

A MULTI-PART SERIES ABOUT THE MCCARTY GANG BY BAKER CITY HISTORIAN GARY DIELMAN

## MCCARTY

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The Skovlins, who lived in Cove, began researching their book about the McCarty family in the early 1970s and finally published it in 2001. Then in 2011 the Skovlins contacted me as curator of the Baker County Library's historic archives. They offered to donate to the library several boxes of

research materials, which detail their 30-year journey, including traveling all over the West, as they "pursued" the McCartys. The result, according to history book reviewers, is the very best book about the McCarty Gang. Sadly, the Skovlins both died in the past five years, Jon in 2013 and Donna in 2015.

This series of episodes (there likely will be eight, published on Fridays)

about the McCarty Gang summarizes the gang's activities beginning in the late 1880's and is based almost completely on information in the Skovlin book. Not to leave any stone unturned in writing this series, I have recently looked at all of the Skovlin research material.

If this series piques your interest, I highly recommend you read "In Pursuit of the McCartys." The book is

out of print but available at the Baker County Library and may be found for purchase on the internet. Read the book to discover interesting details about the McCartys in the Northwest and for the McCarty family origins and outlaw activities in several other states, especially in Utah and Colorado, before 1885.

—Gary Dielman

By Gary Dielman  
For the Baker City Herald

The McCarty Gang's base of operations for committing robberies in Eastern Oregon and Central Washington was located at a ranch in an area I call McCarty Basin.

That's an unofficial name in remembrance of the notorious McCarty family of cattle rustlers, horse thieves, and train and bank robbers. In 1885 McCarty Basin was a rather desolate sagebrush area a couple miles east of Haines. Even though the famous Oregon Trail literally ran through the middle of the basin, it was nevertheless an unattractive, out-of-the-way stretch of land to which the federal government lured settlers to occupy and improve with the carrot of free land applied for through the Desert Land Grant Act of 1877.

Today, though, after the passage of more than a century, the narrow strip of land on the east side of Coyote Butte and west of Interstate I-84 is no longer a desolate desert but more like a garden of Eden populated by well over 30 huge irrigated crop circles of green alfalfa, potatoes and wheat.

"McCarty Bridge Road" is the official name for the road which runs through the area I call McCarty Basin. The north end of McCarty Bridge Road begins at its junction with Highway 30 three-and-one-third miles south of North Powder. Turn east and follow the road about a mile, then southeast another two-and-one-third miles to the namesake McCarty Bridge. In that last half mile the road dips off a barren hill into bottom land, which in the latter part of the 19th century was quite swampy. Powder River, meandering through the basin in tight loops, flows under McCarty Bridge and on north to North Powder.

The office of the Baker County Clerk has property

records showing that on Nov. 23, 1885, Bill McCarty, age 33, bought ranch land in Baker County, which lay along both banks of Powder River. The McCarty ranch house and outbuildings are gone, so nothing is left on the ground to mark the spot. The simplest way to describe where they used to stand is in reference to McCarty Bridge. If you drive to the bridge or locate it on Google Earth, the ranch house stood about 300 feet north and about midway between McCarty Bridge Road and Powder River and about 500 feet west of I-84.

The freeway is elevated enough that travelers on can look right down on the area where the McCarty house and barn once stood. Three-quarters of a mile east of I-84 are four cell towers on top of a sagebrush hill, elevation 3,800 feet. Except for the cell towers, the area east of I-84 probably looks today much as it did when the McCartys first ran cattle on the range over a century ago.

Bill McCarty operated his Baker County cattle ranch from 1885 until 1893. The cattle roamed over mostly public land in the summer ranging as far northeast as the Wallowa Mountains. Since winters in Powder River Valley were harsh for cattle raising, in late fall Bill drove them on a four-day trek to the much lower elevation area of Snake River, where the cattle could again browse on public lands for free.

As far as his neighbors and local authorities knew, Bill was just a cattle rancher. That had been his occupation in La Sal, Utah, located on the Colorado border 25 miles southeast of Moab, Utah. In 1884 Bill sold his cattle operation there for about \$40,000. He used some of that money to purchase the ranch in



Bill  
McCarty

Baker Valley and a house in Baker City about 12 miles south. The two-story house was located on Madison Street a couple of lots west of Fourth Street and just north across Madison from the future site of St. Elizabeth Hospital, now condominium apartments.

The family of Dr. Alexander and Mary McCarty was a tight-knit unit while the children were young, but once they grew to adulthood they went their own ways. In 1885 Bill and Lettie McCarty had settled on their ranch in Baker County. George and Nellie were mining in the Cornucopia area and had some property on the Idaho side of Snake River opposite Iron Dyke Mine on the Oregon side. Tom had bought property in Wallowa County and lived for a short time northeast of Joseph and Pine Creek Prairie. Brother-in-law Matt Warner and wife Rose Morgan had a tent restaurant business on what they called their 7U ranch northeast of Ellensburg, Washington. The ranch was named for their registered cattle brand.

Before the McCartys came to Oregon, they had committed plenty of cattle rustling and horse stealing crimes, for which they were seldom held to account. When they came to Oregon in 1885, they gave



Tom  
McCarty

up their lawless ways for several years. (I refer the reader to the Skovlin book for details about the lawless escapades of the McCartys before 1885.) Before I summarize the McCarty Gang crimes in the Northwest, I'll describe two bank robberies in Colorado, which were precursors to bank robberies they later committed in Northeastern Oregon and

Eastern Washington.

### Denver bank robbery — March 30, 1889

On March 30, 1889, Tom McCarty pulled off a brazen, single-handed robbery of the First National Bank of Denver. Using the surname "Wells," Tom lied his way into the office of the bank owner, David Moffat. Tom stuck a pistol in Moffat's face and coerced him into writing a check to a Mr. "Wells" for \$21,000, which he demanded that the bank immediately cash.

In addition to the pistol, Tom, acting crazy, waived a bottle of "nitroglycerin" (later determined to contain water), threatening to blow the place up and everyone in it, including himself, if his demands were not immediately carried out. Tom made off with \$20,000 in large bills and \$1,000 in gold coin (about \$575,000 in today's money). Tom's true identity was never officially discovered. Later a woman friend of Tom said he told her all about the robbery on numerous occasions.

### Telluride, Colorado, Bank Robbery — June 24, 1889

During the June 24, 1889, robbery of a bank in Telluride, Colorado, Tom had the help of his brother-in-law Matt Warner and none



Matt  
Warner

other than Butch Cassidy, for whom Tom was a mentor in the outlaw ways. While a cowboy friend of Butch stayed with their horses in front of the bank, Tom, Matt, and Butch entered the bank. It was empty of customers and staffed by a single employee, a teller. The teller thrust his arms into the air upon

seeing Matt aiming a pistol at him. With alacrity the robbers stuffed cash into a buckskin pouch and left the bank forcing the teller ahead of them, so he could not get a weapon or sound an alarm. Releasing him unharmed, they jumped on their horses and made their getaway with about \$22,000 (about \$600,000 today).

## Oregon economy humming

By Gary A. Warner  
WesCom News Service

SALEM — Oregon's economy is humming along in fine shape, but there are some likely bumps ahead, state economists said last week.

The December Economic & Revenue Outlook was presented to a joint legislative committee at an informational hearing held at the Capitol.

It's one of the quarterly reports given to lawmakers as an update on how much money the state is bringing in and what economic factors might portend for the future. The December

forecast will also be used by Gov. Kate Brown to fine-tune her budget proposal, due next month.

Overall, the outlook showed the state's economy should continue to grow through 2020. After that, it's a question mark.

"There's quite a bit of headwind in the outlook," said Mark McMullen, the state economist.

But in the meantime, Oregon is doing very well.

"Things are awesome, but maybe a recession is coming?" Rep. Rob Nosse, D-Portland asked.

## BURGLARY

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Baker City Police officers are continuing to investigate the crime and have a list of people they are interested in talking with, but there are no suspects at this time.

The BCPD was first notified of the burglary on the morning of Nov. 13. Police haven't determined how the burglar entered the store but McLin thinks entry was gained through one of the vacant storefronts next door on the north side of his business.

The burglary didn't result in any damage to the store itself. Since the burglary, the store has

remained open during its regular hours.

Some of the valuables stolen include 90-percent silver coins that are worth up to 12 times their original value. McLin says that more than \$7,000 worth of coins are missing since the night of the burglary. McLin has continued to find items missing in recent days and says that it's difficult to know exactly how much was taken.

The store originally was opened in 1981 by McLin and his partner. McLin left the business in 1984 but returned in the early 2000s. During his time as the owner, McLin could recall only one other burglary. That crime took place about six years ago and the burglar was convicted.

## The McCarty Family

### PARENTS

Dr. Alexander G. McCarty b. 1825 in Iowa, and Mary Ann Farmer McCarty b. 1830 in Indiana. Alexander was a physician and surgeon. The parents, after dragging their family all over the Midwest and West, finally settled down for good in 1885 near Myrtle Creek, Douglas County, in the southwest corner of Oregon.

### CHILDREN AND SPOUSES

John Thomas "Tom" McCarty, b. in Iowa around 1850, was the leader of the family and the eldest of the McCarty siblings; in 1873 Tom married fifteen-year-old Christina "Teenie" Marie Christiansen; their children: Lewis "Lew" William McCarty, b. 7-4-1874 and Thomas Leonard "Len" McCarty, b. 1868; Teenie's brother was Willard Erastus "Ras" Christiansen, aka Matt Warner, and aka Ras Lewis, who married Rose Morgan, whose sister was Sara Morgan; William "Bill" McCarty, b. in Iowa 1852; Bill married Lettie Maxwell in 1873; Lettie had been previously married to Alexander Brown, by whom she had a son named E.C. "Eck" Brown; Bill and Lettie had two sons: Fred b. 1871 and Pearl b. 1878. Lois McCarty b. in Indiana 1856; Lois married Hank Vaughn in 1875; they had two sons: Jake and Bert; Lois divorced Hank Vaughn, then married Joseph Rhinehart Hunsaker; they lived in Pine Valley, Oregon; their son Joseph Leonard b. 1887. George W. McCarty b. in Iowa 1862; his first marriage to Ruby Cornelison ended in divorce, one child Claude b. 1879; George and second wife, Nellie Blanchette, were married in Utah Territory 1884; Rosa McCarty, b. in 1866 in Montana Territory; Reatha McCarty, b. 1872 in Salt Lake City; Rosa and Reatha played no part in the lawlessness of their siblings.

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*Preview Among the Trees*  
Thursday, November 29, 2018  
6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.  
Tickets: \$15 per person  
Hors d'oeuvres, No-host Bar,  
Silent Auction  
**Gala**  
Friday, November 30, 2018  
5:30 p.m.—11:00 p.m.  
Cocktails 5:30 p.m.—Dinner 6:30 p.m.  
Tickets: \$60 per person  
Buffet Dinner, No-host Bar,  
Silent & Live Auction  
*Dance to live music of the "High Street Band" following the auction!*  
Tickets still available for "Preview" at Betty's Books, The Sycamore Tree  
and Saint Alphonsus Medical Center—Baker City  
**Family Day**  
Saturday, December 1, 2018  
10:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.  
Admission: Canned food or unwrapped toy  
Events are held at the Baker County Event Center  
2600 East Street  
Baker City, Oregon  
**Saint Alphonsus FOUNDATION**