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THE SKIFF MYSTERY.

North Powder News Prints Article on Unclear Mystery.

Steps taken this week looking to the final settlement of the Willis Skiff estate has revived public interest in the mysterious disappearance of that gentleman, and several misstatements of fact are being published that are prejudicial to the good name of North Powder.

It is true that Mr. Skiff disappeared while on a business trip to North Powder, over 20 years ago, very much as Editor Palmer disappeared in La Grande recently.

Like Palmer, Skiff has been "heard from" and even "seen" at intervals, but no skeleton was ever identified as his, and the big reward offered was but recently withdrawn, the estate is only now being settled.

The facts as related by substantial citizens of this place who were here and cognizant of the strange affair throughout, are as follows:

Willis Skiff, who is remembered as a tall, active man, fearless, athletic—he not infrequently walked to North Powder and back to Union—an alert vigorous man, fully capable of giving an account of himself, a big-hearted and friendly man without a known enemy, came to North Powder by rail Saturday morning, July 24, 1887, and spent the day on Wolf creek, bargaining for the farmers' wheat crop. The grain was to be paid for as usual, on delivery at his mill, the old Red mill below Union, where the electric light plant now stands.

In the afternoon he came back to town and took a room in the North Powder hotel, kept by George Bobler.

The hotel was unusually full that night. About 8 p. m. Bobler went to Vandecar's and bought an extra bed, saying he was overcrowded.

After supper Skiff, with A. C. Huntington of La Grande, Mr. Tibbets, a fruit tree agent; Godfrey, the hostler, and others, sat a while on the porch, talking. The porch was low, with a flat roof, railed about. In this upper porch sat Messrs. Marshall and Hall, partners in mercantile and lumber business; Hall, who ran the sawmill on Tucker Flat, was selling his interest to the former, who ran the store.

Shortly before the party below broke up to retire, Mr. Skiff arose and sauntered over toward the section house. He was seen to pause by a binder a few rods away, stooping to peer under or around it. No one paid any attention, but idly looking that way later, it was seen that he was gone. If he crossed the track to where a party of emigrants were camped; if he walked away, or caught a passing train, time has not yet developed, if he was followed or attacked—it was a quiet, fair evening and sounds carried far.

The two men sat talking on the upper porch until midnight, undisturbed. And the hotel was a crazy little shack, shaken throughout by sneeze or snore.

Next morning Bobler found Skiff's bed had not been occupied, but was not alarmed, as he had many friends in town. Monday inquiry was made; Tuesday the alarm became general; Wednesday all Union came up and scoured the town.

Bobler threw his house open to them and it was fairly torn up; parlor, dining-room and porch floors were taken up and the ground dug away beneath them. Mill, buildings, cellars, streams, willows and the adjacent country were gone over then and afterward, but without yielding a clue. A reward of \$5000 was offered. Wood a Portland detective, was employed at \$10 a day and expenses.

Wood proceeded to frame up a case on Bobler, "finding" some of Skiff's belongings in Pyle canyon, and an expert discovered traces of blood in some dirt and slivers Wood said he got off Bobler's porch.

Bobler was tried that fall and acquitted. He did not become insane or die, as published, but is still living a quiet, respectable life in Washington.

Years later a skeleton was found lodged in the willows of North Powder river. It was that of a tall man of Mr. Skiff's build, the skull stove in as by a blow. It was taken to Union, but proved not to be Skiff. For one thing the deceased had sound teeth, while the skull had recently put in fillings for Skiff.

Not a shred of evidence of Skiff's death has ever been produced. He carried nothing of value and had no enemies. Nor had he any known reason for leaving. His home was happy, and though it developed that he owed \$10000, \$7000 of which was due and \$3000 pressing, his property was large

and his credit good. The affair remains an impenetrable mystery.—North Powder News.

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