

PART 3 OF A MULTI-PART SERIES ABOUT THE MCCARTY GANG BY BAKER CITY HISTORIAN GARY DIELMAN

Many years ago I heard about what seemed to me a mythical "McCarty Gang" of outlaws that had a "hideout" east of Haines. Recently I found out the McCarty Gang is no myth. I was enlightened by reading "In Pursuit of the McCartys," 2001, 340 pages, including 121 photos and six maps, written by Jon and Donna Skovlin. Reading their book did not happen by chance.

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,



Dielman

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; Part 1 was in the Nov. 23 issue of the Herald, and Part 2 in

the Nov. 30 issue) about the McCarty Gang summarizes the gang's activities beginning in the late 1880s 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

Baker County's Outlaw Family

By Gary Dielman
For the Baker City Herald

Attempted Train Robbery Near Telocaset — April 27, 1892

The McCarty Gang made two attempts to rob trains in Eastern Oregon. The first attempt failed; the second was a complete success.

The first attempt took place on the Union Pacific line near Telocaset, Oregon, which was a rail crew maintenance camp in southern Union County midway between Union and North Powder.

That section of the Union Pacific Railroad had been in operation since 1884, when track being built from Portland met up near Huntington, with track being built from Lincoln, Nebraska, thereby linking Oregon with the East Coast of the United States. Emigration via covered wagon along the Oregon Trail dwindled after 1884.

On the U.P. line there was a tunnel between Telocaset and North Powder. Thinking the south-end tunnel entrance would be an ideal place to stop the train, the McCartys placed rocks and

timbers near the entrance and waited. When they heard the train approaching, they pulled their bandanas up above their noses and with guns at the ready, waited for the train to appear.

Problem was that in that high desert sagebrush land there were no trees to hide behind. As the train approached the tunnel entrance, the engineer spotted the robbers. Instead of stopping to avoid the blockage he throttled the steam engine to full speed ahead. The cow catcher on the front of the locomotive easily bumped the rocks and timbers to the side of the track and kept right on going. The robbers, powerless to hinder the train's progress, went home with empty saddlebags.

Robbery at Sparta Store — April 30, 1892

Three days after their botched attempt to rob the Union Pacific train, the still-smarting McCartys chose a much softer target, the Sparta store, located in the southern foothills of the Wallowa Mountains 25 miles east of Baker City. Sparta was a mining camp

that never developed into a real town. Today it is a ghost town.

In 1872 two emigrant Jewish merchant brothers, Sigmund and Seligmann Heilner, built the store of native stone, the only non-wood structure in town. Within a couple of years the brothers moved their merchant business to Baker City, where the business thrived for over 125 years. The Heilner stone store is still standing as a reminder of their short-lived presence in Sparta.

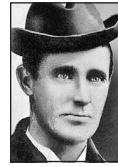
In 1892 the stone building served as the E.E. Clough Mercantile Store. Around 9 p.m. the McCarty Gang, consisting of Tom, Bill, Matt, Fred, George and Nellie, stood ready to rob the little store, which was still occupied by customers. As usual, Nellie was holding the horses in a clump of nearby trees. George and Fred remained in the street to make

sure no more customers entered the store.

Tom, Bill, and Matt, all three masked, entered the store. At gunpoint they made everyone move to one side of the room and face the wall. Bill forced the clerk to open the safe and place gold dust and nuggets into a pouch.

As the robbers were about leave, Bill decided he'd help himself to a new pair of boots. He hurriedly tried on some boots, all the while enduring constant chastisement from his anxious companions. Finally deciding on a pair, Bill and the others ran from the store to where Nellie and George were holding their horses and galloped off. Later they all had a laugh at Bill, who discovered he made off with two left boots. Their take, between \$400 and \$500, was also a disappointment.

The Sparta store robbery created much greater loss than the monetary amount the McCartys stole. Several innocent men, who were identified by eyewitnesses as the robbers, were rounded up, tried, and convicted of the robbery. A couple of the men served 10 years in prison.



Tom McCarty



Bill McCarty

executed his part of the gang's plan. Tom held the engineer and fireman at gunpoint; Bill entered the baggage car, ordered the express agent to open the safe, and upon compliance, emptied the safe's valuable contents into a sack; meanwhile Matt entered the passenger car and relieved passengers of their valuables.

With their tasks completed, they jumped on their horses and rode off to execute the rest of their plan. Their getaway route was described by the Skovlins.

The trio rode at breakneck speed across the eastern end of Elkhorn Ridge, near Auburn, down through the open ponderosa pine foothills where they met Nellie. She was holding a set of relay horses in the timber above Wingville about three miles out of Baker City. Here they exchanged their take and their spent horses for fresh horses, which they proceeded to ride casually into town, giving the appearance that they had just come from the ranch.

Later they tallied their loot at nearly \$3,000 in cash, plus an unknown amount of gold dust. The cash today would be worth about \$83,000.



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