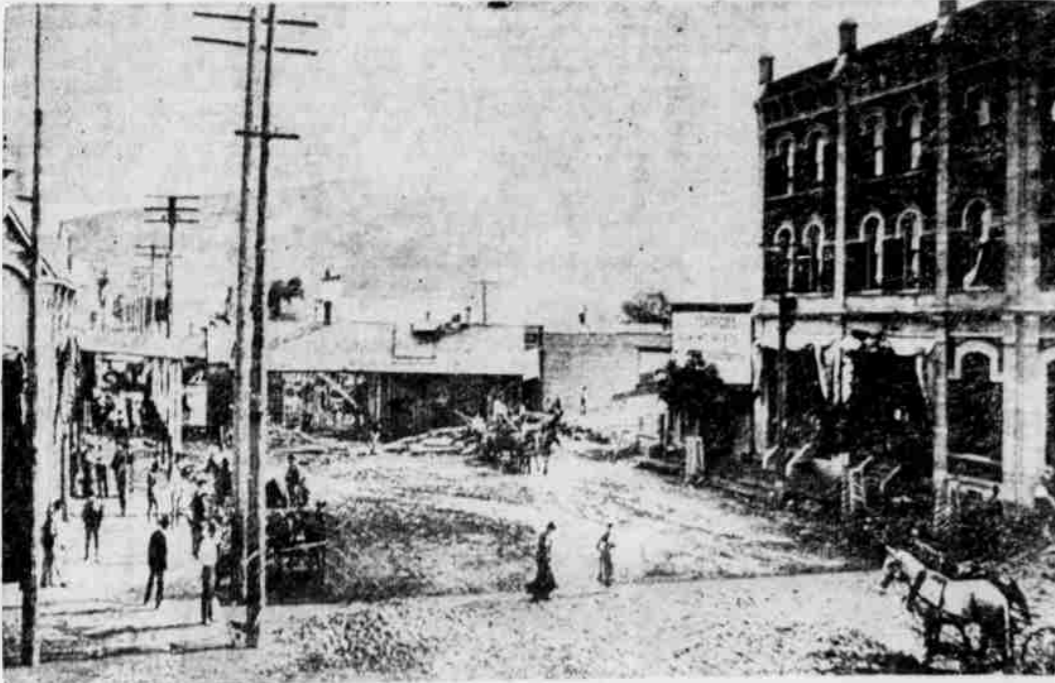


Two Old-Timers Recall Catastrophic Sunday of June 14, 1903, In Heppner



LOOKING NORTH on Heppner's Main Street after the flood of 1903 from the corner of May Street was this scene taken from the spot where Fullerton Chevrolet company is now located. On the right is the old Palace hotel, which was destroyed by fire in 1918. On the left corner was the old First National Bank building in the same location as the present site of the Heppner branch. First National. Main street was completely blocked by buildings which were washed in from the east side of the street.

THE DAY OF THE FLOOD

By Arthur Raymond Crawford

There are times, perhaps rare occasions, when stark reality can far out-do the most horrible of nightmarish dreams; and in youth, when fantasies and imaginings are so often at all-out war against the mere mundane things, then indeed do harsh facts upset ethereal fancies, dreams and nightmares. So jolting comes reality we would wish that after all it was in truth a nightmare.

The year was 1903 and the day was the 14th of June. It was the day of the Heppner Flood. On the third of the month I had reached the age of 10. Early summer in Eastern Oregon is a time of year which ordinarily gives forth the finest of weather. But already in this particular month sultry days were providing a series of electrical thunder storms with resultant flash floods overflowing creeks, gullies and dry washes.

On Saturday the 13th, in the early afternoon, father came in to the house and announced that since it was such a nice day he thought a trip out to Uncle John's would be just fine. Then, too, Virginia, oldest of the children, who had been at the ranch for several days, could come home with us on our return. So I accompanied father over to the livery stable where we stood by while Mr. Thompson hitched the horses to one of his fanciest "buggies." It was to be the last time that my father, myself, or the horses and the surry too, would ever again be in that stable. (The site of the stable at that time was on the corner of Main and Baltimore, where Fara's shoe repair shop is now located.)

With father and mother and six of us children, four boys and two girls, sister Virginia already being at the ranch, there was a surry full. My two younger sisters were to come along in later years. The 16-mile trip over into adjoining Rhea Creek Valley was uneventful, but I do recall the day was terrifically warm and the old country road was very dry and very dusty

Arriving at the ranch we spent the rest of the day and evening so normally that I would likely not be able to set the time apart from any other pleasant boyhood experience except that it predated an event, a catastrophe would be the better word, that hundreds of persons were never to forget and when things that were would never be the same again.

Sunday morning of this never-to-be-forgotten day found a perfectly gorgeous early morning, but the temperature was rising rapidly, and I remember Uncle John Spencer saying something also about the humidity, which didn't mean a thing to me at that time. The early afternoon, even if it was Sunday, was too nice for anyone to deny the suggestion of a few games of pitching horseshoes. So all of us, probably about twenty men, women and children were soon out in front of the blacksmith's shop and the "sports" proceeded to show their skill. I recall the participating and arguing the distances of the respective "shots" from the peg.

Uncle John had gone on with rapt interest by all, when suddenly sunshine gave way to semi-darkness and instantly huge raindrops were falling in a sort of easy splatter manner—not wet enough to drive one to cover. But now someone happened to look up the valley and then he yelled. It was not a great distance to the house but it seems now, in looking back to the time, things happened awfully fast. The roar coming down the valley was blended in with the continuous claps of thunder, and by the time we reached the house the deluge had struck. In a matter of minutes the house was completely isolated in a sea of water. However, the flood water soon receded and no real damage resulted. There seemed to be no survivors; everyone retired for the night in fine spirits.

I remember being awakened by a noise around eleven o'clock

that night. I could see the clock on the night stand and there was a lighted lantern on the stand by the clock. There was also a man sitting by the other bed in the far corner. Coming out of a sound sleep I was not sure that I was not having some sort of a nightmare, for this man was telling my mother's cousin, Curtis Rhea, the man in the other bed about homes, houses and many other buildings being washed away in a flood resulting from a huge cloudburst that had struck some eight or nine miles above the town; but more awesome, he was enumerating in some detail, the names of many persons, entire families, who had been drowned. Many of those named were relatives of ours and many of the others were dear and close friends. The late night visitor had brought word of the catastrophe. I learned later, by horseback, as all telephone lines were out. The man was still talking as I lowered back on the pillow and went back to sleep.

In the morning mother met me at the foot of the stairway and she was sobbing. It seemed like everyone was crying, so I began to cry also. It was then I fully realized I had not been dreaming in the night.

On that early Monday morning, father and mother and all the children except my next younger brother Spencer and me, were on their sad journey back to town. They were accompanied by my Aunt Edith, who was soon to learn that both her father, Dr. Vaughn, who for years had been the town's dentist and had been serving as postmaster in the President McKinley administration and her mother had lost their lives in the flood.

Uncle John had the usual and necessary ranch chores to do and it was some two hours later when we were in the buckboard behind a fast stepping span of horses. It was a comparatively fast trip and there was very little conversation. Finally we came into the long road at the crest of the hill which leads into town on the south, and soon my

Story of Ah Ling

By O. M. YEAGER

This story was told in the Portland Oregonian a few weeks after the Heppner flood, and was titled, "FIGHT BRINGS OUT STORY OF A MURDER: WHY CHINAMEN WERE DRIVEN FROM THE TOWN."

"Ah Ling is a Chinaman and has no political influence whatever. Yet he managed by one act to get every Chinaman at Heppner banished from that city, and to this day not a denizen of the flowery kingdom is allowed there."

"In the eyes of Ah Ling the charge against him was trivial and really deserved no considerations at all, but the 'Melican men' thought differently. Ling was merely accused of hiring a high-binder to kill a sick man and rob him of \$2,000 that he intended to use in getting back to the Orient and supporting himself until his death, which was not far distant, in the natural course of events, had he not been murdered."

"This story was told again at the police station yesterday afternoon when Ling and Wun Lin were arrested and charged with fighting. They stood on the corner of Second and Oak Streets, diagonally across from police headquarters, and after brandishing their fists in each other's faces for a few minutes

began a fight in earnest. Desk Officer Wendorf and Detective Hellyer ran across the street and arrested them."

"He allee samee owe me brud-dah \$400 and say he no pay!" screeched Lin to Captain Gritz-macher. "He velly bad man, allee samee kill heap plenty people."

"Captain, you know me velly well," suavely replied Ling. "This man San Francisco highbindah. He workee in Barba shop heah as a blind. He allee samee tellee me many times if I no play him no money he killee me. I no flight. He thleaten killee me and stlike at me and I hold him away."

"Lin had no money and went to jail. Ling put up \$10 bail. Both were charged with fighting."

"Ling was arrested shortly after the Heppner flood and charged with causing the murder of his countryman, who was beaten to death with a club in sight of the railway station. The Chinaman who did the deed confessed and was the only witness. He said the intention was to commit the murder in such a manner that when the body was afterward found in the Willows the authorities would think the man drowned and that his body had been washed down during the flood. This story was effectually disapproved, however, by several people, who would have sworn that the murdered Chinese drew money out of the Heppner bank and went to the railway station, where he met his death, sometime after the flood."

incident and knew Ah Ling personally, and the real truth of this matter is this: The Chinaman, Ah Ling, who hired the other Chinaman to do the murdering, went to our county jail in Heppner and hired the prisoner to hang himself for a small sum of money. This money was found on the table in his cell when they found his body. The sheriff of the county caught the witness in an attic in a vacant cabin out in Eight Mile country a few miles south of

Heppner. For a good many years not one Chinaman was allowed to even enter Heppner, but as the years slipped by, the younger generation forgot all about the murder and once again Chinamen were allowed to live in Heppner and operate restaurants. Eddie Chin, finally came and operated the old Elk Horn restaurant for many years and the people of Heppner liked him very much. He sold out a few years ago and opened up a swell restaurant in Hermiston, Oregon.

uncle brought the horses to a stop and my brother and I quickly understood why. Following his gaze off across the valley below us, we could look over where the long, steep road went up the hill to Masonic Cemetery. It was not yet noon-time, but there was already a long procession of horse-drawn vehicles, each carrying a wooden box.

Sixty years ago, yes—but to me it seems only yesterday.

"The Chinese witness became insane and hanged himself while confined at Heppner. There being no other witness of the murder, Ling had to be released. Enraged at this miscarriage of justice, the people rose up as one man and forced every Chinese in the city to leave. Not a single Chinaman has since then been allowed to stay in Heppner."

Author's note: I remember this

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