

Lynching at Audrey

by Gary Dielman

The recent article about Maynard Drawson's search for the Audrey hanging tree* sent me searching for notes on the hanging I had written about 10 years ago after reading microfilm about the case at the Baker County Library.

By chance I had run across an eye-catching headline that stretched across the top of page 1 of the July 17, 1914, issue of the *Baker Herald*.

MASKED MEN LYNCH STRANGER TO TREE AT BURNT RIVER AND ESCAPE.

The subheading added gruesome detail.

LEFT BODY OF VICTIM HANGING IN CANYON FAR ABOVE THE GROUND WITH HIS FEET TIED TOGETHER.

Checking microfilm of Baker's other daily newspaper, the *Morning Democrat*, I found its headline crouched in pseudo-judicial language.

"JUDGE LYNCH" OFFICIATED AT THE HANGING OF UNKNOWN MAN NEAR WHITNEY.

After reviewing several newspaper articles and handwritten statements in the Courthouse inquest records in a packet titled "Unknown," I have pieced together the following contemporary account of the events surrounding what was the last illegal hanging in Baker County.

In the summer of 1914, rancher Bart Hardman, his wife, Pearl, and their nine-year-old daughter, Grace (born 7-25-1905), were living at Audrey, a small community situated where China Creek flows into the North Fork of Burnt River (six miles northwest of Hereford and seven miles southeast of Whitney). The family had seen much illness recently, including the death of a daughter. The newspapers speculated that sympathy for the family may have played a role in the swift revenge meted out to the unknown alleged assailant of young Grace.

The stranger was a drifter, about 30 years old, five feet, eight inches tall, weighing 150 pounds, who had gotten kicked off the train at Durkee, which he had apparently boarded illegally on the morning of Wednesday, July 15, 1914. Later that day he showed up at Audrey.

Newspaper reports of his identity were conflicting. The *Baker Herald* reported that little Grace said he called himself Walter and was from Washington. But he

told people at the ranch, where he applied for work, he was from Michigan. Another newspaper article reported his name was Albert.

What the stranger did to Grace is also not known for sure. Statements contained in the Courthouse inquest file speak only in vague terms of “caught Grace” and “attacked the little girl.”

The *Baker Herald* gave a more detailed account of the attack.

“The girl escaped harm, it appeared at the inquest today, only by breaking away from the stranger and darting through a fence and running to the top of a hill where the town of Audrey was in view. Her clothes were almost entirely torn from her at the time.”

The *Morning Democrat* gave a similar report.

“Taking an opportunity some distance from the house he seized the child, and in the struggle practically all her clothes were torn off, and although frightened to the point of hysteria and slightly hurt, she managed to escape from the man without serious injury. She ran to the house and gave the alarm, while her assailant went the other way.”

At the inquest in Whitney on July 17, Hardman told coroner Earl West that he first heard of the attack on his daughter around noon on July 15, when George Tureman came riding up to them as they unhitched their teams for the noon watering. They mounted up and returned to Audrey to get a description of the man—old black pants, blue coat, gray hat and one shoe with a hole in the sole. They located a track crossing China Creek about a half mile from where the attack occurred and searched the area for the man until nightfall before returning home.

Another posse continued its search on into the night. Posse member W. M. Whitaker testified at the inquest that he and three others—Dow Davidson, Byron Ruddle, and George Tureman—found the stranger about 1½ miles west of Hereford around midnight.

“We were riding along. My dog found him first,” Whitaker said. “He was sitting along the side of the road. We lit some matches and took a look at him. We examined his shoes and found he had a hole in his shoe. We concluded he was the man we were looking for.”

They took the man back to Hereford and left him in charge of Tureman for the night.

The next morning the posse hauled Grace’s attacker to the Hardman Ranch at Audrey for positive identification. Grace’s mother, Pearl, related at the inquest on

July 17 that she took Grace outside where they were holding the man and asked her if he was the man who had attacked her the day before. Grace answered that he was. Pearl asked if she was sure and Grace said she was. Then Pearl asked the man if he was the one who attacked her daughter, and he answered her, "Yes, I admit it."

There were two main accounts of what happened next. Hardman testified before the coroner's jury that since they were sure they had the right man, he and Tureman, accompanied by Mrs. Hardman and Grace, headed off toward Whitney to turn their prisoner over to the authorities waiting for him there. About two to three miles from Audrey they heard a man shout, "Halt!" When Tureman had reigned in the horses, a man in the bushes about 100 feet distance with a gunnysack over his head and a rifle leveled at them commanded, "Halt! Deliver that man!"

Hardman told his prisoner he had better get out of the rig, and the man complied. Then the man with the gun told them to drive on, which they did, all the way to Whitney, where they reported to Deputy Sheriff Ed Jackson what had happened to their prisoner.

One account in the newspapers said that they were about 1½ miles from Audrey "when two men with gunnysacks over their heads stepped out in the road, and with drawn revolvers demanded that Hardman and Tureman deliver the prisoner over to them. ...The two masked men then made off with the prisoner, who was pleading for mercy." Another newspaper account said he was taken by a masked "mob."

Deputy Jackson testified at the inquest that he went immediately to the site of the abduction and soon found the stranger about 150 feet from the road "hanging in a tree with a rope around his neck, his feet tied together and also tied to the tree. His hands were also tied behind him." In the vicinity of the tree, Jackson found tracks of just two horses. Once back in Whitney, he reported to the Sheriff's office in Baker and received instructions to leave the man hanging until District Attorney Godwin could arrive.

In Baker no one had a clue as to who the dead man was, but there was apparently much discussion about who the abductors might be. The descriptions given by Hardman and Tureman were of no use. The newspapers speculated that the locals knew who did it but would not talk figuring that the man got what he deserved.

Not everyone thought the stranger's lynching was just. An editorial in the July 17 issue of the *Baker Herald* said, "The law of Judge Lynch can find no honest supporters. ...Hot blood on the part of a party of lynchers cannot be condoned any more than hot blood on the part of the slayer." The editorial ended by

declaring that “the crime of yesterday...makes that of the day before pale into insignificance.”

After three days of newspaper headlines, the furor died down. The stranger was buried at Whitney.

*Maynard Drawson did not find the Audrey hanging tree. It had been cut down in recent times as part of a timber harvest.

(Tom Oliver, a classmate of mine who learned the story about the hanging from relatives years ago, told me recently that his grandmother, who lived in the Audrey area, told him the identities of the lynchers were known and that later something bad befell each of them. Officially, the identities of the men who lynched Grace’s alleged attacker remain unknown to this day. Rumor has it that when Grace was eighteen years old, she admitted that the stranger did not molest her. She died a suicide.)

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