

Chapter 20 of “Homesteader: Finding Sharon” the sequel to “The Great Liquor War”

20

Once again, I made a mistake with Martin. I thought it would take him a couple of weeks to recover from being branded a thief and a liar. Apparently, it didn't mean a thing to him. On the following Monday, a week after we appeared in front of the Magistrate, he was trying to tear down my fence.

Charlie, Joe, and I had finished the line fences around both Harry's and my north quarter sections and had begun cross fencing. Since the garden and buildings, in the beginning at least, would be on my land we had started there and were just stringing the last hundred yards before moving over to Harry's. We were north and just to the west of Beupré hill which cut off our view to the south. I don't know what it was that warned Joe, but he suddenly stood up from driving staples, and said, "Weasel come. Many cow."

I stood up and looked around but couldn't see any movement.

He pointed to the south east and the little hill. "South, behind hill," he said.

Quickly I tightened the cinch on my saddle. "Take the team an' wagon up t' your lodges," I instructed. "If he breaks through, get your families out best you can." I swung into the saddle and rode up slope.

The hill covered most of the quarter section to the south and west of what I thought of as my home quarter. From the top of it I could see four riders approaching the fence that ran along the south side of Harry's quarter. Behind them was a herd of at least five hundred cattle. The hill was covered with pine, spruce, and a few aspen, so I was pretty sure they hadn't seen me.

I turned west and then south, keeping the hill between me and the approaching riders. Near the south of the high ground there was a finger of hill that ran toward the east. With the tree cover, the height, and Martin and his men looking at the fence, I was sure I could get to within a few hundred yards of them.

It happened that I was riding Socks, one of the sorrels that Harry had bought. Even though Black had lost part of an ear in my gun battle with Frank Spencer, he could go to sleep

beside me while I was firing at a target with my new 45-70. However, I wasn't so sure about Socks, so I tied the reins to a brush and worked forward down the finger of high ground on foot.

I tied those reins tight. I could see three men with Martin, and there were probably more with the herd that was bunched to the south. I was alone. I thought there was a good chance I would have to leave the area in a hurry and I didn't want to do it walking. I wanted a horse around so the leaving could be done quickly.

There were a few big pines on that slope in those days, but a few of them had already fallen under the attacks of nature and time. I dropped to hands and knees, scurried up to one of these fallen logs and rested my rifle barrel across it.

I was less than two hundred yards from Martin and three other riders. Though I couldn't hear what was said I had a clear view. One of the riders held both hands up, palms forward and was shaking his head. Martin rode his horse close to the man and ripped the rope from the other man's saddle.

While he built a small loop in the lariat, Martin turned his horse and rode toward the fence. Dropping the loop on the corner post, he took a double dally on his saddle horn.

I put a bullet into that corner post.

That corner post was made from a tamarack that had been dead for some years before it was cut. It was hard and brittle. When the bullet hit it, six inches from the top disappeared into splinters.

One of the four horses remained calm. The rider on it brought his hands up to shoulder height and didn't move. The other three men were busy trying to keep their seats as their mounts bucked and tried to fight their way out of the country.

Martin had a special problem. As usual he was riding the only thing that would hold him up all day, a big round horse of at least fifteen hundred pounds with a relatively flat back. When the post blew up so did his mount. He dropped the rope and grabbed the saddle horn, but his double dally gave the rope enough purchase that his saddle was pulled askew before the rope hit the ground.

The last I saw of him that day he was headed south, right leg hooked over the horses back, the left foot almost on the ground. Both hands held the horn of a saddle that was fast slipping toward the horse's belly. Despite the improbable position of the equipment and cargo, the horse was making real good time.