Black Bart’s Poetry

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On August 3, 1877, the Wells Fargo & Co. stage between Point Arenas and Duncan’s Mills on the Russian River, just north of San Francisco, was robbed. It was notable for the scrap of paper left behind in the empty treasure box missing $300 and a check drawn on Granger’s Bank of San Francisco. On the back of a waybill was written:

“I’ve labored long and hard for bred (bread)
   For honor and for riches
But on my corns too long yove (you’ve) tred (tread)
   You fine-haired sons _____.”

Black Bart, 1877

This was one of many daring thefts by the same highwayman, Charles E. Bolton, alias Charles E. Boles, alias Black Bart, “The PO8.” On July 25, 1878, he held up the stage between Quincy and Oroville, taking $379 in currency, along with jewelry and the US Mail. He left this message:

“Here I lay me down to Sleep
   To wait the coming morrow
Perhaps Success perhaps defeat
   And everlasting Sorrow

Let come what will I’ll try it on
   My condition can’t be worse
And if there’s money in that Box
‘Tis munny (money) in my purse.”

Black Bart –The PO8

As the number of robberies attributed to Bart grew, California Governor William Irwin announced a $300 reward for Bart’s capture and conviction. Wells Fargo contributed another $300 and the US postal authorities increased the reward by $200. James B. Hume, chief investigator for Wells Fargo led the hunt for Black Bart.
“The PO8” finally was caught after his last stage robbery on November 3, 1883 between Sonora and Milton. A laundry mark—F.X.0.7—on the handkerchief he left behind served as the clue to his capture. At the time, it was determined that Charles E. Bolton robbed the Wells, Fargo & Co Express stages on these routes and dates:

- Sonora to Milton, July 26, 1875
- San Juan to Marysville, December 28, 1875
- Roseburg to Yreka, June 2, 1875
- Point Arenas to Duncan’s Mills, August 3, 1877
- Quincy to Oroville, July 23, 1878
- Laporte to Oroville, July 30, 1878
- Cahto to Ukiah, October 2, 1878
- Covelo to Ukiah, October 3, 1878
- Laporte to Oroville, June 21, 1879
- Roseburg to Redding, October 25, 1879
- Alturas to Redding, October 27, 1879
- Point Arenas to Duncan’s Mills, July 22, 1880
- Weaverville to Redding, September 1, 1880
- Roseburg to Yreka, September 10, 1880
- Roseburg to Redding, November 20, 1880
- Roseburg to Yreka, August 31, 1881
- Lakeview to Redding, October 11, 1881
- Downieville to Marysville, December 13, 1881
- North San Juan to Smartville, December 27, 1881
- Ukiah to Cloverdale, January 26, 1882
- Little Lake to Ukiah, June 14, 1882
- Attempt to rob stage from Laporte to Oroville, July 13, 1882
- Yreka to Redding, September 17, 1882
- Lakeport to Cloverdale, November 24, 1882
- Lakeport to Cloverdale, April 12, 1883
- Jackson to Ione, June 23, 1883
- Sonora to Milton, November 3, 1883

Bolton-Boles-Bart pleaded guilty to the stage robbery of November 3, 1883 before Judge P.H. Kean in San Andreas and was sentenced to 6 years in the California State Prison. He entered San Quentin on November 21, 1883 and served four years and two months before his release for good behavior.

Outside of prison, newspaper reporters mobbed him. One asked, *Did he intend to rob stages again?* Bart shook his head no. Another question: *Had he any more verses up his sleeve?* Bart replied, “Young man, didn’t you hear me say I would commit no more crimes?” Black Bart headed away from the San Francisco Bay Area as far south as Visalia, and disappeared.