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# KENTUCKY CANNIBAL IN CARIBOO

A STORY OF THE KILLER, BOONE HELM

Jason Young

*Never before in the history of colony of British Columbia had such a viscious and depraved badman, in the character of one Boone Helm, travelled amongst us. Having killed, robbed, cheated and even eaten so many of his honest brethren that it is doubtful whether even he, could have given an accurate account of his crimes; still, he escaped the laws of two countries over a period of some twenty years and left a legacy of infamy that lives on to this day.*



Born in Kentucky in 1828, Boone moved with his parents to one of the newest settlements in Missouri

**“urging his horse up the stairs into the court-room, (Helm) astonished the judge by demanding with profane emphasis what he wanted ...**

ism. He delighted in nothing more than any quarrel which would bring his prowess into full display. He was also an inordinate consumer of liquor, and when thus excited would give way to all the evil passions of nature. On one occasion, while the circuit court was in session, the sheriff attempted to arrest him. Helm resisted the officer, but urging his horse up the stairs into the court-room, astonished the judge by demanding with profane emphasis what he wanted with him.

Boone determined to emigrate either to Texas or California. Littlebury Shoot, a neighbour and friend had promised to accompany him. By some accounts, Shoot had made the promise to a drunken Helm with intent of pacification. When Helm heard that his friend was intending to stay in Missouri he called upon his friend’s house and an exchange of this sort took place:—

“So Littlebury, you’ve backed down on the Texas question, have you?”  
Shoot, attempting an explanation was stopped by the preemptory demand:—  
“Well, are you going or not? Say yes or no.”  
“No!”

At the utterance of this reply, Helm dissolved the brief partnership with a bowie knife between the ribs. Shoot died instantly and Boone fled West. The brother of the victim and a few resolute friends followed in pursuit. They tracked him for a distance before capturing him by surprise at an Indian reservation and returning him to Monroe county for trial. He was convicted of murder; but his conduct was such while in confinement as to raise some serious doubts of his sanity. In the words of the court, “His manner was not only unbecoming but unbalanced.”

After his conviction, under the advice of physicians, he was consigned to the lunatic asylum from which he eventually escaped and fled immediately to California.



Helm killed several persons then in 1858 escaped arrest by flight to the Dalles, Oregon Territory.

Late in October Boone and several companions left Grande Ronde river for Camp Floyd. A first hand narrative of this adventure was detailed by John W. Powell who unwittingly saved the scoundrel’s life near the end of his journey:—

**“I had crossed the Snake river just above Fort Hall, pitched my lodge and was entering to indulge in a brief sleep, when I heard some one outside ask in a loud tone of voice, “Who owns this shebang?” Stepping to the door and looking out, I saw a tall, cadaverous, sunken-eyed man standing over me, dressed in a dirty, dilapidated coat and shirt and drawers, and moccasins so worn that they could scarcely be tied to his feet.”**

“...on the 10th of April, 1859... I had crossed the Snake river just above Fort Hall, pitched my lodge and was entering to indulge in a brief sleep, when I heard some one outside ask in a loud tone

CANNIBAL ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



# THE GREEN GOLD OF THE CARIBOO

the FIRST CATTLE RANCH IN WESTERN CANADA?

From Cache Creek north to Quesnel, Highway 97 passes through the grasslands that are the green gold of the Cariboo, grasslands that have been raising beef cattle since the first days of the Gold Rush.

Along with leaving thousands of miners with no prospects, the end of the California gold rush left ranchers in the northwestern United States with no market for their beef. The Cariboo Gold Rush came along just in time for all of them. The first boatload of California prospectors arrived in Victoria in April, 1858. The first herd of Oregon cattle crossed the border at Osoyoos two months later.

General Joel Palmer, a veteran of California beef drives, trailed that first herd to the BC goldfields. Travelling with cattle, cowboys, and oxen-drawn wagons carrying supplies, his crew spent two rough months on the treacherous trail. Palmer sold the oxen and supplies at Fort Kamloops, and the cattle to meat-hungry miners prospecting along the Fraser River.

For the next few years there was a steady stream of cattle coming into the country. Drovers bought the cattle for \$10 a head and paid \$2 duty for each at the border. Riders wages were \$30 a month plus grub (sow belly, beans, and bannock). The cattle ate free, and were sold for \$100 to \$150 dollars each at the gold fields. Most stockman made more money on one cattle drive than many miners made during the entire gold rush.

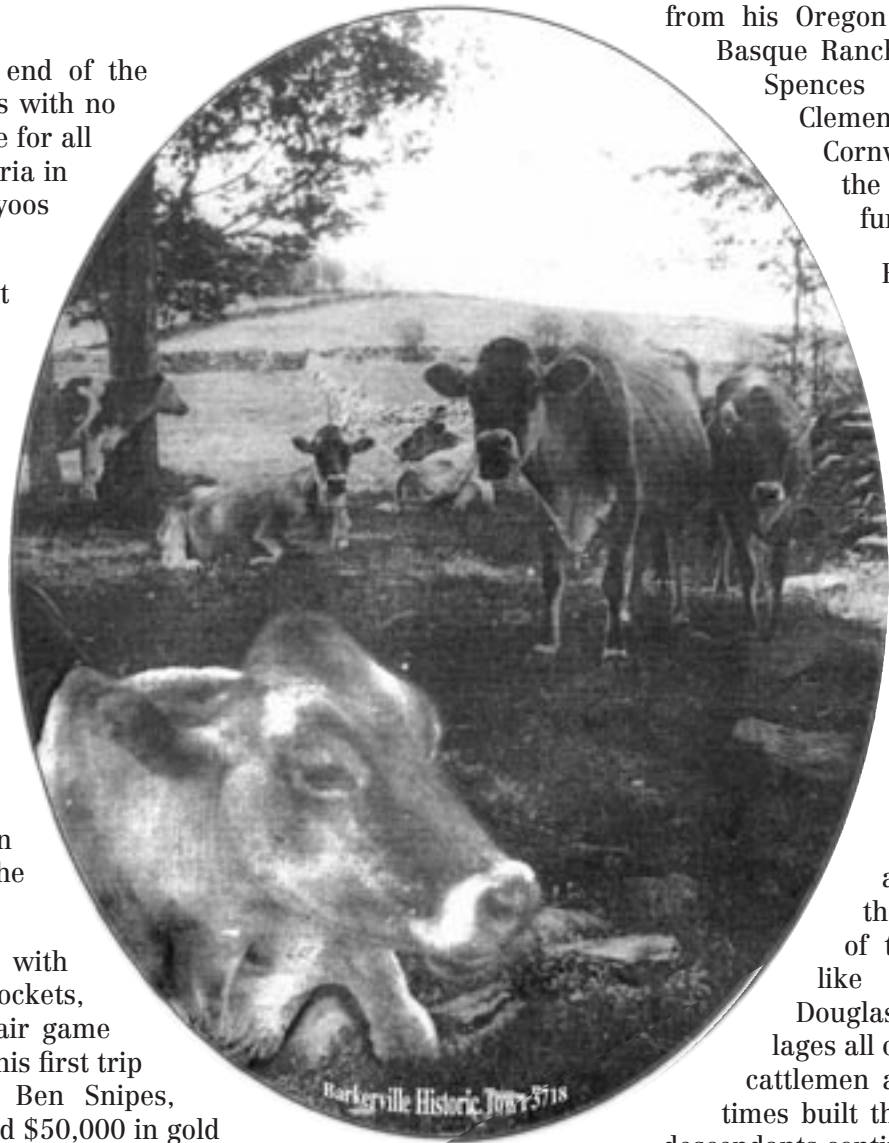
Drovers bought cattle in the US in the fall when prices were low, crossed the border, and wintered the herds on the lush grass-clad slopes around Cache Creek, Kamloops, and the Nicola Valley. A man or two stayed with the herd. The owners returned in spring and the drive continued on its way.

Cariboo Road. It is now an historic site. Innkeeper Antoine Minnabarriet brought cattle from his Oregon holdings to his Basque Ranch operation near Spences Bridge and Clement and Henry Cornwall established the Ashcroft Ranch further along.

By 1870 the Cariboo gold rush was all but over, and the ranchers had little local market for their product. Most of them had everything they owned invested in the land, and they had put down roots, so they stayed. Villages had grown up around most of the spreads -- some of the big ranches, like the Gang and Douglas Lake, were villages all on their own. The cattlemen adapted with the times built the country. Their descendants continue to do so.

Raising cattle is a sustainable industry, ranches established during the gold rush are still in operation. A few, like the Dougherty ranch near Clinton, and the Moffat ranch near Quesnel, are operated today by the fourth generation of the original families.

contributed by Diana French



Heading home with gold in their pockets, drovers were fair game for thieves. On his first trip to Barkerville, Ben Snipes, age 22, was paid \$50,000 in gold dust for his herd. Warned of robbers, he left town at night. Riding a mule, not the speediest of beasts, and travelling only in darkness, he made the 1120km trip home to Washington in seven days with the gold intact.

Jerome and Thaddeus Harper were among the first drovers to realize the grassy slopes were ideal for raising beef. They acquired property early on and their holdings grew into the legendary Gang Ranch, once one of the largest cattle operations in Canada. In 1863 they joined forces with the three von Volkenburgh brothers who owned slaughter houses, and the partners controlled the BC cattle market for the next twenty years. A typical Harper drive would be 500 steers, 50 cows and as many horses, all to be sold. They pastured the cattle and drove them to the slaughter houses as needed. Barkerville residents alone consumed around 1400 head of cattle a year.

The colonial government encouraged settlers with a generous lease system and laws which ensured the least possible interference in ranch affairs. By the mid-1860s ranches were strung like beads along the travelled routes to the gold fields. Some of the first holdings were no more than a good garden plot but that was big enough. One fellow at Soda Creek sold a crop of turnips for \$3000.

Pennsylvania prospector Peter C. Dunlevy, the first to make a stake in the Cariboo gold fields, used his money to build roadhouses and later a huge farm near the boom town of Soda Creek. Other ranches developed in combination with roadhouses. Herman Bowe's Alkali Lake Ranch, believed to be the first beef operation in western Canada, began as a roadside inn on the Fraser River trail. Hudson's Bay Company factor Donald McLean (later killed in the Chilcotin War) set up the Hat Creek Ranch and stopping place by the



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# WILLIAMS LAKE

ORIGINALLY A SECWEPHEM VILLAGE - NAMED AFTER CHIEF WILLIAM

The city of Williams Lake began as a Secwepemc village, located at the northeastern end of a lake where a number of trading trails met. During the fur trading years, these trails were used by the fur brigades travelling between Fort Alexandria and the Hudson's Bay's southern trading posts. The name came about after Roman Catholic Bishop Modeste Demers visited the village in 1852 and his reports refer to "Chief William." Thereafter the lake was called Williams Lake.

When gold was discovered in the Cariboo, prospectors poured like ants along the brigade trails heading for the goldfields. Thomas Davidson established the first farm, roadhouse and store in Williams Lake in 1859 and the next year Gold Commissioner Phillip Nind chose the settlement as his headquarters. A year later, Tom Menefee, one of the first to strike gold in the Cariboo, bought the Davidson holdings. By 1862, when construction of the Cariboo Road began, Williams Lake was well on its way to becoming the distribution centre for the Cariboo.

Gustavus Wright and John C. Calbreath won the contract to build the road between Lillooet and Soda Creek. Williams Lake was to be on the route but when the contractors needed money and Menefee refused to lend them any, they rerouted the road, bypassing the village. Nind and everyone else left for Barkerville, except Nind's assistant, Constable William Pinchbeck. Pinchbeck and partner William Lyne acquired most of the land in the valley, established an Upper and a Lower farm where they raised meat, produce and prize winning wheat for sale to the miners. They had a sawmill, a gristmill and a distillery where they made White Wheat Whiskey.

In 1888, Pinchbeck borrowed money from Gang Ranch to buy out Lyne, but times were hard and he died in 1893 before he could replay the loan. He was buried in what is now Pinchbeck Park by the Stampede Grounds.

Robert Borland bought the property and operated a roadhouse at the Lower House and leased the Upper House land to Chilcotin pioneer Mike Minton. The two farms slumbered along until the Pacific Great Eastern Railway arrived in 1919 and Williams Lake was reborn as a major cattle shipping point. The Borland wheat field became an instant town as entrepreneurs arrived by the score and scurried about throwing up tents and shacks to house banks, stores, hotels and restaurants. Almost sixty years after the first try, Williams Lake became Cariboo's main trading and service centre. It is still a major cattle shipping point.

The Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin in downtown Williams Lake focuses on the area's rich ranching and rodeo heritage, and showcases the BC Cowboy Hall of Fame which honours the province's working and rodeo cowboys, along with cowboy writers, poets and artists.

contributed by Diana French

September 22, 1862

No man can work the mines hear exept he has some capital. Surfis (surface) digging is ... out. You must then sink 40 to 50 feet to the bead rock then you may (reach) the bar it lies in. Hair thair is no use in a man coming hear that cannot work at any thing. Not clerks not townsmen nor traidsmen but sutch men as can swing a wooley cradle or chop ... . Not that thair is any ploughing or cradling in B.Columbia for I have not seen grain Enough to keep a threshing mill for 2 days working for a distance of 700 miles along the fraser nor a farm I would take as a gift. It is all hills mountains rocks exept some ... of poor land.

Victoria November 16, 1862

Tel no clerks no city gentlemen com in fact too many has come if evry third son of the ... gentlemen in Canada are sawing wood scraping streets and many other nasty jobs ... A man who come hear must turn his hand to evry thing..

Do not beleav evry thing yo read about this country ... it is the most wicked country in the world cursing gambling drinking and some times shooting. I have saw some killed some dead an walked over gravs as unconcerned as I have through a potatoes field at home. Many Indians maid drunk by whits and kill each other nor can I say half what I want to say. I cannot dwell any longer

Sunday is no more respected than Monday. Hear all work gambling and drinking is seen to a grate extent. Whiskey 25 cents per glass it is paid as read as one cent they have not seen my 25 cents nor never will.

November 16, 1862

I have saw many strang seems many strang faces of evry nation sence I saw yours.

Thair is plenty of gold in Cariboo no doubt but it is onley one out of 100 can find it thair is onley 3 months of sumer thair and it is rainey wether mostly You want about 5 or six hundred dolers at least to find any gold.

I have a claim on the far famed Williams Creek. Thair is gold in it if I can onley get gold enough to get it out. I am determin to try though like thousands I may not sucseed it is 600 miles from hear to Wm. Creek.

Joseph Halpenny

## QUOTES from the PAST



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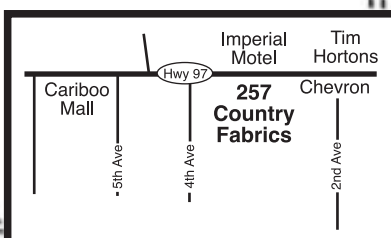
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## "CANNIBAL" ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

of voice, "Who owns this shebang?" Stepping to the door and looking out, I saw a tall, cadaverous, sunken-eyed man standing over me, dressed in a dirty, dilapidated coat and shirt and drawers, and moccasins so worn that they could scarcely be tied to his feet. Having invited him in and inquired his business, he told me substantially the following:—

His name was Boone Helm. In company with five others he had left Dalles City, Oregon, in October, 1858, intending to go to Camp Floyd, Utah Territory. Having reached the Raft river they were attacked by a party of Digger Indians, with whom they maintained a running fight for several miles, but none of the party was killed or severely wounded. Late in the evening they reached the Bannack river, where they camped, picketed their horses near by, and stationed two sentinels. During the night one of the sentinels was killed, the savage who committed the deed escaping on a horse belonging to the party.

(Eventually) ... they reached Soda Springs on Bear river... and travelled up that river until they reached Thomas's fork... where they found a comfortable cabin and went into winter quarters. Their provisions soon being all gone they commenced subsisting on their horses, killing one after another... making snow-shoes out of the hides of the horses... and started towards Fort Hall.

The party kept together until they had got beyond Soda Springs, where some had become so exhausted they could scarcely travel. With their meat supply getting low, Helm and a man named Burton concluded not to endanger their own lives by waiting for the wearied ones, so they left them behind.

When they had reached the site of Cantonment Loring, Burton: starv-

ing, weary, and snow-blind; was unable to proceed. Helm left him, and continued on for the Fort.

Reaching the fort, he found it without an occupant. He then returned to Burton, reaching him about dark. When out in the willows procuring firewood, he heard the report of a pistol. Running back into the house, he found Burton had committed suicide by shooting himself. Helm decided to try and find his way into Salt Lake valley. Cutting off, well up in the thigh, Burton's remaining leg (having already eaten the other) he rolled the limb up in an old red flannel shirt, tied it across his shoulder, and started.

Boone Helm eventually made Salt Lake City where he was again driven out of town for his atrocious deeds. There is good reason to believe that before Helm fled from that town, he murdered two citizens in cold blood.

**From a letter published in the Colonist newspaper on April 4, 1864 we learn that Helm has made his way to Cariboo.**

In July of 1862 the villain is reported to be at Antler Creek, some sixteen kilometres from Barkerville over the heights of Prosperpine Mountain. Here our story picks up in the words of W. T. Collinson, a miner of the era who had the misfortune of meeting Boone that fateful spring, and the good luck of surviving to tell the tale some 31 years later.

"Tommy Harvey, alias 'Irish Tommy' and myself left Antler Creek with Sokolosky and two Frenchmen for Forks Quesnelle. This was on or about the 18th of July, 1862. We journeyed together until we arrived at Keithley Creek, where the three aforementioned gentlemen, carrying on a mule and two horses about \$32,000 in coarse gold, stopped for dinner. Harvey and I, continued

on three miles... where we cooked our repast a la mode Cariboo."

Some have reported that Boone befriended Sokolosky & co. in Antler Creek, although this seems unlikely given Collinson's account. More probable is that after passing Collinson on the road, Helm and his associate met the three men either at Keithley Creek or somewhere between there and Heck's ferry. After an exchange of lead slugs, in which the three gold-laden miners were slayed, Helm & friend, buried the greater portion of gold and left the bodies near the road. Boone Helm and his partner turned back to Quesnelle Forks in haste, intending to retrieve their cache at a later date.

Collinson continues:

"We stayed at the Forks next day and saw the murdered men brought in. They had made a brave fight, every man's pistol (good six shooters) was empty, and each man had a bullet through his head. Boone Helm and his chum killed these three men, took and hid the dust, and if no stranger has found it, it is there yet. For Boone left the country, I have proof of that..."

"After leaving the Forks, I ... journeyed on down, stopping at Beaver Lake, Deep Creek, and Williams Lake. I met Boone Helm and his chum at Little Bloody Run ...a few miles above Cook & Kimble's Ferry (now Spence's Bridge)."

"The first thing I heard was,

"Throw up your hands!"

and looking up, I saw the muzzle of a double-barreled shot-gun about four feet from my head. It took his partner about five minutes to cut my packstraps, after taking my six shooter and purse. The latter contained three Mexican dollars and three British shillings. One of my old shirts contained a good wad..." but a "small

bag containing bullets attracted their attention and saved my dust, which being tied in the old shirt pocket... was not seen. They emptied my pistol, gave it back to me and told me to 'git' and not look back. As my road was downhill, I lost no time."

A. Browning had just arrived in Quesnelle Forks the day after the murders had been committed and saw the bodies brought in. He gives the following illumination:

"The trail leading down the mountain to the Forks of Quesnelle was a mile long and as I came near... I saw on the trail... a procession of men carrying three stretchers. I found on meeting them that they were carrying three dead men. They were found on the trail coming from Cariboo, robbed and murdered for... each of them [had been] carrying bags of gold... Who was the murderer, or who were the murderers? Everybody said in whispers it was Boone Helm, a gambler and cutthroat who had escaped the San Francisco Vigilance Committee..."

"Pursuit down the trail was determined on, and \$700 raised to pay the cost of pursuers. Boone, I imagine, got wind of all this, and escaped across the line..."

From Browning, we see that the case was viewed with grave sincerity by the community of Quesnelle Forks and that every effort was made to capture "CANNIBAL" CONTINUED ON

PAGE 14

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# THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME

## 100 MILE HOUSE

The origin of 100 Mile House goes back even further than the well-known gold rush of the 1860s. Even before the discovery of gold at Barkerville, 100 Mile House was known as Bridge Creek. It was



The Old 100 Mile Stopping House,  
originally built by Tom and Christine Hamilton in 1862.

a popular camping and resting place for fur brigades travelling between Fort St. James and Kamloops via Bridge Lake and the North Thompson River.

When fur trading gave way to gold fever many of the fur company factors took up acreages along the Cariboo Road and built log cabins and barns. Tom Hamilton and his wife, Christine, were the first to settle legally at Bridge Creek. Their house became a series of log cabins joined together in an ingenious way to make it more convenient and comfortable for travelers.

As the Hamilton home changed hands over the years more additions and alternations were made. The late Marquis of Exeter purchased the property in 1912 and by the time the house was razed by fire in 1937 it had become a great labyrinth of pantries, parlours and alcoves.

The name 100 Mile House and all the other "mile designated" placed along the Cariboo Road were all derived from the Gold Rush days when the only route from the Lower Mainland and coast to the B.C. Interior was from Harrison to Lillooet. Lillooet came to be known as the starting point for the 300-mile trek to the Barkerville gold fields.

The number of miles away from Lillooet designated stopovers along the route. So 100 Mile House was 100 Miles from Lillooet, one-third of the way along the road to riches and considered a most suitable place to stop for the night.

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## Jessop

... CONT. FROM PG. 6

rode to a larger camp of 14 to 15 lodges. In this camp was a Kutenai Indian returning to the Tobacco Plains west of the mountains. For a gift of blankets, clothing, a rifle, ammunition and tobacco he agreed to act as guide. During the night Jessop's horses disappeared. After several hours of searching a reward was offered, and in short order several young braves rode the "lost" horses into camp. Pack saddles were made from the abandoned carts, and the westward procession continued, the easterners fully aware that this chance meeting had likely saved them from starvation.

They followed the Waterton River into what is now Waterton National Park, where the mountain freshness, green grass and sparkling water gave their dejected spirits a lift. Their new-found exuberance was spiced with the relief of having a guide and knowing their location for the first time in months.

On October 2 they zigzagged up Blakiston Creek beneath cloud-covered peaks and crossed the South Kootenay Pass in falling snow to reach a westward flowing river. In six days they left the Rockies and arrived at

several crude cabins with the presumptuous title of Fort Kootenay, just south of the U.S.-Canada border on the Kootenay River. HBC trader John Linklater greeted them warmly, explaining that they were only the second party to pass through in his six winters at the fort. The season was too late for a direct route to the Fraser, he told them, so they would have to head south into the Washington Territories. He had few provisions but could trade them some grizzly meat and berries. By October 15, after a few days' rest, they were on their way.

Progress was steady now. At the Pend Oreille River half the party headed north to Fort Shepard in British Columbia while Jessop, Duff and two others continued south and west toward the Colville Valley. Food ran out again, but a handful of dried salmon skins at an Indian camp saw them through to the end of their journey. Jessop arrived at a settler's house, "...more

dead than alive; but a hearty meal of newly baked bread and rashers of bacon soon resuscitated me."

There was a pack train leaving Fort Colville for B.C. the next day so John hustled the 20 miles north, reaching

the town in such a state that he was comic relief for the troops. His hat was just a rim, his boots tattered moccasins; his pants had no legs below the knees and not much above; and his shirt had

JESSOP CONT. ON PAGE 16

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"CANNIBAL" CONTINUED

FROM PAGE 12

Helm and bring him to justice for his evil deeds. Strangely, Boone Helm did *not* go 'across the line', or at least, not for any length of time. The *Victoria Colonist* next reports him showing up in that city on October 13, 1862.

"Boone Helm, said to be a dangerous character, was arrested by Sergeant Blake last evening."

And on October 14th:

**Suspicious Character.-** Boone Helm, represented as a bad character, was taken into custody on Sunday night last, upon a charge of drinking at saloons and leaving without settling his score ... Sgt. Blake, who made the arrest, said that he understood the accused had killed a man at Salmon River (Florence), and fled to British Columbia. Helm was remanded for three days in order to see what account he can then give of himself."

And on the 17th.

"Boone Helm.- ... was brought before the Police Magistrate yesterday on a remand from Monday last. The prisoner was defended by Mr. Bishop, by whom it was urged that a prejudice had been created against him in the minds of the residents. The Police officers present denied that any such arrangement existed so far as they were aware, and the Chief of Police swore that he was known as a bad character. The proprietor of the Adelphi Saloon testified that he had procured drinks there, and then when pay was requested, replied,

"Don't you know that I'm a desparate character?"

Sergeant Blake said that people who knew the accused best, were afraid of him. The Magistrate ordered Helm to find security to be of good behavior for the term of six months, himself in 50,

and two securities in 20 each; in default, to suffer one month's imprisonment."

Boone defaulted and spent the next month building and repairing the streets of Victoria in a chain gang.

As another historian echoes before me, "It seems odd that in the newspaper articles at the time of Helm's court hearing in October 1862, that no reference is made to the suspicion that he was responsible for the three deaths in the Cariboo that summer." Victoria was a popular wintering place for miners who had 'made their pile', surely there would have been those in Victoria who had heard of Helm's involvement in the slayings at Quesnelle Forks?

The *Colonist* reports that authorities held Boone Helm in "safe-keeping for some three or four weeks, in the expectation that a charge would be preferred against him by our cousins on the other side, and a request

made for his surrender, but as nothing transpired, he was released and three days afterwards the demand came."

By that time, Helm was gone and it wasn't until the spring of 1863 that he was again arrested, this time at Fort Yale in the Fraser Canyon.

W. T. Collinson says this:

"The next I saw of Helm was at Sumas in the spring of 1864 (Collinson has his year confused, it was 1863). He was along with a packtrain owned by Dan Harris (alias Dirty Harris)... Helm was on his way to get the dust hid at Quesnelle and next day I got on my way to intercept Helm at Yale,

From the *Colonist*:

"...a notorious character named Boon [sic.] Helm, who it is said to have committed a murder somewhere on the Salmon River, has been arrested by the British Authorities at

Fort Yale on the Fraser River, and handed over in due form to the custody of a Mr. Brandian, a special officer sent across for the purpose by the U.S. Authorities..." while another BC paper reports "He was brought into the city last night strongly ironed. The first clue of the detectives was the report that two men had been seen trudging up the Frazer river on foot... Helm's conduct on the road is conclusive evidence that he was aware he was being pursued. He passed around the more populous settlements, or through them in the night time. When overtaken, he was so exhausted by fatigue and hunger that it would have been impossible for him to have continued many hours longer... Upon being asked what had become of his companion, he replied with the utmost sang froid:—"

"Why, do you suppose that I'm a — fool enough to starve to death when I can help

it? I ate him up, of course."

"The man who accompanied him has not been seen or heard of since, and from what we have been told of this case-hardened villain's antecedents, we are inclined to believe he told the truth. It is said this is not the first time he has been guilty of cannibalism."

Boone Helm was transported from Victoria to Port Townsend where Collinson reports he "dug out of Townsend jail and once more made his way to the hills, finally fetching up in..." either Boise, Idaho or Bannock, Montana.

Here begins the final chapter of Helm's depravity. Having teamed up with the notorious Henry Plummer, who was sheriff of Bannock and a thief and murderer on the side, Boone and his friends raised the ire

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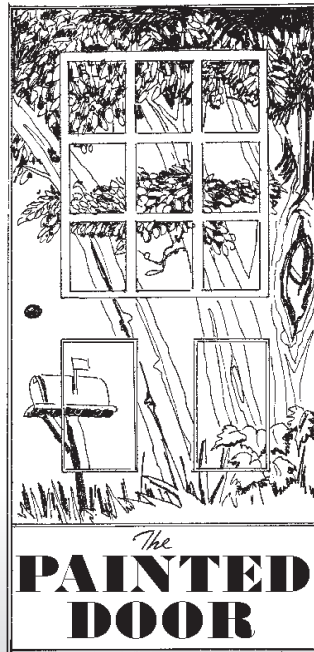
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