



Cowboy Charlie Glass all dressed and ready to go out on the town. Notice his signature scarf, Angora chaps, lariat, ever-present dog and the silver conchos on his horse's harness. Photo courtesy of Bill Cunningham

Grazing disputes go to lethal extremes for sheepmen, ranchers

(Second in a Series)

By Kathy Jordan

Range wars between cattlemen and sheepmen were common in the early years of the 20th century, and in 1921, legendary cowboy Charlie Glass, became deeply involved in one.

For years, many cattlemen let their animals roam thousands of acres in Eastern Utah and western Colorado, some of which was leased from the Indians and the federal government. A constant feud existed between cattlemen and sheepmen over range rights.

The government had few regulations for grazing rights during this time, but ranchers agreed among themselves on dividing the range. They did request and get help from state officials on drawing lines between themselves and the sheepmen.

Herds of sheep spent the summer in Colorado High Country and in the winter moved to Eastern Utah ranges.

In 1920 and 1921 there were a number of incidences of sheep crossing the line of the cattlemen's range, which had been established by H.E. Herbert, the sheep inspector.

The government tried quarantining the out-of-state sheep behind a line. That didn't work. Trespassing continued, and the feud between the cattlemen and sheepmen escalated.

In 1921 the feud came to a head on the morning of Thursday, Feb. 24, when Charlie Glass, then foreman for the Turner ranch in eastern Utah, shot and killed Felix Jesui, a shepherd for William Fitzpatrick of Montrose.

After the shooting, Charlie returned to the Turner ranch and told Turner that he had killed Jesui. He said he would wait at the ranch while Turner went to get the sheriff so he could turn himself in.

Charlie was arraigned on Feb. 26, at 7 p.m., charged with second-degree murder. He waived his preliminary hearing and was released from custody on a \$10,000 bond posted by Oscar Turner, W.E. Gordon, Don, Max B. and Tom Taylor.

After a coroner's inquest, the jury brought in a verdict that Jesui had died from a gunshot wound to the head inflicted by Charlie.

Ten months after the shooting Charlie's case went to trial.

According to an article written by Walker D. Wyman and John D. Hart for the Colorado Magazine, court proceedings were taken but never transcribed because of Charlie's acquittal. The Moab Times-Independent covered the trial and reported that the feud between the cattlemen and sheepmen started coming to a head in late February and peaked with the shooting.

According to the newspaper, there had been run-ins between Charlie and another cowboy, Jim Warner, with a couple of shepherders a few days before the shooting. The shepherders had fired shots in the air, sending the message that they had guns and weren't afraid to use them.

The paper also reported that H.E. Herbert, the state sheep inspector, testified that a couple of shepherders were ignoring the lines and when confronted became defiant and made threats.

At trial the paper reported Charlie told his story “in a straightforward manner and the cross-examination by Mr. Dalton, the prosecutor, failed to jar him in the least”.

Charlie testified that for several days preceding the homicide the shepherders had persisted in driving their herds across the line which had been established to protect a small nook of country surrounding the Turner ranch. The country had been reserved for weaner calves and poor cattle belonging to Turner.

On the morning of the killing Charlie said he had discovered a herd of sheep about a half-mile over the line. He rode to within 25 feet of the herder, dismounted, and advanced to meet the herder, Felix Jesui, and talk the matter over. Charlie said Jesui was armed with a rifle and a pistol, and was “very defiant.” Charlie said he told Jesui he wouldn’t quarrel with him but would talk to his boss and started to leave. Charlie had reached his horse when the herder yelled and shot his rifle, the bullet whizzing past Charlie’s shoulder. Charlie said he whirled around, drew his gun, and in the meantime Jesui had shot at him two more times with his pistol. Charlie said they fired at each other several times simultaneously before Jesui fell.

The snow was the best witness for the Charlie. Tracks in the snow showed where Charlie had stopped his horse, dismounted, walked approximately 10 feet towards Jesui, then turned and returned to his horse. The undisturbed spent shells from Jesui’s gun were lying on the snow by his body.

The case went to the jury at 10 p.m. on Dec. 10, 1921, after a week of testimony and summations were completed. Shortly after midnight on Dec. 11, 1921, the jury reached a verdict of acquittal.

There was talk that Turner paid for Charlie’s defense, but no one knows for sure. If Turner did, Charlie paid him back when he deeded his 160-acre homestead to Turner.

What is known is that the trial and its outcome added luster to the legend of Charlie Glass.

(Next Friday: Charlie’s saga comes to an end)