

Corydon Elphalet Cooley

Cooley, he never used his given name, was born in Loudon County, Virginia, on April 2, 1836. It's been reported that he attended college and quit to come west in 1856 to "see the elephant" and seek his fortune. No proof of his college years has ever been discovered.

After a brief stay in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he moved on to the Pike's Peak area of Colorado and searched for gold. In August of 1861 he joined the Union Army as a Lieutenant in the 2nd New Mexico Infantry Regiment and for two years saw action in all the New Mexico skirmishes with the Confederates. After his discharge, he managed a hotel near Fort Union, New Mexico, until he heard of easy to find gold in Arizona.

Cooley came to the White Mountains as a prospector and was one of the first white men to extensively explore the mineral wealth of the region. He loved and respected the Apache people and married two daughters of Pedro, an Apache band chief in the Forestdale area. He and his wives, Molly, the oldest, and Cora established a ranch in the area that is now the city of Show Low, Arizona. Martha Summerhayes, author of *Vanished Arizona*, a book of her memories of life as an officer's wife on the Arizona frontier, had been intrigued by the story of Cooley living with two Apache women. On a journey between forts, Martha and her husband were overnight guests of the Cooleys. When she asked her husband which of the attractive young women was Cooley's wife, he said, "I don't know. Both of 'em, I guess". Refined Victorian lady that she was, Martha tried to rationalize the situation, writing, "Now this was too awful, but I knew he did not intend for me to ask any more questions." Cora soon died during childbirth, leaving him to live the rest of his life as a monogamist.

Their ranch was one of the most noted stopping places in eastern Arizona and guests were unanimous in their appraisal of Molly as a tidy and gracious housewife and Cooley as a generous and notable host. With his vast knowledge of the White Mountains, the Apache people and their ways, and his ability to speak the very difficult Apache language, he was acknowledged for many years as one of the great and famous scouts of the Arizona Territory. He was Chief of Scouts off and on for General George Crook, one of the greatest Indian fighters the United States Army ever knew. With the possible exception of his good friend Al Sieber, he was Crook's most trusted scout. There was great respect between Crook and Cooley. John G. Bourke, General Crook's aide-de-camp for 11 years and author of the book *On the Border with Crook*, notes that Cooley's influence was always on the side of peace and understanding between the Indian and the white man.

Once when Cooley returned from one of his scouting trips, he stopped at the ranch before checking in at the fort. Molly decided to help him unpack. When she opened his bedroll two human ears fell out. She put them back, rolled up the bedroll, retied them to the saddle and never asked him about it or ever helped him unpack again.

Cooley was not only a consummate scout, he later was a highly skilled lawman. The following quote about Cooley is from the July 1996 issue of Arizona Highways: "Always hungry for adventure and danger, Cooley gladly accepted appointment in 1877 as deputy U.S. marshal for the huge Yavapai County, from which Apache and Navajo counties were later carved. He ranged far and wide in his new job, risking his life more than once to bring in outlaws who had flocked to wild Arizona Territory. In one especially notable raid, he captured and jailed two desperadoes who were threatening to take over the new settlement of Springerville. Scarcely had he left the town, however, when a lynch mob stormed the jail, and in the words of Cooley's report to Gov. John Hoyt, "disposed of the prisoners according to frontier law."

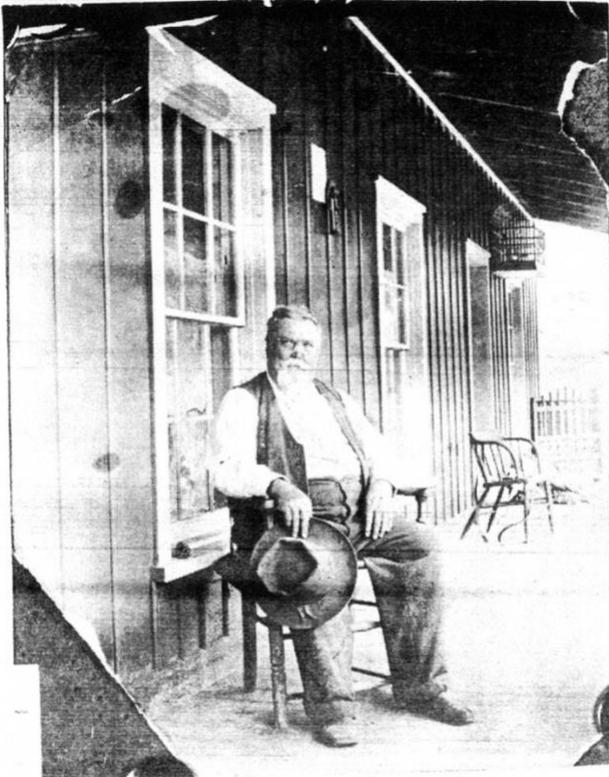
A great quotation came out of the movie, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, when a reporter said, "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." There is a great legend that surrounds Cooley, the city of Show Low and a card game. The legend says that Cooley and his partner in the 100,000 acre ranch that is now the city of Show Low decided the ranch wasn't big enough for both of them. So they had a card game and the winner would own the entire ranch and the loser would leave the area. After many hours of a game called "seven up" and no winner, one of the players held the trey of clubs and feeling he had a sure winner said, "Show low and you take the ranch." Cooley supposedly held the deuce of clubs and won everything. The ranch was eventually sold to Mormons for \$13,500 and they divided the ranch into four and a half shares, split the cattle, and occupied the buildings. They called the settlement Show Low and the main street through town is now named "Deuce of Clubs," and we locals just refer to it as "The Deuce."

A couple of problems with the legend, no one really knows where, when, or if it really happened. If it happened no one knows to what suit the deuce belonged. One version of the story has the card game between Cooley and his first partner, Clark. Another version has the game with another partner, Huning. And you can find a version where each one of them is the winner. If it happened I sort of go with Cooley beating Clark. Clark surely disappeared and was never heard of again. Many of Cooley's descendants live in the area and the search for the truth and for details of his life goes on.

By 1888 Cooley and Molly started ranching a few miles north of where Fort Apache still stands. They built a magnificent two-story

OLD WEST STORIES

home and lived there for the remainder of their lives. He died in on March 19, 1917, not 1915 as his tombstone says, and Molly died in October, 1920. They are buried side-by-side in the old Fort Apache Cemetery on the White Mountain Apache Tribe reservation. The fort and the cemetery are historic landmarks and the public is welcome.



Corydon Eliphalet Cooley, circa 1905