

FIRST BEAVERHEAD SUPERVISOR MURDERED AS SHERIFF
MURDERER HUNG IN COUNTY'S LAST HANGING

It wasn't unusual for Butch Selway, a civil engineering technician for the Beaverhead National Forest, to take a keen interest in making a plaque listing the Beaverhead's Forest Supervisors. Butch researched a variety of records and sources to get the list of 15 men who have held the job since the Forest was established in 1908.

Selway's roots in southwest Montana go way back. His *grandfather, Dick Selway, tramped around southwest Montana back in the 1800's. The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and other geographic features, like the "Bloody Dick" area, south of the Big Hole, commemorate Butch's ancestor.

(The original Selway hailed from Britain and used the word "bloody" just as many in the United Kingdom use it today, as a sentence lubricant.)

The fruit of Butch's labor five years ago, hangs now in the Supervisor's Conference Room.

Then, just a few weeks ago, Butch went over to the Beaverhead County Courthouse on some business and noticed an exhibit there about the county's sheriffs. Beaverhead, one of Montana's original territorial counties, has a history as long as Montana's.

One of the names in the exhibit caught Butch's eye: "C.K. Wyman." The name sounded familiar.

Butch suddenly remembered why: C.K. Wyman was the first Forest Supervisor of the Beaverhead National Forest! He read on. A thief murdered Sheriff Wyman in 1920 and became the last man hung in the county.

Intrigued, Butch found old issues of the Dillon Examiner, the predecessor of today's Dillon Tribune-Examiner.

The trail of C.K. Wyman's death begins on Wednesday, April 17, 1920. On that day, according to the April 23rd Examiner, Wyman, "one of the most popular and upright officers who has ever served in Beaverhead County, was atrociously murdered at Monida shortly after the noon hour..."

The night of Tuesday, April 16 or early on the 17th, a man named Albert Yeik, came to Monida, a small village on the Montana-Idaho border, astride the Union Pacific railroad. Yeik let himself into a barn, put his horse in it and went to sleep in the hay loft.

Wednesday morning, a "youth from Idaho Falls, employed at Monida" recognized his father's saddle hanging in the barn. The saddle had been stolen and so was the horse. The youth reported what he found to the local sheriff's office which, in turn, alerted Wyman. Wyman took the morning passenger train from Dillon to Monida to investigate.

Meantime, the owner of the Monida general store offered Yeik a job for the morning, to keep him in town so the sheriff could catch him. Witnesses later said they thought it unusual that Yeik took his breakfast and "dinner" (lunch) wearing his chaps. It turned out he had a .32 pistol hidden under the chaps.

Wyman arrived at noon and went to the Monida hotel, where he found Yeik eating lunch. The sheriff approached Yeik, who said he'd go along, but had to get his coat in the barn. Wyman followed Yeik into an alley where Yeik whipped the pistol out and shot Wyman twice in the abdomen. Yeik fled to the barn for his horse.

Townfolk rushed out when they heard the shots and came to Wyman's aid. One man fired at Yeik but only wounded his horse. The horse got unruly and so Yeik dismounted and ran along the railroad with two dogs, firing back.

A surgeon came to attend Wyman, but he died two hours later.

Meantime, the undersheriff gathered a posse in Lima, Armistead, and Dillon, all to the north, and trailed Yeik. He took refuge in a shack, which the posse surrounded and fired into. The posse tried setting the shack on fire twice. Deep snow lay on the ground and the wind was "stinging," so the fires didn't catch. The posse finally entered the shack and found Yeik under a trap door in the floor. He'd choked one of the dogs to keep it from whining and giving him away.

The lawmen then had to get Yeik to Dillon, contending first with an angry Monida crowd and then taking him to Dillon in secret by automobile, avoiding the hostile crowd that waited for Yeik at the Dillon train station.

The Examiner continues the story on April 30, 1920, with a report on Wyman's funeral. The paper reports his full name as Cyrus King Wyman, said he was born on March 29, 1867, in Maine, and that his father Alphonso was visiting him in Dillon at the time of his murder. (The paper first reports Alphonso's age as 79, then in August 1921 said the elder Wyman was 85.)

The paper goes on to say C.K. Wyman came to Montana at age 19, locating near Philipsburg, where he "engaged for several years in mining pursuits." He went back to Maine in 1889, married his "boyhood sweetheart," Alice Hall, and returned to Philipsburg. There he served as deputy sheriff.

The paper says Wyman entered the Forest Service in 1904 and quickly achieved the grade of ranger, and in 1905 got "supervision" of the Beaverhead National Forest. Wyman gets credit for organizing the forest reserve which wasn't completely surveyed at the time.

(Actually, the Beaverhead National Forest wasn't proclaimed until July 1, 1908, when Wyman's term as supervisor begins in official records. Much of the land that went into the Beaverhead National Forest had already been reserved starting in 1897, in the Big Hole, Hell Gate, Bitter Root forest reserves. We should note here that the three eastern parts of the modern Beaverhead Forest, mostly in Madison County, lay then in the Madison and Gallatin national forests.)

Wyman served as the Beaverhead's supervisor until 1916, when he was elected Beaverhead County Sheriff.

The Wyman story doesn't end there, though. The Dillon Examiner's August 17, 1921 issue has a front-page story about the pending execution of Albert Yeik. The story talks about Yeik's eating and sleeping habits and about the gallows being built in a yard between the courthouse and the county jail.

A week later, the paper has another front-page story that tells when Yeik will hang, mentions that women and boys under 21 won't be allowed to see the hanging (it was a by-invitation-only event!).

The paper went to say that "young boys who persist in loitering about the courtyard after they are ordered away, will be locked up in jail and held there until the hanging is over." A few residents of Dillon, the paper reports, were circulating petitions asking the governor to commute Yeik's sentence to life imprisonment. The governor chose not to get involved and so Yeik hanged for his crime at 4:30 a.m., on Friday, August 26, 1921. And, that became Beaverhead County's last execution.