

The Killing of Charlie O.

By Trail End State Historic Site Superintendent Cynde Georgen, 2014

NOTE: Due to privacy concerns, the names of those involved in this event have been altered at the request of descendants who still live in the area. All other facts are as reported in public documents readily available on the Internet and in local libraries.



Charlie O---, deceased, 1928 (Kendrick Collection, TESHS)

In early 1928, ditch digger Charlie O--- was shot to death in his home near Arvada, Wyoming, by his son-in-law, Charles F---. Shortly after the shooting, Mary Kendrick Morgan, U. S. Senator John B. Kendrick's half-niece, went to the scene of the crime and shot the above photograph before officials had a chance to move the body.

The following is the bulk of the information we have been able to find out about the crime, which involved two longtime Kendrick Cattle Company employees.

THE FATHER

Edward Theodore "Charlie" O--- (1864-1928) is born in Sweden (no relation to others of that name living in and around Sheridan County, Wyoming) and immigrates to the United States in 1882. His name does not appear in the 1900 Federal Census, but in 1910 he is living in Arvada, Wyoming. The forty-six year old naturalized citizen is enumerated with his twenty year old wife Etta and their one year old daughter Carola.

Charlie O--- works throughout the eastern part of Sheridan County as an irrigator. On 7 November 1908, *The Sheridan Post* gives details of the project that takes up most of his time for the next several years:

E. T. O--- is building an immense ditch on Clear Creek for J. B. Kendrick. The ditch is ten feet on the bottom and goes through twenty foot cuts in many places. The ditch will cross the divide between Clear Creek and Powder River. At this place a tunnel 600 feet long will be built. The ditch will irrigate 1300 acres. This is a big step in the development of that part of the country. The force of men will be kept busy in cold weather working on the tunnel.

Charlie does not show up in the 1920 census, by which time his wife has left him and taken their two children – Daisy Carola (born 1908) and Albert Franklin (born 1911) – with her.

Although apparently estranged from her for a good part of her childhood, Charlie spends Christmas of 1927 with daughter Daisy and her husband, Charles F---. On 16 January 1928, Charlie is shot to death in his home near Arvada. He is buried in Mount Pisgah Cemetery in Gillette, Wyoming.

THE MOTHER

Etta Ines A--- (1889-1956) is born in Pines Plains, Michigan. She marries E. T. O--- in April 1908. They are divorced sometime after 1910. In June 1913, at the Foster House Hotel in Sheridan, Wyoming, Etta marries Montana rancher Cassius C. F--- (1887-1953), by whom she has three additional children: Arthur (born 1915), Lester (born 1918) and James (born 1920).

In the 1920 census, Etta is living with her parents, George and Sarina A---, in Decker, Big Horn County, Montana; her children reside next door with husband Cassius. The couple ranch in the Little Horn area of southern Montana until 1948, when they retire and move to Sheridan. A one-time operator of the Birney Stage (1919), Cassius dies in September 1953 as a result of injuries sustained in an automobile accident near Spotted Horse, Wyoming. Etta passes away on 15 July 1956 and is buried in Sheridan.

THE DAUGHTER/WIFE

Daisy Carola O--- (1908-1978) is born in Birney, Montana, the only daughter (and oldest child) of Charlie and Etta O---. In 1910, she is living with her parents in Arvada, Wyoming. In 1920, she and her younger brother Albert reside with their stepfather, Cassius C. F---, on his ranch near Decker, Montana. On 7 June 1923, seventeen year old Daisy travels to Hot Springs, South Dakota, to marry a man over twice her age, forty-one year old Charles F---. Following their marriage, they live on her husband's ranch near Decker.

By 1930, Daisy is living in Sheridan, Wyoming, with her two children. The 1931 City Directory shows her working as a domestic servant. On 23 May 1932, Daisy journeys to Billings, Montana, to marry her second husband, Burlington railroad mechanic Carl Edward F--- (1903-1952). They

live in Sheridan, where she works as a nurses' aide and raises seven children. She dies on 23 July 1978 in Sheridan, Wyoming, from injuries sustained in an automobile accident near Wyola, Montana. She is buried in Sheridan alongside her second husband.

THE SON-IN-LAW/HUSBAND

Charles Edger F--- (1881-1973) is born in York County, Pennsylvania. He is in the Sheridan area as early as 1910, trapping wolves, coyotes and bobcats for the government. In March 1910, *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* prints a story about his winter season:

Charles F---, who has been trapping on the OW range, brought in his winter catch today and sold it to Sheridan dealers. He had 43 coyote hides, two gray wolf and two bobcat hides. Mr. F--- has found the business of trapping a profitable one at the present prices.

On 21 June 1910, *The Sheridan Post* notes,

Charles F---, who has been employed on the OW ranch, 50 miles east of Sheridan, is in the city being treated for blood poisoning. Starting from a little scratch or pimple on his hand last Thursday, Mr. F---'s hand and forearm within a few hours showed evidences of being infected, and when he reached Sheridan the next day he was suffering severely. The poisoning has yielded to treatment and the surgeon thinks F--- will be able to return to work in a few days.

Charles' territory covers a vast area of north-central Wyoming and south-central Montana, and he is frequently touted as the busiest trapper in the region. The *Wyoming Tribune* notes in March 1913 that the previous two months of trapping net him 112 coyotes and eleven adult wolves, which he sells in Hardin,



Montana. In 1922, two of his captured wolf pups become the main attraction at Sheridan's Pioneer Park zoo.

His 1918 draft registration card describes Charles as tall and slender with dark hair and dark eyes. The 1920 census shows him working as a rancher in Big Horn County, Montana, and living on property immediately adjacent to that occupied by the Cassius C. F--- family.

In 1923, forty-one year old Charles marries the only girl in the Cassius F--- household, seventeen year old Daisy Carola O--- (daughter of Etta, Cassius' second wife). They have two children: daughter Montana D. (born 1925) and son Charles (born 1927).

At some point before 1932, Charles and Daisy divorce. He marries his second wife, Jennie Belle H---, in April 1949 in Hot Springs, South Dakota (the same town in which he married his first wife). Charles retires to Sheridan, where he dies on 30 March 1973. He is buried in the Sheridan Municipal Cemetery.

THE CRIME

On 17 January 1928, *The Sheridan Post-Enterprise* publishes a story that shocks many of its readers:

Charles F---, 46-year-old trapper from southern Montana, walked into the Sheridan police station, Tuesday night, and announced that he had shot and killed his father-in-law, [Charlie] O---, in a lonely homestead shack in the Powder River hills. The reason, he said, was that O--- had assaulted his own daughter, a 21-year-old woman who has been the wife of F--- for the past four years.

The story of the shooting was substantiated Wednesday when Tom Kendrick of the LX Bar ranch, acting upon advice from the authorities here, made a four-mile trip to the O--- homestead and found the 65-year-old man dead from a gunshot wound. Kendrick, upon his return to the LX Bar, informed the sheriff's office here that the shooting took place in Campbell county ...

F---, a former government trapper, talked without restraint upon the shooting as he sat on a bed in the jail cell Wednesday. After learning of the assault, which is alleged to have taken place on December 22 at F---'s homestead near Decker, Mont., he said he took down his powerful 65-mm rifle and started out on horseback across the 50 miles of hills that separate his place from O---'s rented homestead down on Powder River.

It was about noon, Monday, when F--- said he entered O---'s shanty and accused his father-in-law of the sordid crime. "He didn't deny it. ... He made for me, but I forced him with the gun to back up. He made for me again and grabbed for the gun. Then I shot him."

Immediately after he shot rang out, F--- turned on his heel and walked out to his waiting horse. "I didn't even wait to see him fall," he explained. ... He did not appear to be remorseful over the deed.

On Friday, 20 January 1928, under the headline "Trapper's Wife Wronged By Her Wanton Father," *The Sheridan Journal* offers a similar account of the final meeting between Charles F--- and Charlie O---:

A sordid story of a father assaulting his own daughter was told to local authorities Tuesday of this week, when Charles F---, 46-year-old trapper from southern Montana, walked into the office of Chief of Police Guy Webb and surrendered himself for killing his father-in-law, [Charlie] O---.

F--- ... said he had become suspicious of the way his wife's father had been acting around the ranch home and, after a visit with the father, had questioned his wife. She broke down and told him how her own father, after having made several advances, assaulted her on December 22, during the absence of F---, and had warned her to keep silent or he would kill her.

F--- said he then saddled his horse, took his high-power rifle, and rode to the cabin of the elder O---. Finding him in, they entered into a heated debate and when O--- made a rush for F---, the latter shot him with his rifle. He then returned to his ranch where he requested a neighbor to drive him to Sheridan. ...

The principals of the affair are all well known in Sheridan and resided close to the state line. The F--- homestead was across the line in Montana, while O--- was in a homesteader's shack on ... Lower Powder river, four miles below the LX Bar ranch, and in Campbell county.

O--- had worked for years on the Kendrick ranches, it is said, and is well known to many of the old timers in Sheridan.

Another description of the shooting comes from Joal Samaha's *Criminal Law*, published by Cengage Learning, 2013:

E. T. O--- ... stayed with his daughter Daisy F--- ... and her husband Charles F--- ... at their farm in Montana, while F--- left to go trapping (F--- was a farmer in summer and a trapper in winter). When F--- returned just before Christmas, O--- went back to his own farm in Campbell County, Wyoming, about fifty miles from Charles and Daisy's farm. After O--- left, Daisy told Charles that her father had raped her. Charles left their farm with his gun, which he always carried with him, and walked all day, staying overnight at

a Mr. Hudsonpillar's house. The next morning he walked the rest of the way, arriving at his father-in-law's at about 11 a.m. They exchanged angry words and F--- shot O---, who was unarmed. According to Charles, "I was mad on the way over [from Mr. Hudsonpillar's] but not any madder than anyone else under the circumstances."

A jury convicts Charles of second-degree murder. He appeals. The appeals court rules that although the incest and rape couldn't justify the killing, they could be used to reduce Charles F---'s crime to voluntary manslaughter because a jury could find that F---'s passion hadn't reasonably cooled. The court says that the heinous combination of incest and rape is more than enough to keep a reasonable person in a murderous rage for at least several days.

Charles, who presents himself to law enforcement officials and confesses to the crime, is sent to the Wyoming State Prison in Rawlins, Wyoming, where he is enumerated amongst the prisoners in the 1930 Federal Census. After his release from prison, F--- returns to his work as a trapper for the Kendrick Cattle Company.



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