

# Ruby Valley

## Book eyes vigilantes' past

The famous Montana Vigilantes, who in 1864 hanged 21 troublemakers including a rogue sheriff, were justified in taking the law into their own hands.

At first, Then it got ugly.

So concludes Frederick Allen in a new book on the Montana Vigilantes. The problem, Allen asserts, was that Montana's righteous hangmen refused to disband after federal courts began operating. Instead, they continued their ways in what became the deadliest campaign of vigilante justice in American history. Eventually, they lynched more than fifty men, many of them in no way deserving of such punishment.

In *A Decent, Orderly Lynching: The Montana Vigilantes* (\$34.95, October), award-winning journalist and historian Frederick Allen cites fresh research to show how Montana's founding fathers succumbed to power and continued to carry out extra-legal executions until 1870, six years after legitimate government was established in their territory.

Taking his title from a Montana newspaper editor who openly advocated lynching as a tool of social control, Allen describes how the convenience of summary execution overwhelmed the belief of many early settlers in trial by jury, presumption of innocence, and rule of law. To this day, Allen argues, the heroic legacy of the vigilantes unfairly identifies Montana as a place that tolerates scofflaws.

With this book, Allen enters a contentious debate that has raged for years, especially over the guilt or innocence of rogue sheriff Henry Plummer, who was accused of masterminding a string of stagecoach robberies that provoked the vigilantes into action. Determined to impose order in the gold camps of the Rocky Mountain foothills at a time when legal governance was hundreds of miles away, the Montana Vigilantes hanged Plummer and almost two dozen others suspected of participating in the robberies.

Richard Maxwell Brown, Beekman Professor Emeritus of Northwest and Pacific History at the University of Oregon and an expert on Western vigilantism, praised Allen's

book, stating, "Rick Allen has given us the full-fledged book on the Montana vigilantes that has so long been needed. His primary-source research is a splendid achievement, replete with much new evidence missed or neglected by previous historians."

In a verdict that will comfort neither side, Allen concludes that the vigilantes had just cause to fear Plummer but lacked enough evidence to have obtained a guilty verdict in a modern American courtroom.

Adding significant scholarship to Montana's "formative morality play," Allen shows that at one point, there were actually two separate vigilance committees operating simultaneously. Their actions, he notes, fit the social fabric of a nation in turmoil from civil war.

Allen's penetrating character studies of the vigilante leaders will change textbook accounts of Montana's founders, darkening the reputations of Governor Sidney Edgerton and chronicler Nathaniel Langford while polishing the memory of others, notably Wilber Fisk Sanders and Francis Thompson.

"For readers outside Montana," Allen said, "I think the story of the vigilantes has special relevance because it shows how experience in the frontier West so closely parallels our current debates in the fight against terrorism. The vigilantes had to decide: Were they at war against an enemy who needed to be killed, or did they confront criminals who deserved capture, trial, and the protections of the courts? Today we are torn between two strong American traditions - the need to confront and defeat evil versus our instinct not to act like a bully."

Relying on 40 eyewitness accounts, some never before published, *A Decent, Orderly Lynching* creates a detailed narrative about the actions men take - and the troublesome consequences - when they find themselves beyond the protections of legal governance and in fear for their lives.

Frederick Allen is a former political editor and columnist with the Atlanta Constitution and commentator for CNN. His history of the Coca-Cola Company, *Secret Formula*, has been translated into seven languages. *Atlanta Rising*, his analysis of the forces that shaped modern Atlanta, is taught at several colleges. He and his wife, Linda, divide their time between Atlanta and Bozeman, Montana.

## Chapter hosts range meet

By Becca Hamler

On Tuesday, September 21, the Ruby Valley FFA Chapter hosted their 30th annual Ruby Valley Invitational (RVI) Livestock and Range Evaluation competition. The completion was held at the Ruby Oxbow Equestrian Center operated by Morris Land and at Neil Barnosky's. More than 180 students participated in the judging event providing for an excellent event.

FFA and 4-H members from as far away as Conrad competed in rangeland evaluation and livestock judging. The rangeland evaluation portion of the contest was organized by Marni Thompson of the NRCS and featured tests on plant identification, stocking rates, soils evaluation and plant utilization.

The livestock evaluation included judging of swine, beef heifers, breeding ewes, horses and wool as well as a class of bison provided by Dave Dixon and Snowcrest Ranch. Students were also tested on their knowledge of the livestock industry and veterinary tool identification.

The competition went very well and many students received awards for their knowledge of range identification and livestock placing. The big winners of the day were the Park FFA Chapter in the range competition and the Cascade FFA Chapter in Livestock. The competition also served as the Southwestern District competition and the Big Timber FFA, Park FFA and Ruby Valley FFA all claimed awards in the district competition.

The Ruby Valley FFA members, alumni, and parents made it possible for everyone to enjoy a great day of fun and learning. FFA state officers attended and helped present awards for the contest. A heartfelt thanks to all who provided time, energy, food and effort to make this another successful event.

### Valley Chorale starts practice

The Ruby Valley Chorale will be starting practice on Oct. 13 at 8 pm at the Church of the Valley in Twin Bridges. The group will be practicing singing a Christmas Cantata for an anticipated performance on December 12. Practices will rotate between Twin Bridges and Sheridan and anyone interested in joining, singing and having a good time is welcome. For more information contact director Craig Ballou at 684-5623.

## Toys for Tots gets you into the games free

Toys for Tots is getting underway again in the Ruby Valley, according to Tim Wall, coordinator of the project. Sponsored by American Legion Post 31 in conjunction with the U. S. Marine Corps, the drive begins at the homecoming football game with Granite County and the volleyball game with Gardiner on Saturday, October 9.

Free admission to the game can be had by bringing a new, unwrapped toy to either of the games.

Collection sites for toys are also set at Three Rivers Cenex, McAlear's Pharmacy and Grocery and Sub Sandwich and Pizza.

The Toys for Tots drive has been an annual event in the Ruby Valley for the past three years.

## Hospice plans training session

A new training program for the Madison County Hospice and its volunteers is slated to start soon.

The Hospice, according to its mission statement, is to "work within Madison County to assist with the care and comfort and support of those families who desire to maintain critically or terminally ill family members at home; make needed in-home hospice services available to a rural, underserved population and reduce end-of-life suffering and isolation."

The organization formed two years ago. Local volunteers, both with and without a medical background take part in the program, which has served families in Cardwell, Ennis, McAllister, Sheridan, Twin Bridges and Virginia City.

The Madison County Volunteer Hospice invites Madison County residents to join its ranks.

A training program for new volunteers will start at 10 a.m. Saturday, October 9, in the basement of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Virginia City. Current volunteers are also encouraged to come, as there will be opportunity to evaluate the past year's activities and discuss general needs for the upcoming year.

The hospice holds monthly training sessions for its volunteers, with a wide range of services being covered.

Some of those services include skilled nursing, personal care, respite care and

other family support services, transportation and shopping, guidance and counseling, social services and bereavement services.

Donita Powell of Ennis has recently accepted the part-time position of hospice coordinator.

For more information about the organization, potential volunteers or individuals in need of hospice care should contact her at 682-3100.

Requests for hospice services are handled in a strictly confidential manner.



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## AG APPRECIATION DAY & HARVEST FESTIVAL

**Thursday, October 14th: Enter Harvest Contests by Noon**

- Most well worn hat/coat at Big Sky Western Wear
- Most used old ranch truck at McLeod (sponsored by The Shop)
- Photo Contest at Serendipity
- Best Cinnamon Roll at Booze N Buns

- Public is invited to vote at these locations until 4:00 p.m. Friday, October 15th -

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