

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

CARL BUCK

Number 452

1973

In 1936, an Idaho Guide (put out by Vardis Fisher of the Federal Writers' Project) published "a few tall tales" including the following story of Carl Buck. Originality was the main basis for choice of those included. In explaining the selection, Fisher noted:

Every Western State has its tall tales, a few of which are indigenous but most of which belong to the folklore of the world and reappear with variations as something new under an old name. Of the few given [including the Carl Buck yarn] it is not known how ancient their ancestry may be or in how many countries or how many times they may have been born anew; but only such fables have been chosen as seem likely not to have been trademarked by too much use.

Other tales included incidents attributed to Thomas Wickersham, Fay Hubbard, Sam Strickland, and Sam Rich. These resemble the Paul Bunyan stories, which were omitted because of overuse elsewhere.

Carl Buck of eastern Idaho was a crack rifleshooter. He could trim the whiskers off a cat at a hundred yards or shoot between the legs of a hummingbird at fifty. One morning he saw a coyote out in a field and seized his gun and at just a little over half a mile blazed away.

The coyote did not budge. It was strange, Carl reflected, that he had missed so easy a shot; and after approaching a hundred yards nearer he fired again. And still that coyote stood there beyond the sagebrush and looked at him. Carl examined his gun and approached another hundred yards and again fired--and again drew nearer and fired and drew nearer. When he was only fifty yards away, he sat and took a dead rest and delivered six shots--and still that beast stood without batting an eye and stared at him across the sagebrush. At this point Carl began to have a weird sense of unreality, and for perhaps an hour he wiped his brow and looked at the coyote and the coyote looked at him. He thereupon decided to approach without firing, and learned to his amazement that he had with his first shot struck the beast exactly in the center of the forehead and had put twenty-six more bullets through the same hole. The coyote's chin had caught in the fork of a sagebrush and there the villain had hung as dead as a doornail while its body from the neck clear to its tail was being shot completely away.

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428