

FORSYTH SCOUT - BEECHER ISLAND

Newsletter # 1

February 2008

Welcome to the first Forsyth Scout - Beecher Island Battle newsletter. This will be pretty informal and probably put out on a sporadic basis, as time permits. Any input is welcome. We will start in this format as a e-mail and maybe switch to something web based so more pictures can be used. Some of the pictures in this mail, may not show up, depending on your computer's settings.

Please ignore my obvious typo's. I'll try to present facts and not opinions. Corrections, suggestions and constructive criticism is welcome and appreciated. In each letter I would hope to include little bits of information, particularly any new information on the Scouts or the battle. We will try to fill in unknown information on the well known scouts and maybe add to what is known about the lesser known scouts.

One thing that I have a pet peeve about is the "rescue" of the scouts after the battle. They had fought the battle and most lived to tell the tale. I personally believe they were simply "relieved" rather than rescued, and that is the terminology that I will try to use. That said, on to the news and history.

Something that I ran across recently is one of the first published newspaper accounts of the battle from Plattsburgh, New York, the home of Dr. Mooers, Surgeon of the Forsyth party. Imagine this entire article was originally sent by telegraph in dot and dashes:

Plattsburgh Sentinel
Plattsburgh, N. Y.
October 2, 1868
The Indian War

A Desperate Fight-Lieutenant Fred H. Beecher, and Dr. John H. Mooers among the killed - a general uprising of the Indians.

We learned by a telegraphic dispatch received in Plattsburgh, Thursday evening the 24th inst., that Dr. H. Mooers of Plattsburgh, was mortally wounded by the Indians in a scrimmage, near Fort Wallace, Kansas. Dr. M. is a son of our venerable neighbor, Dr. Benjamin J. Mooers, and brother of W.P. Mooers, and had gone out as Ass't Surgeon in the 16th NY Volunteers, and was afterwards made full Surgeon of the 118th N.Y. , in which regiment he served until the close of the war. He has a wife and child living in Plattsburgh.

Dr. Mooers was Acting Surgeon to a regiment of U.S. Cavalry. In the same fight Col. Forsyth was dangerously wounded and Lieut. Beecher killed.

The following are the published accounts:

Fort Wallace, Sept. 23.

Two scouts from Colonel Forsyth's command, who had been scouring the country toward the headwaters of the Republican River, arrived last night. They left Col. Forsyth's camp on the Dry Fork, Republican City, five miles from the mouth, and ninety miles north of here. They report that on the morning of the 17th inst.

the Indians tried to run off a portion of Col. Forsyth's stock, and half an hour later three or four hundred appeared on the bluffs two miles off and made a dash for the camp. Col. Forsyth having only fifty men, crossed them to a small island. The Indians fired on him, and kept it up briskly until 11 o'clock after which only scattered shots until 3 o'clock, when they again opened fire with increased force. Their number was estimated to be about 700. The fight was continued in this manner until sunset, when the Indians made a desperate charge to take the camp, but were unsuccessful. They continued the fight until 11 o'clock, at which time the scouts left for Fort Wallace to obtain assistance. They were obliged to crawl two miles on their hands and knees through the Indians to get out. At daylight they heard firing back at camp, seven miles away, and occasional shots all day. The casualties are: Col. Forsyth, left leg broken by a ball and shot through the right thigh; Lieutenant Beecher, shot in several places and supposed to be dying as his back was broken. He begged his men to kill him. Dr. Mooers was shot in the head. Two were killed and twenty wounded. All the stock of the command was killed and the men were living on horse flesh. The scouts had only a pound and a half to last them into Fort Wallace. The party had 65 rounds of ammunition left, and were fortifying. The scouts could travel only at night, on account of the danger from Indians. On learning of Col. Forsyth's condition, Lieut. Bankhead, commanding this post, sent out a hundred men with provisions and ammunition to his relief. He also sent scouts to Col. Carpenter, who was supposed to be 45 miles west of here, to proceed to Col. Forsyth's assistance.

Later, 8 p.m. - Gen. Nichols has just arrived from Fort Reynolds and reports that Lieut. Beecher is dead. Dr. Mooers is mortally wounded and is dying, and Col. Forsyth is nearly as bad. All are lying there with Indians all around them eating their horse flesh and waiting for relief. Col. Bankhead and Carpenter will reach them tonight.

A dispatch from Col. Bankhead, gives the following killed and wounded: The killed are Lieut. F.H. Beecher, Acting Surgeon Mooers, G.W. Culver, Wm. Wilson and Lewis Farley.

Wounded - Col. G.A. Forsyth, William P. Armstrong, George B. Clark, Barney Day, Hutson Farley, Richard Garnett, John Haley, Frank Herington, Wm. H.H. McCall, Howard Morton, Thomas O'Donnell, Henry H. Tucker, Louis McLaughlin, Harry Davenport, S.P.(sic) Davis.

St. Louis, Sept. 29.

A dispatch from Grinnell Railway Station, says Col. Forsyth and all the wounded arrived at Fort Wallace and are doing well.

600 Indians crossed the railroad yesterday near Monument, and it is believed that they are preparing for an attack on all the stations, driving the buffaloes before them. Immense numbers of the latter are along the line of the railway. All citizens on the route are under arms.

Ammunition is being issued to troops and inspections are being made.

Washington, Sept. 29.

The following was received this morning at Army Headquarters:

St. Louis, Sept. 28.

To the Adjutant General:

General Sherman has full reports from Col. Bankhead, who would start for Fort Wallace the 27th. He reports Lieut. Beecher and Surgeon Mooers dead and buried, also that George W. Culver, Wm. Wilson and Lewis Farley, scouts are dead, and gives a list of others wounded. Col. Forsyth has two wounds. He thinks at least 75 Indians were killed or badly wounded. From signs it is alleged the Indians are moving South.

Gen. Sheridan reports seven companies of the Fifth Cavalry on hand, ready for service and he will keep every man at work to catch and destroy the Indians.

[Signed] W. T. Sherman
Lieutenant General

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A picture of Scout George B. Clark, was discovered and provided by Sam Geonetta, a descendant of Scout Clark. It is included as an attachment (if it works). George B. Clark married Lucinda Tripp, daughter of William "Poke" Tripp and his wife, Elizabeth. The Tripp's were among the earliest settlers in area of what would eventually become Tescott, Ottawa County, Kansas, eventual home of several of the scouts. The Tripps were there in the area as early as 1864, as there is reference that the party of settlers that went to Lincoln County to bury the Moffitt brothers, Tyler and Houston, victims of the first Indian raid in the area, stopped there overnight on the way back to the small village of Salina. The Moffitt, Tyler and Houston killings was just the start of the conflict in the Saline River valley that would eventually lead to the forming of the Forsyth Scouts and the Beecher Island Battle

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Jim Gray, The Cowboy, at Drovers Mercantile in Ellsworth, Kansas, recently wrote **"I am wondering if you think we could pull off a gathering of the descendents [of the Scouts] at Fort Harker Days in July?"** Fort Harker (now Kanopolis, Kansas), just east of Ellsworth, was significant, as this was where many of the Forsyth Scouts signed on with Quartermaster Inman and they left from here on their expedition that would end at Beecher Island. Several of the old original sandstone buildings are still standing and now part of the fort museum complex. There are many links to the fort on the net, here is one: <http://www.forttours.com/pages/fortharker.asp> It sounds like fun to me!! Jim can be contacted at www.droversmercantile.com or kansascowboy@kans.com, 785-472-4703, yes Ellsworth is an old cowtown, but you can contact Jim by phone or e-mail, no telegraph or Pony Express needed. Let him know your thoughts.

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Several of our scouts unfortunately went on to be known more for their misdeeds than their gallantry in the Beecher Island battle. One was James "Big Jim" Currie. He was better known for shooting of Maurice Barrymore, patriarch of the acting family and killing his partner Ben C. Porter in Marshall, Texas in 1879. A newspaper of the time says he served in the Civil War with President Hays. After serving prison time for another assault and having been reported to himself have been killed a number of times, he died of natural causes in Spokane, Washington. His name is spelled both Currie and Curry, I use Currie as that is the spelling on his grave marker in Fairmount Cemetery, Spokane. Here are some of his obituaries:

Spokane Daily Chronicle
Spokane, Washington
September 21, 1899
Page 1

Gasped and Fell Dead

James Curry had just Time to Say "Goodbye."

James Curry, who has been engaged in the laundry business in this city with Mrs. J. C. (Anna) Sommert at 238 Front Avenue, fell dead last night, presumably of heart failure. He had been boarding with Mrs. Sommert, and for the last 18 months has been sick. In the last 2 or 3 days he had gotten decidedly worse. This morning between 2 and 3 o'clock he rose from the chair in which he was sitting. As he did so he staggered, said "good bye" to his landlady, gasped and fell dead.

Mrs. Sommert immediately called in the neighbors who in turn notified the police. Coroner Baker ordered the body taken to Gillman's undertaking establishment, where it is today. Mr. Curry has a brother in Shreveport, LA., who will be notified. Death is believed to have resulted from natural causes and no inquest will be held.

Below is a different spin on the founding of the Forsyth Scouts.

THE FORT WAYNE JOURNAL GAZETTE

Fort Wayne, Indiana
October 5, 1899
Thursday Morning
Page 10, Column 2

"JIM" CURRIE IS DEAD

BAD MAN OF TEXAS WHO TRIED TO KILL MAURICE BARRYMORE

DROPS OFF AT SPOKANE - CURRIE HAD MANY A DEATH NOTCH ON HIS REVOLVER BUTT - ONE OF HIS BOLDEST DEEDS WAS THE CHALLENGING OF WILD BILL TO A DUEL

SPOKANE Oct 4, - Jim Currie, famous as one of the most daring scouts of the west, and notorious as a bad man during the boom days in western Kansas and Texas, dropped dead of heart disease in this city last Sunday morning. Currie is the man who attempted to kill Maurice Barrymore, the actor, in Texas, but missed him and killed Dick Porter, a member of the latter's company, instead. The attempt upon Barrymore was but an incident in a stormy life which included dozens of shooting scrapes and such a list of deaths as to make the story read like the pages of a romance.

Currie was born in Ireland, but was brought to this country in his early youth. His parents settled in Indiana and Currie made his home in that state until the breaking out of the war. He was attracted to the railroad business and began working in engine houses while still a small boy. He had not yet secured his engine when hostilities started, but as soon as the first call for volunteers was issued he gave up his work and enlisted.

Currie served through the entire Civil War, and at its completion was discharged with honor. Upon his return home he was unable to secure a situation and naturally drifted west, landing after several weeks of wandering in Hays City, Kansas, which was then a scene of wild excitement. It was then the terminus of the Kansas and Pacific Railroad and was naturally a center of business, stage lines carrying the traffic from there on to Denver, Santa Fe and other western towns. The Indians of western Kansas did not approve of the railroad, and devoted all their energies to making life interesting for the employees of the corporation. Trains were ditched, ties burned and miles of track torn up. The Indians would be beside the tracks and wait for the trains, and would welcome them with fusillades of shots, to the great discomfort of the passengers and crew. The officials of the company had great trouble finding men with nerve enough to pull a train, until Jim Currie came along. As soon as he struck Hays City he applied for a job and was given one of the trains across the "bad lands", a position that he held down for several years. It was the custom after leaving Harker, the border of the Indian territory, to put out all lights and pull down the blinds so that the train might not be seen by the Indians. Without headlight, Jim Currie would sit at the throttle, and at a lively rate pull his train across the dangerous country into Hays City.

"JIM" CURRIE'S BAND OF SCOUTS

In 1868 the Indians became worse than ever and the whole country was in a fever of excitement. Currie left his engine and organized a band of scouts known as "Jim Currie's Scouts". In August of that year he fought the memorable battle of the "Republican", one of the most famous battles in the history of western Indian wars. Currie and his band of fifty men were surrounded on the open plain by Chief Roman Nose and 3000 warriors. Escape seemed impossible. Drawing his men into a small circle, Currie ordered all the horses killed. Behind the barricade formed by their bodies the men dug trenches, and protected only by these rude works, Currie and his men for eight days kept back the horde of redskins. During that time they had nothing to eat but the flesh of the horses they had killed the first day. The sun shone down with scorching heat, but they managed to procure a little water by digging a well with their knives. On the first night of the siege two of the imprisoned scouts stole out in search of aid. The next night two more followed them, for fear that the first might have been killed or captured. Late on the afternoon of the eighth day reinforcements came and the Indians were routed. It was in this battle that Lieutenant Tony Forsyth, received eight wounds.

After the Indian war Currie returned to Hays City, and, although he became very popular, he soon made a reputation as a dangerous man. One day while playing a game of poker with man named Gilmore, he became incensed and threatened to shoot Gilmore's tongue off. Gilmore jumped up from the table and ran out of the room, pursued by Currie. Gilmore turned and said: "For God's sake Jim, don't shoot," but as he opened his mouth Currie thrust the barrel of the gun in and pulled the trigger. The ball cut Gilmore's tongue off and lodged in the back of his neck, failing, however, to kill him.

HE ENCOUNTERS WILD BILL

"The story that Currie once backed down , Wild Bill, is not correct", said one old timer in talking about the dead man. "Bill and Jim were old acquaintances. One day they met in Paddy Welch's saloon. Currie said to Bill; 'This town is not large enough for both of us. Come out on the sidewalk and I will fight you a duel to see which of us stays.' Bill replied: 'No, Jim, you and I are old time friends. I do not want to have any trouble with you. I will not fight you in a duel, but whenever, you want to shoot, commence.' That was all there was to it. Both lived in the town for some time afterward, although each kept his own end."

Many stories are told of Currie while running the saloon in Hays City. At one time the thirty eighth Infantry, colored, was being massed there and Currie became involved in a dispute with a band of the soldiers. Single handed he jumped into the crowd and began to hammer right and left with the butt end of his revolver when it went off, shooting him in the mouth. Some of his friends came to his rescue and that night when roll call was sounded some thirty soldiers failed to answer.

Colonel Jennison, a well know sporting man of Kansas City, once paid Hays City a visit. Currie gave him a royal welcome. Colonel Jennison was wearing a silk hat that pleased the western man, and he expressed a desire to have one like it. "When I go back to Kansas City, " said the Colonel, "I will have one made and sent to you." In due time the hat arrived, but for some reason, probably an oversight, it came C.O.D., a circumstance that immediately aroused Currie's wrath. A few days later he had a misunderstanding with a negro and killed him. The remains were put in a rough box and expressed to Colonel Jennison in Kansas City, C.O.D.

Hundreds of similar stories are told and the victims of Curries ever ready gun were from all sorts and conditions of life. In time Hays City became too civilized for Currie, and when there began to be talk of legal punishment for murder, he moved on to Ellsworth. One morning he got into a street fight there and after it was all over and the smoke began to clear away it was found that six highly respected citizens of Ellsworth were dead, several more were wounded and Currie was unharmed. This incident was a little bit too much for the people of Ellsworth and they soon managed to make life so uncomfortable for Currie that he decided to move on.

ATTACK ON MAURICE BARRYMORE

From there he drifted down to Texas. He started a restaurant in Marshall, but went broke and secured a position as engineer with the Texas and Pacific. It was about this time that he made his famous attack upon Maurice Barrymore. The train was standing at Marshall one day when the actor and engineer became involved in conversation. Barrymore made some comment that aroused Currie's nasty temper and he at once whipped out his revolver and fired before anyone could seize his hand. Barrymore dodged but the bullet struck Dick Porter, a member of his company, killing him instantly. Currie shot again, but this time without effect. He was overpowered and placed under arrest. After a long trial, in which he was materially assisted by an organization of which he was a charter member. Currie was at last liberated.

This incident seemed to take all the bravado and dash out of Currie. It was the first time he had been brought in contact with the law. He drifted around the west, keeping very quiet and never revealing his identity, except when compelled to. To prevent the old temptation coming back to him, he even quit carrying a gun. A few years ago he came to Spokane and has lived quietly here, only a few of his old friends recognizing in him the notorious bad man of western Kansas. His end came suddenly, heart disease causing him to drop dead on the street last Sunday.

Currie had been granted a pension by the government, but he never drew a cent of it. It is rumored that he left considerable property, but it is known that for several years past he has been taken care of by a friend of his prosperous days. He may have left property, but it is much more probable that he spent as he went.

With all his faults, those that knew Jim Currie best say that his charitable deeds knew no bounds and that if he was handy with his gun it was because this was necessary in the days he lived and in the country where there was no law, no officers, and nothing but the rule of might and six-shooters.

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The first Scout on the alphabetical listing of Scouts is Thomas Alderdice, the last is Eli Zigler, they were brothers-in-law. Thomas was married to Eli's older sister, Susannah Zigler Daily Alderdice. In the spring of 1869 Tall Bull's Dog Soldiers again raid what would become Lincoln County, Kansas, home of many of the Scouts, who had fought the Beecher Island fight. In local history this is known as the Spillman Creek Raid. A number of people were killed. Thomas Alderdice's wife, Susanna was taken by the Indians along with Maria Weichell. Three of Susanna's children were shot and left for dead, one, Willis Daily, survived. In August of 1869, a rescue attempt was made to recover Susanna and Maria. It resulted in Susanna being killed and Maria being wounded, but she survived and recovered. So Thomas survived the Beecher Island fight, only to lose his wife and children the following spring to the continuing frontier warfare.

Ironically, the battle of Summit Springs, near Sterling, Colorado, where the rescue attempt was made, and Susanna was killed, is only about 60 miles northwest of where Thomas had fought less than a year earlier on Beecher Island. For more in-depth information on Scout Thomas Alderdice and his wife and surviving family check out Jeff Broome's great book "Dog Soldier Justice: The Ordeal of Susanna Alderdice in the Kansas Indian War".

Another really great source of information is Orvel Criqui's "Fifty Fearless Men". I think this is now out of print, but can often be found used, online. It contains a bio of known information on each of the Scouts. Really Great Book, Orvel.

Another good book is Christian Bernhardt's 1910, "Indian Raids in Lincoln County." This can be found on line at: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/lincoln/indian.htm> Since many of the Scouts were from Lincoln County, there is much information here: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/genweb/lincoln/index.html> The search function will find many of the Scouts listed as well as the writings of many of the early settlers, including Roenigk and Erhardt.

I hope that I am not boring you yet!!!!

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Scout William Henry Harrison McCall had fought in the Civil War, ending his career as a Brevet Brigadier General of the Pennsylvania 34th Infantry Regiment, (5th Reserves). As a civilian, he joined the Scouts and served as acting sergeant during the Beecher Island expedition. Following the Beecher Island Battle, he moved to Prescott, Arizona, sometime in the last half of the 1870's. In the 1880 census he is found in enumeration district 26, Page 4, Prescott, Yavapai County, Arizona, living on Montezuma Street. Information as follows:

Line 18, Mc Call, W. H. white, male, 29 miner b. Philadelphia

Line 19, Mc Call, Mary white, female, 22 b. Kansas

Line 20, Mc Call, James W. white, male, 1 b. Arizona

Next door residence 52,

Line 21, Holladay, J. H. white, male, 29 Dentist Georgia

Yes, even if his last name is mis-spelled in the census, Scout McCall's next door neighbor was none other than famous western dentist and gun-fighter, John Henry "Doc" Holliday. It truly was a wild, wild west!

Thank you for your time and patience. There may be better ways of presenting this information than as an e-mail, maybe on a web site. We are in our infancy and will have growing pains. Please bear with us.

Feel free to forward this to anyone interested. If they will contact me, I will put them in the mailing list.

Until the next letter, so long and Happy Trails.

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316-262-5778

Our Readers:

Mike Nelson, historian and related to Scouts Eutsler and Smith
Chris Bernard, descendant of Scout George B. Clark
Sam Geonetta, descendant of Scout George B. Clark
Mrs. Arliene Matthews, Tescott, KS museum
Madrene White, descendant of Scout Charles C. Piatt
Dr. Jeff Broome, western historian & author
Donna Tauber, Farley family historian
Donna Watters, descendant of Scout Thomas Alderdice's step-son Willis Daily
Jim Grey, Drovers Mercantile, Ellsworth, KS - historian
Gary Bathurst, historian, descendant from Alverson -Alderdice -Zigler line
Ginny Kane, descendant of the D.C. Skinner was with Peate in the relief
Jack Neely, descendant of Scout Allison Pliley
Jean Roen; Tucker family historian
Judy Lilly, historian, Campbell Room, Salina, KS Public Library
Kelly Tucker McCallay, descendant of Scout Henry Tucker
Kerry and Jane Petersen, descendant of Scout George Green
Mary Smith, descendant, by marriage of Scout Chalmers Smith
Noel Bourasaw, historian, Sedro Woolley, WA, later home of Scouts Green & Farley
Orvel Criqui, author & historical researcher
Sarah Ingram, Zeigler (Zigler) and Norton family historian
Sherry Witt, Herington family historian, cousin of Scout Frank Herington
The Glenn's, Beecher Island historians
Tracee Hamilton, Lincoln county, Kansas historian
Marilyn Helmer, Village Lines, Lincoln, KS & local historian
Wendy Ratnavale, descendant of Scout Sigmund Shlesinger
John Greenwald, descendant of Scout Sigmund Shlesinger
Kathy Atkins, Jewell County, KS, historian - researching Scout Vilott
Linda Olds, researching Scout George Green
Patsy Vinson, Scout Allison Pliley, researcher & cousin
Gill Donovan, cousin of Scout John "Jack" Donovan
Bill Anderson, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Bill Sutton, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Tod Sutton, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Bill Davis, western history researcher
Jim Sechrist, great, great grandson of Christian Bernhardt, writer of "Indian Raids in Lincoln County." 1910
Bernard Kitt. Great grandson of Scout John Donovan