

Henry Edmundson

Wyoming State Penitentiary Inmate #377

On April 15th, 1898 Henry Edmundson was sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime of murder. He apparently did not approve of his daughter's relationship with one of his ranch hands, so he solved the problem by shooting the ranch hand. He was 40 years old when entered into his life sentenced and was listed as a heavy drinker and a morphine fiend.

Edmundson was not a friendly man, and his appearance gave no illusion to kindness. One inmate's description of him was such: "He was a tough looking character and was even tougher than he looked. He possessed an evil mind and a calloused." (The Sweet Smell of Sagebrush)

During his stay at the Wyoming Frontier Prison Edmundson did his best to be as difficult as he could. One example of his difficultness could be seen in his refusal to work. According to the Sweet Smell of Sagebrush he was the one man among the one hundred and fifty prisoners there who boasted of never having been made to work. All efforts to make him do so only added to his determination to avoid the workshop.

According to the Sweet Smell of Sagebrush: "At first he absolutely refused to go to work and as a matter of course was put in the dungeon. After being left there for a week or more he was taken out and told to go to the broom shop. He did as he was told insofar as going to the shop was concerned. For the accommodation of the convicts in the shop, two sticks hung in the front of the guards' station. When a prisoner wished to leave the shop he saluted the guard, reached up, and took one of the sticks and went out. The first act of Edmundson upon entering the shop was to secure one of the sticks. That was the privilege of which a prisoner could avail himself at any time. There were but two sticks and not more than two men could be absent for the factory at the same time. If both of the sticks happened to be in use, the next man would be allowed to sit upon a bench in front of the guard and wait until someone came back with one. Edmundson didn't come back with his stick and the guard reported him missing to the officers in the cell house. He had thrown the stick away upon reaching the yard and when they located him he was sitting in his cell smoking. He was immediately taken to the dungeon. After about two weeks he was taken out and told to go to the shop and report for work. He went and repeated the performance with the wooden sticks. This was done over and over with the same results. He wouldn't work."

Another example of his stubbornness is in regard to the full beard he acquired during his stay at the Wyoming State Penitentiary. One day the warden decided that Edmundson



needed to have his beard shaved off, Edmundson did not agree with this observation. “Old Ed stroked his beard as he stood there meditating, well he said, you are determined to make me shave off my beard are you? The guard said yes. Well said the old fellow, I will have to be put in that chair by force and I don’t doubt there are enough guards to do it. But he added, if you shave me there is one thing certain, you will never shave another man. He was taken back to his cell without a shave. They searched his cell and found a huge club made of hardwood and a ten inch butcher knife with its edge ground to razor keenness. He was the only man there with a full beard.”

With an attitude like his, it was no wonder that Edmundson managed to collect a few enemies during his stay. Once, after witnessing the lynching of Frank Wigfall, he turned in a list of individuals who had been involved. This list went beyond the truth though and listed several of Edmundson’s enemies too. He must have figured that it was a good way to cause them a little grief.

On December 22nd, 1915 Edmundson was pardoned by Governor John K. Kendrick. He was one of the only people to be pardoned on the account of his bad behavior rather than the good. His pardon came with the condition that he leave the state of Wyoming and never return.

Written by Nychelle Bowles

Cited:

Sweet Smell of Sagebrush – A Prisoner’s Diary
Files from the Wyoming Frontier Prison