglas had recently sent to his sister Mrs. Mersena Edwards in Havelock, Iowa, he was concerned that Pierson was hanging around his place and asking for money and that he expected trouble.

It was early Friday evening March 22, 1912 when Billy Pierson approached the Douglas homestead. He could see light coming through the second floor window of the barn where George Douglas had his living quarters and knew he was home. Slowly he climbed the ladder to the second story, pushed open the trap door and confronted Douglas. He wanted money and Douglas wouldn't give it to him. They fought and finally Pierson seized Douglas' 44-caliber Colt's revolver and shot him in the back of the head, the ball exiting out of the forehead. He then proceeded to break his skull with the butt of the pistol and a hammer.



An 1860 cap & ball Colt's 44-caliber revolver like this one was used to kill George Douglas.

**BRUTAL MURDER
NEAR PEQUOT**

George C. Douglas, Living Near
Pelican Lake, the Victim.

Wm. Pierson, a Minneapolis Book Binder,
is Held for the Crime.

On Friday evening last George C. Douglas, a bachelor farmer making his home on a claim six miles east of Pequot, on Pelican lake, was found murdered in his house. He had been badly beaten, his skull was fractured, and his brains were oozing out upon the floor. Douglas was about 55 years

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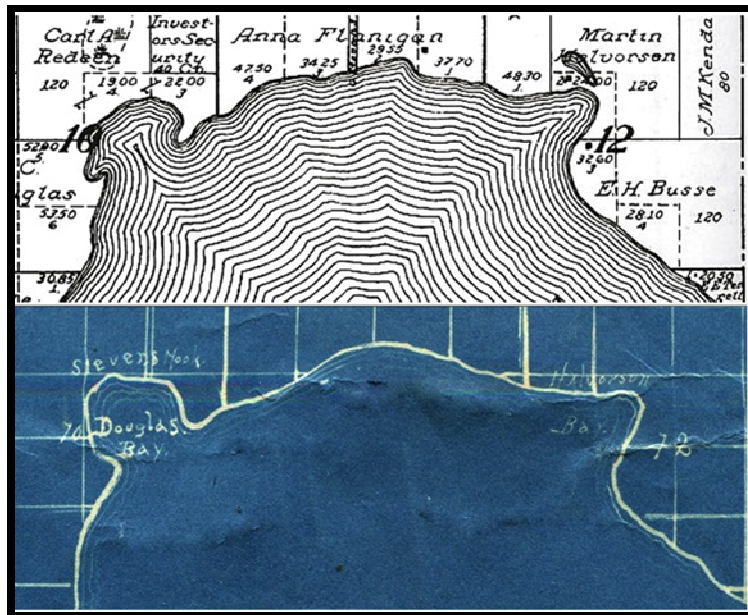
Grabbing the revolver, the hammer and all of Douglas' cash he ran to his shack down the lakeshore. Later that night Pierson filled with remorse and fear by what he'd done, he went to the farm home of Martin Halverson

about a mile east of the Douglas place and reported that he gone to visit Douglas and thought he was dead, finding him lying on the floor of his cabin “kicking like a rabbit.” Halverson became suspicious and made a citizen’s arrest and took Pierson into Pequot Lakes to Constable Chris Knudson. Having no jail in Pequot, Pierson was detained under guard over night in the hotel and the next day taken by train to Brainerd where he was lodged in the County Jail.

At the time of his arrest Pierson made a verbal confession, but the next day he recanted. He confessed again at his inquest in District Court a week after the murder and waived his right to counsel. Judge Stanton sentenced him to life in prison at Stillwater. It was revealed that William Pierson’s mother had spent 7 years in the hospital for the insane in Rochester and had been released in 1907. Pierson’s younger brother Ernest was also a patient in the Rochester asylum in 1910. Mental instability seems to have run in the family. Billy Pierson, spent the next 32 years of his remaining life in the insane ward in Stillwater Prison or in the state hospital for the criminally insane in St. Peter.

Today two small lakes near Pelican bear the Douglas name, but those that live around Cree Bay now know the grisly tale of murder and mayhem that happened a century ago near what was then called Douglas Bay.

The author is collecting information and old photos of resorts and lake views around Pelican Lake for future articles in the PLA newsletter. If you have photos or information you’d like to share with our readers please email Jim Henderson at james7122@gmail.com.



(Top) North portion of 1913 Pelican Township Plat Map showing the George Douglas farm in Section 10 and the Martin Halverson farm in Section 12. (Bottom) Circa 1920 Haerberle-Foster map identifies the location of Douglas Bay now called Cree Bay.