

## Black Bart!

He was actually Charles Earl Bowles, born in Norfolk Co., England, in 1829. He set out for the goldfields in late 1849, mining with some success in Shasta and Trinity counties before heading home to New York. In 1854, Charles was done with mining and headed for home. He married his wife, Mary Elizabeth Johnson, and he had two daughters by 1861. By then the Civil War had started, and he enlisted for three years with the 116th Reg't Illinois Infantry on August 13th, 1862 at Decatur. By 1871, he had headed for the gold fields of California again. Some legends have him teaching school. His wife assumed him dead when he stopped writing. Something happened in those four years to change his way of looking at things. In 1875, the Sonora to Milton stage in Calaveras County was robbed by a man wearing a flour sack over his head. He carried a double barreled shotgun and wore a long linen duster and sacks on his boots, as well, to hide his garb. He was polite and used no foul language. These became his trademarks.

In the early 1870's, the *Sacramento Union* ran a serial called "The Case of Summerfield". The last villain in the story is dressed in black with unruly black hair, large black beard and wild grey eyes and the character has already brought fear to the hearts of its readers. "The *character* is a certain Bartholomew Graham, also called the "Black" Bart, who is wanted for crimes against humanity and Wells Fargo & Co. (!)" Charles decided to build on this legend. August 3, 1877 the stage from Point Arena to Duncan's Mill in Sonoma County was robbed of \$300 in coin and a check for \$305.52 from the Grangers Bank of San Francisco. Bart was afraid to cash this check. The posse went back to the site to look for clues and found the first poem written on a waybill, under a stone atop a tree stump. And that's the way his career went for the next some 15 years. His annual average "income" amounted to \$6000. That's a tidy sum for that day and age. He was eventually tracked down through a laundry mark on a dropped handkerchief. He was sentenced to San Quentin Prison for six years but it was shortened to four years for good behavior. The

last time Bart was seen was in San Francisco on February 28, 1888 at the Nevada House. The next day he was gone. Leaving his belongings behind.

[facts from <http://www.sptddog.com/sotp/bbpo8.html>]



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