

The Murder of John T. Ussher

The horrible murder of John Ussher, Government agent by the McLean brothers is one of the best known stories of the district. Many versions of it have been printed, some with many errors, and it has recently become widely popular in Ian and Sylvia's song.

The version here given was written immediately after the event by John Tait, Factor at Kamloops, in a report to the Hudson Bay Company authorities in Victoria. The punctuation is Mr. Tait's!

30th December 1879

I presume you have heard of the exciting time we had here last week and a part of this, which was all caused by the most worthless set of Vagabonds that ever lived in any country, i.e. Allen McLean, Charles McLean, Archie McLean & Alexander Hare. Hector McLean although not with the others at the time of the murder is considered equally guilty as he has been with them and has supplied them with food. he too is sent below. it is most fortunate the threats and brutish intentions of the Murderers were arrested when as soon as they were. a few days more and many more would have been butchered and property destroyed.

The reward offered by the Government \$250.00 was insufficient to induce white men or Indians to bother with the then only thieves and Robbers. I took some interest in the matter myself as I had several times been told that the outlaws intended taking the lives of certain persons at Kamloops(in which my name was included) and then burn down the place. Knowing this I took the responsibility of increasing the reward \$250.00(and if not acknowledged by the Company to pay it myself) if the four were brought in within three weeks of the 6th inst. This appeared to encourage people and for the \$500.00 sufficient men could have been procured to make the arrest but J. Ussher's idea was for him to go alone believing he could do it without force.

I was about the last person that spoke to him when he was leaving, and told him he was making a great mistake by not taking men with him. his answer was dont ~~worry~~ you be afraid, if I get my eyes on them, they will be sure to come along. he must have considered himself invulnerable as while they were behind Trees shooting at him and two more that went as guides, Ussher dismounted leaving his Pistol in the Canteenas on the saddle and walked towards them. Young Nick Hare came from behind a Tree and met Ussher who attempted to put his hand on Hares shoulder. The two clinched and Ussher fell back to the ground. Hare jumped on him with a knife in his left hd. & a Pistol in the right, holding it by the barrel. Ussher begged them not to kill him as he did not come to harm them. at this time Archie McLean the youngest demon in the lot came up with his Pistol and said oh, shoot the Son of a B.- with that he fired. The Ball entered the head a little above the left eye, besides a fearful gash or knife wound on the right side of the neck near the Jaw. The head was completely battered by blows with their pistols. they were not satisfied to Butcher the poor man but took his Boots, over Coat, Gloves, Horse & Saddle.

they then started for Nicola and on their way called at Trapp and McDonald's. Trapp was at home they demanded the Rifle, shot Gun and all the Ammunition he had. while two held their Guns pointed at Trapps head the other two took what they wanted.

The next unfortunate they met was Peter Frasers shepherd "Kelly" a short distance from Trapp & McDonalds. after a few words with him Allen McLean shot him dead, and C. McLean said in Court that he put a ball through him after he was dead. from here and on their way to Nicola met P. Fraser & called at a Mr. Scotts House but did not molest them. The next house they went to was Palmers at Nicola. Mrs. Palmer and her three children were at home. They demanded the Guns and Ammunition which she no doubt handed them very quickly. before leaving they told Mrs. Palmer they were determined to kill her husband as he had offended one of their party some time previous. from Palmers they made for Douglas lake Expecting on their way to find a John Kennedy they had spotted but he too was away from home.

After reaching Douglas Lake immediatedly set to work to get indians to join them which I am happy to say they failed in accomplishing, although we quite expected that some of the young scamps would. The white men turned out well. Mr. Cornwall came here with a party of 15 men from Cache Creek, all that could be spared went from here, and also from Nicola. The great trouble was want of arms. The weather at the time was very disagreeable, it snowed nearly the whole of three days and nights. The depth of snow was quite 18 inches.