

The Hanging Tree (Part III)

By Robert Hutchison

This part is dedicated to proving the innocence of the three hanging victims—Jamie Stott, James Scott and Jeff (Billy) Wilson.

In recognition of the tragic event, a group gathered again at the Aztec Spring Ranch on August 11, 2016—the 128th year anniversary of the abduction and subsequent triple homicide—to sort out the factual events and testimony provided by witnesses.

Unaware of their upcoming fate on that date in history, Jamie and Jeff prepared breakfast for the 25 men who were there to abduct and murder them. Included in the breakfast fare were five dozen eggs, 70 pancakes and 100 cups of hot coffee. Some of the men had traveled more than 100 miles to the location. Preparation of the meal would have required about two hours. Each man ate his fill, and dishes were then washed, rinsed and dried.

The testimony of eye witnesses Lamott Clymer and Alfred Ingram indicates that:

(1) The Aztec Land and Cattle Co. had to be taught a lesson by the “prime movers” of the Tonto Basin and Pleasant Valley residents; otherwise, said boys would have been sniped off like the other 45 to 50 previous victims. The well-planned murders were to be committed at the Aztec Spring Ranch. This proves itself by the fact that Scott was brought from Pleasant Valley, past the hanging tree, and then another 25 miles, to the Aztec by the Tewksberry group. If the hanging tree was to be the murder site, they would have waited for Houck and the others.

(2) Testimony by Z.B. Decker was given that riders from the north announced there was going to be “some doin’s up Willow Wash and would he like to join in?” Decker declined, as it would mean leaving his sheep untended. He was warned, “Mum is the word.”

The Aztec Spring Ranch is located in Willow Wash. Decker testified that he heard riders coming fast during the night and that he didn’t know who they were. On August 11, 1888, the moon was orbiting in its “new-moon phase” and it would have been pitch black at night. One would not have been able to see the trail and Ponderosa pine limbs could have ripped a person’s head off. Decker knew the riders! And he hated Jamie.

(3) As was customary at the time, the boys were handcuffed, with the center chain passing through the pommel of each saddle. With that done, their fates were sealed. At the aforementioned junction, Houck testified that 40 masked men took his prisoners away and he did not know what happened to them. Why would 24 of those men mask their faces after eating breakfast and riding with him all day? Houck was lying. Houck claimed to be the one and only absent from the hangings but the handcuffs had to be unlocked on one side by key, then relocked behind their backs. There was evidence against Houck...No handcuffs were on the corpses.

As the grand jury was assembling in Holbrook, Houck and between eight and nine Pleasant Valley men rode into town in full phalanx and fully armed. No witnesses could be located.

Readers must now understand the extent to which the victims were made to suffer. These were not “hangings!” A hanging is done by preparing a noose with between seven and 13 coils. The victim is dropped a distance of freefall sufficient to snap the cervical vertebrae in the neck and to

collapse the trachea and larynx simultaneously, through gravity and the body weight of the victim, causing an irreversible, mortal injury. The noose knot is generally placed at or behind the left ear. The boys in question were slowly strangled to death with a loop of their own lariats. Side by side, Scott and Wilson witnessed the horror and despair of the other. The postmortem bodily function release into the trousers and boots would have been pitiful.

It was then Jamie's turn. According to the book *Pleasant Valley War*, by Jinx Pyle, Fred Haught may have been the one to tie a red bandana around Jamie's "portly neck" before he was, in brutal fashion, repeatedly hoisted and tortured. The whiskey "jug would now be passed around in celebration, as they built cigarettes from their makin's." Blowflies and maggots witnessed the transport and burial two miles away (five days after death). Stott, Scott and Wilson would not be seen again for 54 years. And (at burial) Jamie was still wearing the gold wedding ring of his father...."