

BILL TIBBETTS

(continued)

“nearly insane with remorse, and has not been able to get any sleep since being placed in the jail.”

San Juan County had a tough time deciding whether to charge the man with first or second degree murder. He was initially charged with second-degree, and might have been released on a \$5,000 bond, but before he could raise the money, the charge was changed to first-degree. Winny had to stay in jail without the possibility of posting bail. A trial date was set for late April.

The county had a casual attitude toward prisoners in 1923. Winny could not be paroled, but early that spring he was allowed to go with county deputies and other prisoners to cut cedar posts in the canyons near Monticello. Prisoner work crews were expected to help pay the costs of running the jail. The sheriff made Winny promise that he would not try to escape. Allred was known to be a man who kept his word, so that was the end of the matter.

Unfortunately, Winny was sent to camp early one afternoon to fix supper for the work crew, and while in camp alone, he found a .22 rifle belonging to a sheriff’s deputy. He shot himself in the forehead, killing himself instantly.

In Moab, the newspaper came to Winny’s defense after his suicide:



The Drought Hits Southern Utah

“Having known Allred over a long period of time, we cannot conceive of his taking the life of another without having some justification for the act. Quite literally, he was so crazed from drink that he acted on blind impulse or in sudden anger; the true story will now, of course, never be known. Yet Allred’s friends—and he had many friends—will never consider him a murderer...”

“...These things we do know; that Allred lived an honest, peaceful life; that he was big-hearted, generous to a fault; that he had a high regard for his word, and met his obligations scrupulously. In the face of a record like this, can we, by a mere snap of the finger, brand him as a low criminal and ignore his many estimable traits of character?”

After his mother’s divorce and Winny Allred’s suicide, Bill Tibbetts tried even harder to take care of his mother and help with his younger half-brothers and sisters.

It was late September 1923, and Bill, Tom Perkins, and Uncle Ephraim were camped in a large rock shelter along the Big Water Wash in Elaterite Basin. They were sitting around an evening campfire, deeply engaged in a council of war.

“Between us, we’ve got over a thousand head,” Eph said, staring blankly into the fire. “Considerin’ the dry range conditions and all, I think we ought to sell about half of the herd, at least. With what’s left, we can take a hundred or so up on the White Rim and scatter the rest real thin along the river bottoms. If we can get half of the cows through the winter, we’ll still have a purdy good bunch to start with again next spring.”

“Well, I’ve been with you now for a little over four years,” Bill proclaimed, cradling a cup of coffee in his hands. “But near half of this outfit belongs to me and my mother. And since old Winny Allred shot himself last springtime, these cows are about all she’s got between her and the poorhouse. This is the second time the woman has been up against this. We cut her back by fifty percent and that’ll cut her income, and my income, purdy considerable.”

“Yeah, but we can always save the money and buy new stock when the grass comes back.”

“It doesn’t always work out that way, Eph. You know that. Besides, these cows are ours. They’re home grown and they know this desert country. Hell, we got our own breed started here with that mix of your Mexican longhorn stuff and Mother’s Herforders. It’ll take us another four or five years to get back to where we are right now if we sell half of them.”

“So, what do you suggest?” Eph asked quietly, trying hard not to sound annoyed by Bill’s hardheadedness. “The grass here in Laterite is all burned up by drought. And them sheep outfits will be droppin’ down off the Big Ledge any day now to winter in here, too. There just ain’t no feed, Bill. Sell ‘em or watch ‘em die. That’s how I see it.”

“No, by Gawd. I won’t do it.”

“It’s your only choice.”

“No, Eph, we’ve got another choice. And I’ve been thinkin’ long and hard about it, too. Let’s take this outfit to the best rangeland there is. Let’s move the whole show up on the Big Flat beyond Island in the Sky. You said yourself there’s still grass up there.”

“Oh, good Lord, Bill. You’d have to fight every rancher this side of the Book Cliffs if you moved up on there. That range is old and well established. Some of the biggest outfits in this part of the country are up on the Big Flat. They wouldn’t just step aside and let us in there. No way.”

“It’s public domain, Eph. Those guys can’t keep us out if we decide to go there. They don’t own that grass any more than me and you.”

“Damn it, Bill. They’ve got a first-right to that range. It wouldn’t be proper.”

“Yea, but it would still be legal. I don’t know about you, but legal, moral, and proper get all mixed up when my cows are starvin’.”

“Naw, I don’t like it,” Eph said. And then he stood up and turned his backside to the fire, staring out into the stars and the deep desert night. The faint hooting of an owl filtered in through the cedar trees. One of the horses grazing nearby blew through his nose in disgust.

“You remember that story from the Bible that Grandpa Moore used to read to me when I was a kid? The one about King David and the shewbread in the temple? He read it to me several times because he thought it was so funny when I asked Grandma to make me some shoe bread in one of my shoes. Well, anyway, did you ever listen to what really happened in that story, Eph?”

Eph was still standing with his back to the fire, looking out at the stars. He didn’t answer or act like he was listening to what Bill was saying.

Bill continued without waiting for a reply. Turning toward Tom Perkins, he began:

“As I recall, old King David was runnin’ from some bad guys and he was hungry. So were his merry men. They stopped by at the temple for something to eat and the priest there didn’t have any grub. All he had was shewbread, that holy stuff they kept there in the temple for doin’ the sacraments and stuff. Well, David said it was an emergency, and so he took the shewbread and gave it to his troops to eat. David ate it, too. And in the end, the priest said it was okay since it was an emergency and all. Do you remember that story, Eph?”

“Yeah, I remember it,” Eph said quietly, still looking out into the darkness.

“Well, the way I see it, you and me are like King David now. Our cows are hungry like David’s troops. We gotta find ‘em some groceries. I know it’s against the Code of the West to move in on those rich guys up on the Big Flat country, but it’s an emergency. It’s like eatin’ shewbread, Eph. It might have been immoral to do it last year when things were good, but we’re in starvin’ times now and everything has changed. We gotta go where the grass is. If we don’t, we’re gonna lose it all. We’ve worked too hard to give it up and just sell out. I vote we take the whole herd up on top to the Big Flat. I promise to smile and be real polite and try to get along with the neighbors. What do ya say?”

“I’ll have to sleep on it,” Eph said flatly. He then turned and walked toward his bed-roll.

NEXT TIME: “THE FIGHT FOR GREENER PASTURES”

WHY READ THE ZEPHYR?

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be...The people cannot be safe without information. Where the press is free and every man able to read, All is safe.”

Thomas Jefferson

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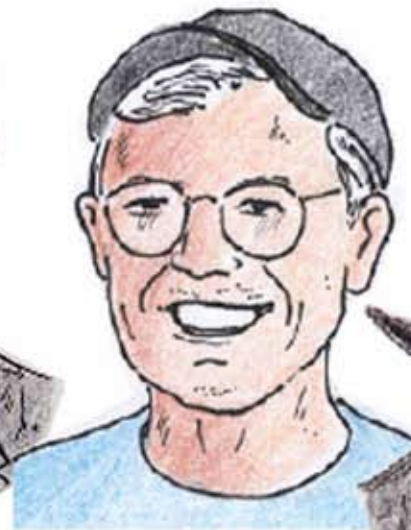
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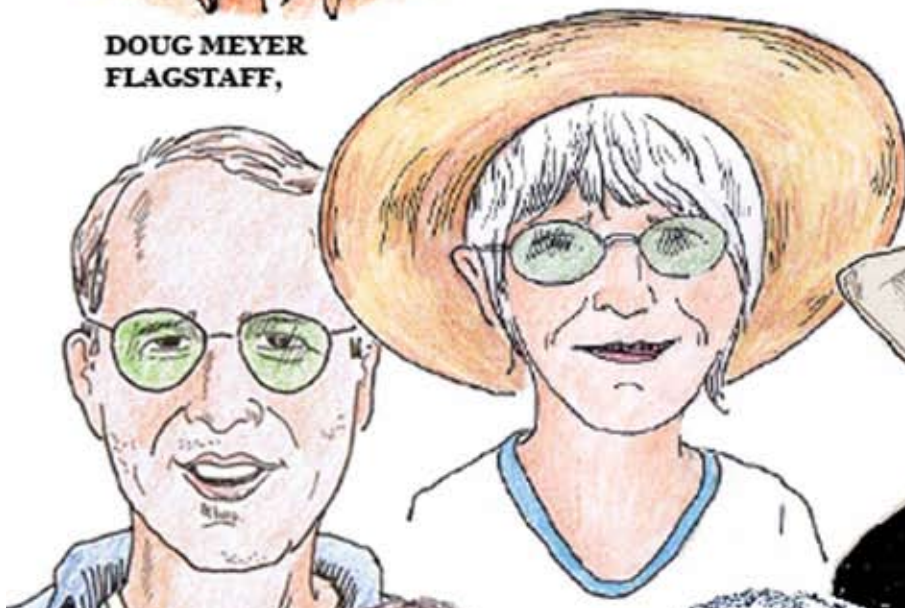


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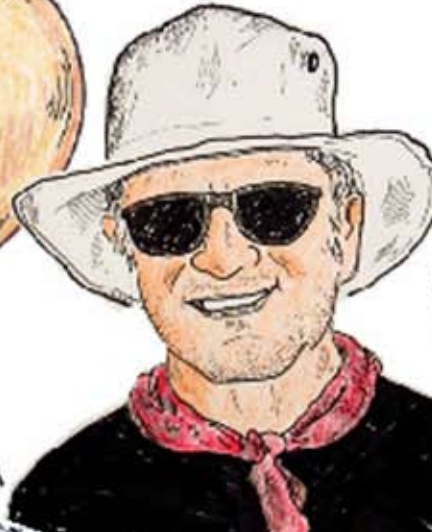
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October/November 2015

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