

## Newel Van Tassel

Newel Van Tassel was born in 1872 in La Porte, Indiana. Not much is known about his early years, but at some point as a young man, he headed west. Arriving in Montana in 1892, he started working as a ranch hand.

In 1895, he went to work for Lowther and Clifton at the NF ranch near Roundup. As well as running cattle, the NF was known for their business of procuring horses for military use.

Van Tassel went to work as a deputy sheriff in 1900, serving at first as a jailer to substitute for an injured friend he had met while at the NF ranch. His biggest adventure as a deputy was in a chase after two horse thieves in 1900. He and undersheriff Tom Sayles set off after two men who were accused of taking horses and saddles from their employer and fleeing with them. By the time the crime was discovered on December 21st, the lawmen were ten hours behind the thieves. They were also hampered by a raging blizzard the next day that covered tracks, causing them to ride some 20 miles out of their way, though they learned information about the men's direction. They made their way to Meeteetse, Wyoming on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and discovered that the men weren't there as expected. The next morning, while deciding what to do next, Sayles saw the men ride into town, half a day behind them. The thieves were arrested at a blacksmith's shop as they got down from the very horses they had been accused of stealing. The deputies and their prisoners set off for Billings on Christmas morning, and despite some heavy snow drifts, made it back on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the men went to jail.

Local musical performances were a regular form of entertainment in those days, and Van Tassel enjoyed singing. His name showed up in a number of church entertainments as among the Bass voices. In the spring of 1901, he joined the chorus of "Queen Esther", a fundraiser for the Methodist Church, and thirty years later was still singing in biblical dramas as part of a YMCA community chorus.

Van Tassel left the sheriff's office after a few years and returned to working as a ranch hand in the Billings area. In his later years, he worked as a watchman for an auto wrecking company until his death at age 74 in 1947.

### Sources:

- *Billings Gazette*, "Horse Thieves Brought Back", January 1, 1901
- *Billings Gazette*, "Former Stockman, 74, Succumbs", January 15, 1947
- *Billings Gazette*, "'Queen Esther' List of Those to Take Part in Rendition", June 5, 1901
- *Billings Gazette*, "Vesper Event Attracts Many", April 14, 1930

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