ARTIST RUSSELL PAINTS WORD PICTURE OF "THE GOLDEN DAYS" WHEN HE FIRST RODE INTO GREAT FALLS, 32 YEARS AGO

(This story is reproduced from the Great Falls High School Roundup, the official school magazine, with the consent of the author, Charles M. Russell, Montana's famous artist, whose home is in Great Falls.)

The Golden Days

By CHARLES M. RUSSELL.

About 45 years ago a small band of Crows, maybe 25 lodges, were camped on Greybull. As with all plains Indians, this meant wealth. This camp was rich, for the hills were covered with ponies of all sizes and colors. It was early summer, and among them were many colts.

Two Crow boys squatted on a knoll, wrapped to their beady eyes, one in a white Hudson Bay blanket, the other in a ragged buffalo robe. The hair of both was carefully fashioned in the style of their people—two parts starting over each temple and ending at the scalp lock. The partings were painted bright vermillion, the same as the upper part of the face. The hair between was cropped and stool erect in a brush-like crest. Beneath their robes they wore breechclouts and leggings, with moccasins. Neither wore a shirt.

These boys were herders, and their ponies grazed at the ends of their elkskin ropes. They not only watched the pony herds, but their keen eyes say anything that moved for miles around.

The boy in the buffalo robe beat the ground with the elkhorn handle of his quirt and chanted the war song of his father. Suddenly his companion threw his naked arm from under his blanket and signed, "Medicine," at the same time pointing with his chin to a mare that grazed nearby. The animal was a pinto, and the white parts of her coat were painted in a way that means much to red men. Her foretop and tail wore strips of weatherworn otter skin, and braided in her mane was a skin bag that hid the medicine secrets of her owner.

The mare was well known. She was old, but had given many buffalo horses to her master, and the long-legged colt at her flank was also a pinto. His short back and deep chest spoke well for his future years. His were the points of a buffalo horse.

The colt had been acquainted with the world only a few hours, but he had seen, felt and heard many strange things. He had tried many times to reach the grass with his muzzle, but failed by many inches. The boys saw this, and Small Shield, the one in the ragged robe, said his grandfather had told him that a colt was good when a little horse did this; he would be strong and would carry his rider a long way between suns.

It is the life story of a pinto colt I shall tell you.

His first year was spent close to his mother's flank. One morning not long after the day on which my story begins, there was great excitement in camp. The pinto colt, which had been given the name of Paint, saw all the horses among the lodges. The men were catching their best animals. Some were smearing their mounts with paint. Most of the hunters rode one horse and led another. The led horses wore no saddles and sometimes were ridden by naked boys. These horses were decked with feathers and paint and wore a medicine charm in mane or tail. This might be the full skin of a magpie or a wolf leg, or possible a bat's wing, but whatever it was, it meant luck to the owner of the horse.

The women were also busy, saddling the quieter ponies or harnessing them to the long-poled travois. As they left the camp the hunters were much in advance of the women, and as the latter traveled slower, they were soon left behind.

Paint noticed that after they had gone some distance, a very old man made a signal and the women ceased talking. Even the children were quiet. Now all conversation was carried on by the hands in sign language. Not long after they topped a ridge, and it was here that Paint smelled the dust and heard the roar of a running herd. The Crows were among the buffalo.

Here the women stopped their ponies. Many of them sang. It meant meat and robes, which spelled life to these wild people.

Paint stood with pricked ears, watching the scene in the valley below. It was an old story to his mother, who quietly cropped the grass. Before long a rider appeared, leading a sweat-covered, panting pony. Then others came and the women moved down the slope.

Paint saw many brown spots upon the prairie. As they neared them he saw that these were horned animals, lying motionless, and he smelled blood.

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For five years he lived with the Crows, and became, himself, a buffalo horse, wandering from one country to another, always in the wake of the herds. One night the Crows were camped on Painted Robe creek. They were in a dangerous country, a land where their enemies, the Blackfeet, often came, so the lodges were placed in a great circle, forming a corral. At night the horses were brot into the enclosure, most of them staked, or picketed, with short ropes.

The Crows had danced, and all slept soundly. A coyote back of a butte barked. It would have fooled any human, but the wind came and told the nose of Paint the truth—it was a man. The dogs knew, too, and many of them howled in answer.

Not long after this, tho the night was dark, Paint saw several robed figures among the ponies. They were busy cutting ropes, and a pony, as soon as loosened, would walk quietly from among the lodges. One came to Paint, and after cutting the rope at the picket pin, coiled it and rubbed her neck. Paint knew it was a stranger and snorted; then jumping to one side, he backed into a tripod of travois, which was hung with drying meat. All of this upset and fell against a lodge, awakening the sleepers. But the stranger held to Paint's rope, and crowding him among the other horses, sprang to his back.

The stranger drove his heels into Paint's flanks and flapped his robe which he had loosened from his body, over the backs of the animals nearest. The horses were all running now. There was much noise. Guns talked with their yellow tongues into the darkness. Women screamed, dogs howled and men sang their death songs.

A few jumps and Paint, with his rider, was at the edge of the lodges that formed the corral. Gunfire streaked the darkness from most of the lodges, but as no Indian likes to kill a horse both the Crows and their enemies fired low enough to kill a rider, but too high to hit a horse. As Paint passed between the lodges he saw a streak of fire rip the blackness at his side, and he felt his rider clutch his mane and ride as he had seen the Crows at the trading post when they drank something the white men traded them. Then Paint felt something warm and wet on his neck and withers; the rider's legs loosened and his body lurched heavily over the pony's shoulders to the ground, and Paint ran on riderless.

He was glad to leave the lodges. The noise frightened him. He had seen guns and arrows kill buffalo, and this night he felt as tho they might kill a horse. They had traveled far and fast when it grew light. The pony saw painted strangers behind him. This was a Piegan war party down from the north, which had surprised the sleeping Crows. When they left Belly river they numbered ten, but now they were only nine. They were mostly young men, led by Bad Wound.

Bad Wound had seen over 50 winters. Time had been good to him, but war had left him not good to look at. He had lost one eye, and a trade ball from a flintlock in the hands of a Crow had broken both jaws, leaving him with a horrible war dimple in each check and a crooked mouth.

When the sun came the party halted to change mounts, as the horses under them were winded. The ponies were bunched and each rider dropped his loop on the neck of a fresh one. It was Bad Wound's loop that caught Paint. The war chief looked him over at rope's end, and then signed "good and strong" to his painted companions. Walking up for close inspection, Bad Wound's hand felt the hard, dark brown substance on his mane and withers and knew why his men only counted nine. Then the chief drew the loop from Paint's neck, and slipped his Henry rifle from his skin cover, fired at the pinto as it trotted into the herd. The animal went to its knees; then rolled over and stiffened. "It was not good," said Bad Wound, "to let a friend walk to the sand hills. The trail is long and I have given him a strong horse."

After the warriors had all caught fresh horses they took the herd to a deep, grassy valley, where their mounts were hobbled and all the ponies were watered an allowed to graze. The men then ate their jerked meat, and all excepting two sentinels, who watched the back country, rolled in their blankets or robes and slept.

The sun was low when they moved again, and when Bad Wound's one eye passed over the traveling herd, his hand went to his mouth in surprise. He said "Ghost horse," to a near companion, and pointed to a blood-stained horse in the herd. It was Paint, and his head and neck showed fresh blood. Bad Wound thot his bullet had made a wound that killed, but the lead which was meant for his head had only passed thru the neck cord, stunning him for a short time.

They traveled mostly by night, and it was many days before they reached the Piegan camp on the Teton. This was a large camp, a mixture of Piegans, Bloods and Blackfeet. As far as Paint could see the smoked skin lodges dotted the valley. A scout, or wolf, as he is called, reported the coming of Bad Wound's party long before his arrival, so when he and his men with the stolen ponies entered the camp, an old medicine man on a much painted pony rode in advance and told the people: "Two moons have come since these men danced with the sun and left their lodges afoot. Their bellies have often been empty and their tracks sometimes red, but they are brothers of the wolf, with strong hearts. When a Blackfoot goes to war he may never return, or his hair may be whitened by winters when he comes, but if he reaches his lodge, whether it has been a few suns or many winters, his feet are not sore, for he has an enemy's horse under him. I have said these are wolves, and the wolf women will give them meat. It is good.

As the party rode into camp hundreds of dogs slunk silently among the lodges. They did not bark, as their only language is the howl of their wilder cousin, the wolf. Every travois and extra lodge pole was hung with buffalo flesh, and the wind was heavy with the smell of meat.

In the Piegan camp there was much featsting, but there were five with their faces painted black; a father, mother, two sisters and a young wife of Calf Robe, the one left dead among the Crow lodges. These people did not join in the merriment, but squatted out on the butte, crying and cutting their arms and legs while those in camp sang and stepped time to the big drum. And when the mourners returned to camp, Calf Robe's wife had but two fingers on her left hand. She had given the others to the sun to show her great sorrow.

Then Bad Woman came to Calf Robe's father and gave him three horses and said: "Old man, I would give you the horse your son rode, but he is a ghost horse. I tried to give him to your son, but the horse would not die. It is not good to give a friend a pony that dead men ride. Three times while I slept the spotted horse came to me. Your son rode him, but he was dead and the pony's back was red with blood. He is a good horse, but I will never ride him. My heart is afraid and I have said that it is not good to give a friend what you fear yourself."

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Next spring the Piegans were camped on a river called The Banks that Fell on Them, when a few whites came to buy ponies. Among them was a very young boy and a man with a gray beard, who was the boy's companion. When Bad Wound led out Paint, the boy was much pleased, and Gray Beard counted out forty-five silver dollars into the hand of Bad Wound.

So now Paint had a white master. He had never felt a bit in his mouth before. His had always been two half-hitches of rawhide thong about his under jaw, and the white man's saddle with its two cinches was strange to him. His back knew the halfbreed pad and other Indian saddles.

Paint was gentle, but as all Indians mount from the off side, it was days before he would allow the boy to mount from the near side. The pinto pony was not to be alone, as the boy already owned a black mare which packed his blankets and grub.

Some days later, Paint, the mare and their master joined a hunter and trapper who lived in the mountains. One night as they were cooking supper, the old hunter told the boys to trade off the mare. "Lady hosses," said he, "are like their human sisters. They get notions of goin' home, an' no gentleman cayuse would think of letting a lady go alone. Judging from actions, there ain't a cayuse in our bunch that ain't a perfect gentleman, so to play safe, boy, you stake that mare."

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A few days later the boy traded the mare for a one-eyed, buckskin cayuse.

For two years the boy lived with the hunter. The next time he appears in our story he is wrangling horses for a trail herd which was traveling north. This herd was turned loose on Ross's Fork, where there was a big roundup camp. Here the boy was hired to night-herd for hundred saddle horses. This camp reminded Paint somewhat of the homes of his early wild owners, but the lodges were not tall like those of the Crows or Piegans.

For many years Paint, with his master, followed the white man's buffalo. Once they went north and again the pony was among the lodges of the Piegans. When the big cow herds moved north of the Missouri, Paint and his master were with them.

One night in a little cow town on Milk river, Paint, among other ponies was tied to a rack in front of a place where cow men drank, sang and made merry. The night was warm, and the door was open, so Paint could see inside. There was some hard talk, and Paint knew men well enough to understand that it was war talk of the white man. He saw a man pull a gun and fire twice; then back thru the door with the smoking weapon in his hand. Another man lay on the floor very still. The man who had fired the gun stepped to the hitching rack, mounted a horse and rode away into the darkness. Paint knew then that the white man was no different from the red. They both kill their own kind.

Some years later two riders, one leading a pack horse, traveled between the Missouri river and the Highwood mountains. One of them pointed to heavy smoke that showed on the horizon, a little south of west. "There's where we camp tonight," said he.

It was dark when they reached the town which the smoke had led them to, and their ponies, which knew no lights but nature's, jumped the great shadows made by the arc lights at the street crossings. They passed rows of saloons, dance halls and gambling houses, and after inquiring the way of a bystander, rode to the Park stables, where they unsaddled and stripped the pack horse of their bedding and grub.

Now, under the overhanging light of the stable, I will describe the riders and their mounts. One rider was rather slender with black hair and eyes. The other was of medium height, with light hair worn rather long. Both men were dressed as cow hands, and the only difference in their clothes was a bright colored, French halfbreed sash, worn by the light-haired man. The latter's mount was a rangy gray, branded Diamond G—one of the old Geddis herd. The pack horse which he led was a bay pinto.

The darker man rode a brown, strongly built broncho, which snorted at every strange thing he saw.

The name of this town was Great Falls. The rider of the brown bronc was Henry Stough. The other, who rode the gray, was the writer of this story. The pinto pack horse was Paint, called Monty by his owner.

When Paint died near Great Falls he had been with his master 25 years.

Reproduction of water color by Artist Charles M. Russell showing the artist in his boyhood days astride his favorite pony, Paint. In the background is Jake Hoover bringing up the line as the caravan moves thru a pass in the Crazy mountains. The picture portrays Mr. Russell and Paint as they appeared in 1882 or as the title of the picture says, "When I Was a Kid."

The picture furnishes the subject for the article which Artist Russell wrote for the Great Falls High School Roundup this year and which, with his consent, is reproduced here so that the readers of The Tribune may have a close up view of the artist's style in telling of some of his early experiences and also affords the chance to learn of the first visit of the artist to the city which is now his home. He then rode in on the hurricane deck of the favorite pony.

RAILWAY OFFICIALS HERE

J. M. Gruber and C. O. Jenks, respectively general manager and assistant general manager for the Great Northern's western territory, returned to Great Falls yesterday from Butte and left later in the day on train No. 43 for Shelby and points north. The officials arrived in Great Falls first Friday morning, going from here to Billings and Butte on an inspection trip. It was their intention then to cover the Havre branch after going over the Butte division, but a change in their plans sent them north thru Shelby.

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