



CHAPTER I

## The Mormon Horse

THE HORSE CAREFULLY PICKED his way down a faint deer trail that ran parallel to a draw near the head of Muddy Creek, Montana. It was early spring, and the ground was still cold and muddy with patches of snow in the timber and on the shady side of the high bluffs that bordered the valley that encompassed the creek. The horse moved slowly, planting his left front foot firmly on the ground before moving his hind feet forward. For the next step he put minimal weight on the right front foot before hopping ahead. Reaching the bottom of the draw, he stopped between a big sand rock and some pine trees where the sun had melted the snow, revealing some of last year's grass and some fresh green shoots. He grazed hungrily and rested before moving on toward the creek.

Muddy Creek in the spring of 1890 was on the newly created Northern Cheyenne Reservation in southeastern Montana. It was a meandering stream set in a valley between high buttes that flowed north into Rosebud Creek and then on to the Yellowstone River. Home to some of the best grasslands in North America, it had been cherished by the buffalo and the people who hunted them. However, when the buffalo were nearly exterminated by 1885, they were rapidly replaced by cattlemen and thousands of head of cattle to eat the nutritious grass. The grass and timber on the Cheyenne and Crow Reservations were the subjects of especially envious attention by white pioneers moving into the area.

The horse, tired of eating snow, moved toward the creek seeking a drink of running water. Intersecting an old buffalo trail that paralleled the creek, he turned onto the trail where the traveling was easier, and soon came to a place that crossed the creek. Stopping in the running water, he drank his fill and let the injured

foot soak awhile before continuing downstream on the old buffalo trail. Picking up the scent of other horses, he increased his pace despite his injury. After another couple of miles, the horse rounded a bend in the creek and sighted a group of cabins, a tepee, log barn, and set of corrals. Letting out an anxious nicker, he was excited to hear an answering call from several horses in the corral. Traveling at a three-legged trot, he rapidly closed the distance to the corral. After exchanging a greeting of snorts and foot stomping, the exhausted horse leaned against the corral and dozed off. A faint pink glow in the eastern sky heralded the approaching daybreak.

Willis (Willie) Rowland awoke to the sound of the excited horses and barking dogs. Throwing off his buffalo robe, he reached for his pants and rough shirt, and pulled on a pair of high-topped boots. Grabbing his jacket and lever-action rifle, he opened the flap on the canvas tepee he shared with five of his brothers and noted the rapidly dawning morning. Stopping momentarily, he listened for more horse activity that might indicate they were being harassed by wolves or a mountain lion. Hearing none, he proceeded to the corral to discover the cause of the disturbance. He was immediately joined by two of the family dogs, which he commanded to stay behind him. Standing at the corral was a big sorrel horse, covered with mud, head down and obviously worn out. Noting the white saddle marks high on the horse's withers, Willie knew that this horse was broken to ride. He went back to the barn, picked up a halter and half a pail of oats, and returned to the tired animal. The horse allowed himself to be haltered and greedily tied into the oats while Willie continued the examination.

Willie found an exceptionally well-formed animal, of good temperament, with a missing right front horseshoe and a badly split hoof. Willie thought the horse was salvageable but would be lame for weeks, and looked for a brand that would indicate ownership. The brand was located on the left hip and displayed a Box D Eight, a brand with which Willie was not familiar. However, he noted that the upper right portion of the Box and parts of the Eight were fresh marks, indicating that the brand had

been changed from the original. The original brand was clearly an L D S, which was widely known to be a Mormon Church brand for Latter Day Saints.

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Given the way the horse was rebranded, Willie suspected the horse was stolen. Leading the horse to a box stall in the log barn, Willie locked him away from the other horses, pitched him some hay, and proceeded to the kitchen to make some coffee and assess the situation.

Willis Rowland, whose Cheyenne name was To'estone-nene'htane'he (Long Forehead), was a twenty-seven-year-old man with a Scottish-American father and a Southern Cheyenne mother. That made him a "mixed blood," or as was known at the time, a "half breed." In Willie's case, he had received the best genes from both "tribes," combining the sharp intelligence and stubborn grit of his father's Scottish heritage with the Cheyenne athleticism and sense of humor of his mother. His father, William (Bill) Rowland was a retired U.S. Army Cheyenne/English interpreter and the first white man to settle in the area that had become the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Bill Rowland had been COL Nelson Miles' primary Cheyenne/English interpreter after the Cheyenne surrender in 1877. In fact, the father and his sons had served as army or Indian agent interpreters on various occasions.

Willie, despite the normal prejudices of the times, was on equally good terms with both whites and Indians. Since he had been educated with the army officer children at the various army forts where his father interpreted, Willie had received a level of schooling far beyond that of the average white settler. However, beginning at about age twelve, he had also been instructed in Cheyenne warrior ways by a maternal uncle, given the Cheyenne name of Long Forehead, and later inducted into the Dog Men warrior society. Furthermore, he was not intimidated by perceived rank or station in life, having dealt with army officers and Cheyenne chiefs during his many years of interpreting.



*Willis Rowland circa 1913.* PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Mixed bloods such as Willis Rowland were common during the late 1880s and 1890s. Early white travelers to the western United States were almost exclusively male and the only women available to them were Native Americans. In the course of life many of these early white men “married” Indian women who bore children of mixed blood, or “half breeds.” Some of these unions were permanent, but most were transitory, and the white men moved on after a time to return to white settlements and a white wife. The mixed-blood children generally remained with the tribe of the Indian mother to be raised as Indians, but were not fully accepted by

either red or white communities. A fortunate few like Willis Rowland were raised in a permanent relationship between a white man and a red woman and learned to successfully tread the narrow bridge between the two.

After growing up with nine brothers and one sister, Willie was ready to move on with his own life. He had his eye on a nice piece of ground on Rosebud Creek about eleven miles north of the Rosebud Battlefield (Crook versus Sioux and Cheyennes, June 1876, the week before the Custer fight) and wanted to file a homestead claim. However, his small salary as a part-time interpreter and the few cows of his own that he ran with the family was not enough to make the move to his own place. Despite his education and native intelligence, he was not generally as welcome in the white community as he was in the Cheyenne Tribe because of the white biases against anyone with nonwhite blood.

Interestingly, the common general bias against nonwhites was in conflict with the white western custom of accepting people as individuals regardless of their race or prior station in life. Black, Spanish, Asian, Indian, or mixed bloods were often accepted as full members by their white brethren after they had proved their worth to their fellow workers. There are countless stories of black and brown cowboys being harassed by individual whites only to have the harasser confronted by the whole crew. The same cowboy who cursed Indians as no better than dogs would commonly intervene on behalf of an Indian girl being accosted by a white man. Often the same man who would advocate dissolution of the Indian's reservation would also treat the individual with full respect and invite him to eat at his table. Thus, the issue of white bias was much more nuanced than is generally reported.

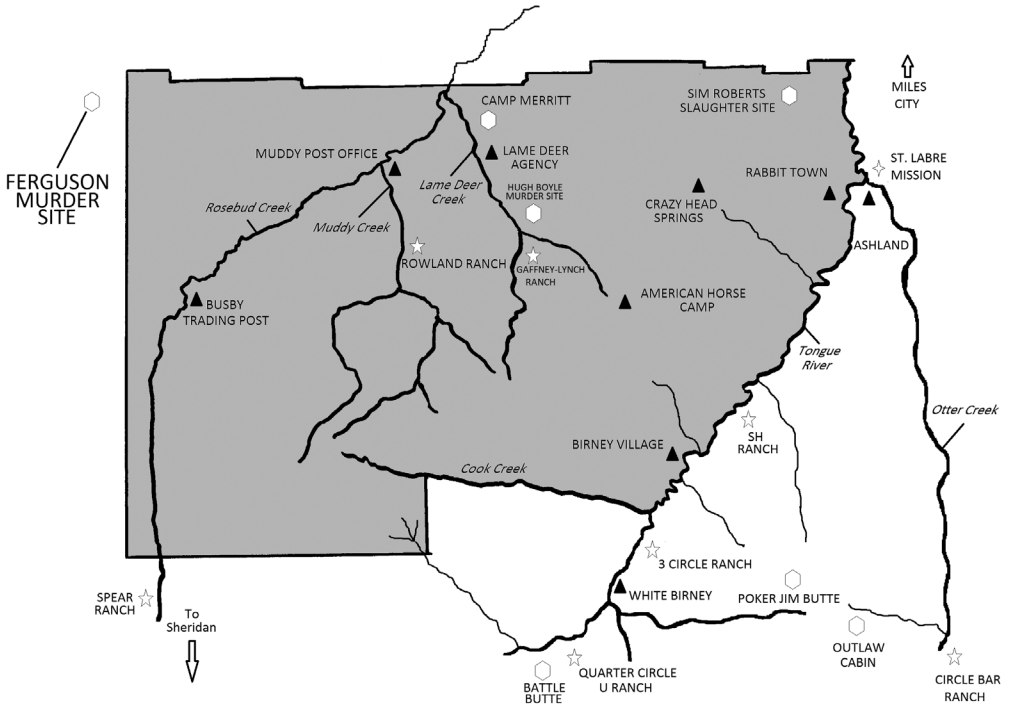
Willie/Long Forehead had been courting a girl named Bear Woman, the daughter of Elk River, a traditional Cheyenne warrior. That relationship was gaining strength, and Willie was anxious to start his own family. Willie let his mind wander and smiled to himself as he remembered when he first met Bear Woman and her mother. Cheyenne mothers looked on suitors with great disdain, and Willis was no exception, especially since he wasn't a pure-blood Cheyenne.

After Willis began to show interest in Bear Woman and she returned the attention, her mother had berated Willie in a sharp voice: "Who are you to come around this girl? What have you ever done in battle? How many times have you touched the enemy?"

The mother, knowing that the Cheyennes had not been at war for nearly ten years, expected Willie to withdraw, hanging his head, like most of the other young men had done. It was a common problem for young Cheyenne men at this time to prove their worth, because very few had the opportunity to count coup (touch or strike an enemy with a hand or weapon) like the Cheyennes of old. She was very surprised when Long Forehead softly replied that he had counted two coups to his credit. He then told her to ask Howling Wolf, a respected Cheyenne Scout, if this was not true and walked away.

The coups to which Willie Rowland/Long Forehead referred were counted in August 1880 near the present town of Glendive, Montana. Willis Rowland and three Cheyenne Scouts—Howling Wolf, Shell, and Big Footed Bull—were scouting with a patrol of eight U.S. soldiers searching for Sioux hostiles who had killed a stagecoach driver four days before. The body of the stage driver had been found by another party of soldiers and two Sioux scouts, but the Sioux said they could not find the trail of the hostiles. Rowland, sensing that maybe the Sioux scouts were lying about losing the trail of their fellow Sioux, suggested to the sergeant leading the patrol that the Cheyenne Scouts go to the spot where the driver's body was found and take a closer look. Sure enough, Howling Wolf picked up the trail and Shell discovered where the hostile Sioux had left the stage road. They determined that they were following a party of four men and a small band of loose horses. After some hard riding, the Cheyenne Scouts spotted two Sioux men butchering a buffalo and suspected the other two were camped nearby.

The Scouts followed the two Sioux back to their camp and then brought up the army patrol. Just as the patrol arrived, the four hostile Sioux broke camp and started moving out. The Scouts and the patrol engaged the group at about 300 yards and knocked one Sioux out of the saddle, breaking his leg and stampeding their band of horses. Rowland and the Scouts rushed forward on their horses toward the



*Northern Cheyenne Resovation (gray) and surrounding area.*

downed man. Shell and Rowland stopped to kill the wounded Sioux and count coup, while Howling Wolf and Big Footed Bull went after the loose horses. With the soldiers in tow, they all galloped after the remaining Sioux.

Rounding a hill, the Scouts and soldiers ran into the hostile Sioux, and with everyone firing they killed one man and wounded another. The wounded Sioux rode a short way off and fell off his horse. Again, Shell and Rowland killed the wounded Sioux and counted coup. Howling Wolf and Big Footed Bull scalped the three dead Sioux. The fourth Sioux got away because the Scouts and soldiers' horses were played out while the remaining Sioux's horse was fresh. Packs found on the recovered horses contained mail from the stagecoach. The Scouts were allowed to keep the recovered horses and returned to Fort Keogh for a scalp dance. That was how Long

Forehead/Willis Rowland earned his two coups at the tender age of seventeen and was inducted into the "Dog Soldiers" of the Dog Men military society.

The "Dog Men" got their name by taking a vow of suicide in defense of their villages. They would drive a stake in the ground with a rawhide rope attached to it and the other end tied around their waists. The rope could not be untied until either the enemy was defeated or the warrior was killed. They also frequently acted as camp policemen to ensure discipline on behalf of the chiefs. Of the three Northern Cheyenne military societies, the Kit Foxes, Elkhorn Scrapers, and Dog Men, the Dog Men were the most prestigious.

Willie's attention returned to what to do about the injured horse with the changed brand. Normally, Willie would have sought the advice of his father or Agent Upshaw, the Indian agent for the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. However, both men had gone to Miles City, Montana, for the fifth annual Montana Stockgrowers meeting and would not return for a few days. Willie knew he needed to report the horse to someone, but the sheriff of Custer County, Montana, was seventy-five miles away, also in Miles City. In the end he decided to keep the horse in the barn and out of sight until his father returned.