

August Trautwein (1862-1885)

A murdered German Russian immigrant.



- **1862-Birth.** August was born on September 27, 1862 in Deutschland.
- **1855-Death.** August was murdered on September 16, 1885 in Big Flat Missoula at his homestead. (The death year on the marker is incorrect per all legal accounts.)
- **Translation of Marker:** *“Here lies August Trautwein born in Deutschland on 27 Sept. 1862, murdered in Big Flat on 16 Sept. 1886”*
- August was found at his home on Big Flat which was on the bend of the river about eight miles below town. He had been shot. Two sheaves of oats were lying by him which evidenced that he was returning from the field. He was 22 years old. His father was working at the Bennett ranch near Stevensville MT at the time of the shooting.

• The murder investigation determined that August had probably been killed by one of the bands of Indians camped on his property. Initially, it was believed that the Indians may have stolen vegetables from his garden and then killed August after they were confronted. Citizen descriptions noted the group was of the Nez Perce Indians from Idaho. A posse was rounded up and headed after the Indians before they could arrive back at their reservation. The various Indian groups had separated with a small group going through the Bitterroot Valley and a much larger group heading through the Frenchtown Valley. The posse set out after the larger group of Indians. After a hard trek through the mountainous region, they came upon the Indian band only to find they were the wrong ones. These Indians were Flatheads, had all their papers in order, and did not match the citizen descriptions. The posse then backtracked to the Bitterroot Valley to find the trail of the smaller Indian band. The trail led them on an old trail leading from the Lou Lou (Lolo) to Mosse Creek ferry and then Grave Creek. They went as far as Dan Woodman’s ranch before they spied the Indians. Seven bucks were arrested and held in captivity in one of Woodman’s outbuildings. Upon further inquiries, however, the Indians were released and no charges were filed. Other theories were discussed but the case is believed to have never been officially solved.

The iron sign was a marker used by the Germans from Russia. The Germans migrated to the steppes of Russia where there were no trees so they made iron markers. Most of these Germans were of Catholic faith. No two markers were ever alike. Most of these crosses are found in prairie areas throughout the states where ever these German pioneers settled. This cross is the ONLY one found in western Montana and is especially unique due to its enamel plaque. Information researched by Paulette Parpart, Missoula Public Library historian.