

GENERAL TELEGRAPH NEWS

FIFTY YEARS A HORSE THIEF.

THE STRANGE CAREER OF ELIHU GREGG

BROUGHT TO A CLOSE.

RED STONE JUNCTION, Penn., Dec. 20.—A local paper of one of the border counties of West Virginia announces briefly the finding of the dead body of Elihu Gregg on the mountain in the northwestern part of Preston County. Gregg was over 80 years old, and had for more than 50 years been a successful horse and cattle thief, operating in the border counties of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. He had but recently been released from the Fayette County Jail, where he had served a term for horse stealing. Gregg had been three times sentenced to death, and once to imprisonment for life. He escaped hanging each time by a singular train of circumstances. He had, in 1869, committed an unusually bold theft of stock in Ohio, and, being closely pressed by officers, fled to the mountains of West Virginia. He subsequently took up his residence in Preston County, where he was prosecuted on a charge of slander made by one of his neighbors. A judgment was obtained against him, and a decree granted for the sale of his property. Before the writ could be issued from the records in the case the Court House of Preston County was burned to the ground, together with all the county records. This prevented the judgment sale of Gregg's property. The fire had been unmistakably an incendiary one, and from the action of the old horse thief he was suspected of having fired the building. Sufficient evidence was found to warrant his arrest, and when his trial came on the crime was clearly proved against him. Incendiarism was then a capital crime in West Virginia, and Judge Dille sentenced Gregg to be hanged on the 2d of September, 1869. The case was carried to the Supreme Court, and a new trial was ordered. Gregg was convicted the second time, and was resentenced to be hanged, this time on the 28th of January, 1870. He had his choice between hanging or imprisonment for life, and he chose hanging. Two weeks after his second sentence he dug his way out of the Preston County Jail. No trace of him could be found, but on the 28th of January, the day he was to have been hanged, the Sheriff of Preston County received a letter from Gregg, in which he conveyed his regrets that he was unable to be present at the ceremony the Governor had arranged for him on that day.

The exact whereabouts of Gregg were not known till 1877, although many bold horse and cattle thefts, planned and executed as only the veteran robber could plan and execute them, assured the people on the border that he was still lurking in their vicinity. He had a daughter living at Rice's Landing, Greene County, this State, and one night in December, 1877, he surprised her by walking into her house. She gave him shelter, but he had been there but a few days when he quarreled with her husband because the latter refused to join him in a raid on the stables of certain farmers, living in the neighborhood. He remained at the Landing, however, and a week after his quarrel with his son-in-law officers of Preston County, West Va., appeared in the place and captured the old criminal. Gregg charged his son-in-law with having betrayed him to the authorities, and made an almost successful attempt to kill both him and his wife, shooting his son-in-law three times and his daughter twice. He refused to go with the officers, and they were forced to carry him to the cars. They got him safely to the Preston County Jail, and as they were placing the old man in a cell he swallowed the contents of a vial of laudanum, which he had in the lining of his coat. The poison soon made him unconscious, in which condition he remained for 12 hours, but the physician succeeded in saving his life. The day fixed for his hanging having passed, his counsel held that the sentence could not be legally executed. The case passed through all the courts of this State, and in 1879 Judge Brandon of the court of last resort decided that the lapse of the sentence was no bar to the pronouncing of another, and Gregg was sentenced to death for the third time, the date being fixed for Feb. 6, 1880. Gov. Matthews commuted the sentence to imprisonment for life, against Gregg's wishes, and in 1881 he was pardoned.

After leaving the penitentiary Gregg disappeared, and nothing was heard of him for five years. One night in November, 1886, a valuable blooded horse was stolen from Louis Knight, of Luzerne, this county. Officers got on track of the thief, and as they followed the trail they found that he had taken three other horses as he passed along. For six weeks the officers followed the thief, and finally the trail led up into the wildest parts of the West Virginia mountain. Following it into almost inaccessible depths they at last came to a hut among the rocks, and in this hut they found Knight's missing horse and two others. A pistol shot from a corner of the hut whistled past the ear of one of the officers, and the next instant a man sprang out, pistol in hand, and grappled with the officer. The man was the long-missing Elihu Gregg. He was overpowered, and the officers started with him for Pennsylvania. Before reaching the State line he escaped from the officers and got safely back to the woods. He eluded pursuit until May last, when he for some reason came to Redstone Junction, where he was recognized. There was a reward on his head, and he was captured and held until officers could arrive from the county seat. He was lodged in jail and escaped with six months' imprisonment. On being released he started at once for the mountains of West Virginia, swearing vengeance on different persons, whom he charged with treachery to him.

No details of the cause of Gregg's death have been received, but it is reported from Preston County that there was a bullet hole in his breast, and the opinion was that he had been killed by some one of the parties he had sworn to kill.

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