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Benedict Family Closely Related
To Early Idaho County History
By J. Loyal Adkison

The passing of Grant Benedict at Seattle a few weeks ago has caused me to look back on his life and his association with the first 80 years of Idaho county history. The two are very closely interwoven. To the writer's Personal knowledge, the life of no other individual has so closely paced the pioneer history of Idaho than that of Grant Benedict, Idaho county's first son.

A casual survey of his family background, reveals the character and stamina necessary to overcome the hardships and tragedies of pioneer life. In 1849, his mother was a babe in arms when her parents brought her around the Horn to California. Successful in life at pioneer merchandizing, we find the mother's family in the Willamette valley when gold was discovered in the Salmon River area of Washington territory. Disposing of their business in '62, they joined the rush up the Columbia to the new El Dorado. They found Lewiston mostly a tent town of squatters on land claimed by the Indians. Transportation to Brown's station at Mt. Idaho was by horseback or on foot. Way stations were being established at the Board House and at Cottonwood they passed a "Shebang" (a robber's roost or hangout) conveniently located to intercept gold carriers coming either by way of Mt. Idaho or White Bird. The stream on which this hideout was located soon took, and still carries the name, Shebang. Fresh horses were available for the women at Mt. Idaho. From there they took the new Milner trail, then Brown's Toll road, to Florence.

The merchant Kelley soon had a stock of goods and Isabella, now 14, was giving her father a helping hand in the new store. Here she worked, contented and happy with life as a merchants daughter, 'til she met the handsome young Hollander, Samuel Benedict, the village blacksmith. The childhood dreams of romance soon budded into reality. They wanted to be married. When the parents objected, they decided to elope. Perhaps we should first have a look at Florence as it was in January, 1863.

Underneath a blanket of snow, ten feet deep, fifteen hundred people were wintering. Some miners lived in tents. Others in pole frame shacks lined on the inside with muslin. All of the stores and saloons were of the latter construction. Alonzo Brown said, when he closed out his Florence store in the fall of '63, he sold his muslin for \$50.00, the rest of the building for \$25.00. Most of the families lived in log cabins. Many of the miners were eking out an existence by digging down through the snow, then sometimes tunneling to pay dirt which they thawed out, shovelfull at a time, with a kettle of hot water. Many died from want and exposure. Others died more quickly on an average of one a day, by the knife and the bullet.

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The breaking up of the Missouri "border raiders" by the Union army had caused many outlaw leaders and their followers to head for the newly discovered gold fields. These outlaws were often protected, and their depredations "winked at" by a large percentage of the citizenry who were themselves Confederate sympathizers. Already the vanguard of thousands of paroled prisoners of war were beginning to arrive in the mining camps of the west. These ex-soldiers of the Confederacy soon took over and dominated Idaho's Territorial government for the next twenty years. Robbing a Union miner of his gold in the early sixties, in many camps of the west, became a highly commendable and patriotic duty.

Protected as they were, the criminal element dictated the rules of social behavior in Florence 'til the winter of '62-63. However, contrary to popular belief, Florence did have a "better element" strata in its social makeup. At this time there were approximately twenty stores of merchandise in Florence. Many of the merchants had, perhaps by now to their regret, brought their families with them. Also, many of the miners were family men from Oregon. Most of them were Union sympathizers from good old New England stock who believed in law and order. By January 1 among this "better element" leadership had developed. (I fancy we could name a few of them.) They were ready for a showdown, and they didn't have long to wait. On January 2nd, Cherokee Bob, a renegade outlaw, who had killed two Union soldiers at Walla Walla, and his partner Willowby went gunning for the committee who had ejected the former's kept female from the public dance two nights before. When the smoke of battle, by Idaho's first vigilantes, had cleared away there were two more graves on "boot hill", and the living riffraff began drifting to other camps. This was Florence when Samuel Benedict and Isabella Kelley were planning to elope. Where could they go?

There was a Union settlement at the mouth of Slate Creek. They had appropriately named their town Freedom, but they had no preacher or magistrate. Neither did Mt. Idaho. The Warren district had two sets of officials. One at Richmond, the Confederate camp, and other at Washington, the Union camp. As Samuel and Isabella were both Union, they must have been headed for Washington when they were overtaken by Papa Kelley. However, with the parents blessing, the couple was married at Florence on February 7, 1863. Early the next year they moved to Freedom where several pack trains had been wintering and needed to be shod for the spring work. In late February these trains were moving out along the trail to Lewiston and Walla Walla, to bring in a badly needed cargo of supplies. After a few days of warm sunshine, these trains were coming in at night over the crusted snow. Flour, beans, bacon and sugar were all retailing at \$1.25 per lb.

Here at Freedom, in a log cabin, the Benedicts lived, and on October 9, 1864, Idaho county's first son was born. Indicative of the time and place, the new baby was named Ulysses Grant. A few years later we find the family at the mouth of White Bird creek. Here Benedict was doing well as merchant, blacksmith and stockman. Grant remembered his father as an intensively patriotic citizen, and on the 4th of July he never missed an opportunity to shoot the evils. After

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When Grant and his older sister, Caddie, were ready for school his father built a school house across the creek from their home. Their first school teacher was Frankie Aram. She later became Mrs Henry Johnson. During the summer of 1877 Grant and Caddie were in school at Mt. Idaho, staying with the Rudolph family. The two younger children were at home on White Bird creek. These sisters, Mrs. Frankie Shissler and Mrs. Addie Brown are still living and reside at Marysville, Wash. A half sister, Mrs. Alice Robie Russell, is still living and resides on the old Robie place on Salmon river where she was born.

Much has been said about events at White Bird on June 14th. The writer will only touch on the details enough to clear up a few controversial points. Those still living who knew Samuel Benedict say: "He was a fine man, and everybody liked him." They also say that the Indians liked him and liked to trade with him. He didn't cheat them and never sold them liquor. The latter might well have been the reason some of the younger braves were sore at him. He never killed an Indian as has been elsewhere recorded by a deaf man who was unable to get details of the story he had heard. In spite of all this, Benedict was one of the first men killed. Why?

Early in the spring of '77, a petition had been sent to the Indian agency urging that the Indians be moved to the reservation immediately. This bore the signature of many settlers on the Camas prairie as well as Salmon river. Somehow, the Indians learned whose names were on the petition. Samuel Benedict denied that he ever signed the petition, and so do other members of his family to this day. Still his name was there. (Philosophizing, one might say "greed and jealousy breedeth many a storm.")

Previous to this Larry Ott has moved across the river and settled on land claimed by an Indian. In an argument over timber, he had killed the Indian. According to custom among all Indians, as well as the common law laid down to them by the whites: "A man who kills another, except in self-defense, shall be punished." Ott went back across the river and sought shelter among the whites. The Indians demanded that he be punished. This happened when the county seat of Idaho county was still at Washington, in the Warren district. Camas Prairie, at the time, was still a part of Nez Perce county. The citizens of both areas were wrought up over the annexation of Camas prairie to Idaho county, as well as moving the county seat from Washington to Mt. Idaho. In the midst of this confusion, the killing of an Indian somewhere on Salmon River was given very little consideration. However the Indians were insistent and the white settlers on the river appointed a committee to determine what should be done. Elfers and Benedict were on that committee. Like most committees without legal authority, they avoided a showdown by doing nothing.

The appointment of a local committee to decide what was to be done when a murder had been committed is only one of many incidents that might be enumerated to illustrate what a farce Idaho Territorial government had become after it was taken over by Southern sympathizers. This condition prevailed for nearly twenty years following the Civil war.

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During the most of this time the northern counties were trying to withdraw and join up with Washington Territory. Throughout this political turmoil, outlaw renegades continued to spread rebel sentiment among all the tribes of the northwest. Thus, when Howard issued the hasty order for the Indians to be on the reservation within thirty days, he was only adding fuel to the fire already burning. Yet in spite of all this, as well as the seasonal difficulties, we find Joseph with all his people and ten thousand head of stock camped out in the open, just one days drive from the reservation. The Indians resented the order to move. Still the great majority respected the government and were willing to comply, though reluctantly. Renegades from other tribes of the northwest were in the camp at Tolo lake. These would be weeded out on the reservation. The unscrupulous white and breeds who had for years been furnishing liquor to the young bucke, these also would be put out of business. At best a drunk Indian is no saint, but when being taunted with being a coward for not avenging the wrongs which he has suffered, then indeed, he could become a mean varmint.

Now back to Grant Benedict at Mr. Idaho

Early in the afternoon of the 14th, school was dismissed to make extra room to house the crowd of settlers who were beginning to fill up the town. These brought word of the killings already committed on the Salmon river. When Grant heard that his father had been killed he wanted to go home. He thought he could be of some help to his mother and the younger girls. Those in charge soon dissuaded him of such a venture. The next morning, after a sleepless night, Grant saw the Norton wagon come in. Norton was already dead, and his wife shot through the calves of both legs. Joe Moore and Lew Day were both fatally wounded. Later in the day the Chamberlin family was brought in. The husband and small son were dead. The wife showing the effects of brutal treatment, and like her little girl, suffering from knife wounds. (The Chamberlins were the only family who tried to leave the prairie after trouble started. They got as far as Cottonwood when Lew Day came in wounded.)

Later, on the morning of the 15th, Grant heard Brown's message to the commanding officer at Lapwai. Part of this he would never forget. It read: "The Indians have possession of the prairie, and threaten Mt. Idaho. All the people are here. Give us relief, arms and ammunition. I fear all the people on Salmon river are killed. Hurry up; hurry! Rely on this Indian. I have known him for a long time." The Indian bearing this message was a brother to LLooking-Glass, who later joined up with Joseph.

In spite of anguish and worry, young Benedict worked feverishly all day with the men at building the fort. With the rest he carried sacks of flour up the hill from Brown's mill. When night came he saw extra guards placed on the hill to the west.

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Later he heard the rifle fire when they clashed with a raiding party of Indians at the Fairfield place a half mile away. He joined the frenzied rush that followed, in getting the women and children to the unfinished fort on the hill to the north. He remembered the confusion and panic there until the wee hours of the morning. To quiet the taunt nerves, Josh Rowton and Lew Swartz led in the singing of old time songs. One sone, very appropriate to the occation, went something like this:

"When angels are guarding the good at night,
As God has ordered them to do,
I know there is one guarding you.
Go where you will on land or on sea,
I'll share all your sorrows and cares,
And at night when I kneel by my bedside and pray,
I'll remember you, love, in my prayers."

June 16th was another anxious day with no word of his mother and sisters at White Bird. However the fort was finished, but still only a few rifles to defend it. Many of the 30 or 40 men who had gone out the day before to meet rescuers of the Norton party were armed with pick handles and pitch forks.

Fancy the relief to strain and pent up emotions when on the evening of the 16th, the sound of a bugle was heard coming over the ridge to the west. Capt. Perry was coming. Grant overheard part of the conversation in the conference that followed at the hotel. The most pressing problem seemed to be: Should Perry start "killing Indians" or should he attempt to hold a parley. It seemed that a great many were opposed to a parley. For days he had heard the same issue discussed, among the settlers. He had heard harsh words, ugly names called. On this subject he saw ill feeling develop in a few days, which never died down during the entire life of many of the more heated participants.

Perry's position was: A parley might save the lives of some of the whites still behind the Indian lines. He contended that by now, the Indians might be soberly aware of the serious situation confronting them and would perhaps be glad to parley. He explained that the policy of the department was to avoid another Indian war. The Nez Perce Indians were a proud race of people and had always been friends of the whites, even giving them protection in times of danger. He thought that by a parley he might persuade the Indians to turn over the killers as well as the other trouble makers and get the others on the reservation where they had started. To arrange and interpret at such a parley Perry arranged for several friendly Indians to accompany him.

With these interpreters and eleven volunteers who were all the available men with arms, outside of those on guard duty, Perry and his 90 cavalry men set out for the Indian camp at White Bird.. As evidence of good faith of his willingness to parley, when he was in the vicinity of the Indian camp, he ordered his men to dismount, even loosen their saddles. As the friendly Indians were moving forward to arrange a conference and a messenger was coming out from the Indian stronghold, a shot was fired. Some historians say an Indian fired the shot, others are not so sure. Anyway, war with the Nez Perce tribe, the thing Perry had tried to avoid, was on.

Perry's decision to parley disappointed many of the settlers who later became the Idaho Volunteers. Among this group may be found the most voluble critics of the army throughout the subsequent campaign. Because of this, we later find the volunteers acting on their own, entirely independent of the army.

Grant Benedict was at the hotel the morning of the 17th, when some of the volunteers who had gone out with Perry the night before, brought in the news of Perry's defeat. Again he saw every available man with a mount go forth to join the fray. A few carried "cap and ball" pistols, but most were armed as they were two days before--with pick handles and pitch forks. Later in the morning soldiers brought in Grant's two little sisters. Frankie told him she had seen her mother get on a horse. The day dragged on. The rescue party and the soldiers were all in. Along toward evening, Edward Robie, who had gone out to see why Charlie Horton hadn't come in, brought Mrs. Benedict in. He had found her at the Hughes place. (This place is now owned by Ralph Long.) Horton was running a dairy on Johns Creek. (This is the place where Mrs. Henry Telcher was raised.) Horton's body was found a few days later by Jim Adkison and Ab Smith out near the old Adkison place. (Going out along the highway today, looking a little north of east, just before you come to Johns Creek, you can see the patch of scab land where Horton's body was found. (The writer has seen it many times.) As Mrs. Frankie Shissler has already written a very illuminating article on the death of her father and her mother's experiences, we will leave out those details.

Grant Benedict, like Hill Norton, who was now one of his daily playmates, had reason to hate the Indians, yet they both sickened at the sight of an Indian scalp brought in by some whites and exhibited as proof that they had killed an Indian. (This was the only scalp taken, by either side, during the entire conflict.)

Such were the hazards of pioneer life. Meeting them as they came, Grant Benedict did his part--played his hand. The shift of fortune in a few days had made the schoolboy an orphan and a breadwinner. That fall he went to work with Robie, the miller, at the Grange mill on Three Mile. By his presence of mind in turning off the water he probably saved the millers life when he was caught in the machinery. The next summer he worked for Crooks in the harvest. Out where the hospital now stands he set up and ran the first mowing machine that came to Idaho County.

By this time Crooks and Shumway had brought in a thousand head of cattle and Grant soon became a real cow hand. In the fall of 1880, Grant's mother, now Mrs. Robie, persuaded him to go back to school. Thus we find him attending the old Columbia River Conference Academy when the Rev. W. A. Hall was in charge. Later he worked as an apprentice and soon became a full fledged carpenter at which trade he worked for many years. Because he was adept as a mechanic and willing to work he was always busy. During slack periods he found work. For a time he worked with Parker at the Free Press. Also in Vollmer and Scott's store and later at the depot as freight handler and switch engine man. In 1894 he was married to Miss Carrie Perkins. From this marriage there is one surviving son, Lyle.

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When his brother-in-law, "Billy" Brown, became sheriff, Grant became the jailer at the court house. He kept at this, off and on, for the next 30 years. In the capacity as jailer, when nearing 80 years of age, he put up a fight to prevent the escape of a brutal prisoner and was terribly beaten in the face with a hammer. From these wounds he never recovered and the last eight years of his life were spent with his son in Seattle. Here he passed to his reward on December 9, 1951, and was laid to rest among the evergreens of beautiful Calvary cemetery.

In spite of suffering, Grant Benedict spent the twilight of life as he had lived the best, always optimistic and cheerful. but few of his pioneer friends will ever read the marker at his grave. As one of those old friends, I am honored to voice the sentiment engraved in the hearts of all who knew him.

Asking no favors and expecting no reward, he faced the front with his life.

Idaho county's first son, we salute you.

J. Loyal Adkison.