

The Murder of Samuel S. Shull

By Robert Hutchison

June 2, 1887, St. Johns Herald:

“The Prescott (capitol of Arizona Territory - A. T.) Journal - Miner says: Sheriff William J. Muluenon received a telegram from Henry Behrens at Campe Verde stating that Sam'l S. Shull, a well-known stockman (sheepherder for Daggs Brothers - Flagstaff) of the Mogollon Mountains, has been found dead in his cabin, shot through the head with a shotgun. Muluenon immediately started to the scene of the murder and will institute a thorough investigation.” There was never a mention of any dead dogs at the scene which the Herald would have expanded upon generously. “A.T. Governor Conrad Meyer Zulick has offered the customary \$500.00 reward for the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Samuel L. Shull.”

On July 7, 1887, St. Johns Herald (Apache County A.T.) nearly named William Hampton (Hamp) Blevins as being the shooter. For 130 years, Hamp has been blamed for this homicide and any Kindergarten dropout could see that he didn't do it. He wouldn't get a chance to deny the allegations because he was ambushed and murdered himself in an unrelated incident on August 10, 1887.

Logically, only three types of people would be allowed to the back of any cabin during this time period: a friend, a youthful man or a man with authority. Since Shull was a sheepherder, nobody would get the drop on him without the sheepdogs and his personal guard dogs forwarding him.

Allegedly, one week before the murder, Shull was the winner of fist fight with Hamp. Since May is usually a lamb birthing month, I doubt whether this took place anywhere other than Shull's camp in Yavapai County, A.T. One week after the fight, Shull and his dogs would not have allowed Hamp into the back of their cabin. He would have bite marks from the previous week in the form of scabs.

Prior to the fight, there must have been whiskey involved because Hamp would have had the same chance of winning as a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. Hamp only had a left arm and would not have been very effective leading and feinting with his chin. In a photograph with other men, Hamp appears to be about 150-160 pounds. Shull, like many sheepherders, typically could have been 200-280 pounds and double tough. Also, a one-armed man, with a pistol holstered on his hip is not going to further handicap himself by holding a double barreled 12-gauge shotgun in his only free hand. Instead, Hamp would have shot Shull six times with his pistol and made every one of them hurt! The only conclusion we can come up with is that Hamp didn't do it!

Check back in October when we will have solved this murder...at least we are 99% sure.
For more stories about Arizona mountain murders in the 1800s, check out www.getyourmountainonaz.com/history.