

[Van Zandt, John Jacob]

Lamentable Affair—Suicide of John J. Van Zandt

Our citizens are startled last evening on hearing the report that John J. Van Zandt¹, who was an old and respected citizen, had committed suicide at his residence in Howell street, by shooting himself through the heart with a pistol. It appears from the testimony given on the inquest held by Coroner Harder, that deceased, while dining yesterday noon, complained of feeling ill, and requested his son to go to his store in Main street and inform the persons there that he would not be there until about four o'clock. Mr. Van Zandt then retired to his room and laid down. His wife, who was made aware of his illness, bathed his head—which he said felt dizzy—until he apparently went to sleep. About four o'clock Mrs. Van Zandt was startled by a sharp report, which she at first thought was caused by the slamming of a door. Hearing a groan, she made haste to her husband's room, to find that he appeared to be fainting; and on throwing back the bed-clothes she was made aware by the flowing blood that her husband had shot himself. The revolver with which the fatal deed was committed was by his side and covered with blood. Miss Kate Spoor, who was in the house, summoned Dr. Sumner, but before he arrived Mr. Van Zandt was dead. An examination by Dr. Sumner showed that the ball had passed nearly through the body in the region of the heart.

The coroner's jury, which Chauncey Perry, Esq., was foreman, returned the following verdict, "That John J. Van Zandt came to his death by a pistol shot fired by his own hand, whilst in bed at his own house, at or about 4 o'clock P.M. on the 7th day of February, 1870, whilst laboring under a mental or brain disease, he then being insane."

Further testimony went to show that Mr. Van Zandt had been afflicted at times with aberration of mind for nearly a year. His wife had noticed in his actions such peculiarities as led her to suspect that his mind was affected, and she therefore took every precaution possible against anything like the sad occurrence which has just taken place. She would never leave him alone in the house, and would permit him to be absent on business only as long as necessary. Others outside the family have noticed a tendency toward mental derangement in deceased.

Mr. Van Zandt was fifty-seven years of age, and leaves a wife and five children to lament his death. He had an insurance, it is said, of ten or fifteen thousand dollars on his life. It is supposed that financial difficulties had unsettled his mind. But [only] a few years ago he was possessed of quite a fortune, but unfortunate speculations had made quite an inroad on it, and the loss so worked on his brain as to cause insanity. He was well known for years as the proprietor of the coffee and spice mills in Aqueduct which bear his name. Two or three days since he purchased the store of Schank Bros. in Main street, but had not fully entered into possession of it when he terminated his life.

Union & Advertiser, Rochester NY, 8 Feb 1870

Transcribed on 5 Feb 2004 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

¹ He was one of the earliest founders of the First Universalist Society of Rochester, NY.