

Tombstone Tuesday: Edson Benjamin- "A Cowardly Murder," Part 1



Benjamin-Slade Headstone in the Odd Fellows Cemetery, The Dalles, Oregon. Reprinted with kind permission of photographer.

A murder in the family? So heartbreaking, but true. (Thankfully not a murderER.) Distant, in relationship as well as time, it is still a sad tale that should be told, especially since Edson V. Benjamin had no descendants to pass on his story due to his untimely death.

It was 1863, on a cold day after two years of turmoil in our nation with two more years of civil war to follow, that Edson Benjamin was the first child born to Jonathan Felix Benjamin (1838-1913) and Hannah E. Marple Benjamin (1842-1900). Ohio on 29 Jan 1863 was a state with mixed sympathies over slavery and the war, and in July of that year the inhabitants would be terrorized by the Confederate bands of Morgan's Raiders. The Benjamins probably lived in some of the areas where the raiders pillaged businesses, houses, and farms, "procuring"

supplies like food and horses as well as other spoils of war, leaving the area inhabitants hungry and without supplies, and soldiers and citizens dead. This turmoil was nothing new for the Benjamins, however: Edson was the grandson of Jonathan N. Benjamin (1799-1876) and Hannah E. Ford (1798-1891), themselves frontiers people and descendants of Indian fighters, Indian captives, Revolutionary War veterans, as well as veterans of the War of 1812.

After the war, Edson's family and his grandparents migrated to Jasper County, Iowa, in covered wagons, probably about 1867. By the 1870 US Federal Census, seven-year old Edson was found with his family living in the same household as his paternal grandparents, Jonathan N. and Hannah E. (Ford) Benjamin in Malaka Township Jasper County, Iowa.

At age 17 Edson was listed on the US Federal Census as a farmer, living with his parents and siblings on a farm in Twin Lakes, Calhoun, Iowa, about 150 miles northwest of Jasper County, on June 9th. In 1885, the Iowa State Census lists him as a single man living in Rockwell, Twin Lakes, Calhoun County, Iowa. He was entitled to vote but also subject to military duty.

Edson married Martha "Jennie" Munger, daughter of Irish immigrants, about 1888 per the 1900 US Federal Census when they had Jennie's mother living with them; they had no children. They had moved to Hood River, Wasco, Oregon, and purchased a place there about 1899. Previously, they had lived in The Dalles, Oregon, to which they had migrated about 1897. (No information yet found on the time between 1885-1897.)

Edson was working as a logger and then the foreman of a logging camp in 1901. The camps traveled around Oregon and Washington state as they cleared the forest. Edson was well-liked and much respected by his coworkers and neighbors... except for one.

The newspapers tell the story best, but that will need to be in my next posts...

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) My Find A Grave Memorial # with help from research done by ColumbiaGypsy and shared with all.

2) Morgan's Raid: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan%27s_Raid

3) 1880 US Federal Census- Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: *Twin Lakes, Calhoun, Iowa*; Roll: 330; Family History Film: 1254330; Page: 285B; Enumeration District: 025; Image: 0313.

4) 1880 non-population schedule for Columbia, Washington: Source Citation: Census Year: 1880; Census Place: *District 3, Columbia, Washington*; Archive Collection Number: A1154; Roll: 6; Page: 4; Line: 01; Schedule Type: *Agriculture*. (Interestingly, an "E. Benjamin" was also listed on 7 June 1880 on the US Federal Non-Population Schedule – more research is needed to clarify these entries, which include a William Benjamin- Edson had a brother named William, but that is a common name- on the same page in Columbia, Washington, where Edson later lived.)

5) 1885 Iowa State census- Source Information: Quigg, Gary, comp.. *Iowa, State Census 1885* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2003.

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