

MEMORIES OF OLD  
ALTURAS COUNTY, IDAHO

Lucille Hathaway Hall



BIG MOUNTAIN PRESS, *Denver*

Book 1956

72 p. illus. 24 cm.

I asked him never to come calling over our way again. I also told him he could be thankful that I hadn't shot him. "You see," I told him, "we don't put up with night prowling." We never saw him again.

The second summer I spent on my homestead, a crowd of us drove down to Huff Creek where we picked up saddle horses, left the Buick, and rode out into the lava beds on an old Indian trail, in quest of a cave in which I had been years before during a vicious storm. There were six in the party. One little school teacher had asked permission to go along. She was a good rider and did not crave attention every minute. We each carried firearms, a lunch, and a jug of water. I took the lead riding a tall black mare, full of life and very touchy. The morning was one of those gorgeous June set ups hard to best in any land. As we penetrated deeper into the lavas, it became warmer and before long really hot. My mount was rather soft and was all lather before long. We saw many rattlesnakes off the side of the trail, lying on the rocks warming their bellies. After about two hours of slow travel, I realized that we were getting close to the cave. There were hundreds of head of cattle out around in the grassy meadows feeding, and we saw the chuckwagon in the distance. We now left the trail and turned to the left where the going was tough with rattlesnakes everywhere. I saw my objective about fifteen feet ahead and the others followed me closely. We had two coleman lanterns along, so we got them to going. Meanwhile, our horses paid no attention to the snakes, but started to eat the grass growing in spots through the lavas, dragging the bridle reins along to one side. We had entered the cave and had walked a short distance when we were nearly overcome with droves of bats, hitting us on all sides as the light disturbed them. Now we had to squat down to get through an opening into a larger cave. One of the men went ahead and we followed. This was a large

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place and we could walk erect, but the air was foul. I slanted the light to one side and there were several large bull snakes, black, with red eyes, glaring at us. Some of these were eight feet long and thick as small poles. We left them alone and proceeded on our way with the worst yet to come. We slid down a short incline into the place I was looking for. People had died in that hole years before, three of them. It had now been sixteen years since I first had been in this place. They hadn't changed the least bit in those years. They lay on the rough floor. Their clothing still covered their bones, their hair which had dropped back from their scalps seemed very long and black. In past years I had overcome fear, so I reached down and lifted one of the skulls so that I might get a closer view of the teeth and jaw. The mandible was intact and this one had been really an aristocrat. His molars were filled with gold of rather crude workmanship. My friends wouldn't touch these decomposed bodies, so I was not able to get a whole anatomy, as I had planned to do, but took the three skulls. We had a most horrible time getting out of that "hell hole," crawling back up the inclines we had slid down. Then we were into the chamber of snakes. How they did stink. When we finally reached a place where we could get a breath of fresh air, we were sure that we would be out of the horrible place very soon. As we climbed into the last outer cave, we heard a terrific blast of thunder and found rain pouring down in torrents, while the lightning flashed close at hand and the thunder was deafening. Our horses had left us and likewise the rattlesnakes. We started for the chuckwagon, while the rain nearly knocked us over. Lightning was striking the rocks nearby, while we staggered against the storm. I prayed, asking God to help us. As we went forward we heard someone calling and soon a horseman came close to us, leading our horses. They had become frightened and had gone to the

wagon. We were like drowned rats, not a dry rag on our bodies, and I had lost all but one of the skulls.

Several times I have had people ask me to show them the cave. Never again. I promised my Heavenly Father that day in the terrible storm, that I never would go back there again. Several years later I read in Washington Irving's *Astoria* that three members of a party going West from Fort Hall had taken what they supposed would be a short cut to the Pacific Coast and were never heard of again. Perhaps this is where they perished.

The people who were running cattle were now using the grassy meadow in the lavas. This particular place is now known as Laidlow Park. Here the grass and water were plentiful until the later summer when, after days of scorching heat, water and grass became non-existent. Several enterprising fellows tried to put down a well, but this was not a success and the cattle, most of them, go on to the United States reserve about June the first.

Several years ago I made a trip out to the cow camp in a power wagon. We saw numerous rattlesnakes and had the usual afternoon thunderstorm, thunder, lightning, and rain. Since the unforgettable trip to the caves, I have no desire to explore in this locale.

An old fellow by the name of Bradley, who didn't stay long as a farmer, moved over on the Silver Creek side of a mountain which now bears his name. Here he catered to the traveling public, especially if they were of the thirsty type. At this particular spot there's a small spring close to where his cabin once stood. He was a "character." He was always lit up like a Christmas tree. When he would make his appearance at a dance, people would sing, "Empty is the bottle. Bradley is here." Mr. Le Duce settled in the Silver Creek valley and

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