



DECEMBER 2008 / FEATURE

The Lynching of Louie Sam

In 1884, an American mob brought frontier justice to the Canadian border. Their deed echoes to this day

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Updated 11:20, Jul. 27, 2020 | Published 4:21, Dec. 12, 2008

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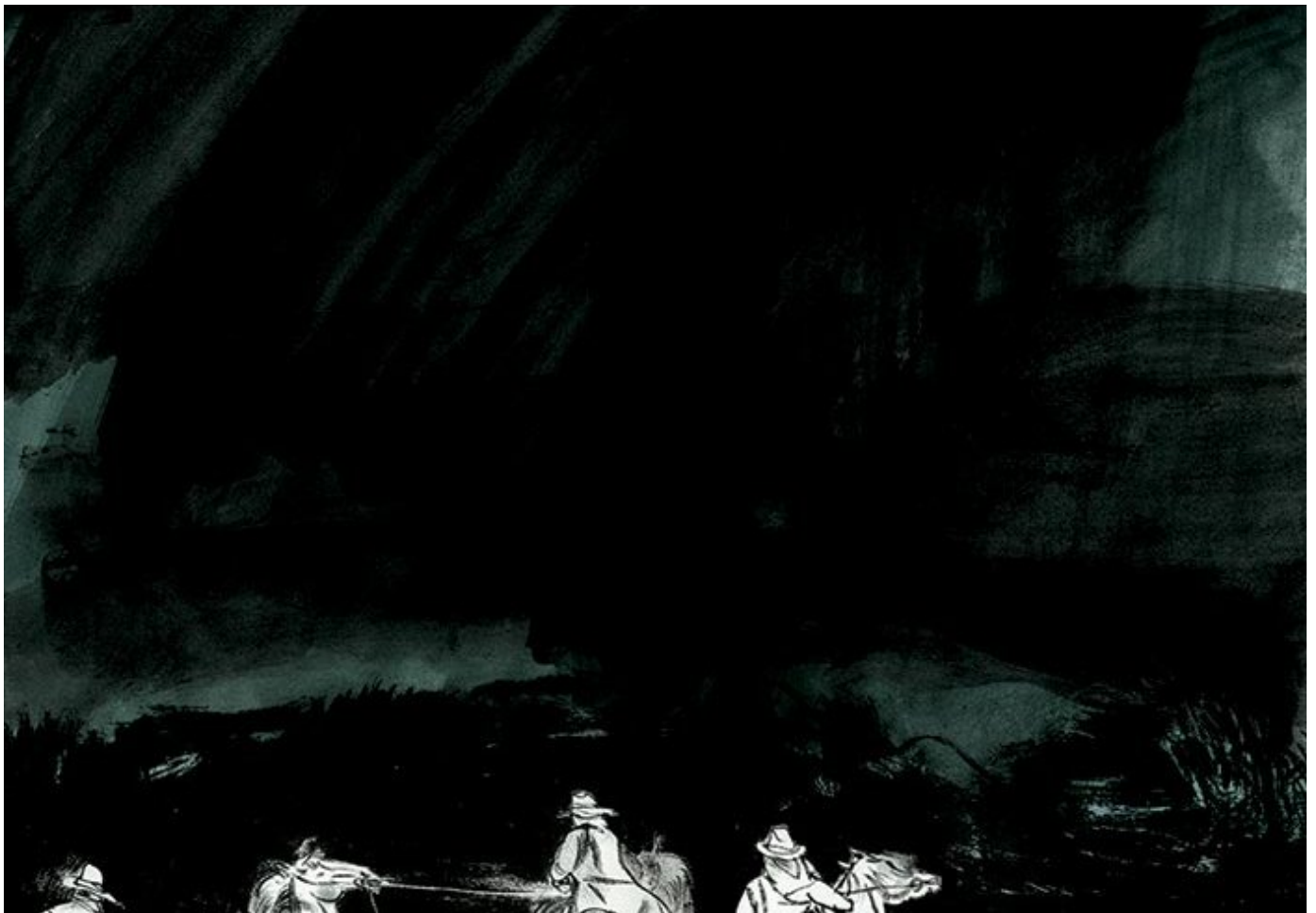



Illustration by Jillian Tamaki



OF ALL THE THINGS that touched Louie Sam during his short life, only the

 handcuffs remain. They reside now in the basement of the Vancouver Museum, rusty but still functional. I was haunted by this: that there was no tangible evidence of this boy's life besides the twin voids through which he was dragged so roughly from it. I had the opportunity to put these handcuffs on, so I did, wondering if I might be the first person to wear them since Sam was cut down from a cedar tree just north of the Washington–British Columbia border on the morning of February 28, 1884. I was hoping for a sign, but the boy was long gone. There was nothing in those bracelets apart from my own hands.

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Lynchings, maybe more than other murders, leave ghosts behind and business unfinished that gnaw at the collective mind. The restless memory of the victim issues insistent demands: *Recall me. Remember me. Release me.* In the United States, there are many in need of this attention; the list of victims from Texas alone numbers almost 500. And though we tend to think of lynchings as a phenomenon of the Deep South, they actually occurred in all but four of the contiguous forty-eight states.

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Here's a statistic: between 1882, when reliable records started to be kept, and 1968, there were 4,743 lynchings recorded in the United States. In Canada, during this same eighty-six-year period, there was one: Louie Sam's. Tuskegee University, from whose archives these statistics come, classified 1,297 of the victims as "White" (a figure that includes immigrants and aboriginals, but vastly underestimates the numbers for these groups). No such archives exist in Canada, because there appears to be no need for them, though other lynchings did occur here.

Given our common native and European roots, and our shared indebtedness to Britain and its legal system, it is hard to imagine how the United States and Canada could differ so much on the subject of due process. And yet we do. The sheer magnitude of the imbalance stuns and perplexes, and it cannot be explained away by race or region. Lynching is a medium through which America has long expressed itself, like football, rock and roll, or war. Indeed, in the sense that lynching is a unilateral commandeering of the judicial process, with death as a by-product, the second invasion of Iraq can be seen as simply an extension of tradition.

What makes Canada's lone statistical aberration more unusual still is who the victim was: a member of what is now known as the Sto:lo (stah-lo) Nation of southern British Columbia. Louie Sam died at fourteen or fifteen, during an era when tens of thousands of natives were dying throughout North America. Given that aboriginals were often completely overlooked by census counts and related data collecting, the fact that Sam's death would become one of the most thoroughly documented lynchings of the nineteenth century, and the spark for an international incident, is nothing short of amazing.

This Canadian example may also allow us to glimpse the mechanics of divergence that caused a common past to become a fault line, to become a border, to become an altogether different branch of the North American family tree. The case of Louie Sam illustrates that the difference between "peace,

order, and good government” and “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is not superficial; it cuts to the bone. When you look at these sprawling, sometimes feuding fraternal twins through the lens of mob justice, it seems Canada stayed home to be raised by stable if somewhat overbearing parents, while the States ran away with the Lord of the Flies.

BECAUSE LOUIE SAM’S handcuffs were tangible and evocative, I thought about them a lot. A century ago, they would have been known to those in the apprehension business as “darbies,” and they were a staple of law enforcement throughout the British Empire and the United States. The design originated in Britain and appears to have been ergonomic: the cuffs are truly wrist shaped, with rounded, convex rims that feel almost soft against one’s tendons and bones. They are linked by a short chain on a swivel that allows for maximum mobility under the circumstances, and are probably the most humane manacles ever mass produced. Nineteenth-century prisoners, travelling on foot or on horseback, would have spent much more time in bondage than their modern counterparts and so may have appreciated the darbies’ relative comfort. But when all was said and done, none of this would matter much to Louie Sam.

By 9 p.m. on the night of February 27, 1884, Sam would have been shackled in his darbies for hours—ever since he’d been arrested in Kilgard on suspicion of murder. Kilgard, also known as Indian Reserve No. 6, was a squalid shack settlement near the base of a mountain, about eighty kilometres east of Vancouver and a kilometre or so from the US border. In those days, only about twenty people lived there. Spread out below the reserve was an extraordinarily beautiful and fertile flood plain that extended south across the border, with grass growing two metres high. The mosquitoes there were a force of nature, clogging the air in dark blizzards that forced residents to hide indoors. One settler described her white house as having been turned black by the swarms that settled on it.

There is a tendency to imagine frontier settlements as sets for Western movies—tidy, intimate, organized—but this was not the case in BC’s southern border country. Most homesteaders here lived exhausting, isolated lives in dirt-floored

cabins on large parcels of land that had yet to be cleared of the often-enormous trees that covered them. In many cases, neighbours were beyond shouting distance, and at night the darkness was absolute. Jim Berg, a seventy-three-year-old local historian whose family helped to settle the area around Nooksack, Washington, ten kilometres south of Kilgard, recalled his homesteader great-uncle's reason for building a two-storey cabin and living in the upstairs: "I could defend a stairwell," his uncle explained. "I couldn't defend four walls." People regularly travelled with firearms into the 1930s.

Today the houses of Kilgard have been updated somewhat, and the population has increased, but the place appears under siege. The mountain itself is being systematically dismantled by half a dozen gravel companies, and roaring parades of dump trucks crowd the area's narrow roads all day long. What hasn't been claimed by extractors is being overrun by developers capitalizing on Vancouver's eastward sprawl. It's worth mentioning this, because something similar was happening in Louie Sam's day.

The first wave came in the form of 30,000 American gold seekers who poured across the border starting in 1858. The Sto:lo called these people Xwelitem ("the starving ones"), likely because the Hudson's Bay Company was trading with them for massive amounts of fish for export, and they didn't understand who could possibly be eating it all. Settlers soon followed, and the arrival of the Northern Pacific and Canadian Pacific railways ushered in a third wave. Between 1880 and 1890, the population of Washington increased nearly fivefold. All of this put pressure on local native populations, creating an atmospheric gumbo of opportunity and resentment.

This was the environment Louie Sam was raised in, and his father, a man known to local whites as Mesachie ("bad" in Chinook trading jargon) Jim, was one sign of the times. Jim Sam was already suspected of murdering an aggressive and unpopular American settler who went missing in 1882 when he was sentenced to five years in provincial prison for shooting cattle. Killing settlers and cattle

implies a wish to be rid of both, but any stated motive (or proof) has been lost. Jim Sam died in prison in 1885, from tuberculosis. If newspaper accounts of the day are to be believed, Louie had a terrible reputation, not least because of his association with his father. The family lived in poverty, travelling between native communities on either side of the line. Louie's most valuable possession would have been a Hudson's Bay trade musket that may well have belonged to his father.

The border region at this place and time was sparsely populated, and the border itself barely acknowledged. People crossed in both directions, often and without interference. For local natives like Louie Sam, the border was irrelevant; their historic lands straddled the line, and their relatives lived on both sides (the Sto:lo's southern counterparts are now known as the Nooksack). As a result, travel and seasonal migrations for work were commonplace into the 1970s. Even today, there is no fence, nor scarcely any other indication that the Sto:lo's homeland is perched on the rim of the world's most feared and fearful nation.

It was on the American side of this imaginary line that a fifty-eight-year-old shopkeeper named James Bell was found supine on the floor of his burning home, shot through the back of the head. It was Sunday, February 24, 1884, and three boys returning home from church had seen the smoke and found the body. A homesteader named Breckenridge, from the nearby settlement of Nooksack, claimed to have seen Sam "one mile from James Bell's" about an hour before the murder. A fifteen-year-old boy claimed to have seen him afterward as well, recalling later that "the look on the Indian's face as he approached me struck me with terror."

That was all it took: the local sheriff, Stuart Leckie, was notified, and three days later, on Wednesday the twenty-seventh, he and Breckenridge crossed the border in search of William Campbell, a provincial justice of the peace. Campbell, a local man, took the Americans at their word, likely mounting his mule and riding immediately to Kilgard, where he knew he would find Louie Sam. Once there, Campbell charged Sam and handcuffed him on the spot. Thus.

a foreign national, and a minor to boot, became the sole suspect and defendant in the case of *US Authorities v. Louie Sam*. Sheriff Leckie, who some said was present for the arrest, wanted to extradite Sam immediately, but Campbell forbade it; the youth would have his day in a Canadian court first.

Sometime that same afternoon, approximately seventy-five men departed Nooksack on foot and horseback, bound for the Canadian border, about ten kilometres away. They had just buried their neighbor, James Bell, and the image of Bell's ten-year-old son riding to the graveyard on his murdered father's coffin would have been fresh in their minds. Until now, this group had resembled the typical inhabitants of any northwestern settlers' community. Among them were homesteaders and shopkeepers—by and large churchgoing men. But on this dark winter afternoon, they were transformed: a number of the men were clothed in their wives' skirts; others wore their coats inside out. They had blackened their faces and bound rags around their heads; some had painted red lines across their eyes, “Injun” style.

Lynching wasn't all that common in the American Northwest, so it is interesting to note that the members of this group seemed to know exactly what they were doing and went to some pains to disguise themselves. These men, who came to be known as the Nooksack Vigilance Committee, were armed with buffalo guns, pistols, and a length of hemp rope. Shortly after nightfall, they crossed into British Columbia at a place called Sumas Prairie, due south of Kilgard.

As the mass of men and horses moved north in the moonless dark, their masked features would have been further obscured by silver clouds of their own breath. Somewhere near the border, they met a man on the road heading south. This man was almost certainly Sheriff Leckie.

What is puzzling about these events is their apparent coordination at both ends. After arresting Louie Sam, Campbell, the JP, had put him in the hands of two hastily deputized constables: Thomas York, a well-established resident of

Sumas Prairie; and Joe Steele who, interestingly, made his home on the American side of the border. The two men were given instructions to escort the handcuffed Sam to the jail at New Westminster, more than fifty kilometres away. Because of the length of the journey, Campbell told them to hold Sam at York's house for the night and start for New Westminster in the morning. It was at this point that a routine prisoner transfer started looking like a barroom collaboration between Agatha Christie and Louis L'Amour.

THE YORK HOUSE was one of the few proper homes in the area. It lay less than a kilometre north of the border, and it was a popular place. Offering travellers a meal or several nights' lodging was common in those days—even the murder victim, James Bell, routinely fed passersby—and on the night of Louie Sam's visit, the Yorks had a houseful. In addition to Mr. and Mrs. York and their employees, Owen Hughes and Dick Williams, there was Special Constable Steele, Louie Sam, and two other unnamed men, one of whom was described in court records only as a "traveller" and the other simply as a "stranger." The Traveller was "a big man with black whiskers" who carried with him only a bedroll. The Stranger arrived with no blankets at all, just a gun.

Most of the household retired to their rooms at about 8 p.m., but Constable Steele stayed up to watch the prisoner, who was probably in the parlour. Before he turned in, Owen Hughes had made certain all the doors and windows were locked. Approximately one hour later, the entire house was roused by a banging at the front door, coupled with the sound of many horses. From upstairs, Thomas York and others heard a man yell, "Open the door, or I will break it in!" By the time he descended the stairs, trousers in hand, the door was already open and the room full of armed men with blackened faces. They greeted him with drawn weapons and an order to stay out of the way if he didn't want to get hurt. Hughes rushed downstairs as well, and had a pistol thrust in his face before being pushed behind a door and ordered to stay back.

Hughes later estimated that there were twenty men in the front room. Ann

Marie York believed there were another fifteen in the kitchen, and about seventy-five in all. For some reason, the intruders took the time to put on Louie Sam's shoes; they also demanded his gun. Steele, though armed, was sitting quietly in a corner; this may have been the wisest thing to do under the circumstances, or it may have been part of a plan. Hughes, the one who had locked the doors earlier, believed that the armed stranger had not gone to bed with everyone else, or at least had not undressed; he further claimed that someone, possibly this man, had descended the stairs about ten minutes before the mob showed up.

Special Constable York, who estimated that the men "did not stay over three minutes," made a strange request before they left. Although they had taken two rifles and his prisoner, it was the handcuffs he demanded they leave behind. The men refused, telling York he "could get them tomorrow."

Then the boy, already manacled, was bound with a rope, thrown onto a horse, and borne away into the darkness, surrounded by dozens of angry men in drag. The following morning, Louie Sam's body was found hanging from a cedar tree on the Whatcom Trail, not 200 paces from the US border.

THE YORK HOUSEHOLD seemed to have returned to bed after the traumatic events of the evening. What else could they have done? The idea of further endangering themselves on behalf of a boy who was not only an aboriginal but very possibly a thief and a murderer was likely beyond the pale of contemplation. The following morning, perhaps over breakfast, the Traveller told York he had known the mob was coming. It has never come clear who unlocked the door and let the men inside.

Most of the surviving witness accounts come from a coroner's inquest that took place across several days following the lynching. The coroner, Charles Todd, interviewed everyone in the house except for the Traveller and the Stranger, both of whom had disappeared, and Constable Steele, who had returned to his home south of the border. Steele had, however, stayed around long enough to notify Campbell, the justice of the peace. It was these two, along with two

Sto:lo men named Big Charley and Indian Jim, who went to cut Louie Sam's body down. "The boy was tied with his feet together. And handcuffs on his hands," recalled Big Charley. "Campbell came and said, 'I wonder what they took him away for?'"

In his testimony, Campbell noted "no signs of violence except the mark of the rope around the neck." After removing the noose, on which he detected a "strong smell of musk," he removed the handcuffs, which he kept for the rest of his life.

The bad news travelled fast, and that same afternoon the BC Attorney General sent a telegram to the governor of Washington Territory, requesting that his police be prepared to arrest members of the lynch party, "pending our application for extradition."

EIGHTEEN EIGHTY-FOUR was a bad year for lynching in America; in fact, it was the second-worst on record. Not including Louie Sam, 211 people were killed. More than three-quarters of the victims recorded that year were white.

In the hands of a lynch mob, the legal concept of *habeas corpus ad subjiciendum*—"You shall have the body for submitting"—takes on a sinister meaning. Outside the scope of a fair trial, it devolves into a feral mockery of the law. The body is certainly there, and so is the submission, in a manner of speaking, but the legal armature designed to offer protection has been cast aside. Victims of such rough justice were often described as having gone before Judge Lynch, or having been subject to Lynch's Law—an allusion to Captain William Lynch (1742–1820), who argued on behalf of a vigilance committee in an apparently lawless region of Virginia during the Revolutionary War. In Lynch's day, though, punishment wasn't always terminal; it tended to come in the form of flogging or tarring and feathering.

Although escaped and rebellious slaves were severely punished and even

burned alive as far north as New York, it wasn't until the 1830s and the rise of the abolition movement that summary, extralegal execution by a self-empowered group was regularly referred to as "lynching." In the South over the next century, these relatively rare events became steadily more frequent, until they metastasized into public spectacles where slow, agonizing death was commonplace. Between 1890 and 1952, seven presidents petitioned Congress to end the practice, and in the first half of the twentieth century alone nearly 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced. Three made it through the House of Representatives, only to be stopped in the Senate by filibusters driven by powerful southern senators who claimed such a law would infringe on states' rights.

Of course, this kind of self-serving protectionism didn't (and doesn't) restrict itself to individual states. It occurred at the city and village levels, too. Like many nineteenth-century frontier communities, Nooksack was largely on its own; if there was a fire, it was up to the community to put it out. This feeling of vulnerability, combined with entrenched racism and a mistrust of legal procedures (not to mention residual trauma from the Civil War), created a fertile environment for local and spontaneous action in the face of threats. One could call this impulse the shadow side of community spirit.

Even though Louie Sam was hanged in the name of justice, his guilt was presumed because of deeply ingrained racism and resentment, not just toward aboriginals in general, but toward "northern" aboriginals in particular. American settlers in the northwest believed these "British" First Nations to be dangerous and were afraid of them, in part because many tribes on the north coast had justifiably notorious reputations as raiders and slavers. The name of one tribe from Vancouver Island, Lekwiltok, translates literally as "unkillable things." For them and others, taking heads as trophies was common practice into the 1870s. Canada's reputation as a haven for "bad Indians" wasn't helped by the fact that veterans of Little Big Horn and the Nez Perce uprising took refuge here. These two events, perceived by many as direct attacks on what would now be called "American values" or "our way of life," were as vivid in the minds of homesteaders then as 9/11 is for Americans today. As a result, the

Canadian border was seen by many westerners in the same way that Pakistan's northern frontier is perceived now: a porous place managed by a suspect government that tolerates and maybe even nurtures America's enemies.

So while Canada's *Victoria Colonist* clucked at the news of Louie Sam, the American *Whatcom Reveille* crowed: "The speedy and righteous justice meted out for Jack [Louie] Sam last week by Judge Lynch and his determined followers may have a salutary effect... Sam should have been hung long ago on general principles... It is worse than folly for the *Victoria Colonist* and other British snobs to endeavor to raise any trouble, simply because Jack Sam was hanged on their soil."

But Sam's death had some unanticipated results. Had he been an American aboriginal, his lynching would have merited only a passing mention in the news. Instead, it received steady coverage for a month. Though the press on both sides of the border took pains to depict Sam as isolated and friendless, the impassioned response of the Sto:lo around Sumas suggested otherwise.

IN THE EARLY 1880s, there were approximately 2,000 Sto:lo, or "river people," living in some two dozen communities along the Fraser River between present-day Vancouver and Yale, BC, a distance of well over 100 kilometres. Their lives and economies revolved around the salmon fishery, and while they were not as famously aggressive as some of their northern neighbours, the Sto:lo nonetheless took a keen interest in the concept of "blood balance," which translates roughly as "an eye for an eye." In this respect, they had much in common with the white residents of Nooksack. But over the years, the Fraser River peoples had suffered greatly from canoe attacks by northern coastal raiders, and their communities were the ones most severely impacted by the relentless influx of American gold miners and settlers.

Word of the Sumas lynching spread up and down the river, and within ten days a major council consisting of more than 200 representatives from twenty-one villages was convened at a Sto:lo hub community about thirty kilometres

upriver. This was cause for concern for the settlers, but more disturbing still were rumours that the Sto:lo were buying all the powder and ball they could lay their hands on. Their activities provoked this volley from the *Reveille*: “The 200 vengeful Indians at Sumas had better retire and let well enough alone. Should they attempt an outbreak to avenge the death of their Siwash [Indian] friend, several more ‘good Indians’ will be found dangling in the woods before the trouble ends.”

To anyone paying attention, the danger of an international race war was clear and present. It was so clear, in fact, that a Canadian Indian Agent named Patrick McTiernan had already boarded a steamboat to take the people’s pulse along the river. On March 9, eleven days after the lynching, McTiernan was summoned to the Sto:lo council, and he was alarmed by what he heard there. Retribution was at the top of the agenda; the options being discussed ranged from travelling south and killing the first American they saw, to travelling south and killing one for each member of the lynch party.

McTiernan persuaded tribal leaders to give the police a chance to investigate the case before taking matters into their own hands. He was able to do this in part because the Sto:lo leaders were pragmatic and didn’t want to subject themselves to undue risk, and in part because they had some faith in the British judicial process. They had co-operated with the authorities in the past and had apparently found them to be logical, disciplined, and relatively consistent.

Once McTiernan had secured the forbearance of the Sto:lo, he notified the head of the provincial police, who did something no American police chief would have done. Over the next two months, Inspector H. B. Roycroft sent three undercover detectives across the border to investigate the vigilantes and the murder of James Bell. Posing as itinerant labourers, the detectives followed leads from Sumas to Seattle. One was exposed and forced to turn back immediately, but the other two, Detectives Russell and Clark, returned home with loaded notebooks, threats against their lives, and a conspiracy theory.

In a letter to Inspector Roycroft, Detective Russell wrote that “the settlers at Nooksack Crossing were talking about the Indian trouble and they had said that if there was any more trouble about them or with them the People would come clear from Seattle and kill every Indian they got their hands on.” Russell noted, too, that the settlers had become suspicious of Detective Clark: “Strong hints were thrown out that people who came to spy out the land were sometimes troubled with a throat disorder from which they never recovered.”

But Clark made some headway: a settler named Tallhammer told him, “We gathered a crowd and went over and took the Indian from the officers.” David Harkness, also part of the lynch mob, claimed that despite the threat of imminent death, Louie Sam would not confess but would “only curse and swear.”

“I did not hinder my boys from going to hang the Indian,” said Harkness’s father, an elderly homesteader, “because I knew it was right enough.”

This last comment illuminates the American lyncher’s logic most succinctly: when one is dealing with enemies or otherwise expendable people, “right enough” is good enough. Why follow the letter of the law when shorthand will do? After giving Russell an account of the lynching, Robert Breckenridge, the man who had first laid charges against Louie Sam, added that “I would kill an Indian as quick as I would kill a Chinaman, and I would kill a Chinaman as quick as I would a dog.”

According to the detectives’ findings, it was clear that Louie Sam and his brother were known thieves, much disliked by American whites and, it seems, by their Canadian neighbours as well. Furthermore, Sam had indeed been seen near Bell’s home with a Hudson’s Bay trade musket, and the coast-to-coast wound through Bell’s head was consistent with that weapon. There was also the matter of footprints tracked from Bell’s house into the swamp by the discoverers of the murder, said to be made by Sam’s shoes, the same shoes in which his abductors had taken such interest at the York house. Finally, a knife

and other articles were found on Louie Sam's person at the time of his arrest, and these were said to match similar items seen in Bell's store. The evidence was there, but it was circumstantial—circumstantial enough that the Sto:lo soon floated an elaborate but not implausible theory that Sam had been framed.

The Sto:lo were the ones who first proposed the entrapment scenario, but the local papers soon took it up, and Detectives Russell and Clark later lent it real credibility. The Sto:lo version put both James Bell and Louie Sam in the crossfire of economic and romantic rivalries centring on the village telegraph operator, William Osterman, the last known person to see Bell alive. According to the Sto:lo, Osterman had lured Louie Sam to Nooksack with the promise of work, murdering Bell and fleeing just as Sam was passing by.

The plot, if there was one, was devious in the extreme but plausible. The region's white and native populations were well aware of each other and would have overlapped often. Furthermore, two local women intimated to Detective Russell that Osterman had had the opportunity and a motive to commit the murder. The story told by the Sto:lo supports this: they claimed that once Louie Sam had travelled as far as Bell's, Osterman had told him he wouldn't be needed after all and sent him back.

If Sam had had the reputation people claimed he did, he would have made an ideal fall guy. Osterman may well have assumed that Sam would be apprehended immediately—on the American side, thus obviating the need for extradition and/or a Canadian trial. But with Sam in Canadian custody, Osterman would have had to go to plan B: the lynching. Because of the culture, the crime, and Sam's race and reputation, this was amazingly easy to engineer.

Nobody knows for sure. While the existing records are filled with tantalizing detail, they are short on concrete evidence. Washington's territorial governor, William Newell, threw up his hands at the Canadian Attorney General's request that the mob members be arrested, arguing that it was “well nigh impossible to

make discoveries of a band of disguised people who, with the entire community, are interested in the secrecy which pertains to such illegal and violent transactions.”

Meanwhile, Indian Agent McTiernan and the Canadian authorities managed to placate the Sto:lo leadership with sincere but vague promises that they would pursue the case. Ultimately, their hands were tied; the American authorities only paid lip service, and nobody really wanted a war, except perhaps for some readers and editors of the *Whatcom Reveille*. When the paper learned that McTiernan had forestalled Sto:lo plans for a revenge mission, it claimed this was “much to the disappointment of the whites on the Nootsack [sic] who were itching for a chance to clean out the entire band of murdering, thieving redskins.”

Not surprisingly, this attitude had a chilling effect on cross-border race relations in the Sumas area. Though the Sto:lo eventually moved on to other, more pressing issues than the matter of Louie Sam, they also moved away. Among them was a high-ranking member of the tribe, about whom the late Sto:lo historian Albert Louie said, “When they go to hung [Louie Sam] by the Line... he got scared because they were after all them Indians there, so he beat it away.”

FOR DECADES, the story of Louie Sam drifted in a painful limbo alongside the stories of so many American lynching victims. Why their collective resurrection would begin simultaneously, yet independently, is hard to explain.

In 1992, the same year a Santa Fe–based publisher named Jack Woody was conceptualizing a photographic history of lynching in America, the fourth suicide in five years shook the Sto:lo reserve in Kilgard. The victims were all teenagers, and their deaths cast a pall over the small community.

Hazel Silver, an elder on the reserve, began searching for reasons her small

community would be suffering such a disproportionate number of suicides, and Louie Sam's hanging came to mind. "It was as if there was a dark cloud hanging over Kilgard," she said, "and I wondered if there might be a connection." Could these recent deaths be an expression of an old injustice?

At Kilgard's next burning ceremony—a twice-yearly feast at which the spirits of ancestors, and of the "forgotten ones," are remembered and ritually fed—Silver set places for Louie Sam and the four suicide victims. In addition to a big, beautiful trout, Silver's offering to Sam included a warm blanket, a set of nice clothes, and a hand-woven shoulder bag filled with smaller pouches of medicine and tobacco. After all of this had gone into the fire, something unusual happened. "It's normal for eagles to show up at these ceremonies," Silver explained, "but usually they circle overhead. This time, an eagle came down and sat in a tree right near us. It was screeching and flapping its wings. None of us had ever seen an eagle come down and do that before. It was like Louie Sam had come back."

The Sto:lo have a sign for gratitude that involves raising one's arms in the air. This is what Silver's sister, Marlene, saw in the young eagle's flapping gesture. "It was like he was thanking us," she said. "It was a real tear-jerker."

Meanwhile, at the same time as Jack Woody—soon to be teamed with a collector of lynching photographs named James Allen—was assembling the images that would ultimately become *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, an archaeologist and friend of Hazel Silver's named Gordon Mohs began sifting through the Sto:lo tribal archives in search of information about Louie Sam. Shortly after Mohs delivered a paper on the topic to the Society for American Archaeology, a historian named Keith Carlson picked up the story, and in 1996 Carlson published an article in the academic journal *B.C. Studies*.

In 2000, Woody published *Without Sanctuary*, in conjunction with a touring exhibition of its horrific lynching photographs. As the exhibition travelled through the US, Carlson's article on Louie Sam circulated in Canada, inspiring a documentary film that went into production in 2003. *Without Sanctuary* caught

the attention of Mary Landrieu, a white Democratic senator from Louisiana whose great-uncle had been lynched. Landrieu was deeply moved, and realized that a collective recognition of these crimes was long overdue.

Much like Stephen Harper's formal apology to former students of Canadian residential schools in June of this year, US Senate Resolution 39 was conceived as a mass national apology to victims and their families. It passed in June 2005. That same year, *The Lynching of Louie Sam* went on the documentary film circuit, and Sam's story came to the attention of British Columbia's then Lieutenant-Governor, Iona Campagnolo, who in turn raised it with her counterpart in Washington State, Lieutenant-Governor Brad Owen.

In March 2006, nine months after US Senate Resolution 39 was approved, a delegation of Sto:lo travelled to the state capitol in Olympia, Washington. For a number of reasons, Owen had favoured a "healing" as opposed to a formal apology, and so, at a drum ceremony in the capitol's rotunda, he expressed his deepest sympathies to Louie Sam's family moments after reading the following resolution on the Senate floor: "Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the House of Representatives and the State of Washington recognize that the territorial government of Washington and the Government of British Columbia both failed to take adequate action to identify the true culprit of the murder and bring the organizers and members of the lynch mob to justice."

The 450-word resolution did not assign any responsibility for the lynching, ensuring that the state could not be held financially responsible. Still, it was a potent recognition for the Sto:lo, who are currently in the process of rediscovering their long-suppressed culture and reasserting their political might. If one uses Hazel Silver's measure, the results of these efforts have been mixed: in the sixteen years since she initiated the first of several burnings for Louie Sam, there have been more suicides and drug overdoses in Kilgard. If the goal—the true healing—sought in a burning ceremony or a formal resolution is unity through recognition and atonement, then that is much harder to quantify.

But Steven Nolte took a shot at it. Nolte is the great grandson of William Pritts, one of the Nooksack vigilantes. Behind Nolte's house squats a massive stump that served as the home of another homesteader while he was building his first cabin. "They supported each other," said Nolte. "If one of the neighbours came by saying that they had to take care of this guy [Louie Sam], everyone would have gone."

Nolte owns an 1869 Sharps buffalo rifle, which he recounts was used by his great-grandfather in Sam's abduction. "He wouldn't hang," said Nolte, recalling the family story. "He just sat there taunting them until they knocked him out. This was the gun they did it with. There's a ding in the barrel, and the legend is that's the mark left by Sam's head." Nolte laughed as he said this, a way of grounding the charge still generated by the story after all these years.

"I'm sure my grandpa would have been heartbroken if he would've known [that Sam might have been innocent]," he said. "For my part, I'm sorry if there was anything unjustly done. I don't think they should have taken him [out of custody], but I don't think my relatives did anything wrong—from their point of view—because they were trying to collect someone who they thought was a murderer. I don't think there should be restitution, but there should be some acknowledgement."

Nolte's older brother, John, had a different take: "I feel really bad for [Louie Sam]," he said, "but I don't feel I have anything to apologize for. No offence—my heart goes out to anyone who was taken away by some kind of crime—but really, in my gut, I don't think they would have gone off and hung a guy just on the say-so of someone else."

IN THE SUMMER of 1945, Charles Bell, a childhood friend of William Campbell's son, showed up at the Vancouver Archives with a pair of antique handcuffs. For as long as Bell could remember, they had hung on the wall in the Campbells' farmhouse near the Kilgard Reserve. When old Mrs. Campbell finally left the

farm, Bell annexed the handcuffs. He held on to them for more than a decade before he was ready to let them go.

Earlier that year, a flintlock rifle with the stock missing had turned up at the Vancouver Archives as well. It was delivered by the innkeeper Thomas York's daughter-in-law, and she claimed it had belonged to Louie Sam. When her husband, a customs officer at Sumas, was clearing off a spot to build the customs house, he had turned it up. The York family was, of course, intimate with the details of Sam's story, and what makes this part of it convincing is the fact that the gun appears to have been swung repeatedly against a hard object. Someone had seen to it that nothing would ever come out of that barrel again.

This appeared in the December 2008 issue.

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