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**HISTORY AND REMINISCENCE**

JAY AMOS BARRETT

**LINCOLN IN THE SEVENTIES**

In the early seventies society at Lincoln had not yet that fully developed respect for the law which it is said to possess today. The two score years and more that have elapsed since then have made a vast difference in the methods of dealing with crime. The way men had to punish certain infringements of the law, or at least did punish them, before law had grown strong arms is well illustrated by the following story. It came to me almost directly from the lips of one of the actors. It is a bit of history connected with Lincoln, and involves one of the notorious characters seen upon her streets until recently. This narrative will, I doubt not, fall under the notice of more than one who had glimpses of the series of events as they were being enacted.

The first act in the drama is the stealing of several teams of mules and horses by Mike Sheedy, a brother of the John Sheedy, concerning whose death occurred one of the notable criminal trials in Lincoln. Mike was interested in some railroad grading which was done some sixty miles west of Lincoln, and needed more teams to accomplish the work. Knowing of certain animals and wagons at a small Missouri hamlet that were quite to his purpose, he forthwith visited the place and made way with them.

A cousin of the man who thus lost his horses, was a young attorney at Gallatin, in the same state, an able lawyer, a man full of enterprise, and one who understood well the secrets of dealing with men. He undertook the case for his cousin, and started for Lincoln. Only a small wooden station house marked the site where now the large Burlington and Missouri depot stands. Stepping from the platform, he passed up the road to the centre of the town. Four or five years before, the place had been laid out for a capital city, and a marked growth had been made; but it was still simply a frontier village. Not a single shanty adorned the foot of the hill where the depot was. As he approached the group of stores clustered about the square even then known as "Post Office square," he paused to inquire of a passer-by where he could find John Sheedy. The man looked at him with an expression of inquiry in his features, which might have been interpreted to mean, "What do you want with a gambler?" and said, "Right over there in that building, stranger. That's his place of business." The lawyer strolled over across the square and entered the house. Scattered about a fair-sized room were several chairs, and behind the only table in the room sat a man reading a newspaper. Back of the man, upon the wall, were sets of pigeon-holes containing packs of cards, and on the table lay two revolvers with cards. As the lawyer entered, the man looked up. With a gesture the gambler remarked in a business tone, "Have a chair." At the same time he laid aside his paper and pushed one of the revolvers and a pack of cards toward the other side of the table. "Is this Mr. Sheedy?" asked the lawyer. "Yes," was the reply, "It is." Said the stranger, "I haven't time for a game to-day, Mr. Sheedy. Can you tell me where your brother Mike is?" Without seeming surprised, Mr. Sheedy quickly asked, "What do you want with Mike?"

"I have some business with him," said the lawyer. Without change in the hard features of his face, Mr. Sheedy said: "Mike is out on the 'dump'

about sixty miles west of here; but you touch him at the peril of your life."

"Well," was the rejoinder, "I have no need to touch him. I merely wished to see him on a little business matter."

With a few more words, the lawyer left the resort and sought a hotel. While thinking of the matter, he looked about him to see what kind of help was to be had for the remainder of the trip; for he had calmly determined to go out to the railroad camp and recover the stolen teams and wagons. To one of the fellows about the hotel, apparently not then engaged in any business, whose appearance pleased him, he addressed some questions. Finding him available and able to use a revolver when and only when he was told, he enlisted the fellow in his service, and instructed him to get two more men of the same stamp.

The party of four was soon made up and started out to find the camp of railroad graders. They came upon it where John Sheedy had indicated, but they did not enter the place at once or reveal their presence. While waiting for the darkness of night to bring a favorable moment for seizing the stolen property, which they ascertained to be intact, they took care to locate each piece and animal. About two o'clock in the morning, when the silence of profound slumber had settled down over the camp, the four approached the little group of tents. Entering the one in which they knew Mike Sheedy to be, the lawyer, revolver in hand, woke him with some word of address.

"Is that you, Mr. B.?" asked the startled man, addressing the lawyer by name.

"Yes, it is I," was the answer. The four men then bound the horse-thief hand and foot. Fastening his wife the same way they left that tent and went to the others in turn. There were but few men in camp, two or three of whom they decided to take with them to pilot the teams back to Nebraska City. Without delay the horses and mules were started on their return trip to Missouri. The lawyer directed that his comrades should take the southern route, passing many miles to the south of Lincoln, while he himself should take the risk of returning to Lincoln. He had no intention of being delayed by the comparatively slow livery team. Instead he drove to the nearest station, and took the train. At the place where he was thus compelled to leave the livery, he reported the plight in which he had left the graders, and arranged for their release.

The day was not far gone when he stepped once more from the train at the Lincoln depot. Before he had left the platform one of the hotel boys came to him with the information, "John Sheedy is gunning for you." He sent the boy to the livery barn to settle the bill, while he himself went to the building that served the B. & M. as a round-house, and endeavored to engage a special engine to Nebraska City. "How much have you?" said the railroad official.

"One hundred and twenty-five" said the lawyer, drawing it from his pocket.

The railroad man took it, but handed a small part of it back to him. "All right" was the word, and not many minutes elapsed before the engine, which had already some steam up, was moving slowly from the vicinity of the depot.

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