

SLAUGHTER *on the* **OTTER**



The **Kendrick Sheep Raid**

Forest B. Dunning

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No book with a historical bent can be written without the assistance of others. So it was with this book. Given the limited amount of public information on the Bear Creek (Kendrick) Sheep Raid, information had to be pieced together one bit at a time from widely diverse sources. The list of contributors to this story was many and varied.

I received valuable input from many people in the Birney and Otter communities of Montana in the form of oral history and stories from the time of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Specifically, the Brewster, Brown, and Alderson families from Birney were very forthcoming with old photographs and stories. “Bunny” Hayes and “Irv” Alderson were particularly helpful in putting the story in its historical context. In Otter, Marcus Stevens spent several hours with me traveling throughout the area pointing out important sites related to the sheep killing. His insight into the history of the Circle Bar Ranch and Levi Howes was critical to the confirmation of critical aspects of the story. Wally Badgett, Frank Hagen, Hardy Tate, Bill McKinney, the Bull family, and the Fletchers were all valued contributors.

One of the best informants with specific and valuable information was Neil Thex, grandson of Charles Thex, who spent hours researching the activities of his grandfather and the Bear Creek Raid. Without his help and encouragement, this book could not have been written.

Institutional assistance in Wyoming was provided by Cynde Georgen of the Trail End Museum in Sheridan, the Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library’s Wyoming Room, the Sheridan Episcopal Church, the Washakie Museum & Cultural Center in Worland, and the American Heritage Center in Laramie; and in Montana, the Montana Historical Society Research Center in Helena, the Powder River Historical Society and Museum in Broadus, and the Range Riders Museum in Miles City.

A special thanks should go to John Davis of Worland, Wyoming, for his information and assistance on the Spring Creek Raid. I liberally used his research in the comparison of the Bear Creek (Kendrick) and Spring Creek Sheep Raids.

Most honorable mention should go to Alice Orr, English professor from Eastern Tennessee University, and Katie Curtiss, former history professor at Sheridan Junior College, for their good efforts to edit my abysmal spelling, punctuation, and historical references. They vastly improved the story.

Last, but most important, was the help of my son, Shane Dunning, who acted as my research assistant, mentor, editor, and chief critic. Without his great computer skills; hours of online time plowing through historical newspapers, census reports, obituaries, and court records; and recovery of hours of taped transcripts from long-dead pioneers, the book would never have been completed. In addition, his ability to recover old photographs and correctly size and caption them added immeasurably to the final work.

That I am still married is a tribute to my wonderful and loving wife, Susie, who put up with my frustrations, temper tantrums, and bad language over the past year.

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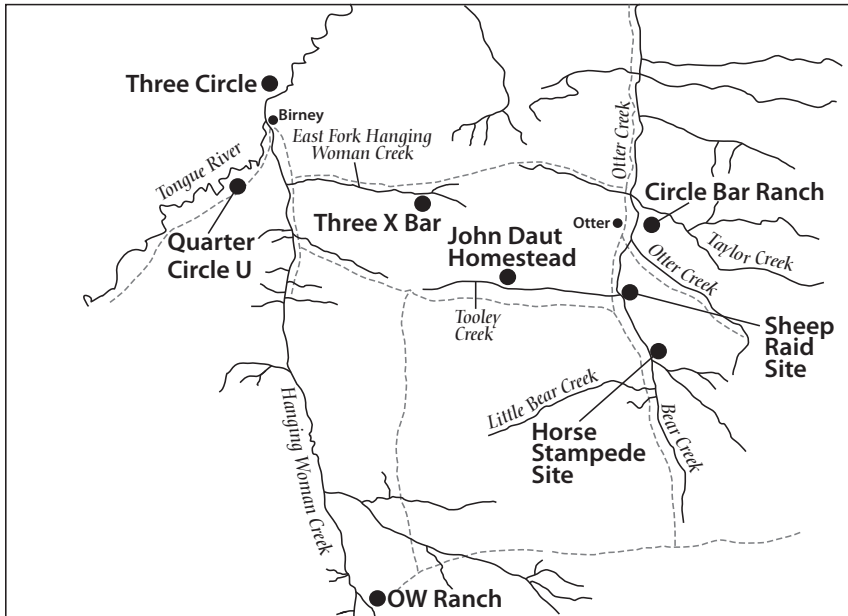


Figure 1: Map of the Otter Creek Valley Sheep Raid Sites.

UNDER THE TABLE

On a warm summer evening in 1956, I chanced to overhear the story that is related in this book. At the time I was only nine years old and staying for a few days with my step-uncle John Moreland at his ranch on Cook Creek in the Birney, Montana, area.

On that evening Uncle John was talking to an old cowboy about the days when he was a young man. A bottle of Old Hermitage whiskey was on the table, and they were both partaking liberally. The old man was J. H. “Shorty” Caddel, an old cowboy who had come “up the trail” and had worked at the Quarter Circle U Ranch at the beginning of the twentieth century. Shorty was only about five feet, five inches tall but rather heavysset. I recall that I was impressed that he was missing two fingers on his “dally” hand, and had

tobacco juice running down one side of his chin and whiskey down the other side. He looked like he was the real deal. Since I had a keen interest in hearing old stories, I curled up under the table and listened intently.

The conversation began with Shorty describing how they worked the longhorn cattle on the open range and the trip up the trail from Texas. He talked about the problems that Birney and Otter Creek ranchers encountered with Cheyenne Indians killing their cattle because they were starving on the Cheyenne Reservation. He also gave his opinion of some of the local early settlers like John B. Kendrick, Captain Joseph T. Brown, George Brewster, Booker Lacy, and Levi Howes. At one point, after several drinks, Uncle John asked, "What do you know about that big sheep killing over on Otter Creek?" Shorty took some time to answer but then replied, "I was there. Guess I can talk now since I already told Lyman Brewster about it last year."

The tale that he told Uncle John that night has remained seared into my memory for over sixty years.

While doing research on another book, *Between Two Tribes*, I was visiting with an old army friend, Neil Thex, who grew up on Otter Creek, and mentioned to him that I remembered Shorty Caddel telling John Moreland that Charlie Thex, his grandfather, had been a participant in the sheep raid. Neil told me that he already knew about the raid because Lyman Brewster had written an article on the subject for the Montana Historical Society. Furthermore, he had a copy, which he mailed to me in addition to other information on his grandfather. Upon reading the article, memories came flooding back as the story I had heard was put in its historical context and filled in with the names of the other participants. However, because I was busy with the *Between Two Tribes* project, which was set in the year 1890, and the raid happened in late December of 1900, I had to defer action on the Bear Creek Raid until the first project was finished.

In my research on the first project, more information on the incident was uncovered. Again, I put that information aside until I could

give it the attention it deserved. However, I noted that many of the players in the first book were also involved in the Bear Creek Raid.

Since the beginning of 1901, the “raid” has been variously named the “Kendrick Raid,” “Otter Creek Valley Sheep Killing,” and the “Bear Creek Sheep Raid.” All are the same incident. Prior to 1974 the leadership of John B. Kendrick in the raid was not confirmed, and it was called the Bear Creek Raid. This book uses “Kendrick Raid” and “Bear Creek Raid” interchangeably.

It was terribly difficult to get accurate information about the Bear Creek Raid. While the topic has been awash with rumors for over 100 years, the only written material from the time are a few newspaper accounts, which are largely inaccurate. The most reliable sources are the interviews in the 1940s by Maude Beach of the Works Progress Administration, the Lyman Brewster article “December 1900: The Quiet Slaughter” published in 1974 in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, and various tape recordings of pioneers made by Robert Helvey in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Despite the difficulties, I believe that there is enough information to paint a reasonably accurate portrait of the raid—who planned it, who conducted it, and who helped cover it up.

The purpose of this book is to discuss the historical forces that led to the raid, record the facts, introduce the participants, describe their motivations, and assess the results of the raid. To some extent many of the conclusions reached are speculative in nature due to lack of verifiable information but reflect my best efforts to tell the story from the limited information available.

As of December 28, 2018, the raid occurred 118 years ago, and the participants are all long dead and buried. Over fifty years have passed since the last participant, Shorty Caddel, passed away on May 21, 1966. To those descendants who may feel offended by the exposure of the actions of their great-grandfathers in this book, I extend my sincere apologies. It was a different time and a new reality for those pioneer settlers who had to fight weather, grasshoppers, hostile Indians, outlaws, and then deal with hundreds of settlers out to secure their idea of the “American Dream.” They

made the great country that we now enjoy. Let us record this incident to the best of our ability and enjoy the courage and fortitude of our forbearers.

Here is the story as best as I can determine it.



Figure 2: Shorty Caddel and John Moreland, courtesy of Sharon Moreland Carleton.

THE RAID

Just the Facts Ma'am

As daylight broke on the morning of December 28, 1900, eleven men rode down a tributary to Otter Creek in southeast Montana on a grim mission. Their objective was the elimination of a band of sheep that had “invaded” their range six weeks earlier. Despite repeated warnings by cattlemen in the area, the sheep owners had taken the strictly legal position that the country was public land and they had as much right as the cattlemen to graze their sheep in that area. However, their actions ran counter to range customs that had been observed for many years, which delineated areas for sheep from those for cattle. This open violation of “range orders” was a potential death sentence to the cattle industry in the Otter Creek, Hanging Woman, and Tongue River drainages. When faced with the potential loss of homes and ranches, these cattlemen were prepared to take drastic action.

The riders were later identified by Lyman Brewster and Shorty Caddel as cattlemen John B. Kendrick, George Brewster, Charles Thex, Horton Boal, and Frank “Booker” Lacy and cowboys “Barney” Hall, William “Bill” Munson, Walt Snider, Mahlon “Tug” Wilson, Frank McKinney, and J. H. “Shorty” Caddel. At the junction of Tooley Creek and Bear Creek, they observed a sheep wagon, small corral, and about 2,200 head of sheep belonging to a partnership between John Daut and R. R. “Bob” Selway.



Figure 3: Site of the Bear Creek Sheep Raid, photo taken March 2018.

Donning gunnysacks with eye sockets cut out, they rode into herder Dan Squires' camp with ash clubs and guns in hand. One man, later identified as Charlie Thex, dismounted and, placing a pistol under the sheepherder's nose, said, "A little coffee, please. A little sugar, please."¹

The remainder of the men dismounted and drank hot coffee after their cold ride. Following the coffee, they tied the sheepherder to his sheep wagon and proceeded to beat to death his 2,200 head of sheep. It should be noted that during the incident, the herder was not roughly treated or abused other than the indignity of being shown a gun and tied to a wagon wheel on a cold day in December.

Killing the sheep took most of the day and was incredibly hard work. There is some evidence that initially the men tried to kill the sheep in a roundup corral while on horseback.² However, the corral

¹ Shorty Caddel interview with Bob Helvey. Also Shorty Caddel with John Moreland and Forest Dunning.

² *Forsyth Times*, January 8, 1901.

was too small to hold 2,200 head of sheep, and it was difficult to hit a sheep perfectly from a moving horse in the middle of more frightened sheep. The corral soon became clogged with dead and injured sheep. The sheep were then pushed into a sharp bend in Tooley Creek underneath the high cut bank (shown on page 2). Because most of the dead sheep were found in this area, it was reported that the sheep were stampeded over the cut bank to their death.³ However, this was not true. Almost all the sheep were killed by being clubbed in the head.

This particular herd was not made up of mature sheep. Instead it was a band of “coming yearling” ewe lambs that had been picked as elite replacements for Selway’s other herds, as they were to be culled for age.⁴ Because their skulls were not yet mature, these lambs were much more susceptible to death by clubbing than older sheep.

Following the dispatch of the sheep, the herder, Dan Squires, was untied and told to stay in camp for an hour. He was also instructed to leave the area or he would be killed on sight.⁵ The sheep killing party then split up and returned to two separate ranches where they would be witnessed at New Year’s weekend dances. On the way home, some of the men fell in behind wild horses and drove them in front to hide their tracks.⁶

The herder went to John Daut’s homestead and reported the slaughter. He thought he recognized the voices and mannerisms of some of the raiders despite the gunnysack masks and told Daut who he suspected. Then Squires left Daut’s house. He showed up at Captain Joe T. Brown’s ranch on the Tongue River the next morning to report the raid. He went to the Three Circle Ranch because he had served under Captain Brown in the Montana State Militia and felt safe there.⁷ He then departed for

³ *The Sheridan Post*, January 3, 1901.

⁴ Booker Lacy interview with Robert Helvey.

⁵ Shorty Cadell discussion with John Moreland and Forest Dunning, 1956.

⁶ Brewster, “December 1900: The Quiet Slaughter.”

⁷ Arthur Hayes, Jr. (great-grandson of Captain Joe T. Brown) interview, March 2018.

unknown parts and was never seen in the immediate Otter Creek country again.

The following morning, John Daut came down Tooley Creek and found the dead sheep and abandoned sheep wagon. Proceeding on up Bear Creek, he informed the large flock herders of the raid. Then he rushed to the nearest telephone at the post office located at the Charles Bull ranch and called Custer County Sheriff O. C. Cato in Miles City to report the dead sheep and missing herder. While herder Squires had told Daut that he was leaving the country, Daut did not know where Squires was at the time of the report. Daut also sent word to St. Labre Mission at Ashland to tell the Northern Cheyenne tribe: "Heap big kill, bring plenty wagons."

Cato telegraphed the news to R. R. Selway in Sheridan, Wyoming, and then left for Tooley Creek. Selway immediately responded by offering a \$2,000 reward for information relating to the killing.

Sheriff O. C. Cato made a quick investigation of the site, talked to John Daut, gathered several blood-stained clubs, and returned to Miles City to confirm that 2,113 sheep had indeed been killed by persons unknown.

Selway perceived that Cato was not all that interested in capturing the sheep killers after he told Selway, "I stand ready to arrest any man who comes in to claim his club."⁸ Cattlemen from all over the county showed up at his office during the next month to examine the clubs. Joking comments like "I don't see my club here, mine had a knot in it," and "That looks like Joe's club but he was in your jail that night" were prevalent. When questioned by Cato, Shorty Badgett of the Bug Ranch said, "Are my initials on that club? I always put my initials on my clubs. If my initials aren't on it, must not be my club."⁹ Most of the cattlemen thought it was a fine piece of work. Sheriff Cato was the former manager of the

⁸ Brown and Felton, *Before Barbed Wire*.

⁹ Interview with Wally Badgett (great-grandson of Shorty Badgett), May 10, 2018.

huge XIT cattle ranch and a lame duck, with only a month left to serve on his term.

Excitement abounded throughout the Otter and Birney communities as people wondered who had carried out the raid. Most of the prime suspects were those cattlemen and their cowboys in the immediate area. However, all had been seen at the dances held over the New Year's weekend. It was reported that Charlie Thex played the violin at one dance, and John B. Kendrick was much in evidence as he greeted guests at the OW.¹⁰ An effort was made by all participants to make sure they would be seen and remembered. Lyman Brewster later referred to these as "alibi" dances.

Meanwhile the Northern Cheyennes had been making good use of the dead sheep. They mobilized thirty-three wagons to haul off the carcasses. Daut told the Cheyennes to skin the sheep, give him the hides, and they could have the carcasses for meat. The Cheyennes spent the next three days hauling wagonload after wagonload back to the reservation at Ashland and Indian Birney.¹¹ Joe Brown, Jr. of the Three Circle recalled that the smell of dead sheep permeated the Tongue River Valley all spring.¹² However, the Cheyennes also remember that winter as being the one winter when they were well fed.

For nearly seventy-four years the secret of who participated in the Bear Creek Raid was tightly held. Despite rewards for as much as \$19,000 in today's dollars, no \$40-per-month cowboy ever talked, even when drunk. While people speculated in hushed tones, \$15,000 in damage money was deposited anonymously in Selway's bank account to pay for the sheep. Selway refused the money and continued to pursue John B. Kendrick, whom he believed responsible, until the whole incident was largely forgotten. Kendrick continued to build his ranching fortune, became governor of the state of Wyoming, and served in the U.S. Senate until his death in 1933.

¹⁰ Interview and correspondence with Neil Thex.

¹¹ Beach, *Faded Hoof Prints—Bygone Dreams*, John Daut's Story.

¹² Joe Brown, Jr. conversation with Forest Dunning, 1960s.

Report is Verified.

A telephone message from Bull's store at Otter verifies the report of the killing of two thousand sheep belonging to Dawnt & Selway, by masked riders on Friday morning. Mr. Bull who sent the message stated that the herder was surprised early in the morning just as he was coming out of the wagon to begin his days work. He was held up at the point of a pistol and told to keep quiet. One of the men stood guard and the others entered the corral and dispatched the sheep with clubs.

Sheriff Cato left for the scene of the slaughter the following afternoon and as it is yet too soon to receive word from this section direct, the only available source of information is by the long distance telephone to Bull's ranch.

The sheriff's office is in receipt of a communication this morning from R. R. Selway of Sheridan, Wyoming offering a reward of \$2,000 for the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator of the deed and this will doubtless serve as a temptation to some who may be acquainted with the facts in case to divulge information that will lead to the arrest of the men who inaugurated the range war. More definite news is looked for tomorrow.

Figure 4: Forsyth Times, January 8, 1901.