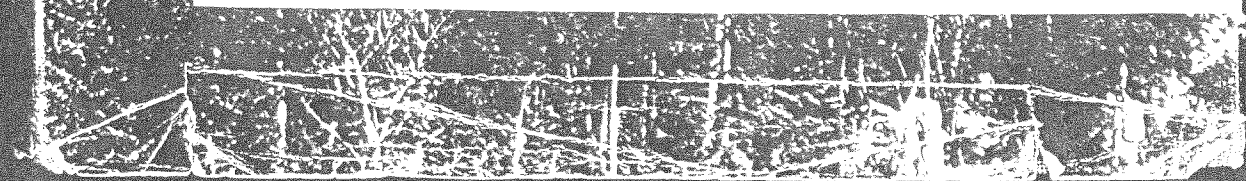




THE BLACK HILLS

Edited by Roderick Peattie



WHY IT'S HANGMAN'S HILL

Tourists who today motor up the hill at the west edge of Rapid City to inspect the concrete dinosaur and other prehistoric animals on the skyline often ask why it's called Hangman's Hill. That question touches an uneasy spot on the municipal conscience.

Lacking mines, Rapid City early learned to rely on ranching and farming. So great was the demand of the bull trains for feed that only as the very old-timers have died off has "Hay Camp" ceased to be the half-serious, half-deprecatory moniker for the place. The episode that named Hangman's Hill recalls those swashbuckling days when cowboys rode in for a bit of spreeing and Sam Porter's father, who ran a hotel, bought mirrors by the dozen lots for his bar and, with consideration for his guests, placed sheet-iron plates beneath their beds.

Louis Curry, who also was known as Red, and A. J. Allen, called Doc, were a couple of the boys who, like many others in their day, were a bit negligent about securing title to the horses they sold, as quickly as could be arranged, in communities other than the point of origin. One day in June, 1877, they annexed six steeds at Crook City and headed for Rapid. En route they came across James Hall, who was called "the Kid" for the reason that he was in his early twenties and looked younger. Kid Hall was on foot because he had no horse and, moreover, because citizens at Deadwood and Crook City, having become considerably annoyed, had invited him to leave without amenities that would have permitted a conventional departure.

Red and Doc let the Kid ride one of their horses, and the trio jogged along. As night came on they made camp and were asleep in their blankets when Sheriff Moulton and a posse surprised them. The Sheriff was surprised, too. He had been told by frightened woodcutters that the party consisted of raiding Indians, but whites having more horses than

they could readily account for also deserved attention, the Sheriff concluded. At Rapid City, Red and Doc and the Kid were locked up pending formal inquiry, but ill luck crossed their trail. Ed Cook, of the Northwestern Stage and Transportation Company, came in on the stage and recognized four of the six horses as his own.

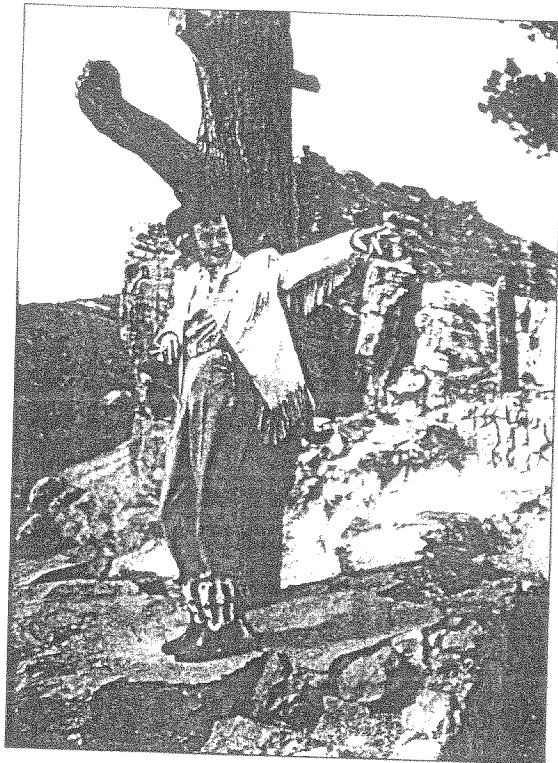
The three men were given a preliminary hearing before a justice of the peace, but that night a band of masked men compelled their guards to surrender the prisoners. Next morning their bodies were swinging from the great pine tree on the brow of the hill since known as Hangman's Hill.

Rapid City of that day immediately split into two factions, and both were quite incensed about what had happened. One group was scandalized by the unworkmanlike job: the trio had been left with toes touching the ground, so they had not been hanged but had strangled to death. Manifestly, a botched necktie party like that was a reflection on vigilantes everywhere. The other faction was equally shocked because word had gone around that Red and Doc had stoutly maintained the Kid was innocent.

Sentimental Rapid Cityites still are bothered about it. But it can be stated on no less authority than the widow of Sam Scott, he who laid out Rapid City with a pocket compass, that he had met Red and Doc at Sidney, Nebraska, some months before and that the Kid was with them, as their crony. That circumstantial evidence, supported by other statements from old-timers Jesse Brown and A. M. Willard, seems adequately conclusive that the Kid was in on the mischief with Red and Doc, for which all three paid the identical and ultimate penalty. Besides, nothing can be done about it now.

THE SIOUX SHADOW LIFTS

After Custer's annihilation in June, 1876, the government had made no gesture, even, of disapproval against whites encroaching on Sioux lands. Legally, matters stood just where they did when the 1875 Commission admitted failure. Men who had spent blood and treasure to acquire property



Hangman's Hill on Skyline Drive was a popular promontory for picnickers with a sense of the bizarre. This young lady is posing for a publicity shot in 1940. "M" Hill, or Cowboy Hill, is in the distance.



An old postcard view from the early 1900s shows a different tree at Hangman's Hill—possibly the original. In April 1877, the first vigilante hanging in the Black Hills took place here with the execution of three accused horse thieves. One was a lad named Kid Hall, who claimed his innocence to the end.

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