

Genoa's hanging tree a reminder of the past



The hanging tree in Genoa is a relic from one of the town's less savory moments. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

GENOA – In the Old West justice was often swift and outside the legal system – especially in the more unruly mining towns. Places like Bodie were accustomed to recording a killing a day.

But Genoa was different. It was a civilized trading post in the late 1800s. So when a mob took the law into its own hands to hang a man it rattled the 1,000 or so residents. Newspapers, though, called it “Nevada justice.”

Today, that “hanging tree” still exists on Genoa Lane in a cluster of cottonwoods. A plaque is posted on the tree. It reads:

“On this tree, early morning Nov. 25, 1897 occurred the blackest episode in the history of Nevada. Adam Uber of Calaveras Co. Cal. was forcefully taken from jail abused and hanged by an angry mob, for the pistol killing of Hans Anderson a local teamster in a Millersville bar room brawl.”

One hundred and twenty-eight years later people are still talking about it. Daniel Wassmund with Nevada State Parks last month led a group to the tree and spilled forth the details about one of the area's darker moments.

The two men knew each other. Some would say Anderson was Uber's only friend even though Anderson didn't really claim Uber as a friend. Uber had made his way out west from Pennsylvania at age 15. Before arriving in Genoa he had been living in Calaveras County.

The two ended up at the same bar in Millersville, which was between Minden and Gardnerville. Red Eye was Uber's drink of choice that night. “A strong, homemade libation,” is how Wassmund described it. An argument ensued and Uber ended up shooting Anderson.

Uber was taken to the jail inside the courthouse in Genoa. His rich uncle paid for his attorney, who had his client plead not guilty on the grounds of mental deficiency. Reports are that Uber was so drunk he didn't remember the shooting. He had woken up in jail not knowing why he was there.

The locals were not satisfied with how the court proceedings were going.

At 2am the sheriff heard banging and opened the door to find 15 angry men with guns. The constable was greeted in much the same manner. The mob got the keys to the jail and dragged Uber into the dark night. Via a wagon they took him to what is now known as the hanging tree.

As Wassmund tells the story, the horses got spooked and Uber was left dangling.

“His last words are a curse on everyone,” Wassmund said. “No one knew if the curses had spiritual value. They were scared of what they didn’t know.”

To make sure Uber was really dead they fired nine shots into his body.

Some of the men believed to be part of the vigilante act died in peculiar ways; like the constable who had a horrible plowing accident. All were blamed on the curse of Uber.

To this day some say they see Uber’s silhouette in the mist on a full moon, others hear his footsteps at the museum at Mormon Station State Historic Park in Genoa.