

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

Among the most haunting and poignant of the unsolved mysteries of the Menominee Iron Range is that of the disappearance of Willie Dickinson, the five-year-old son of Captain William Edmund and Elizabeth (Sargent) Dickinson, on the afternoon of November 1, 1881, in Commonwealth, Marinette County, Wisconsin. The effect of this tragedy on the frantic parents and the sympathetic residents of the communities involved in the search for the lost boy is best captured in the actual articles which appeared in a variety of newspapers for decades, as the family heroically followed any clue which might lead to the recovery of their missing son and brother. – William John Cummings

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 45 [Saturday, November 5, 1881], page 3, columns 3-4

THE sad affair of the loss of Supt. W.E. Dickinson's little son Willie will be found in the Commonwealth column. Up to this morning no tidings have been heard of him. Different rumors are rife, and some hint at kidnapping, but the disappearance, so far, is as much a mystery as ever. Up to the present time the search mentioned elsewhere has been continued. The following is the description in the hand-bills: Is six years old; had on an ulster overcoat, black cap, short grey pants and red stockings, answers to the name of Willie Dickinson. Large rewards are offered for his recovery, dead or alive. If alive the reward will be paid and no questions asked.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 45 [Saturday, November 5, 1881], page 3, column 5

Our usually quiet village was startled on Tuesday evening [Tuesday, November 1, 1881] by the report that Capt. W.E. Dickinson's son, Willie, aged about six years, was missing. The news spread rapidly from house to house, and was quickly communicated to Florence. Men turned out readily and the woods in the vicinity were examined without finding any trace of him. The weather had been unusually fine during the day, but at night a snowstorm set in, and Wednesday was chilly, with snow falling at intervals. Everybody in both places who could leave turned out on the search. Men went out on foot, on horseback and in wagons, and a partially systematic hunt was made. The steam whistles of both the Florence and Commonwealth engine houses were blown at short intervals nearly all the time, day and night. In the event of the boy being found a succession of short sounds were to be blown. The shades of night brought no tidings of the lost one, and the search was renewed on the following day. Capt. Dickinson had meanwhile offered a large reward for the recovery of the boy whether dead or alive, which was supplemented by an additional offer of \$100 by the citizens of Florence, and still later by another \$100 from Manager Tuttle of the mine. About one o'clock on the same day, Thursday, a largely attended meeting was held at Juneau's hall, when it was decided to organize a more systematic method of search. Mr. Alex. Kempt was appointed to take entire charge of the movement, and a captain was selected to take charge of each ten men. Mr. Kempt assigned each captain and his ten men to take a specified course, so as to examine the entire ground adjacent. This was performed in a thorough and systematic manner. The orders were to station the men and travel about a rod apart, and the different squads apportioned so that the entire territory

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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would be carefully looked over. Other parties had been previously sent as far as Bad Water crossing and Lake Chicagon, as a rumor was current that a number of Indians had been seen in town on Tuesday, and there was a bare possibility that he might have been abducted by them. Night again closed in without any word of comfort for the aching hearts who waited in their pleasant home for tidings of their loved and lost one. The search is still being pursued. The sympathy of the entire community is with the grief stricken parents, and many have been the prayers that have been offered for the recovery of their darling boy.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 46 [Saturday, November 12, 1881], page 3, column 2

MR. J.F. SHAFER has now a band of Indians, [sic] searching for Capt. Dickinson's lost son. The citizens have raised a purse for the purchase of provisions for them, and should they be successful in the search they are to be suitably rewarded. Although the general opinion inclines to the belief that the boy has been abducted, yet Mr. Shafer and the numerous friends of Capt. Dickinson's family are not willing to leave anything undone, when there is the least possible change of solving the mystery. Circulars, a copy of which appears in this issue, have been sent to the chief of police of the different cities around, and to different parties in the several towns adjacent, so that no means that suggest themselves, [sic] will be left untried, for the recovery of the child if living or for the finding of the remains, if dead.

FLORENCE MINING NEWS, Florence, Wis.

I avail myself of the medium of your paper, [sic] to tender the heartfelt thanks of myself and Mrs. Dickinson, [sic] to all the citizens of Commonwealth and Florence, [sic] for their active kindness to us in our late misfortune. If it were possible we would thank each one personally, [sic] for their active interests; but as in the endeavor to do so, we know we should have to thank each and every person in the two villages, we trust you will accept from us, through the medium of our local paper, our sincere and earnest thanks, [sic] for your generous labor, [sic] in searching for our lost child.

The last authentic information of the child, [sic] is about 3:30 P.M., Nov. 1st. Since then not a trace of him has been found.

Very Truly Yours,

W.E. DICKINSON.

Commonwealth Mine, November 9th, 1881.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 46 [Saturday, November 12, 1881], page 3, column 3

WILLIE W. DICKINSON'S description: Age six years, hair very dark brown, thin and fine, with tendency to grow in a point at forehead and just below each temple towards the cheek – *not* inclined to curl, penciled eyebrows, the left one with a curve in the center higher than the right one. Blue grey eyes which almost close when laughing, one ear round at the top, the other as if it had been pinched at the rim on top. Ears good size and well set to the head; not spreading. Teeth grow quite wide apart, are small, has lost one on lower jaw front, and another one coming in its place, several teeth loose in front which he may soon lose, to be replaced by second teeth. Skin very white especially on the body.

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Large toe on each foot as if swollen and feet apt to blister by rough shoes or much walking. Is quick and energetic in motion, impulsive and quick to resent any indignity or wrong, shy with strangers and not very talkative with those not known to him, very observant and with excellent memory of places, often carries his hands deep in his pants pockets, is fond of playing horse and inclined to tease people playfully, has a decided way of saying "no" with rising inflection of voice when he refuses to do anything, has a merry joyous disposition naturally which might become a sulky one by ill treatment. Is a very affectionate boy easily touched by kindness. Is large for his age.

DRESS: –High neck long sleeved white merino shirt, cotton flannel drawers, red mottled stockings, machine knit, Grey flannel shirt waist, with light pink stripes, brown (mottled) knee pants. Wore No. 11 shoes laced in front with copper toes. Black cloth cap flat on top with visor, ear pieces which he wears often inside the cap, black ulster coat, well worn, mended at the left hand pocket, frayed a good deal at the edges and button holes, and a pair of bright red mittens in pocket, attached together with dark tape.

Any communication with the view of the restoration of the child may be addressed to:

W.E. DICKINSON

Commonwealth, Wisconsin.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 46 [Saturday, November 12, 1881], page 3, column 4

Commonwealth Currency.

Nothing has yet been heard of Capt. Dickinson's son Willie and the case is as much an impenetrable [*sic – impenetrable*] mystery as ever.

...

J.F. Shafer, [*sic*] started his Indians into the woods on Thursday, [*sic*] in search after the lost boy. It is sincerely to be hoped they will be successful.

...

A meeting was held by the miners, on the evening of Nov. 7th, when it was decided to raise a miners [*sic – miners'*] purse of \$300, to be given to the party, or parties, who will find Capt. W.E. Dickinson's son dead or alive. It is a handsome offer and shows how much they esteem their unfortunate captain and his family. The money has been all subscribed.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 50 [Saturday, December 10, 1881], page 3, column 3

Commonwealth Currency.

Nothing has been heard of Willie Dickinson.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 51 [Saturday, December 17, 1881], page 3, column 4

WE are informed that an attempt was made, [*sic*] on Friday, [*sic*] of last week, [*sic*] to capture a daughter of Captain W.E. Dickinson, [*sic*] by two men, [*sic*] in a buggy. They drove along the road as the school-children [*sic – school children*] were returning home, and inquired of them, [*sic*] where the captain's daughter was. Fortunately she was not with the other girls and after some swearing they disappeared.

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Whether this has anything to do with the disappearance of Willie Dickinson, or not, we do not pretend to say. But whatever the object was, it must have been detestible [sic – detestable], as the men were evidently rough strangers. In any event a double barreled shot gun [sic – shotgun], loaded with buck shot [sic – buckshot], would have been about the right kind of a thing to have interviewed them with.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume II, Number 3 [Saturday, January 14, 1882], page 3, column 2

SUPT. W.E. DICKINSON, of the Commonwealth mine, offers a reward of \$3,000, for the recovery of his son Willie W. Dickinson, who was lost or stolen, [sic] on the first day of November last. He also offers liberal sums for information, which will assist him in getting the boy back, if alive, or for the body, if dead. It is a sad case and we sincerely hope that the mystery will be speedily unraveled.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 19 [Saturday, May 5, 1883], page 1, column 6

THE sad case of the mysterious disappearance of little Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], of Commonwealth, which occurred one year ago the first of last November, is revived to a certain extent by a letter received by Capt. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] from a man in Fargo, Da. [Dakota] The writer gave his name, good references, and asked for four pictures of the missing child. Other than this he was very mysterious and failed to exactly state whether he had a definite clue or not, but hinted to that effect. The captain is assured of his good intentions and will send the

pictures. Capt. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] is still firm in the belief that his little son is alive and was taken from him by some fiend in human form. Every parent in the land will join us in the heartfelt wish that the child is still alive, in good hands, and the hope that the great Omnipotent will soon be pleased to restore him to the arms of his fond father and mother.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 20 [Saturday, May 12, 1883], page 1, columns 4-6; and page 4, column 3 [with cut of Willie Dickinson]

STILL A MYSTERY!

The Awful Absence of Little Willie Dickinson. The Matter Revived by a Dakota Clue, and the Affair Revamped for the Readers of the News.

As stated in the last issue of the NEWS, the terrible mysterious disappearance of little Willie Dickinson has been revived by several fresh clues, or information from parties who think they have clues. The foremost of these is from a man at Fargo, Dakota. In pursuance of his promise to send the man pictures and descriptions of the lost little one, Capt. Dickinson called at the NEWS office during the week and had printed 300 circulars, containing a cut of the child and a full description of him when last seen, including his characteristics and personal peculiarities.

Willie W. Dickinson, son of Capt. W.E. Dickinson, of the Commonwealth, wealth [sic] mine, left the school house at Common- [sic – Commonwealth,] Wis., to go home, on the first day of November,

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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1881, in the afternoon. He was then not quite six years old. Willie stopped on his way at the house of his uncle, which was near by [*sic – nearby*], and got his overcoat which he had left there, and saying to his aunt that he was going home, left the house and started in the direction of his father's residence, which was not far. A teamster from the mine met him and asked him to ride, but the little fellow refused, saying he was in a "hurry to get home to mamma." The two parted, and turning once the driver saw the child proceeding homeward as fast as his little feet could carry him. Just before the teamster met the boy he encountered two strange men in the roadway, who sneaked into the recesses of the thick woods as if to avoid being seen. From their attire, which was better than ordinary, no one would infer that they belonged to the working class. It was about 3:30 o'clock in the afternoon when the teamster met the child, and in about eight minutes afterward Willie's sister Lottie, on horseback in company with a man servant, passed along the same road but saw nothing of either the little one or the strangers. It was always the habit of Willie to go directly home from school and he knew the road well. In fact there was but one other road, a short one, leading to a Frenchman's farm, who knew the little fellow and who says he never knew him to go in that direction at all. He had a strong dislike to going into the woods, unless with his father, and after school was always in a hurry to get to his mamma. In fact the evening was a dreary one, the wind sighed a requiem through the branches of the leafless giants of the forest, and the timber presented no attractions to lure a little child that was hurrying homeward, every energy bent towards getting to those who loved him and whom he loved. Willie was difficult to approach in a familiar manner, and was intensely shy with strangers. It was full 6 o'clock before those

at the Dickinson household commenced really to worry about the absence of the little one, but a strange feeling quickly enveloped the minds of all and in a very brief space of time they admitted he must be lost, and aid was quickly summoned. By half-past six o'clock the woods were full of men, and the mines, outbuildings, pits, and in fact everything and every place were being thoroughly searched. Those anxious in the hunt for the dear little lost one numbered at least 300. They remained out all night, returning next morning heartsick and discouraged, without having found the slightest trace. The following day the people of both Commonwealth and Florence turned out *en masse* with renewed energies and with a generous kindness which will never be forgotten, searched for the child or traces of him. For days this hunt was faithfully and systematically kept up, with a fruitless result. Each man seemed to put as much practical sympathy into the work as if it was [*sic – were*] his own son instead of a neighbor's. When at last it became evident that the child was not to be found in the woods, and the search was sadly and reluctantly [*sic – reluctantly*] abandoned, small parties of men went volunteering into the woods. Then Mr. Shaefer took a party of Indians – the liberal people of Florence provisioning them – and went in search again with no result but the conviction that the boy never went into the woods.

Meanwhile the family accumulated evidence that the child was stolen and that it was a premeditated plan. Indeed, a Commonwealth boy named Sullivan claims still that he saw the two men throw a bag over Willie's head and carry him off. In January letters were received from a party in Chicago, who made the statement that he met in the Chicago & North-Western railway depot a man and two women with a child answering the description of Willie

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Dickinson. This party had read the advertised description of Willie in a Chicago paper. He wrote the trio got into the train with his party which was going to Kenosha, professionally. The man and one woman got off at Kenosha also. There the other woman was joined by a man, tall and light complexioned, who gave the first man a roll of bills. He, the other woman and boy, then got back into the train and went on. The Chicago party knew not where, but heard talk of their intention to go to Ludington, Mich. In the cars the boy came to the party who wrote to Mr. Dickinson, and asked for some water to drink. When asked his name he said "Willie" – and was about to tell the other name when the woman with him snatched him off the Chicago's man [*sic – Chicago man's*] knee and said sharply, "His name is Charlie, and I'm taking him to his uncle and aunt, his father and mother are dead." The boy stoutly denied this and said "my name is Willie, I tell you." This Chicago man then wrote to Mr. Dickinson, who at once sent his wife to Chicago to interview the writer. He – the writer – offered to hunt up the parties he met, purporting to have a clue to their whereabouts, but demanded \$500 in advance for expenses. After due consideration Mrs. D. decided that unless the guarantee was better than the party seemed able to give, that unless he really did have a clue, the money should not be advanced. Subsequent consultation with the family lawyer and Mr. Dickinson confirmed this decision and the other party would agree to no other terms. In March a letter was received by Mr. Dickinson from a gentleman in Culpepper, West Virginia, who had seen an advertisement and picture of Willie in the Police Gazette, saying there was a boy boarding near Culpepper who answered the description in all particulars. He assented when asked if his name was Willie Dickinson. It was at once agreed that Mrs. Dickinson should go to Virginia.

On arriving there she found that the parties had in some mysterious manner been notified of her departure from Commonwealth, and her intended destination and left. The story told her was that in the last part of November a man named William Morris arrived at Brandy Station, six miles from Culpepper, with a boy about six years old and took board for the boy at a house isolated, and then went off to work on a farm, grubbing, etc. He hailed from all over the United States, and was a wood chopper. Mrs. Dickinson, disappointed at not finding the child there, determined to find all she could about the matter, yet had no hopes of it being her boy. By careful inquiries she found there was a pair of small pants left by the parties in their hasty retreat. The moment she saw the clothing she recognized them as the ones once worn by Willie, but not the ones he had on when he was stolen. Then by dint of knowledge of Morris's character through inquiries she found that he had a tintype taken of himself; this she finally got and began tracing him up. She found he had taken a ticket for Washington, D.C., and traced him there beyond a doubt. She tried to get the police interested, and telegraphed the Allan Pinkerton detective office in Philadelphia to send a good man to her assistance, and until he arrived she watched night and day every train going to New York, where Morris had said he was going.

At last, needing in her desperate search a kindly word, a gentleman's influence, a woman's sympathy, she called upon Hon. Jay A. Hubbell, an old friend of her husband. At once with a promptness which added greatly to the kindness of the hospitality, Mr. and Mrs. Hubbell came to Mr. [*sic – Mrs.*] Dickinson and took her to their house, where everything was done to comfort her and help her in [*the*] search. Mrs. Dickinson had a large number of

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Morris' pictures taken from the tintype and distributed to conductors, brakemen and newsmen on every train going out of Washington. Every postman delivering letters in the city had one and every police officer was furnished a copy. When the Pinkerton detective came, he proved a most efficient man. He and Mrs. D. worked together. It was decided that it would be wiser for the poor, anxious mother to return home and give out very publicly that she had given up the hunt, thinking that if Morris was in Washington he would be off his guard and come out of hiding. They had made arrangements to have him captured at once if he came out.

After being home in Commonwealth a week she returned to Washington and Culpepper, then went to the house where the child had boarded. The people there at once recognized the picture of Willie as the boy who had been with them. The boy had said his father was not "that man Mr. Morris," and described a man closely resembling Mr. Dickinson as his father, and spoke of his mother's ponies and two other ponies of his father's, giving the names and colors of each accurately. The lad played mining, and made a childish plan of his father's house at Commonwealth, also speaking of certain rooms in the house and giving their position (relatively) correctly, and giving his brother's correct name. The child seemed very sad and at times as if puzzled about some thoughts of his own which he seemed afraid to speak of. Mrs. Dickinson now determined to find that boy at any cost. She traced Morris through Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and Pennsylvania, *[sic - .]* In Maryland she heard that Morris had threatened that if she ever got up to him he would put a bullet through her head. This seemed to her a more convincing proof than ever that Morris had her boy and wished to avoid her. This, therefore, made her more determined to

find him. Having finally lost all clue she went to Rochester, N.Y., having heard through an old chum of his that he intended going there to put the boy to board while he went to sea, bound for Scotland probably. Mrs. Dickinson's idea was to rest at Rochester and watch every incoming train for Morris's arrival, feeling certain that she was ahead of him. She left her first detective in Washington and sent for another to assist her in Rochester.

In about a week she received news that a man answering Morris' description had arrived at Canondauga *[sic - Canandaigua]* with a child. She sent her detectives there at once and having studied up every characteristic of Morris' she knew his probable actions. According to instructions the detective arrested the child who had been put into an orphan asylum, and afterward arrested Morris when he came to visit the child, and telegraphed Mrs. Dickinson^[,] who came immediately: *[sic - .]* As the boy entered the gate of the house where Mrs. Dickinson stopped on her arrival in Canondauga *[sic - Canandaigua]*, the mother's heart beat fast, for she was sure it was her dearly beloved child. The walk, the manner, look, everything, was her boy's! She started to her feet in her great joy, rushed to the door, opened it, and God only can know the agony she felt when she found it was not her Willie! There was to all but a mother a startling resemblance, but it was certainly not her boy. Close questioning soon showed her that while the boy had been well drilled as to what he was to say, he was probably not the boy who had been in Virginia. Many of the marks on this boy answered to those on Willie, but they were in different positions. In a subsequent examination of Morris he acknowledged that he had been in Wisconsin and Michigan. Mrs. D. went to see Morris after he was released and accosted him on the street. He at once,

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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after she introduced herself, began telling wherein the two boys failed to resemble each other. So accurate was his account of details that Mrs. D. decided that he had certainly seen her boy. She asked permission to have a picture taken of the lad and Morris agreed. He said the reason he had threatened to shoot Mrs. D. was he thought she was the mother of the boy. The The [sic] boy afterwards said, "That man Mr. Morris says he can get your boy Willie Dickinson for a heap of money." Morris heard him say that, and immediately asked for a private interview with Mrs. D. [during] which, being granted, he made a proposition to return the boy for \$3,000, if Mrs. D. would swear that they could raise no more. Mrs. D. was to identify the boy, and promise not to prosecute or appear against Morris. When asked when he would return the child he said that there were two other parties in it and he had to fix it up with them. He said he had "been in jobs like that before," and told the whole *modus operandi* of kidnapping children. He ended by saying he asked no money in advance, but would claim the reward when he delivered the boy and it must be paid in cash; also any interference or hurrying with him would not benefit the family, as he could then put the child where he could never be found. Mrs. D. then found she could do no more, so presenting him with a copy of his own picture left him, and sadly returned to her family.

On her return Captain Dickinson having heard a rumor that a white child was seen with a wandering band of Pottawatomie Indians who had been seen in Florence at just the time Willie disappeared, caused competent scouts to be sent among them to search the story to its foundation. It was discovered to be an idle tale without any foundation.

The woods and test pits around and about Commonwealth have been carefully

and thoroughly hunted through by trained woodsmen and every possible place looked into; neither money, time, nor energy has been spared to trace this saddest of mysteries to its solution. If kind, generous sympathy and prayerful wishes of numerous friends availed to find the boy, he would have been home long ago. The family still believe [sic – believes] in his possible return, while the captain is sure the child was kidnapped. It is the hope of all that the Fargo clue will develop into something. There are many who firmly believe the child was lost in the woods, notwithstanding that the most thorough search failed to discover a single trace. By this time Willie, if alive, is about seven years old. He had dark brown hair which was thin and fine, with a tendency to grow to a point on his forehead, and just below each temple. His hair was not inclined to curl in the slightest. He had penciled eyebrows, the left one with a curve in the center higher than the right one; blue grey eyes which almost close when laughing, one ear round at the top, the other as if it had been pinched at the rim on top; ears good size and well set to the head; not spreading; teeth quite wide apart, small, lost one on lower jaw front, and another one coming in its place; several teeth loose in front which he has no doubt lost before this; skin very white, especially on the body; large toe on each foot as if swollen and feet apt to blister by rough shoes or much walking; is quick and energetic in motion, impulsive and quick to resent any indignity or wrong, shy with strangers and not very talkative with those not known to him, very observant and with excellent memory of places, often carries his hands deep in his pant's [sic – pants] pockets, is fond of playing horse and inclined to tease people playfully; has a decided way of saying "no" with rising inflection of voice when he refuses to do anything; has a merry, joyous

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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disposition naturally which might become a sulky one by ill-treatment; very affectionate; easily touched by kindness; is large for his age. A reward of \$3,000 is offered for his recovery.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 21 [Saturday, May 19, 1883], page 1, column 5

CAPT. W.E. DICKINSON, of the Commonwealth, wishes to say that he has caused a thorough search of the surrounding woods, pits and swamps, to be made this spring in the hopes of finding some clue to the lost Willie, but without avail. So carefully was the ground gone over that, [sic] a broad-axe [sic – broad axe] which disappeared a year ago, [sic] was found hidden in the hollow of a basswood tree, covered with brush. It really seems that if the child was lost in the woods some trace, at least, could be discovered.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 22 [Saturday, May 26, 1883], page 1, column 5

A SHORT time ago Capt. W.E. Dickinson received a letter from southern Kansas, requesting him to come there and get his missing boy. The party writing was very confident that he had seen the boy in the neighborhood. It being desirable to avoid the expense of fruitless jounies [sic – journeys], a correspondence by telegraph and mail, [sic] was opened and a series of questions were sent to the party, asking him to interview the boy and forward his replies. The replies have just come to hand, and none of them being correct as to family names or home surroundings, the Kansas boy cannot be Willie Dickinson.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 29 [Saturday, July 21, 1883], page 8, column 1

Personal and Social.

–Mrs. Capt. W.E. Dickinson and daughters Laura and Christie, [sic] left on Wednesday for New York, Stamford, Conn., and Boston, to be gone a year. Mrs. Dickinson's health has been poor for some time and the trip is made in the hope of benefitting it. Miss Laura has just returned from Lake Forest seminary. During their absence Capt. Dickinson will "batch" [live like a bachelor] and make sundry improvements on his fine residence in Commonwealth.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 32 [Saturday, August 11, 1883], page 1, columns 3-4

A bright little boy named Dunn, living at Commonwealth, reported on Wednesday, [sic] that while picking blue-berries [sic – blueberries] on the plains near Spread Eagle and just south of Le Page's, he had been greatly frightened by discovering a heap of bones and some boy's clothing. It did not take long for the report to spread and it was soon connected with the sad disappearance of little Willie Dickinson. Capt. Dickinson sent men to the scene, under the direction of District Attorney McIntosh and Constable Bush, but they failed to discover anything whatever, although thorough search was made. This should not be allowed to drop. The very proof that nothing was found indicates the affair to be one that should be followed up. The boy surely did not fabricate the story, as he had no reason therefor, but he

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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undoubtedly saw something. This something should be found if it “takes all summer.” It is very difficult for a man to locate himself a second time in the wilds, not to speak of a little 9-year-old boy and it is quite probable the searchers did not traverse the territory where the alarming discovery was made.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 34 [Saturday, August 25, 1883], page 1, column 3

Nothing further has been heard from the alleged finding of a diminutive skeleton and a bundle of small clothes, *[sic]* by the Dunn child, *[sic]* near Spread Eagle. There are those who firmly believe the child saw all it *[sic – he]* claimed, that what it *[sic – he]* saw were the remains of little Willie Dickinson and that sufficient search in the vicinity has not been made.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 41 [Saturday, October 14 *[sic – 13]*, 1883], page 1, column 6

WILLIE DICKINSON

New Clues Being Followed UP and Important Disclosures Expected Soon to be made in the Case – A Reward of £500 Offered for Him Alive in England – Prospects of Soon Finding the Long Lost Littleone *[sic]*.

A cablegram to Milwaukee yesterday stated that £500 sterling was offered at

Cornwall, England, for the recovery of the lost Willie Dickinson alive, and adding that it was thought the lost boy was some place in the duchy of Cornwall. The cablegram was transmitted to the NEWS by special telegram and a reporter was at once detailed to interview Capt. W.E. Dickenson *[sic – Dickinson]*, of the Commonwealth mine, father of the lost littleone *[sic – little one]*. He is greatly surprised at the news of his operations in England reaching this part of the country so soon, as he said the reward had just been published there. “Yes, I am following up an English clue,” he said after recovering himself, “about which I wish to say but little, as I might compromise parties unwarrantably. Suffice to say, on the publication in the MINING NEWS of the discovery of bones near here, thought to be the remains of Willie, we had it shown to a convict, who left this neighborhood about the time my boy was taken and he exclaimed with agitation: ‘Those bones are not of Willie Dickinson. He was taken to Cornwall and is there now!’ This was said to a fellow prisoner who we used as a decoy and it is all the clue we have. I am by no means sure Willie is in Cornwall, or I should be on my way there now. If we find him there it will surprise me greatly, but I do not think it improbable at all. I am following up clues that lead in another direction, by which I am almost sure I will find Willie in this country, but I cannot speak of them, as the utmost secrecy is necessary. Also I have detectives in Mexico, shadowing a woman there, who has a boy answering to Willie’s description. I expect important disclosures soon, by which I expect to find my son, but as I said before, it would not do to make the matter public at present.”

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume III, Number 49 [Saturday, December 8, 1883], page 1, column 4

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

LOST WILLIE

An Additional Chapter Added to the Many That Have Been Written About the Mystery of Little Willie Dickinson – Copy of the Publication of Reward offered in England – Captain Dickinson Hears That Willie is Alive and Well – Close on to him, he is Moved Again – Beliefs Never Before Made Public – Trapper Simpkin's Story – The Eccentric Military Hunter and his Wife – An Interesting Recital – The Veil still Unpierced.

From the West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser, published at Truro, England, obtained through the courtesy of Prof. Frank Scadden, of Crystal Falls, the following publication of the reward offered for the lost Willie Dickinson, is taken:

**£500 REWARD.
FOR CHILD BROUGHT TO CORN-
WALL FROM THE UNITED
STATES.**

The Undersigned will pay the above REWARD for the RESTORATION ALIVE of WILLIE W. DICKINSON, stolen from Commonwealth, Wisconsin, U.S.A., November 1st, 1881, and taken to Cornwall the latter part of that year or early in 1882. A proportionate part of the above reward will be paid for any information that may help in the recovery of the boy.

Description: Age seven years; hair very dark brown, thin and fine, with tendency to grow in point at forehead and just below each temple towards the cheek, not inclined to curl; penciled eyebrows, the left one with a curve in the centre [*sic*] higher than the right one; blue grey eyes; one ear round at the top, the other as if it had been pinched at the rim on top; ears good size, and well set to the head; teeth small; skin very white, especially on body; large toe on each foot appears as if swollen; quick and energetic in motion; shy with strangers, and very observant, with excellent memory for places.

All communications will be held strictly confidential. No prosecution nor questions asked. Parties fully satisfied of willingness and ability to pay the reward.

Address U.S. CONSUL, Hayle; or MRS. W.E. DICKINSON, corner of Adams and Hancock Streets, Dorchester, Mass., U.S.A.; or W.E. DICKINSON, Commonwealth, Wis., U.S.A.

Captain Dickinson, the honorable and gray-haired father of the littleone [*sic – little one*], informs the MINING NEWS that he is almost sure he is now following up the right clue and further he has quite recently heard that Willie is all right, but has been "moved again." More than this it is not wise to divulge at present. John Ronan, of the "clay-cut" below Commonwealth, with his wife, firmly believes that the child was stolen by a wealthy hunter and huntress, who, as they claim had been hunting in the neighborhood previous to his disappearance; had expressed a great liking for him and disappeared mysteriously at the same time that Willie was missed. A NEWS reporter was detailed to look into the matter and after a laborious search, including a weary drive to the lonely home of a hermit trapper, situated on a high hill, overlooking two beautiful little lakes, that shared alone the hunter's isolation,

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

ascertained the following: The fall that Willie disappeared and for several autumns previous thereto, a wealthy gentleman of age quite ripe, with his wife, considerably younger than himself, hunted in the vicinity of Spread Eagle, a region then much frequented by deer, bears, wolves, wildcats and other animals that delight in a *demesne* so little trod by white men, as that was then. This was the wealthy Major Johnson and wife, of Champaign, Ill., an eccentric couple to say the least. They possessed means and life to them was one grand chase. From the everglades of Florida, in winter to the craggy shores of Old Superior in summer, they hunted the wild beasts that roam the forests' deep retreats. Not here did they limit themselves, but in the Adirondacks, the Alleghanies [*sic* – *Alleghenies*] and the kingly Rockies, did they beard the fierce grizzly in his den and entrap the wary catamount. Their movements were as rapid as their shots were sure. It is even claimed that the lady, quite large and always richly dressed, excelled in the Nimrodic pastimes. Monuments to her prowess are to be had in a mounted lynx in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia and a huge antlered deer, in Central Park, New York. The couple slept where best they could and exposure only wrought them more Spartan like.

These are the people whom Mr. Ronan suspects. But from George W. Simpkins, the trapper referred to above, known as the "Great Illinois Hunter," who was well acquainted with the military hunter and his wife, it is ascertained that the Johnsons are wrongfully aspersed. He has known of them more or less all of the time that has intervened since Willie's disappearance and from Captain Dickinson himself, it is learned, that Mrs. Johnson died but a short time ago and that the Major is now on his death bed. Trapper Simpkins firmly believes that Willie perished in the woods

that wild night that saw him last. "I heered [*sic* – *heard*] him that night; I heered [*sic* – *heard*] him," the good old Yankee remarked positively, with a gloomy shake of his head.

"Where did you hear him?" eagerly queried the NEWS reporter.

"I was cout fur deer. The night was bad an' my headlight went cout." Fur shelter I tuk to a bark shanty not fur from Commonwealth. While thar, an' tryin' to light my lamp, I heered him. The cry wus like a woman or a child in distress. Fust I thought it was a varmint, an' arter a listenin' I tuk my gun, put on my lamp an' went cout. But I didn't hear the holler again. Next mornin' I was sent fur to jine the hunt an' the minit I heered the boy wus gon' I sez it wus him I heered. They tole me I didn't; that it wus Miss Dickinson, who was shoutin' with grief histericks. But I know it wasn't. I went as near as I could to the spot where I heerd the holler, but the snow had cum an' I couldn't find nothin'. I shill believe to my dyin' day that I heered the po'r boy holler that drefful night an' if I'd a known some one wus lost, I'd a found him."

This is the end of the old trapper's story. Willie has not been found, although many days have come and gone. The matter is as much a mystery as ever. No stranger case was ever known. No greater efforts were ever made to fathom the ways that seem past finding out. That Captain Dickinson is right in his latest clue, [*sic*] is the heartfelt hope of all who know of the affair.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume IV, Number 7 [Saturday, February 16, 1884], page 1, column 4

WILLIE DICKINSON

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

James Eagan, a Former Florence Tough, Arrested on the Charge of Being Implicated in His Abduction.

Prospects of Interesting Developments Soon to be Made – A Detailed Account of the Matter Prevented by a Fear that Thereby the Workings of the Case Might be Interfered With.

A SENSATIONAL SEQUEL.

On Thursday noon Dist. Att’y McIntosh arrived in Florence with James Eagan, charged with being an accessory to the abduction of Willie Dickinson. Eagan is

A NOTORIOUS TOUGH,

whose prison career is quite a feature of his personal history. He formerly kept a bagnio on the land, the supervision of which was in the hands of Capt. Dickinson. Shortly before Willie’s abduction, he was ordered off the land, and went, as was then supposed, amicably. After the abduction, Capt. Dickinson paid for Eagan’s buildings and he left the country. Circumstances commenced soon after to connect themselves in a manner as to case suspicion upon Eagan, as being connected with the

CRIME OF CARRYING OFF

the little boy. Consequently he was sought and found to be incarcerated at Ionia, in Michigan. Shortly before his sentence

expired, Mr. McIntosh arrayed himself in proper authority and after working night and day for some time, succeeded in landing Eagan in Florence, as above stated. He disclaims any connection with the affair and is now in custody, awaiting developments, which are expected soon to be made. The MINING NEWS is possessed of the

INNERMOST SECRETS

of the affair, but withholds them from publicity, at the urgent request of both Capt. Dickinson and Mr. McIntosh. In thus doing, we hope to further the best interests of the matter, as much as possible. Capt. Dickinson is very certain that Eagan was connected indirectly with his little son’s disappearance. It is the hope of all that he is on the right track. The arrest of Eagan, [sic] caused quite a good deal of excitement and the MINING NEWS will report the matter in detail, as soon as it will not interfere with the working of the case.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume VII, Number 25 [Saturday, June 18, 1887], page 5, column 3

A MYSTERY NO LONGER.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CASE OF WILLIE DICKINSON.

Letters and Papers Found in Milwaukee which, if Genuine, show that the Child Was Kidnapped, Taken to Milwaukee and Murdered – The Murderer’s Confession – The Police to Search for the Body – Details of the Sad Affair – Other Local News.

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

The mystery which has surrounded the fate of Willie Dickinson, the 6-year-old son of Capt. Wm. E. Dickinson, of Commonwealth, who mysteriously disappeared while returning home from school on the afternoon of November 1, 1881, has at last, it is thought, been cleared up in Milwaukee. At the time of the disappearance, it will be remembered, the woods in the neighborhood of Commonwealth and Florence were thoroughly scoured in search of the missing boy, who it was thought had been lost. Subsequent developments, however, showed almost beyond a shadow of a doubt that the boy had been abducted, and suspicion pointed to certain disreputable parties who infested Florence and Commonwealth some six or seven years ago. The motive for the crime is thought to have been revenge, the supposed kidnapers having become incensed against Capt. Dickinson because he had thwarted them in some of their acts of villainy. The latest developments are to the effect that the kidnapers took their little victim to Milwaukee and then murdered him in that city. It appears that in April last two school boys named Emil Bishop and Henry Schmidt, while playing in the back yard at No. 776 Fourteenth Street, between Garfield and North Avenues, Tenth Ward, Milwaukee, found a bottle containing a letter which tends to throw light on the mystery. The letter, which was very dirty and almost illegible, was addressed "To any one who finds this letter," and read as follows: "I, Henry Paine, confess that I killed Willie Dickinson after kidnapping him." The confession further stated that the writer, Henry Paine, was a prisoner in the house No. 776 Fourteenth Street, and that he was dying. The letter further declared that Willie Dickinson's body was buried at a point twelve feet from a certain corner of Lee and Twelfth Streets, in the northern

part of the city. The boys kept their secret for a time, but the startling facts were placed in the hands of the police about two weeks ago and Capt. Dickinson was notified. He went to Milwaukee on Wednesday, and the mysterious affair will be sifted to the bottom. It appears that a map of the country about Florence and Commonwealth and some letters, written in 1882 and signed "Morrison," were found with the confession. The Morrison referred to is supposed to be a fellow by that name who is at present serving a term in a Michigan penitentiary. Capt. Dickinson examined the map indicated, and pronounced it to be an almost perfect profile of the territory represented. Investigation further showed that the house on Fourteenth Street was occupied in 1882 by a stranger who was known under two aliases. Capt. Dickinson says that the authors of the letters and map showed perfect familiarity with the details of the abduction. Three of the four corners at Lee and Twelfth Streets have been built up since 1882, but the Milwaukee police have determined to make a thorough search for the boy's body. There are scores of men living in Florence to-day [*sic – today*] who assisted in the search for Willie Dickinson on that memorable November day, nearly six years ago, and the facts regarding his disappearance are still fresh in the minds of the Florence people. This community has always deeply sympathized with the bereaved family of Capt. Dickinson, who all these years have had firm faith that their dear one still lived. If one of the conspirators be dead, there are others, doubtless, living, and everybody will unite in the hope that the murderers will be speedily apprehended and made to pay the penalty of their heinous crime.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

VII, Number 26 [Saturday, June 25, 1887], page 5, column 1

THE DICKINSON CASE.

ADDITIONAL FACTS REGARDING THE MILWAUKEE AFFAIR.

Full Text of the Mysterious Papers Alleged to Have Been Written by the Kidnappers of Willie Dickinson – The Police Abandon the Investigation – A Warrant for Pat McHugh – A Sad Case of Domestic Infelicity – Newsy Notes.

The announcement in last week's MINING NEWS of the discovery in Milwaukee of a number of letters, one of which purported to be the confession of a man named James (not Henry) Paine of the kidnapping and murder of little Willie Dickinson, the son of Capt. Wm. E. Dickinson, of Commonwealth, caused a most profound sensation in this village. Every detail connected with the abduction of the child on November 1, 1881, which had, owing to the lapse of so many years, been apparently forgotten, were [sic – was] recalled and discussed by people who were living here at the time. Capt. Dickinson returned early in the week, leaving the Milwaukee detectives in charge of the case. In a conversation with a MINING NEWS reporter, the Captain said the police were at work on several important clues, which would, if successful, probably go a great ways toward settling the question as to the genuineness of the mysterious letters. While not prepared at this stage of the investigation to give a decided opinion as to

whether the letters are authentic or not, Capt. Dickinson is evidently inclined to take considerable stock in them. The fact that the writer displayed such an accurate knowledge of the country about Florence and Commonwealth and was also familiar with the details of the abduction, coupled with clues heretofore followed up by Capt. Dickinson leads him to believe that these latest developments may lift the veil which has shrouded the mystery for so many years. The first intimation Capt. Dickinson had of the finding of the papers was conveyed in a letter written by one of the boys who made the discovery. While in Milwaukee he visited the boy's home, and had a long interview with the lad, who impressed him as being a conscientious and truthful person. Capt. Dickinson informed the reporter that, besides the two letters and map referred to by the MINING NEWS and the Milwaukee press last week, there were additional letters which tend to make the case even more mysterious than the others. One of the letters is as follows:

COMMONWEALTH, Wis., November – 1881.

JAMES PAINE ESQ: –Take care ——. They are on your track. Take him to Trapper's house. Keep him there. I and Jack will get him. _____.

(Signed) MORRIS.

The dashes contained in the letter indicate illegible words, and the word "Trapper's" is very indistinct. The fourth letter was dated Commonwealth, November, 1881. Directly underneath the date line was a diagram, sort of an irregular half circle, marked "Brule River." At one end of the curve, and between two faint lines, probably meant for wagon roads, was a large black dot, and about [a] quarter of an inch underneath the dot was a narrow black mark. Following the diagram was a note which read as follows: "To F. (or P.) Follow Brule River to (black dot). Then go

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

south one mile to (indistinct word). Morris.” Another letter, dated Commonwealth, December 1, 1881, read as follows: “Capture successful. All safe now. Come to cave 1. Morris.” A fourth paper had been torn in fragments, but by joining the pieces together, the following startling sentence was discernible: “Dig 3 – feet from corner of Lee and Twelfth Streets you’ll find body of Dickington [sic – Dickinson] boy. James Paine.”

The letters were written in a hand which stamps the author to be an excellent penman. They were all written with a lead pencil on closely ruled paper, such as is contained in the statement books in use by the Commonwealth Mining Company. A careful study of the letters convinced Capt. Dickinson that the writer, who wrote a rather cramped hand, was used to writing in books of that character. The letters were placed in the possession of Chief of Police Ries, of Milwaukee. The Captain has no idea who the man Paine is. He knows of a man by the name of Morris, but the latter, Capt. Dickinson says, was a poor writer. The MINING NEWS made a mistake in last week’s issue in stating that the name of Morrison was attached to the letters. There never has been a scintilla of evidence implicating any one [sic – anyone] by that name with the crime of kidnapping Willie Dickinson. While in Milwaukee, Capt. Dickinson searched for a German named Neff, who lived in the house No. 776 Fourteenth Street, Milwaukee, in November, 1881. He succeeded in obtaining a clue to the man’s present whereabouts, and placed the information in the hands of the police. The finding of this man Neff, it is thought, will shed considerable light on the affair, as he will probably be able to state who his boarders were at that time. Neff is described by his old neighbors as being an easy-going, dissipated man.

A Milwaukee paper, of Tuesday, says that the detectives of that city were satisfied that the mysterious papers were placed where they were found as a hoax. The Milwaukee police now think that the statements made in the letters were too “dime novel” a character to be worthy of further consideration, and evince a disposition to drop further investigation.

In a letter received by Capt. Davidson from Chief of Police Ries, of Milwaukee, yesterday, the latter stated that the police of that city had succeeded in finding Neff, but had been unable to get anything out of the man regarding the mysterious personages who were supposed to have occupied his Fourth [sic – Fourteenth] Street dwelling five or six years ago. The letter was accompanied by the mysterious papers. Thus the matter remains at present. The Milwaukee police have utterly failed to follow up the case, at least to the satisfaction of Captain Dickinson’s friends. No search, it appears, has been made for the body at the point indicated by the letters. The affair remains as great a mystery as ever.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume VIII, Number 6 [Saturday, February 4, 1888], page 5, column 4

NO NEW DEVELOPMENTS

An Interview With Capt. Dickinson Concerning His Missing Boy

The following alleged dispatch from Florence, purporting to give “startling developments” in the Willie Dickinson

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

abduction case, appeared in the Evening Wisconsin on Thursday:

“It is stated to-day [*sic – today*] that the mystery surrounding the disappearance of little Willie Dickinson, the son of Capt. W.E. Dickinson, superintendent of the Commonwealth mine at the neighboring town of Commonwealth, is in a fair way to be cleared up by the return of the boy to his home. It is reported on good authority that within a short time Capt. Dickinson has received assurances that his son is alive and well and that his return to his home is a matter of but a short time. The announcement that the child is alive causes great surprise, as the opinion has been almost universally held, except by the members of the Dickinson family, that the boy was killed and devoured by wild animals and not abducted as Capt. Dickinson has stoutly maintained...When Mrs. Dickinson was in Milwaukee recently, she stated to a Wisconsin reporter that a proposal had been made for the return of her son, the sum of \$10,000 being demanded as a ransom and the affidavit of Capt. Dickinson not to prosecute. The offer was not accepted at that time, but negotiations were pending for the return of her son. Mrs. Dickinson had no idea at that time where the child was or in whose custody.”

Capt. Dickinson was interviewed by a MINING NEWS reporter yesterday as to the truth of the statement contained in the above “dispatch.” The captain said that, as far as he knew, there was nothing new in the case, and denied that he had received assurances within a short time that his boy was alive and would soon be returned. Over a year ago certain parties, who are believed to have been acting as “go betweens” for the real abductors, offered to return the child to his home for \$15,000. They afterwards decreased the proposed ransom to \$10,000, but the offer was

rejected, Capt. Dickinson declaring that he could not afford to pay such an exorbitant sum. He was satisfied at the time that the persons who attempted the negotiations were acting in good faith and that they knew where the boy was concealed. Capt. Dickinson informed the MINING NEWS reporter that he stood ready at any time to pay \$3,000 reward for the recovery of his son, Willie, but in justice to himself and his family could not pay a larger sum. He says he is willing at any time to place the amount designated in the hands of any responsible business man [*sic – businessman*] with implicit instructions to pay it over to those having control of the boy, whenever the child is restored to him. The captain, upon receipt of reasonable assurances that the child is really Willie Dickinson, says he is willing to go anywhere to secure the child, and the money will be promptly paid as soon as the latter is identified. Capt. Dickinson, like the father of lost Charlie Ross, has received hundreds of letters from all over the country containing alleged information regarding the child. The majority of the communications were ignored, and those investigated turned out to be fraudulent. Various attempts have been made to extort money from him, and in some cases ominous threats have been made unless the money demanded was not forthcoming.

The Current, Norway, Menominee County, Michigan, Volume IV, Number 28 [Saturday, August 11, 1888], page 1, column 6

Believed to Have Been Found in a House of Ill Fame at Wausau

Wausau, Wisc., July 7. – Dr. Kate Bushnell, of the Social Purity branch of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union,

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

some time ago visited notorious resorts near the city on her mission among fallen women. At one place kept by one Johnson she noticed a young boy stopping there. Growing suspicious she made inquiries. A family residing in the neighborhood told her that the boy had come from Canada. Later Dr. Bushnell met Captain Dickinson and family on a train and told them of her suspicions. The clue to Willie Dickinson was lost in Canada. This caused the suspicion [*sic – the suspicion*] that this was the missing boy. The officers visited the place and now have the boy in custody. He says he has a sister Christine. Willie Dickinson has a sister of the same name. The boy says his people live in Scotland. Johnson, the keeper of the den, says he brought him from Canada seven years ago. It has been discovered that Willie was abducted by people in the ill fame business, and this boy being found in possession of a man of the same stripe serves to confirm the suspicion that he is the lost Willie Dickinson. Captain Dickinson is expected here Saturday, when Johnson's trial takes place. There is much excitement over the supposed implication of officers in league with Johnson and his gang. – Ex. [*Exchange*]

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume VIII, Number 33 [Saturday, August 11, 1888], page 5, column 3

SOMEBODY ELSE'S BOY

The Waif at Wausau Not Willie Dickinson

Great Excitement at Wausau Over the

Reported Discovery of the Long-Lost-Boy in That City – Mrs. Dickinson and Daughter Pay a Visit to Marathon County to See the Alleged Child, but Fail to Identify Him – Interesting Interviews

The following special dispatch from Wausau appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel on Tuesday:

Dr. Kate Bushnell and Mrs. J.S. Davis, working members of the Social Purity branch of the W.C.T.U. [*Women's Christian Temperance Union*], while visiting a notorious house known as the "Cotton Farm," near this city, gathered evidence sufficient to cause them to believe an abducted boy was housed there. Two policemen and the Rev. J.S. Davis, while going out to make the arrest, were passed on the road by a man on horseback, who had been dispatched by a local liveryman to give warning of the approach of the officers. The minister returned and got the county judge, who made out a warrant for the arrest of Johnson, keeper of the house, and four of the girls. The rest fled through a corn field to the woods, but all were brought to town and put in jail. The parties who made the discovery thought the boy was the missing Willie Dickinson, lost from Florence seven years ago. His mother and sister were here to-day [*sic – today*] at the investigation. They have since gone to confer with the father and the case was adjourned to Saturday. Johnson is out on \$500 bail, and the girls on \$100 each. It is said that several officials are mixed up in the affair.

A representative of the MINING NEWS called upon Mrs. W.E. Dickinson at her pleasant home in Commonwealth, on Tuesday, the day following the return of the lady and her daughter, Miss Lottie Dickinson, from Wausau. After perusing the above clipping, Mrs. Dickinson smilingly

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

said that the account[,] though somewhat garbled, was substantially correct. She proceeded to relate the circumstances under which the trip was made. Capt. Dickinson and herself were returning recently from a trip up north, when they met Dr. Kate Bushnell on the train. The doctress informed them that there was an abducted boy at Wausau whom she thought was Willie Dickinson. Dr. Bushwell [*sic – Bushnell*] subsequently visited Commonwealth, and after seeing the smaller Dickinson children, was sure she could detect a resemblance between them and the waif at Wausau, though she had seen the latter but once. As Capt. Dickinson had expended large sums of money in various wild goose chases of this kind, none of which has tended to develop new facts concerning the whereabouts of the missing boy, both he and his wife were loth [*sic – loath*] to place too much credence in the doctress' well-meant assurances. The latter thereupon returned to Wausau, paid another visit to the boy, and became more than ever convinced that her surmises were correct. She immediately telegraphed to the Dickinsons, urging them to proceed without delay to Wausau. Mrs. Dickinson and her eldest daughter decided to go, and left for Wausau at once. They found the town all torn up, as it were, with excitement, everybody appearing to be terribly agitated over the matter. The ladies visited the house where the alleged abducted boy was living and talked with the lad and the man Johnson. Both boy and man told rambling stories, no two of which agreed, and long before the conclusion of the interviews they became convinced that he was not the missing Willie. The boy said he was 19 years of age, but Mrs. Dickinson did not believe he was more than 15. As the house was full of people, which fact, the ladies thought, might have had a tendency to confuse the boy,

they afterwards determined to talk with him privately. A quiet interview was easily obtained, and the result only confirmed the opinion that he was not Willie. "Then you are sure that he was not your son?" asked the reporter. "If I had not been positive that he was not my boy," Mrs. Dickinson replied, "I would not have left him there."

Mrs. Dickinson, in the course of the conversation with the scribe, said that while many people were sure Willie had been lost in the woods, she was just so sure that he had been stolen. Furthermore, she knew who his abductors were and the motive which prompted the crime. Evidence to prove this, and it would be proven when the proper time came, had been in her possession long since. She declared that while she might not live to see her boy again, she had firm faith that her children would some day [*sic – someday*] see their poor brother. Willie Dickinson was kidnapped November 1, 1881, when in his 6th year. If living he will be 13 years old next January. His mother stated that he was very large for his age, and acted older than a child of 5 years. At the time of his disappearance the boy wore an over coat intended for a boy of 8 or 9 years of age. The interview concluded by Mrs. Dickinson declaring that the family were [*sic – was*] quietly following a clue which appeared brighter and gave them more hope than any other which had developed since the abduction, but the nature of it could not be safely divulged at the present time. The lady is satisfied that, though years have elapsed since she last clasped her loved one, she would be able to identify him from among a thousand boys – from certain marks upon his body of which even his own father was ignorant of. She had frequently been asked by detectives to describe the marks, but very wisely refused to do so.

An Associated Press dispatch of yesterday stated that Capt. Dickinson was

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

expected at Wausau to-day [sic – today] (Saturday), to attend the trial of Johnson, the man who has the alleged kidnapped boy in his possession. Capt. Dickinson did not go to Wausau and, since the return of his wife and daughter from that city, has had no thoughts of doing so. He informed a MINING NEWS reporter on Thursday that he and his family were positive that the boy at Wausau was of Scotch parentage, and presumed that he had been sent to this country to seek a home, like hundreds of waifs in the East who are shipped all over the country for people to adopt. The man, Johnson, who was a Canadian of doubtful character, intended to return to Canada with his protégé. Capt. Dickinson stated that he had been working a good clue in Canada in an altogether different case, and thought it quite likely that something would result from it some time. He had made two trips to Canada, and was now quietly awaiting developments. The scribe refrained from questioning the captain regarding the nature of the clue, realizing that the premature publication of the facts now at hand might thwart the ends so much desired by the afflicted family and their thousands of friends and sympathizers.

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume IX, Number 47 [Saturday, November 16, 1889], page 8, column 1

THINKS HIM HER SON

Mrs. Dickinson Believes the Los Angeles Boy Her Lost Willie

LOS ANGELES, Cal., November 14. – Important developments are expected soon

in the Willie Dickinson case. The father writes under date of of [sic] November 5, to the chief of police, that the presumptions are strong that the boy here is his son, but says he is investigating also a Montana case. The mother adds in pencil that she feels the boy here is her's [sic – hers].

BESSEMER, Mich., November 15. – Mr. Dickinson said to an Evening Wisconsin correspondent to-day [sic – today]: “We have received three photographs of the waif at Los Angeles. There is a decided family resemblance, but we are unable to decide if the boy is Willie. I have taken measures to have a thorough examination of the case.”

The Florence Mining News. Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume IX, Number 49 [Saturday, November 30, 1889], page 5, column 1

A SAD DISAPPOINTMENT

The California Waif Not Willie Dickinson

The Mother and Sister of the Long Lost Boy Fail to Identify the Los Angeles Lad – Convincing Proof that the Latter is not of Their Kin – Return of the Ladies from the Golden State – Sad Death of a Miner – News Notes Concerning Thanksgiving and General City Happenings.

The MINING NEWS is informed by Capt. O.C. Davidson, son-in-law of Supt. W.E. Dickinson, of the Colby mine, Bessemer, Mich., and formerly of Commonwealth, that the little 14-year-old waif, at Los Angeles, Cal., is not the long-lost boy. When Mrs. Dickinson and daughter, Mrs. Davidson, first saw the

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

California lad, soon after their arrival at Los Angeles, they were inclined to believe he was really Willie Dickinson, but a searching investigation unhappily resulted in bringing to light incontrovertible evidence that the lad was not their loved one. "Not ours" was the poor mother's message telegraphed to the waiting and expectant husband and father at Bessemer, [sic] a few days ago. The ladies are expected to arrive at Bessemer to-day [sic – today].

The Current, Norway, Menominee County, Michigan, Volume V, Number 45 [Saturday, December 7, 1889], page 1, column 2

–Mrs. W.E. Dickinson has returned to her home at Ironwood from Los Angeles, Cal., where she went to identify a boy who bore the description of her lost son [sic – son], Willie. She returned satisfied that the boy was not her son.

The Range-Tribune, Iron Mountain, Dickinson County, Michigan, Volume XVI, Number 19 [Saturday, September 1, 1894], page 8, column 2

Capt. W.E. Dickinson, formerly of the Commonwealth mine, still has hopes of recovering his son, who so mysteriously disappeared a number of years ago. There is still a reward of \$3,000 deposited in a Chicago bank for his recovery.

Iron Mountain Press, Iron Mountain, Dickinson County, Michigan, Volume 1, Number 39 [Thursday, February 18, 1897], page 1, column 4

HOW HE DISAPPEARED

Story of Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson]. – His Mother Has Spent a Fortune in Search for Him.

Speaking of the arrival of the young man who thought he was the lost Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], the Florence Mining News says: "Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], it will be remembered, mysteriously disappeared while on his way from school to his home in the village of Commonwealth at three o'clock on the afternoon of Nov. 1, 1881. The boy was between 5 and 6 years old at the time and, if living, would have been of age last month. That he was abducted, there is not a shadow of a doubt. Mrs. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] has positive, convincing and undisputed evidence that her boy was stolen. Though little has been said or written for several years past concerning the Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] case, the unhappy parents of the missing boy have not lost hope of eventually finding him, nor have they by any means abandoned the search, which has already lasted over fifteen years. In fact, Mrs. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] is at the present time engaged in working upon three clues, which she is hopeful will lead to favorable results. Mrs. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] has repeatedly traveled from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Gulf of Mexico to the British possessions in the north looking for her lost boy and a comfortable fortune has been expended in carrying on the quest. During all these years, this indefatigable, patient and noble woman has met scores of lads who had been stolen from their parents in infancy and she has been the means of restoring a number of the waifs to their parents."

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Iron Mountain Press, Iron Mountain, Dickinson County, Michigan, Volume 5, Number 8 [Thursday, June 12, 1900], page 1, column 4

NINETEEN [*sic* – NINETEEN] WEARY YEARS

Has Mrs. Dickinson Searched for Her Baby Boy – She is Still Hopeful.

“It is ninteen [*sic* – *nineteen*] years since my lad was stolen. For ninteen [*sic* – *nineteen*] years I have searched incessantly for him and today I know no more of his whereabouts than when I first lost him. But some day I shall find him. God will not let me die until I have.”

This was the way in which Mrs. W.E. Dickinson, who has recently moved from Florence to Milwaukee to live, concluded a story that sounds more like a thrilling novel than a straightforward account of a happening in these modern times. The celebrated “Willie Dickinson” case, which followed so quickly on the heels of the equally celebrated “Charley Ross” case, has grown dim in public memory and even the people who for years believed with Mrs. Dickinson that the boy was still alive have long since given up all hope.

But the mother is still confident and determined. She has spent over \$30,000 in her long quest, she has investigated hundreds of cases of reported abductions, has personally visited 150 stolen children and restored thirteen of them to their families, but only once in all that time has she had a definate [*sic* – *definite*] clue to her own lad, and that she came upon thousands of miles from the spot where he disappeared. Her search has carried her in

every state in the union, and the experiences she has had with gangs of blackmailers, thugs and roughs whom she encountered, [*sic*] are such that she hesitates to tell them, for fear their accuracy may be doubted, but today she is apparently as far away from her goal as ever unless a certain young soldier stationed with the regular army at a California fort should prove, as there seems a possibility he may, to be the lost boy.

“But I have been disappointed so many times,” said Mrs. Dickinson, “so many times it has seemed from correspondence that I have at last found my lad and so many times I have traveled to the boy to find that he was not my child, that I do not place my hope on any specific case nowadays. Confident, I shall always be and determined to find him in the end, but I dare not place too much reliance on any one case now. If it should be that this young soldier, whose record I have privately investigated and who seems to be a boy any mother would be proud of, is really my lad, I – but you cannot put into words what that would mean. The description of the birth marks and scars on his body tallies with those by which I shall be able to identify Willie, and the photographs which this soldier has sent me bear a strange resemblance to those of my other children. We are writing to each other constantly. He is alone and friendless and calls me his ‘mother friend’ because he says he feels that whether it turns out that I am his real mother or not, he has found a friend in me, as I am sure he has.”

**WISCONSIN GENEALOGY TRAILS
FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN
The Disappearance of Willie Dickinson
(various sources)**

Elkhart Review, Indiana – November 7, 1881

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

Hundreds of men are searching the woods in the region of Florence, Wis., for a six-year-old lad named Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], who disappeared last Tuesday.

New York Herald-Tribune – **October 13, 1883**

TRACING A STOLEN BOY

Believed to Have Been Taken to England – A Reward Offered

Florence, Wis., Oct. 12 – On November 1, 1881, Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] was stolen from his home in Commonwealth, Wis. His abductors were traced to various points in the United States, but the search was finally abandoned. Recently his father obtained a clew [sic – clue] which led him to believe that his son had been taken to England, and a reward of 500 (pounds) had been offered for the boy's return.

Captain Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] is a wealthy man and has spent large sums of money in the search. He said today, "We have sent to England to trace clews [sic – clues] which were obtained here. We have had our eyes on a man who left this part of the country, just before Willie was taken, from whom we expect to derive information of value. This man is now incarcerated in a certain penitentiary. When the publication was made of bones having been found in the woods near here that were supposed to be Willie's skeleton, a paper containing the article was sent to the convict by the warden through another convict who was used as a decoy. On reading it our man became greatly agitated and exclaimed: 'Between you and I those bones are not Willie Dickenson's [sic – Dickinson's].' He was taken to Cornwall and is there now.

Acting on this, I am doing what I can through the American Consul at Hull, but shall be greatly surprised if I find Willie there, though it is not improbable. I am leaving nothing untried, and am therefore following up the Cornwall clew [sic – clue]."

Daily Inter-Ocean – **June 17, 1887**

KIDNAPPED AND MURDERED

Fate of a 9-Year-Old Boy Who Disappeared from Commonwealth, Wis., in 1881

CLEARING UP A MYSTERY

MILWAUKEE, Wis., June 16 – *Special Telegram* – Within the past two weeks events have transpired in this city which promise to clear up the mystery surrounding the abduction of Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], of Commonwealth, Wis., six years ago.

The boy, who was 6 years old at the time, was kidnapped while on his way home from school on the evening of Nov. 1, 1881. Large parties of men from Commonwealth and the neighboring village of Florence scoured the woods in every direction, but no trace of the missing boy could be found, and later developments showed conclusively that he had been kidnapped.

There was evidence which seemed to fix the crime on certain roughs who had been infesting the neighborhood, but nothing definite as to the disposition of the little fellow could be ascertained.

Captain Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] has spent thousands of dollars in vain efforts to find his boy. The case

ATTRACTED WIDESPREAD INTEREST
Owing to the wealth and prominence of the boy's parents.

During the last two weeks evidence has developed which goes to show that Willie

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Dickinson was for some time kept in Milwaukee, and was finally murdered here.

About a week ago two boys named Schmidt and Bishop, pupils in the Tenth District School, found a pile of rubbish near a house on Fourteenth street, near Teutonis [?] street, a bottle which contained a letter. They broke the bottle to read the letter, which contained statements concerning the kidnapping of Willie Dickinson that proved to have been written by someone familiar with all facts of the case.

Continuing their search, the boys found fragments of another letter, and enough of the pieces were put together to show that it contained a remarkable statement. It was addressed "To anyone who finds this letter," and begins: I, Henry Paine, confess that I killed Willie Dickenson [*sic – Dickinson*] after kidnapping him."

The letter goes on to say that the writer, Henry Paine, was a prisoner in the house on Fourteenth street, and that he was dying at the time the letter was written. It also stated that the boy of Willie Dickinson could be found by digging at a point twelve feet from a certain corner of Lee and Twelfth streets.

The boys who found the letter showed them to a schoolmate, Eddie Wagner, of No. 585 Seventh street, and it was

AGREED TO KEEP THE MATTER QUIET. Captain Dickinson was notified, however, and yesterday morning arrived in the city to sift the mysterious affair to the bottom.

There are a number of facts which go to substantiate the story told in the letters. With the letters was found a map of the country about Commonwealth and Florence, which Captain Dickinson pronounces to be correct in almost every detail.

It was also found that a strange man had occupied the house on Fourteenth street at the same time the letter was dated.

This mysterious tenant gave one name to this landlord and another to the canvasser for the city directory. The matter has been placed in the hands of the police, and a search will be made at the place where the boy's body is said to have been buried.

The house in which Paine is supposed to have lived is No. 766 Fourteenth street, between Garfield and North avenues, and

IS A SMALL, TWO-STORY COTTAGE.

Emil Bishop, one of the boys who found the letters, related the circumstances of the finding to a reporter this afternoon. Bishop lives in the next house, No. 780, and back of the houses is a marshy place in which water stands most of the time.

One day in April he and Henry Schmidt, the other boy, were playing in the back yard at No. 776, when they found the bottle contained the letter in the water. The paper was covered with mud, and had been lying there so long that the writing was very illegible. The boys were unable to read it at first, but sometime after showed it to Eddie Wagner. Other letters addressed to Paine and signed by a man named Morrison were also found. The letters addressed to Paine and signed by a man named Morrison were also found. Other letters addressed to Paine and signed by a man named Morrison were also found. The letters were written in 1882.

Morris was the name of one of the gang of criminals who infested the neighborhood of Florence, and who is now spending a term at the Michigan Penitentiary [*sic – Penitentiary*]. The house where the letters were found is now vacant.

Three of the corners at Lee and Twelfth streets are now occupied by houses, only the southwest corner being vacant. Captain Dickinson said to-day [*sic – today*] that the map and letters both showed that their author was perfectly familiar with the details of the case.

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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Sault Ste. Marie News – **June 30, 1887**

The Florence, Wis., News says the mystery which has surrounded the fate of Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], the 9-year-old son of Capt. Wm. H. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], of Commonwealth. He mysteriously disappeared while returning home from school on the afternoon of November 1, 1881, has at last, it is thought, been cleared up. It is believed that the boy was kidnapped and murdered by certain disreputable parties who infested Florence and Commonwealth some six or seven years ago.

The motive for the crime is thought to have been revenge the supposed kidnapers having become incensed against Captain Dickinson because he had thwarted them in some of their acts of villainy. Recently a letter was found in Milwaukee giving a clue to the whole mystery, and the father is there engaged with the police in investigating the affair.

Kansas City Times, Missouri – **February 3, 1888**

IS WILLIE DICKENSON [sic] ALIVE?

Florence, Wis., Feb. 2 – The mysterious disappearance of Willie Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], son of Captain W.E. Dickinson, superintendent of the Commonwealth mine, five years ago is in a fair way to be cleared up by the return of the boy to his home.

It is reported on good authority that within a short time Captain Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] has been approached with a proposal for the return of the boy for a \$10,000 ransom and the affidavit of Captain Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] not to prosecute being demanded.

The announcement that the child was alive caused great surprise, as the opinion

has been almost universally held except by the members of the Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] family that the boy was killed and devoured by wild animals and not abducted as Captain Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] had stoutly maintained.

Wheeling Register, West Virginia – **February 3, 1888**

A Mystery to Be Cleared Up

Florence, Wis., February 3 – Interest in the mysterious case of William Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], the son of Capt. W.E. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], who was supposed to have been abducted five years ago, is in a fair way to be cleared up. It is reported that Capt. Dickinson has been approached with a proposal for the return of the boy, the sum of \$10,000 being demanded as a ransom, and the affidavit of Capt. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] not to prosecute.

Jackson Citizen, Michigan – **1889**

Capt. Wm. G. [sic – E.] Dickenson [sic – Dickinson], of Bessemer, has received two photographs of a waif in the Boy's and Girl's Home at Los Angeles, Cal. They bear a striking resemblance to his son Willie, who was abducted from Florence, Wis., in 1881. Capt. Dickenson [sic – Dickinson] will go to Los Angeles.

[Baltimore] Sun, Maryland – **December 14, 1889**

Found After Years of Search

A special in the New York World from Los Angeles, Cal., says: "L.G. [sic – W.E.] Dickinson eight years ago was manager of some mining property at Commonwealth, Wis. There was a strike of miners

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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employed by him, in which Dickinson came out best, and the strikers swore vengeance. A few days after the strike was settled – in the spring of 1881 [sic – November 1, 1881] – Dickinson's six-year-old boy Willie did not return home from school, and the miners suspected of having made away with him.

Since that day his parents have never set eyes on their child. Their [sic – The] father spent a fortune in trying to discover the boy's whereabouts. Pinkerton's Detective Agency was enlisted in the search, and a standing reward of \$2,000 [sic – \$3,000] was offered for knowledge of the boy's whereabouts.

"About two weeks ago a bright, intelligent lad was found roaming around East Los Angeles by a policeman, who took him to the Boys and Girls' Home. The boy told a strange story.

"He said his name was Willie W. Dickinson; that about six or seven years ago strangers took him from his home to Chicago, where he was abandoned on the streets. He fell in with other boys and made a living selling papers and blacking boots till 1883, when he rode to Sacramento on a brake beam.

"Since his arrival in California he has fallen in with horse jockeys who took him round to fairs with them. When he reached Los Angeles he concluded to remain.

"A week ago the chief of police sent a letter to [the] Chicago chief of police relating the boy's story, and Saturday he received the answer which tells the story of the abduction and encloses a photograph of the missing boy, which tallies exactly with the features of the boy at Los Angeles. The chief of police has informed the father, who now lives in Bessemer, Mich."

Jackson Citizen Patriot – April 29, 1890

A Bad Boy's Daring Scheme

Little Willie Price, a lad who, by his incorrigible behavior, has earned the reputation of being beyond reclamation, is now at his old home in the building of the Boys and Girls' Aid society on Baker street.

The boy was born in San Francisco in 1877. At the age of 7 years he was a well known character on the streets, where he was accustomed to appear ragged, dirty and shivering with cold, pleading for alms with a face so piteous and a manner so deeply touching that none could withstand the appeal.

In 1881 a lad named Willie Dickinson, about the age of the hero of this story, suddenly disappeared from the home of his parents in Commonwealth, Wis. The heartbroken parents, who were very wealthy, advertised far and wide, and offered a large amount of money for the discovery and return of their child.

Young Price saw the advertisement, and while under arrest on a charge of street begging at Los Angeles proposed to the policeman to personate [sic – impersonate] the lost Wisconsin lad if the officer would do the rest of the business necessary to gain the reward for his return. The scheme looked plausible and the officer went into it.

A short time after Mrs. Dickinson arrived at Los Angeles to claim her long lost Willie. At sight of her the young imposter rushed into her arms, exclaiming, "Oh, mamma! I am so glad you have come to take your little Willie away from these bad men. Kiss your Willie, mamma," and the hardened reprobate actually wept.

The overjoyed mother covered her supposed child with kisses. She bought him new and elegant clothing, loading him with presents and began hasty preparations for their return to Wisconsin.

The police officer, feeling secure in the possession of the reward money, conceived the idea of defrauding the boy out of his share of it. Innocent little Willie was,

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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however, too cunning for his partner in crime. He put a damper on this little scheme by boldly declaring his identity to Mrs. Dickinson, who was shocked into a fainting fit by the startling revelation.

“You don’t come any of your little games on dis duck,” he said, addressing the astonished officer. “I’m just plain ordinary Willie Price, of San Francisco, dat’s who I am, d’ye see?”

The disappointed woman returned to her eastern home and young Price was sent to this city and placed in the Boys and Girls’ Aid society. On Jan. 14 he scaled the walls and escaped, and was not seen again until yesterday, when he was recaptured and sent back. – San Francisco Chronicle.

Omaha World Herald – **January 28, 1895**

A WISCONSIN CASE

Equally memorable is the disappearance of Willie Dickinson, son of Captain W.F. *[sic - E.]* Dickinson of Commonwealth, Wis., who vanished from school, and was followed for years through many states.

At the time of the affair Commonwealth was a small mining and lumbering village, and had been founded but two years. The town was controlled by a large mining corporation, for which Mr. Dickinson acted in the capacity of superintendent, and the family resided in a house furnished by the corporation.

Willie was at this time a bright and healthy -5-year-old boy, and was attending the district school. On the day he was stolen – November 1, 1881 – while on his way from school, he stopped at his aunt’s residence, where he had previously left his overcoat, taking it and putting it on, telling her that he was doing directly home to see his baby, as he called a weeks-old brother.

He started away, and when some distance from and between the latter house and his own, he met a teamster with whom he was acquainted, and upon being asked if he wished to ride gave the teamster the same answer he had given his aunt. This was the last seen of him by persons knowing him, it being then about 3:45 o’clock.

Shortly before 6t o’clock the mother became anxious for her child. At 6 o’clock Captain Dickinson arrived home, and, finding that his boy had not returned home from school, set out to search for him.

The whole village was notified that Willie had been lost or stolen, and it did not take long to muster 600 willing and honest men, who commenced a thorough search through the woods and town. After the searchers had been at work all night they were reinforced by 200 more men, and the hunt progressed vigorously.

For three days these kind hearted miners scoured the woods far and near without success, and then returned a week later with the same report.

A full description of the lost boy was sent everywhere, but nothing was heard of his whereabouts for a long time.

The Pinkertons were put on the case, and the said affair was published in all of the newspapers, with a full description and the amount of the reward.

This led to a vast number of letters to the parents from people who thought they could furnish clews *[sic – clues]*. Some of the most important searches were thus instituted.

One party who had read it all wrote to Mr. Dickinson saying that he had seen the child in Culpepper, Va., who answered the description in the advertisement. Mrs. Dickinson immediately departed for this place, but before her arrival the man holding the child had departed, taking the child with him. She found this man’s name

FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING

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was Morris, and that he had been boarding the child of the exact description of the lost Willie at a small farm house.

Mrs. Dickinson, feeling confident that this must be her lost boy, pushed on, not even stopping at the farm house where the child had been boarded, through Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania to New York. There she overtook Morris, but, alas, the child in his possession was not Willie.

Seattle Daily Times, Washington – **October 22, 1905**

LONG LOST SON MAY BE LOCATED HERE

Milwaukee Mother, Whose Boy Was Stolen Years Ago, Believed Her Grown Child in Seattle

MILWAUKEE, Wis., Saturday, Oct. 21 – Twenty-five years ago Willie Dickinson was stolen from his parents at Commonwealth, Wis. The case became second only to that of Charley Ross in prominence.

A fortune was spent in following clues and trails that ended only in disappointment. After this search, which extended over the two American continents and the Southern Seas, there is a possibility that the missing boy, now a man, has been found.

Never for a moment has the mother, Mrs. J.S. *[sic – C.S.]* Dickenson *[sic – Dickinson]*, doubted that in the end she should find her boy. She has been a resident of Milwaukee for some years. Now she is hoping against hope that the last clue will not prove as bitter a disappointment as those which have preceded it.

Mrs. Dickinson is now in communication with a man in Seattle, who may be her son. In his letters to Mrs. Dickinson, the Seattle man recalls one day when there came a great change in his life. Some of his

recollections appear to bear out the mother's hope that this may at last be her son, but she is not too sanguine, remembering the bitter disappointments of the past.

Salt Lake Telegram, Utah – **January 10, 1921**

Prisoner Hangs Himself in Cell

Fond du Lac, Wis., Jan. 10 – L.C. Purcell of Lincoln, Neb., who claimed to be Willie F. *[sic – W.]* Dickenson *[sic – Dickinson]*, who was kidnapped in Florence, Wis., in 1881 today committed suicide in the jail here. Purcell made a rope of towels and handkerchiefs and hanged himself from the top of his cell.

Evening World-Herald, Omaha, Nebraska – **January 10, 1921**

Purcell of Lincoln Hangs Himself in Jail

Fond du Lac, Wis., Jan. 10 – L.C. Purcell, of Lincoln, Neb., who claimed to be Willie F. *[sic – W.]* Dickenson *[sic – Dickinson]*, who was kidnapped in Florence, Wis., in 1881 today committed suicide in the jail here. Purcell made a rope of towels and handkerchiefs and hanged himself from the top of his cell.

Duluth News-Tribune, Minnesota – **January 11, 1921**

Fond du Lac, Wis. – L.C. Purcell of Lincoln, Neb., who claimed to be Willie F. *[sic – W.]* Dickenson *[sic – Dickinson]*, who was kidnapped in Florence, Wis., in 1881, today committed suicide in the jail here. Purcell made a rope of towels and handkerchiefs and hanged himself from the top of his cell.

**FLORENCE COUNTY, WISCONSIN -- FLORENCE
TOWNSHIP – WILLIE DICKINSON KIDNAPPING**

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