

Golden Bibee (1884-1976)

Local poet and songwriter. He arrived in Polson in 1910 after a harrowing trip through the forest fires. He was the caretaker at the Flathead State Park until late into his 80s. His writings paint a picture of the Montana ranch life in vivid color.



- **1884-Birth.** February 3rd 1884 in Kirksville, Missouri.
- **1906-Marriage.** Hattie Gordon in Denver in 1906. They had 3 daughters. Hattie died in 1953.

- **1910-Fire.** Golden came to Polson, Montana with his parents and brother, Sylvester, during the area's most disastrous fire season ever recorded. There were 2,500 small fires and 50 large blazes in northeastern Washington, the Idaho Panhandle and western Montana. The winds gusted up to 70 miles per hour. Within 48 hours some three million acres and between seven to eight billion board feet of timber burned. Eighty-five persons died, 78 of them firefighters. The advancing walls of flame gobbled up the eastern third of Wallace, Idaho, all of the Montana communities of Belknap, Taft, Deborgia, Haugen, parts of Noxon, Trout Creek, Heron, Tuscor and Whitepine, then skirted around Mullan, skipped over Avery, and stopped just west of Thompson Falls. Golden E. Bibee was among early settlers who arrived at the north end of Flathead Lake via the Great Northern Railroad and then came to Polson by boat from Somers. He recounted the train trip from the southern edge of the new Glacier National Park. Forest fires raged on all sides. He wrote:

"It looked like the world was on fire. A pilot engine ran ahead of our train. The night was dark but most of the way the forest fire lighted the coaches like day. "Somewhere in the middle of the burn, the train stopped and several people came aboard. One young mother apologized to my wife because her children had whooping cough. She said they had a very narrow escape and were very thankful to get away from the fire alive." The boat trip to Polson was no less hazardous. The Bibees were aboard the City of Polson when the boat became lost in the smoke. As if the smoke weren't bad enough, a windstorm struck as they were half-way down the lake. "The winds grew wilder and the wind stronger, causing the smoke to sting the eyes intensely. My little family clung together and hung on. My wife was too seasick to care whether the ship went down or not and the crew seemed uneasy. There was much consultation -- we were facing the storm, bouncing like a cork on the waves. For some time we barely held our own. Then the squall stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The sun disappeared behind a mountain and darkness came on sudden and intense. "Then came the search for the shoreline and the Narrows.

How this was accomplished I'll never understand. I couldn't see the bow of the boat. The squall seemed to have thickened the smoke rather than clear it." The boat crept throughout the narrows safely, sped up and pretty soon slowed down again, as the captain groped for the dock, guided by the electric plant's whistle".

Golden's mother died soon after arriving in Polson. She was the second person to be buried in the Lakeview Cemetery.

- **Jobs.** Golden worked at the Cline flour mill in Polson, Montana for six years then at a local harness shop. He homesteaded in the Big Arm area.
- **1955-1968.** As the caretaker at the Flathead Lake State Park near Big Arm, Golden gained

worldwide fame for his kindness and hospitality. During this time he also had a thrice weekly radio program on KOFL. At 84 years of age his application for renewal of the caretaker job was turned down. Golden put an editorial in the Flathead Courier in response:

"I was born on a farm in Missouri at a time when wood was our only fuel so my father chopped the wood for our stove and fireplace. We children had the job of picking up chips for chips were fuel. As soon as I was able to walk I too picked chips. I don't remember but I feel sure that I enjoyed the labor and I almost got my name from it for the first three sentence word I spoke was 'pick up chips'. Thus began by life as a laborer and the habit has stayed with me through life...

Rowing

Row along, row along, row along,
Dripping oars, keeping time with my song;
Little waves tippy tapping the prow,
All appear to invite me somehow.
And the sun and the breeze seem to say:
"We're so glad you came rowing today."

There's a melody down in my throat,
So I sing to the lake and the boat;
Gleaming water so crystal and clear
Seems to be far away yet so near;
There the clouds do reflect tenderness
I am rowing to Heaven, I guess.

...To my friends who expect to see me next season I am sorry to miss seeing you. But do go on get together shake hands, go fishing, sleep in the cool shad, gather around the campfire, tell some good yarns, enjoy every hour of your stay. Welcome the stranger, be happy and plan to return."

- **Poet.** Golden was well known for writing poetry books and songs. He published what he called the "Pony Express" series of limericks and poems. The volumes included "In the Realm of Flathead Lake," "Golden Treasures," "Golden Harvest," "Ranch Ramblings," and "A Peep at People," which was a collection of poems about local people he knew and admired. His songs were "Montana Means Home to Me," "Say a Good Word for the Master," and "Ridin' Alone".

Three Bears

I would like to tell a story
One you haven't heard before,
And I'll start at the beginning
Sixty years ago or more.

Al declared, with less assumption
Than his big ten-gallon hat,
"In a very pronto order
We shall put a stop to that."

Now his tail was right there handy
And he had his greasy nose
Pushed with wild determination
'Gainst the boss's sleepin' clothes.

In the hills of old Wyoming
Just a lad, named Albert Fly,
Was learning every detail
Of the West, as time passed by.

Now Al was sleeping soundly
To the patter of the rain,
When his wife called, "Al, the bear,
They have broke a windowpane."

Al was not a man of silence
But he'd not a word to say,
When with very slight resistance
All the buttons gave away.

Then he drifted to Montana
And he brought what serves the best,
Judgment, guts and brains and honor
Underneath a man-sized vest.

Al was up in just a minute
And with set determined frown,
He was opening up the warehouse
In his long-tailed sleeping gown.

At the finish of the ruckus
Albert dropped the slippery ham,
And he grabbed with desperation
At the swiftly passing jamb.

Now the camp at "Many Glaciers"
Needed someone that was tough,
One the people could depend on,
And that Grizzlies couldn't bluff.

There was bruin, he was chewin'
On a precious picnic ham
Al he grabbed the ham and slapped him
With a big hay-maker wham.

Al was clinging to the doorway,
Like a flash the bear was gone,
And he took into the darkness
All the clothes that Al had on.

For the bear were making trouble
'Til it went beyond endurance,
And a man to put 'em runnin'
Would be very good insurance.

And again in that same instant
Whacked him soundly on the rump,
Like a flash he cleared the threshold
With a swift and mighty jump.

Now the whole camp was alerted
Bright beamed lights began to play,
And the gruff old captain ordered,
"Turn them lights the other way."

So the need was circulated
And tho' many did apply,
The job without a question
Was assigned to Albert Fly.

And behold there was another
Coming from the pickle kegs,
And he made his dash for freedom
Right between the boss's legs.

Those two bear had met their master,
As I'm sure you will agree,
And the camp's own supervisor
He became bare number three!

Though the bear with supper plenty
At the garbage pits were blessed,
They would often raid the warehouse
Just to mutilate the rest.

Al had rode some tough old broncos
But them rides could not compare,
With that fraction of an instant
Ridin' backwards on a bear.

- After retirement Golden lived in LaGrande, Oregon and then Olympia, Washington. In Olympia he frequently appeared with the Apple Jam young Peoples Group where he told stories, recited poetry, and danced the jig.
- **1976-Death.** May 6, 1976.