

THE EARLY HISTORY OF  
TWIN BRIDGES

Author: Margaret Lott  
Twin Bridges Elementary

Sources: Great Falls Tribune  
(Vigilante Leaders  
Founded Lott Ranch)

History of Twin Bridges  
and Vicinity, Vol.I,II.

Mrs. H. Lott

THE EARLY HISTORY OF  
TWIN BRIDGES

The reason for people coming to the Twin Bridges Area of Madison County is that Captain Richard Grant came here to winter cattle and horses. Grant came here during the time of Mormon trouble in Utah during 1850 and 1860. However, Grant didn't come directly to this area but stayed on the Emigrant Road to rest their stock, and in the fall drove the cattle into what is now the Twin Bridges area. But Grant was not the first to see this area, as the Shoshone Indians tribe, relatives of Sacajawea, had been here. Meriwether Lewis, Toussaint Charboneau, Patrick Gass, and George Drewyer of the Lewis and Clark expedition were in the valley earlier. These men of the Lewis and Clark expedition were the first white men to enter the valley.

Jacob Meeks was the first to make a house in the actual place where Twin Bridges now stands. His home stood by the Beaverhead river near the old Indian ford. He, like Grant, came here to winter his stock. This took place between 1858 and 1861.

"While much has been said and written of the privations, hardships and earnest labors of the early settlers of Montana, no town can boast of more heroic pioneers than can Twin Bridges. We refer to Judge M. H. Lott and John S. Lott: but for these two men there would have been no Twin Bridges. Ever since 1864, when they made their first visit here, traces of their work made their appearance --- work that the hand of time will not nor cannot erase. It was in this year that they came and located their land. They built a ditch for irrigation from Wisconsin

creek and in 1865 put in their first crop. Their labors were rewarded with a good yield, but in 1866 and 1867 grasshoppers destroyed their entire crop which had cost in the neighborhood of \$10,000. They paid thirty cents per pound for seed oats. Nothing daunted, they went to the Gallatin valley and purchased seed wheat at thirty cents per pound and were more successful there after."

In 1867, a bridge was constructed across the Beaverhead river at Twin Bridges, another bridge across the Beaverhead at the Point of Rocks. The Lott brothers also began to improve and construct roads. The three bridges that they built cost \$20,000. After the construction of these bridges, the town was called "The Bridges". Later it was changed to Twin Bridges.

"In 1891, the Normal School building was erected for the purpose of working for the location of the State Normal School here. In 1893, Judge Lott, J.M. Paige and Pat Carney succeeded in convincing the representatives of the state that Twin Bridges was the ideal place for the State Orphans' Home, and in 1894 the first orphans made their appearance. This institution with its good management has done more for the welfare of the state at large than any other institution of the state."

In the way of roads of Twin Bridges there were "four Indian trails centered here at an Indian ford at the bend of the river northwest of the present high school building."

The bridges that the Lott brothers built, which I mentioned earlier, were built from trees brought from native forests in the mountains. The ax, saw, and auger were the only tools available when building these bridges. The span of the bridges across the Big Hole and Beaverhead riv-



ers was one hundred feet. Not any iron was used anywhere in the bridges. The different parts were put together with huge bolts and wooden pins, some of which were as large as a man's arm. Before these bridges were given to the county, they were toll bridges for ten years.

After the Lott brothers had bought the cabin of Jacob Meek's, they built another larger house of which one room was covered with all wool, three ply, bright-colored carpet which cost six dollars per yard. The Lott brothers (M.H. Lott and John Lott) were in such a location that many travelers passed their door and many people had meals with them. Soon their fame as cooks spread to the point that, for self-defense, they moved their old store building in Nevada City (M.H. Lott and John Lott formerly owned a store building in Nevada City) and opened a hotel - a large frame building.

I suppose you are wondering where the Lotts originated from. Well, they came from California Gulch, Colorado. They got the urge to come to Montana from a physician who had lived with the Crow Indians in Montana. In May of 1862, they went to Denver to meet some parties who were going to Florence. They got together a group of fourteen in which there was one woman and a girl who was about ten years old. While traveling, they had many hard troubles and were in dangerous situations. At times they had to pass through where the Indians were on the warpath and much destruction and killing had been done. The party was in constant danger, however, but passed these spots without harm. Through these trying incidents they went, but as far as I know never reached Florence as they discovered gold along the way. That caused other people to hurry to the mining area. Now we see how the Lott brothers came to this vicinity.

-4-

Besides the frame hotel which I mentioned earlier the Lott brothers built a new log store where the Masonic block now stands. Next they built the ranch barn. The First National Bank and Gould Hotel stand where the barn corral was. As more and more buildings were built, the town of Twin Bridges took shape. The Great Falls Tribune states the Lott Brothers were "pioneer ranchers - vigilantes - gold miners - saw mill operators - storekeepers - farmers and gardeners - builders of bridges and a town."

Now we know some of the early history of Twin Bridges.

Author: Margaret Lott  
Twin Bridges Elementary

Sources: Great Falls Tribune  
(Vigilante Leaders  
Founded Lott Ranch)

History of Twin Bridges  
and Vicinity, Vol. I, II

Mrs. H. Lott