

Jones-Harper shoot out in Lexington Saloon

By SAM G. MCMILLAN

Edward Jones, age 22, was killed on Thanksgiving night, Nov. 28, 1889, during a savage brawl which broke out as a result of an argument which took place in a card game at the Lexington Saloon. The man who killed Jones was Hiram Harper, a young ranch hand who developed no permanent roots in the community. In the early days of the West, poker games often led to the kind of trouble that no one really wanted. This poker game surely did. In the group of players at the gambling table were Jones, Harper, and Art Minor.

Art, the son of Ellis Minor, a pioneer stockman of Morrow County, was barely 21 at the time of this incident. He had a considerable distance to travel yet before he arrived at the respectability he later earned. The card game was terminated when the argument reached the intensity that made it impossible to continue the play. Apparently, Ed Jones was the loser of the argument, and, in a rage, Jones left the saloon. It was to his own undoing that he returned a few moments later.

When Ed came back to the saloon, he had with him his younger brother, Newt Jones. Newt was not yet 21, but he could pass for 21. Newt was already building up a reputation as one who should be given a wide berth. Hiram Harper was standing at the bar when the two men entered the saloon. Ed Jones ordered drinks for his party, and in due course, spoke to Harper. Harper's reply was most likely an expletive that would have been deleted in print. Whatever it was that Harper said, the reply was definitely not satisfactory, as both Newt and Ed suddenly attacked Harper in a savage manner.

Harper was knocked forward against the bar as the two men rained blow after blow upon Harper's head and face. Harper then covered his head with both arms, while burying his elbows on the bar. Ed swung himself to the top of the bar, and while standing above Harper, proceeded to kick his victim in the face, while Newt continued the attack from below.

Harper, badly beaten, and who was one bloody mess, managed to break away from his assailants for the brief instant it took to draw his revolver. Harper held the gun on both men, and ordered them to back away and stop the fight, or he would shoot. The brothers ignored the warning, and jumped Harper

a second time. Harper pulled the trigger. A slug struck Ed in the left groin, knocking him out of the way. Bystanders carried Ed to a chair in the saloon where he soon gave up the ghost.

Two more shots were fired as Newt wrestled with Harper for possession of the gun. One slug was fired into the floor; the other into the ceiling. At this point Art Minor entered the fight. He picked up a chair and struck Harper over the head with it. Harper was dazed and fell back into the stove with such force that it was knocked from its base. The stove pipe came clattering to the floor. The chair was shattered.

Art Minor's contribution enabled Newt to gain possession of the gun. Newt attempted to shoot Harper, but the gun did not fire. During the scuffle for possession of the gun, the cylinder pin had fallen out, thus making it impossible for the cylinder to revolve. Newt then proceeded to beat Harper over the head with the butt of the gun until he was stopped by bystanders.

'Breath' drive a success

The Breath of Life Campaign in Heppner was 200.75 per cent above the goal set.

This money will be used in research for children who suffer from lung damaging diseases, such as cystic fibrosis, asthma, chronic bronchitis and bronchiectasis. Cystic fibrosis is a genetic (inherited) disease, and a leading cause of death in children. It occurs approximately once in every 1,500 births.

Heppner area collected \$454.45. Mrs. Riley Munkers and Mrs. William Heath, chairmen, extended their thanks to all the volunteer workers and the donors.

BOARDMAN COUNCIL FILING BY OCT. 4

Three positions on the Boardman City Council expire at the end of this year.

Petitions for filing are available at the City Hall. They require the signatures of 20 registered voters and must be returned to the City Hall not later than Oct. 4.

Note—

The killing of Edward Jones in a saloon fight at Lexington in 1889 was reported in The Bunchgrasses in an abbreviated manner since the many facts required for a good story were unknown at the time the book was published.

The historical notes that were available to the writer at that time suggested that here was a killing that seemed truly typical of the portrayals one sees so often in Westerns, both on the screen and on television. Continuing research to make the full story come to life was made through the facilities of the University of Oregon, the Oregon Historical Society, and the Morrow County Museum. Thus, we now have the story as it was known to the people of Lexington and Morrow County in 1889.

Attention was then given the lifeless body of Ed Jones. The slug which had entered his left groin had come out through his right hip.

Harper was beaten very severely, and blood was streaming from his many cuts and bruises. He made his way through the rear door of the saloon, climbed over a board fence, and got to his hotel where he was washed and treated for his injuries.

Colonel C. C. Boon, the town constable, was summoned, as Harper wanted the protection of the law. Harper was placed under arrest by Boon when he arrived at the hotel. Meanwhile, Harper was tracked to the hotel by the trail of blood. A crowd of angry young men gathered in the street in front of the hotel. They wanted to finish the job on Harper.

So far as is known, this was Lexington's only chance to stage a lynching, and they blew it. In the confusion that followed, while Colonel Boon held off the crowd, Harper was left unattended. Fearful for his life, Harper fled the hotel and "took to the hills." The angry crowd that formed in front of the hotel had

overlooked the possibility that Harper might escape through the back door.

After it was discovered that Harper was gone, a manhunt was undertaken. The search was given up after daybreak when it became apparent that Harper was nowhere in Lexington. Harper had gone up Blackhorse Canyon and headed for Ben Swaggart's ranch seven miles northeast of Lexington. He knew Ben, and he felt he would be safe in Ben's protection. More than likely, Ben could have held quite a crowd at bay with that old black snake he used to wear coiled around his neck.

Ben knew what it was to kill a man. Ben had taken a man's life in a Weston saloon prior to taking up his homestead near Lexington. This circumstance in Ben's life may have been the reason for his intense dislike for the saloon, a fact which was reported in The Bunchgrasses. Not reported in The Bunchgrasses was the certainty that Ben had once been a participant in a killing. At the time the material for The Bunchgrasses was being gathered, the writer was unsure of his facts in this regard, and not locating historical evidence upon which to base an assertion, the matter was glossed over as the reader might correctly assume. Lawrence Reaney, a friend and admirer of Ben Swaggart, has since confirmed the story of that event in Ben's life.

Hiram Parker experienced great difficulty in reaching the Swaggart ranch. It took Harper the better part of 24 hours to travel those seven miles. He wandered around the bunch-grass hills, sometimes in circles. He had endured quite a beating in the Lexington Saloon, and the effects of this beating left him dazed and unsure of his route. Ben put Harper up for the night, and on the following morning the two men rode to Heppner where Harper placed himself in the care and custody of Sheriff Howard.

On Monday, Dec. 2, 1889, a preliminary hearing was held

in the court of Justice William Blair in Lexington. The court found there was not sufficient evidence to hold Harper for the grand jury, thus the case was closed. It may well be that Harper reasoned the case might be reopened at anytime should he by chance run into Newt Jones or any of his friends, so Harper shook the dust of Lexington from his boots, taking up residence elsewhere.

Edward Jones was 22 years of age at the time he met his death in the Lexington Saloon. His funeral and burial took place in Heppner the same day as Harper's preliminary hearing in Lexington. Jones had lived the previous two years on the ranch one mile below Lexington which was to become known as the Andrew Reaney place.

Jones left a wife and child. He was married to Rose Donaldson, a daughter of Samuel Donaldson, after whom Donaldson Canyon was named. Rose was 16 when she became the bride of Edward Jones in 1887. The couple moved to the Lexington ranch at that time. The widow Jones later married Walter Richardson at Heppner. Their daughter, the late Josephine

Mahoney Baker, was a well-known resident of Heppner for many years. At the time of her passing, Rose was the wife of Hank Howell, a one-time sheep tender and shearer in the Heppner area.

The father of Edward Jones was James Jones, a pioneer landholder on Willow Creek. In addition to the Lexington property, James Jones owned land southeast of Heppner. It was about 1890 that he inaugurated Heppner's first milk delivery from the ranch known in later years as the Frank Monahan place which Terry Thompson now has. The milk wagon was nothing more than a buckboard which carried five gallon milk cans on the back. The milk was measured out in bulk to those Heppner customers who did not keep a family cow.

Newt Jones lived in and around Heppner until sometime after the turn of the century. By occupation he was a horse trader. Using information based on stories told by old timers, Newt was an expert horseman, and not in actuality, the rough and tough hombre the reader of this article may envision. Newt, like many others who grew to maturity during the early

days of Hardman, Heppner, Lexington, and Ione, had his moments when youthful brashness led to extremes in behavior. According to his birthdate, Oct. 22, 1869, as given in his obituary, Newt had just turned 20 when the saloon fight took place.

Newt's widow was the late Josie Jones who returned to Heppner to make her home after Newt's passing. Josie was the charming date for Les Matlock when the two long-time friends attended public functions. Her daughter was the late Venice Stiles.



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