Adventures of Black Sam, Oregon "Bull Puncher"

This Story of Historical Interest to Eastern Oregon, An Installment to Be Printed Weekly by The Evening Observer, Is Told by Sam Ayotte to Jack Hunter of The Park.

(By Jack Hunter)
(THIRD INSTALLMENT)

"Well sir, having belonged to the gang since 1849, and really one of the first to operate this efficient unwritten law—I was here at once ordered to join this committee supposed to be at least 40, but on this occasion, we found only fourteen that could be entrusted with this most serious affair of trying and hanging men. And this time we had a woman in our bunch—the girl from Missouri—Eleanore Wilson.

"You see, a man can't say that the country was settled at that time in the sense that we understand a settled country today; but, contrary to many younger pioneers—whom I don't blame in trying to bear the distinction of being first in the field, when they tell that thes Oregon country wasn't much of a country before 1860, especially referring to '61 and '62. But let me tell you that I myself brought a good many prospectors from California, starting in 1850. And I found many old trappers and prospectors who had come long before that. You must understand that this big country of Oregon was explored a long, long time before 1850. I have not much of an education, but I have a good memory. For instance that Hudson Bay Fur company was fully equipped and in the field operating full blast on the coast at Astoria in 1811. And there were missionaries long before that. A good sized mission was established at Walla Walla by Dr. Marcus Whitman with a branch at Umatilla, and H. H. Spalding had another on the Clearwater in 1836-38. It is certain that all of the principal gold placer diggings have been prospected for its courses gold in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana as early as 1849, at least starting in the latter part of that year. Most of this was done by discontented forty-niners who were on their way back east, prospecting along the trail, the various rivers and streams. Some of them went back home. Many died on the way, and others remained in this country. So after the real discovery of this gold, came the rush to the Oregon country for settlers along in the '60s. I know an old fellow who settled in Silver Bow in 1852, old Hugh J. Turner, who later discovered the Iowa silver mine at Bustersville, Montana. P. J. Murray was in the Coeur d'Alenes along about that time. Asa Oldman was on the Snake river in 1851, below Huntington, near the mouth of Pine creek. And Charles W. Hensel was settled near La Grande, in Grande Ronde in 1853. I brought him a sack of Barnaby potatoes, which I am almost sure was the first seed potatoes brought to that place.

"So at that time while there was not that real spirit of settling permanently, there were many camps along the old trail; but all ready to move on farther any day. And that way there not many white women in the country. I am referring to this, so that you will not blame me too much when I tell you that I actually for a time went wild over that pretty Missouri woman of only 25 years.

"Well, sir, the case was this: Her father, Ephriam Wilson, with another man named Abrajam Fruit, with their families had come from California, joining a bunch of prospectors. They were about forty wagons set at that place, southwest of where Baker City now is. The wagons were lined up in a horse shoe ring. We called this sometimes a 'Horse Shoe Fort'. This invariably took the name of the leader who first selected the spot. Sometimes we called it 'So and So's' fort, or 'So and So's' camp. This one we called it 'Fort Bentley' for Cap. Bentley had selected the place first. From this fort a great many were prospecting the banks of Powder river and its aributaries.

"It was supposed that the two men, Wilson and Fruit, were returning with much gold, when their mutilated bodies were found by George Wilson, Ephriam's boy, Lenora's brother.

"Old man Fruit's head was cut clean off his shoulders. Wilson had a gaping wound in the side made by one of those large bored 'horse pistols' of that time. (Note—There were no revolvers at that time like so many writers are wont to bring into their fiction stories recently.—J. H.)

Woman Vigilante.

"So Eleanore Wilson begged to be accepted one of the vigilantes committee seeking justice for the murder of her father. And I was most enthusiastic to let her in, and they let this rule aside and she was made a member of this special committee. This was the first and the last woman I ever knew of having been granted that privilege.

"We had splendid evidences of their trail. They had gone up the river into the Blue mountains. They intended to make a detour coming down Rock creek striking the old trail near La Grande.

"But we caught up with them the second day close to where Sumpter is now situated. We proceeded at once to try them for their atrocious crime.

"The moment that Eleanore saw the younger of the two bandits all her enthusiasm seemed to drop. And the nearer time approached for the hanging, her countenance also became more despondent. The girl was simply heart broken and I knew it. But why? It was a mystery to me.

"You see, her brother George was the man that had taken the orders to me from Captain Bentley, a man I knew well since 1849. George Wilson and I at once sealed an invisible pact of friendship—I can't tell you how this happens, but I have met men just that way—you can't help but like them from the first. Well, he told me of his pretty sister, and when I first saw her, she eclipsed it seemed at least for some time everything else I had in my heart concerning women. And I managed to be riding close to her and her brother on our man hunt up Powder river.

"At once it seemer as though we knew each other for years. I called her 'Lenora' and she to my pleasure called me Black Sam from the very first.

Tom Hill, Squaw Man.

"Well, sir, one of the murderers was old Tom Hill. Cap. Bentley recognized him at once. Tom had given him and the vigilantes a long chase in California in 1850, for snitching a poke of gold left on a stump one night. He had got away clear out of the country. Tom Hill was an old Hudson Bay trapper and a squaw man. He not only had a notorious reputation, but had left a trail behind him. For he had one or two Tom Hills in every tribe of the Rocky Mountain Indians. No doubt they were all offspring of old Tom Hill with him several squaws. Hill City, Idaho, I believe was named after him. At that time Tom Hill was badly wanted by the Vigilantes.

"Here was a man who had had a great chance of being a hero in the old, old pioneer days. But instead turned crooked, and I have heard many tales of his cold-blooded murders. He originally came from Canada it is told, long before the Hudson Bay company. The name Hill is a translation and contraction of the French 'De Lacote,' (of the Hill). We finished his career along in August 1856 when he was about 80 years old. We left him dangling from the limb of a tree somewhere near where Sumpter is now in the Blue mountains; and not as someone tells today, that Tom Hill was killed by a squaw man near Flathead lake, Montana.

Bolduc's Story.

"But I have a different story to tell of the younger man. Charley Bolduc—later named Boldock. He was a young French Canadian of 28—well built and very handsome. And he and Eleanore Wilson were engaged in California, and were to be married as soon as they reached Missouri, their old home. So the girl was completely reduced to an actual breakdown. George was really as bad as his sister about it. And I felt mighty queer about the whole affair.

"We made the boy speak for himself. He bravely stated:

"'I have done nothing wrong. I was working for old Tom and he took me along with him. He had done this murder two days before. I didn't know a thing about it until he told me. Then I was scared, because he told me that they would hang me anyway. So I kept running away with him.'

"We left the whole thing with Captain Bentley. He asked George Wilson's opinion.

"'I believe the boy is innocent,' said George.

"Then Eleanor was called to speak. She excitedly told her sentiments:

"'I can't believe that Charley is guilty. He is too tender a man to commit murder, let alone the killing of my father. He was without weapons of any kind whatever, and I believe his own story to be true. So I want him just as bad now as I ever did. Of course I gave to abide by the decision of the committee. But if Charley is hanged, I will be left all alone in this world. There is only another man, whom I would want to take me back to Missouri. And that man is Black Sam here. And if he refuses I will die right here in these mountains with Charley, before the sun sets again!'

"Now I really thought that I was in love with that pretty girl, and she was more lovable in the predicament she was in than before. There was surely a good chance for me to get a fine woman with some good property in Missouri. For the Wilsons had much money with them and still owned their home.

"But, I positively knew in my own heart that young Bolduc was entirely innocent. And this worked hard in my mind.

"Not so with the rest of the bunch. They all clamored for a hanging. They believed that the man was lieing. So they began preparations.

"Eleanore started to cry. Silently standing erect, the tears were pouring down her cheeks.

"I turned my back on the gang, walked a few steps away and there I began praying, pulling my holy scapular, mother's gift. In the scapular I had encased mother's small tintype picture on one side; and I also had my sweetheart's on the other side. As I felt those pictures I at once knew what to do. I was sure that Cap. Bentley was on my side. So, I took Eleanore by the hand, leading here to where my horse was tied. I couldn't speak, but I motioned her what to do.

"She untied the horse, led it to her own, then with the two horses went over to Charley. He mounted into the saddle and soon they disappeared in the pines along Powder river.

"Not a word was spoken by my comrades. I turned and addressed them thus:

"'Boys, if you want to hang and must hang someone, you just go ahead and hang me!'

"Captain Bentley spoke then:

"'Boys, let's go home.'

"George Wilson, her brother, shared his horse with me, which we rode alternately until we reached the camp. The next day my horse was brought back. And Fort Bentley pulled freight not after that, I was told; and I have never heard of Lenora since. But, I was told that a Bolduck family had settled along the Powder river in 1860-61. I have often wondered if that couldn't be Charley and Lenora.

"That fall I was on my way to California.

"On another trip to what was generally called 'The Snake River country' I had quite an adventure. But let me tell you of this river. Many called it the Long river. I gave it the name 'Crooked river' because you could cross that river 14 times on a ten mile run straight line as the crow flies, while it would take about two and a half days by following the river. At one place it made a regular crooked line like a huge yoke and the two bows. Old timers called that place Ox Bow.

"Well, sir, I had just got down the worst grade on that old trail from Fort Hall to The Dalles. This was between Ladd creek and Warm lake. (Hot lake.) There were eight of us. Four of them were passengers of mine. My bulls were all sick from feeding on poisonous weeds the night before. My oldest pair died that morning. We had absolutely to stop and make a stay there. We chose a good camping place on the east side of this warm lake. This is not very far from Old La Grande.

"Our talk was mostly of the activities of the Indians, who were not yet reconciled since the Whitman massacre and the war with the Cayuse tribe in 1849. They had done a few depravities we had been told along the trail recently. So we were all on the lookout for them. So, on the second evening our fear was realized, for we saw several hundred of 'them all apparently 'dressed to kill' coming over the bald hills back of the lake.

"I tell you, that this was one night when I couldn't sleep at all, for they had camped directly on the opposite side of the lake and we could hear them all night dancing and reveling like war mad Indians.

"But we had all agreed not to show any resistence, for it was of no use. The next morning we were all on the alert before sunrise. And as I gazed on my partners, I imagined that I was in company of a lot of denizens from ghost land. They were all so sickly white. And I am sure I must have looked the same to them, for one had the impudence to tell me afterwards, 'Sam, I never thought that your skin could bleach that white over night.' We had just spied four stalwart bucks straddled of fine pinto caymses. Their feathers trailing behind their backs made them look at once suspicious and dangerous. They kept coming closer. And as they approached I was thinking hard. But, I was certain that Indians on the war path would not listen to my 'charm' words. So I thought again of prayers. And I bid farewell to my mother and sweetheart far away.

"They were near now coming on a trot. We could hear them murmur to one another their lingo. I advanced towards them and gave them my 'countersign' and yelled my mystic Indian words.

"They stopped and looked at one another, then laughed. One of them answered:

"'Huh-hughh — Nicomstock shenook wah-wah.'

"They didn't understand my 'charm' at all! I turned to my partners and said: 'Boys, resign yourselves to the fates, we are lost!'"

(To be Continued.)

Back on Lot

Pawnee Bill (Major Gordon W. Lillie), former partner of Buffalo Bill, who retired from the show business in 1913, is organizing a wild west show at his Pawnee (Okla.) ranch which will go to London in May. Though 65, Pawnee Bill is actively directing his new show. King Edward will be the chief patron of the enterprise in England.

COUGAR'S CRIES HEARD

HOOD RIVER, Ore.—Those who maintain that a cougar cries might have found backers among residents of the east side just outside the city. Mrs. John H. Koberg, wife of a truck farmer, whose place is on the Columbia river bottoms, and others reported that they heard the scream of a big cat. Search around a slaughter house revealed tracks of the animal.

Unbroken forest extends from the city to the Mount Hood national forest along the upper range east of the valley, and hunters with dogs today searched the woods near town in vain, though the cougar had returned to the highlands.

J. L. Bowman in Klamath.

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore.—Interested in establishing a woolen retail store in this city, J. L. Bowman of the Brownsville Woolen mills of Portland, spent the past three days in Klamath Falls seeking a location for his prospective business house.

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A few days later you meet Mr. Howard again. And again. He becomes a friend, perhaps an intimate in your social as well as business life.

Mr. Howard's name grows to mean a lot to you. Mr. Walters is rarely seen again and soon forgotten.

In this newspaper are other names—names of advertised products. Day after day you see them. They are like old friends—to be trusted. Their names mean economy, full value and integrity.

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Read the advertisements to know the names that are worth knowing in the market place.