

To The Editor
Wallowa County Chieftain

In the 1950's when my parents, farmers on Prairie Creek, discussed family relatives, the atmosphere in the room became tense with unspoken memories. At 74 years of age I have stumbled upon what I now believe was the reason for this.

My mother was a Bennett who first grew up on Indian Creek near Elgin and later on a place North of Enterprise. The Bennett's first came to the Northwest by the Oregon trail when my mother's grandfather, William Martin Bennett, arrived between 1864 and 1870. He first built a cabin on what used to be called Bennett Flat, now called Enterprise, and then moved to the Indian Creek area. Bennett was a farmer, stockman, and also worked at odd jobs. On May 25, 1886 while supervising a road crew of inmates in Union County, he had a physical interaction with Orlando L. LeGore, who resided near Hurricane Creek and who sometimes freighted goods between counties. According to court depositions, in an unprovoked attack, LeGore assaulted Bennett and left him unconscious for several hours. LeGore left and was not seen for several weeks.

On July 5th 1886 LeGore rode his wagon to Bennett's house, stopped, and reached under the seat for something, which Bennett thought was a gun, so Bennett shot LeGore, killing him. At the age of 48 Bennett was found guilty of murder in 1887 and sentenced to life in the Oregon State Prison. During his time in prison Bennett became the personal chauffeur of Governor Sylvester Pennington and in 1893 received a full pardon from the Governor. He returned to Elgin but was shunned and disowned by all of the Bennett family and died a lonely man according to those who knew him.

After finding this out last year and reflecting on it for some time I have concluded that my mother was ashamed of her grandfather and felt tainted in comparison to my father's family. I now feel strongly that had we been able to somehow know and discuss this old history in a compassionate way, we might have soothed my Mother's feelings and removed much of the tension arising from discussing family relatives. There is much more about this story on FindAGrave.com.

A knowledge of historical facts matters much more than opinion, and ignorance leads to many unfortunate misunderstandings. We see it every day in this year of 2020. Ignorance is not bliss.

From:
Roger W Hockett
14311 SE 77 Court
Newcastle, Wa 98059
425-226-4382
rwhock@gmail.com