

Notes from TV shows and films

Notes from John Morgan Harris episode of *Gold Trails & Ghost Towns*

1) Early in the program, the picture of Harris on his horse at his Virginia mansion is shown, but without comment or explanation. There is no mention of his early days except "He came from an aristocratic southern family."

2) Barlee says at one point Harris was labelled the richest man in the Kootenays. By whom? I have never seen this title attached to him.

3) Barlee says he came into Wallace when it was just getting established and built a real estate empire and a racetrack. The latter detail is apparently taken from the 1918 issue of the Wallace Miner among the JMH funds at UBC.

4) "Something goes wrong. We don't know what happens in Wallace. But he does sell out all his holdings in Wallace and decides to head north ... He comes over the Canadian line with probably \$15-20,000." Interesting that Barlee says he knows something went wrong but doesn't know exactly what. There is no mention of the shooting.

5) "Finally he leads a young girl up there whose name is Alma. She's 26. John

Morgan Harris is 63 ... Within a few months the 63-year-old marries the 26-year-old ... So John Morgan Harris marries her in the early '30s." The ages are correct, but they were married in 1926, two years after Alma arrived.

6) "ROBERTS: So Harris has given up, by 1954, 84 years old ... BARLEE: Harris dies in that year ..." Actually, he died in 1953, at age 89.

7) "BARLEE: Strangely, a man who stayed in the town for over 60 years, he decides not to be buried that Slocan country. Still a man of considerable fortune — kept most of it too — he is buried in his native Virginia. His recently bereaved widow goes back with him. They read the will and they find that she receives exactly, precisely \$1.

ROBERTS: He has no love for her. Obviously she wasn't the woman he had hoped she'd be. BARLEE: I assume that was the case because all the fortune he had he left to one of his nieces." They go on to say this is why Alma sold off all the furnishings at fire sale prices — which makes no sense, because they wouldn't have been hers to sell had she been left nothing in the will.

8) Barlee says in 1896-97 Harris was making \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year.

9) Barlee mentions the Slocan Power Co., but doesn't explain its purpose.

10) Barlee says Fred. T. Kelly was eased out by Harris and Clarence Smith became his minor partner. That does not seem correct.

11) Invitation is shown (I don't recall seeing this in the JMH fonds at UBC);

Formal Opening
of the
Hotel Reco
Thursday Evening
August 30th, 1900
M. _____
Yourself and friends are
cordially invited to attend.

12) A billy club is shown that Barlee bought from Alma Harris. He indicates that Harris would use it if anyone got out of hand in a poker game.

13) Barlee describes the Rabbit Paw as "a landmark case." He says the Whites brought Harris into their company in lieu of the money they owed him at the end of the lawsuit. Suggests they watered down the shares so that Harris only had a fraction of control, for which he never forgave them. Harris bought Silversmith Mines Ltd. for \$1 in 1921. I don't think so.

14) Barlee claims Johnny tried to sell the Reco for a million.

Notes from the Sandon episode of *Ghost Towns of Canada*:

NARRATOR: Running the riches of the boom was a smooth-talking Virginian, Johnny Harris. On the run after shooting a man over a shady land deal, Johnny fled to British Columbia with equally shady plans in mind.

NARRATOR: Nine months after his arrival, Johnny had acquired his first hotel ...

NARRATOR: For Johnny Harris, 1900 marked the high point of his dream. Satisfied with all he had created, he decided to embark on a springtime visit back to his native Virginia.

NARRATOR: A consummate gambler, Harris quipped "Taking out fire insurance would be like betting against myself."

NARRATOR: Within a few days, they announced Nov. 8, 1926 as their wedding day.

HAL WRIGHT: You know, he made an incredible fortune here. He eventually lost it all. I think he died virtually penniless.

The show refers to Harris as a "loveable scoundrel."

Notes from *Silver Rush*, by Fran Benton

BILL BARLEE: His family was very, very well off up till the end of the Civil War. When the end of the Civil War came everything more or less collapsed. And he being about I think 17 or 18 years old decided to go west. He heard about the gold rush in the Coeur d'Alene district, so he went into the Coeur d'Alene district, started at Wallace, had, I think close to 30 lots in Wallace. That's where he ran into trouble with Zach Lewis. And eventually he disposed of Zach Lewis. [Sound effect of gunfire.] Then headed north 'cause he figured that was probably the wisest thing he should do. He took a lot of money with him north and so he settled down into Sandon and became the King of Sandon. And he liked to gamble. Of course, there were some very shrewd gamblers, a lot of them in Sandon.

COLLEEN MCCRORY: [Alma] told me before she came here she used to work in a clothing store. After she moved here she used to get her clothes sent out from that clothing store. Quite a beautiful woman when she was young, and dressed to the tee in the best clothes.

BETTY BENTON: He told her that when he died, which he proposed to do quite a lot sooner than he did, he would leave her everything he owned. Which he did, because when he died, he left her Sandon, only Sandon wasn't worth anything anymore. However, during the time

Sandon was in its heyday, she talked Johnny into buying her a Lincoln car.

BETTY BENTON: When I was up there with dad we walked down and found Johnny in his little store. He'd taken a piece of his basement in the hotel and put this store in there. Alma was really angry with him about it. She found a man of his distinction should not be stooping to that, whereas old Johnny just couldn't pass up a chance to make a buck.

COLLEEN MCCRORY: When he was sick and dying, a number of times, she had his suit cleaned – because he was in his 80s when he died – but he never died. So she'd have to take the suit and Johnny home again.

BILL BARLEE: When he died, he left the will to her. But she had to go down to Virginia to see the will. And she thought he still had money stashed away. Well, if he did have, she didn't get it. She got \$1, which made it legal. One dollar.