

Historical Notes Tell of Curry County's Hangings

Editor's Note: These historical notes on Curry County are from the file of Max Brainard, and are composed from the largest collection of authenticated data on the county.

Occasionally, local people may have information concerning the happenings mentioned in these notes which Max does not possess. If you have any such information, any records, or any stories of the early days of this county, come in and we'll put you in touch with Max. He'd like to talk to you.

By MAX BRAINARD

HANGING

The first legal execution to take place in Curry County was soon after Aug. 15, 1861, George Sullivan and George Brown were hung and buried near the site of the present Gold Beach High School, for the murder of Eliza Ann Graham, whose remains rest in a marked grave in the old Gold Beach cemetery.

Eliza Ann, "Lizzie", was the 18-year-old ward of Dennis and Margaret Cuniff. Over her, the gossip of the day did much gum beating as to her parentage but now even the echoes are dead.

However, the story is the two who were hung accosted and assaulted Lizzie on the trail, that the slaughtered damsel was past recognizing her assailants and that the Vigilantes were over enthusiastic and that the male victims were strangers who were fitted to nooses whether they liked the fit or not. Some old folks reported, years later, hearsay that there was a decrease in local male population about that time, sort of unrelated to the hanging.

On the second of July, in '62, the county court refused S. G. Kerr's bill as coroner in the case.

Still another controversial hanging was that of Coleman Gillespie, October 5, 1900, in the Gold Beach jail yard, for the murder of Mrs. Christina Edson. Gillespie was sentenced by Judge J. W. Hamilton and the certificate of execution witnesses was signed by DeLoss Woodruff, William C. Lake, Joseph Crockett, W. H. Crook, C. S. Winsor, Frank A. Stewart, Thomas Smith, John Jensen, N. B. Moore, W. C. Burrow, John R. Miller, with James Walker, sheriff, and Mauritz Fritsche, his deputy.

Poor old lady Christina had a hard life. As the wife of John Geisel she was captured by the Indians, in February, 1856, to-

gether with her two daughters, after the reds had killed her husband and two little sons, and burned their cabin. She had come across the plains, with her little family, from Ohio, in '53.

On July 10, 1858, Christina, and Frank Buggy were married by C. W. Weaver, J.P., with Frederick Uber and Jason J. McVay present. But this didn't seem to be an agreeable hookup. About five years later Frank appears to have sold most of his holdings and Christina's pleas for a divorce from Frank was granted in the Circuit court session of June 8, 1865.

Her next matrimonial venture was with a Scotchman, James Pate, whom she married Dec. 8, 1869, Peace Justice John Dewey tying the knot, with George Scudder and Ann Geisel as witnesses. (Ann was Christina's daughter, the baby her mother took with her into captivity at the Gold Beach stockade and at the time of this marriage, she was around 13 years old. Christina petitioned for a divorce in the Spring of '71 and it was granted at the June 5 session of that year, she to resume her "maiden" name and pay the costs of the divorce, \$8.75! The divorce court was held in the district school house "near A. J. Edson's", which was then on the east side of the road near the Geisel monument south driveway. Testimony of witnesses at this trial reported Pate as averring, "If I hadn't acted like a Chinaman toward her, her head would have been off long ago!" Pate, incidentally, had departed the jurisdiction some considerable time previously. Note that this marital venture lasted but 18 months.

Avery Johnson Edson was born about 1825 and in '54 was in Port Orford where he got a liquor license Mar. 28, 1856. He was, betimes, county sheriff, and in his latter years had a small store at the "Edson Range", location cited above.

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Fred Moore told how he and Frank Bailey stopped into the old man's store, one day, and Mr. Edson was in a back room, humming and talking to himself. They decided he had company, so waited. When he at last spied them he came to the front of the store and asked why they didn't holler for him.

"We heard you talking and thought you had company."

"No. I was just talking to myself."

"What good does that do you?"

"When I talk, I like to talk to a smart man, so I talk with Old Man Edson."

Mr. Edson had been a widower for some years, his first wife having been Harriet Coleman, aunt of Coleman Gillespie, and by her he had a son, Tom, born about 1854, who homesteaded the range about where the power line now crosses the highway and also Edson Creek, north of Wedderburn.

The elder Mr. Edson married, as his second venture, Christina Geisel, March 12, 1879, by Elder John Mansfield, at her home, with Dennis Cuniff and Mike Riley as witnesses, and they lived together until March 24, 1893, when the husband passed away. His remains were buried in the old Gold Beach cemetery.

How it came about that the widow moved into town has not yet been turned up but, in her old age, she had a little cabin, situated on a small bench still to be seen across the highway from the Sunset Inn, in Gold Beach and there it was that she met her end which, according to reports, was very sad and gruesome, on September 20, 1899. Her survivors were then listed as daugh-

aged as her first child, Mary, is listed as having been born in Hamilton County, Ohio, in 1843.

Purely hearsay, from old-timers, has it that Coleman was a familiar, at her cabin, packing wood and water and doing errands for the old lady, that she was the recipient of a small government check. (Mrs. Geisel had filed an indemnity claim amounting to \$5,450.17 against the government "for property captured, burnt, or destroyed, by the Rogue River Indians, then under superintendence of Capt. Benjamin Wright . . . which said damage, Anne Pompinilla and Mary Blake. She must have been quite

occurred in the month of February, 1856.") And the oldsters said Coleman took the old lady's check, killed her and burned the cabin, and fled on a borrowed horse.

But there is a definite chance in all hearsay material. Mostly, the above Edson-Gillespie material is a digest of the court records.

Fanny L. Gillespie closed the four months' school term, at Pistol River, October, 1889, having had the following pupils under her charge: John Crook, Willie and Maud Walker, Albert, Bertha, Hannah, and Elsie Snodgrass, Ruby Forgy, and John, Allen, and Edward Lawrence.

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