

The Farmer and the Cowman Should Be Friends



Oliver H. Hovda, my daughter-in-law's 1st cousin (4 times removed), was just twenty-two years old when he left his family home in Minnesota for the relatively wide open spaces of Montana. His uncle had promised him a good job in the silver and lead mines there.

He and his cousin Lee Simonsen began working in the mines in 1889. Not only was it dangerous work, life in general had its perils. All miners back then carried "sixshooters" and any differences that occurred between them was usually settled by an exchange of gunfire. Six months later, Oliver and Lee decided to leave the mines and instead bought some sheep.

By this time, Lee's father had purchased some land along the Stillwater River and started a town called Absarokee, a Crow Indian name that meant People of the Raven. Oliver and Lee brought their sheep to the prime grazing area above the river, ignoring the threats of the cattlemen who wanted the land for their herds. The tensions between the cattlemen and the shepherders continued to intensify. Oliver's camp was burnt down twice by the other faction which finally drove Oliver to move his herd (which by now amounted to some 10,000 head) to an area already grazed by the cattle.

The hostility reached its climax when the cattlemen killed a German shepherd named Heide along with many of his sheep. Hovda, incensed, stormed into the saloon where he knew he would find the guilty parties. With his six-shooter strapped to his side, he challenged all the cattlemen present to a shootout. Fortunately for Hovda, who was not very good with a gun, his uncle was also present and managed to hustle him out before blood was spilled, in all likelihood, saving his life.

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