

GIRL HORSE THIEF SENTENCED TO PEN

Myrtle Tipton, Who Masqueraded as a Boy, Gets Two Years

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Transcribed by Monica Bartlett Peters

Myrtle Tipton, the 16 year old girl horse thief, pleaded guilty to the charge against her in the superior court, and was sentenced to two years in the Walla Walla penitentiary by Judge Chadwick.

She is the person who, dressed in male attire and with a smooth story, arrived in St. John about three weeks ago with five head of good work horses. She disposed of them "at a good bargain" to a farmer, John Chenoweth, who lives near St. John. Chenoweth paid for the horses by a check on the St. John bank, and when the stranger wished to get the check cashed identified the supposed man as a person he formerly knew in Dayton. The stranger left on the south bound train that afternoon.

A few days later some Indians from the Coeur d'Alene Indian reservation appeared and, claiming the horses, took them back to the reservation.

Inquiry developed the fact that the girl and her parents formerly lived for a couple of years on the reservation, but were requested to move off by the Indian agent. The girl says she spent most of the past summer on the Snake river, where she worked on a fruit farm, but for a couple of weeks before the alleged stealing she had been working on the reservation doing outdoor farm work. The girl's father lives near Prescott, and her mother is said to be somewhere in California.

When first arrested, Myrtle admitted.....the outfit and to....reporter....herescape....as follows: "I caught the horses in a field one night, about the 19th of October, hitched two of them to the hack and struck out. I reached St. John the next day and readily sold the horses for \$225. With the money I purchased a suit of boy's clothes, had my hair cut and went out and had a good time until quite late that night. I then secured a bed at the hotel, where I remained until the train started for Prescott the next morning. I was acquainted with the Harkness family and have been visiting there since. I don't care if I am sent to the penitentiary; I have a curiosity to see how they run such an institution. I would rather go there than be sent to the reform school."

When asked why she stole the horses and outfit, she replied: "My father has been farming some Indian land on the reservation for two or three years and has made me go out into the field to plow and do other kinds of work, and would never give me any money. I came down to Walla Walla to stay with him this fall after harvest and wanted him to give me money enough to go and visit my mother at North Yakima, but he would not do it so I rode back up to the reservation on horseback, and after staying with some friends a short time, concluded that I would raise some money, and that is why I took the horses and outfit."

Little is known of the family except that they have lived for several years in the neighborhood of Walla Walla and that one of the boys was convicted last week at Pendleton on a charge of forgery and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary, but was paroled by the circuit judge.

The family has been farming land rented from the Indians on the Coeur d'Alene reservation, spending a portion of the year up there and the rest of the time near Walla Walla. Some two months ago the father and mother separated and the mother with one daughter is living in North Yakima.

It is related by persons who have heard of the family that to dress up in boys' clothes was a favorite game of the girl, and that she frequently went to town, spending her time in drinking.

An incident in her stay in St. John after selling the outfit is related by Deputy Sheriff Nessley. When she inquired for a room at the hotel the clerk told her, supposing she was a man, that all rooms were occupied, but that he might possibly make arrangements for her to sleep with another guest. To this she readily consented, and neither the other guest or the clerk knew of her identity until a few days later.

THE GIRL HORSE THIEF
Sketch of the Girl Who Has Been Sent to the Pen for Two Years

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Transcribed by Monica Bartlett Peters

Myrtle Tipton, the girl horse thief, who was sentenced at Colfax, Wash., to serve two years in the state penitentiary, although only 18 years old, has a most remarkable history. She says: "I never did any housework and don't know how. From the time I was old enough to do any work I helped on the farm, driving horses and doing the work of a boy. I never cooked a meal in my life and know lots more about horses, plows and farm work than about dishes, cooking and work about the house.

"I like to work outdoors and would lots rather wear men's clothing than dresses. I always helped my father and he treated me like a boy. I plowed for several weeks with the team I stole. There were three horses, a bay, a gray and a brown. I liked these horses and one night I made up my mind to steal them.

"When I got the money for them--\$225.00--I took the train for Walla Walla. There I blowed all the money in for clothes. I then went to Prescott, where we had lived. I went to a neighbor's and they did not know me. I had my hair cut short at St. John. It has always been rather short, as I had it shingled about once every year. I asked for a room to dress in and went in there and put on girls' clothes.

"I read in the papers all about them looking for me, but I did not try to get away. When the constable and another man came after me they had two big guns and a pair of handcuffs. They pulled the guns on me and tried to make me throw up my hands. I wouldn't do it and bluffed them both out. They were big men and I 'rubbed it into them' about two big men and two guns and a pair of handcuffs after one little girl, but they could not put handcuffs on me and they didn't. I went with them in their wagon. They had a lantern and did not blow it out but put it under the seat lighted, and it burned and smoked my clothes awful."

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Further research on Myrtle Tipton and her family shows many Tiptons were in Douglas County, Oregon by 1870. These included Myrtle's immediate family, as well as her grandparents and many aunts, uncles and cousins. They originally came from Tennessee and then on to Missouri. Myrtle's parents, Joseph and Nancy, were born in Missouri and in the 1880 census Joseph was running a sawmill in Mt. Scott, Douglas County, Oregon. They also took in boarders. In the 1900 census they were in Umatilla, Gilleland County, Oregon and Joseph was a farm laborer. Nancy, his wife, was listed as having 10 children, with 7 living, of which Myrtle was the youngest.

A marriage record was found in Walla Walla for Myrtle Tipton, age 18, and James Leroy, age 33, on August 22, 1907. This would have been about the time Myrtle was released from prison. Her husband was born in Boston, Massachusetts and was a cook. Myrtle was born in Roseburg, Oregon. The record listed the parents of both the bride and groom. No further record was found of Myrtle and James, but Myrtle's father, Joseph was found in the 1910 census in Walla Walla County, Washington, listed as widowed and living with his daughter, Eliza, and her husband, John McDonalds.