



# ROBERT DEWAR MACLEAN

- **36<sup>th</sup> Missoula County Sheriff.**
- **Born.** April 9, 1896 in Mandan, North Dakota to Robert and Anna (MacDonald) Maclean.
- **Nickname.** 'Bob'
- **Married.** May 8, 1928 to Beryl Frazier in Missoula, Montana. They had one child, Robert MacLean Jr.
- **Died.** September 15, 1961 of cancer in Missoula, Montana.

- **1901.** Maclean family moved to Missoula, Montana.
- **1912.** As a teenager, Robert worked as a call boy for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He would call crews to work. He eventually moved up to brakeman then to conductor.
- **WW I.** Robert served in the United States Army. The war ended within days of his being deployed overseas.
- **1929.** Robert worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the depression times.
- **1933 – 1942.** Robert served as Undersheriff of Missoula County for Sheriff James Thompson and Sheriff Jack Shoblom.
- For 12 years, the MacLeans lived in the family quarters at the County Jail. Mrs. MacLean cooked all the meals for the prisoners. During WW II, that also included some Italian and German aliens.
- **1942.** Elected as the 36<sup>th</sup> Missoula County Sheriff. Sheriff MacLean served as Sheriff for 16 years until he retired in 1959.
- **Last Legal Execution in Montana.** September 10, 1943, the last legal execution in state of Montana was overseen by Sheriff MacLean. Philip 'Slim' Coleman Jr., 24 years old, was accused of viciously killing Carl and Roslyn Pearson at Lothrop, Montana. He had robbed them of \$200. Coleman escaped in the Pearson family car which was later discovered abandoned in Drummond. A large manhunt was activated by Sheriff MacLean. From the time Coleman was apprehended, he had a need to brag about his dirty deeds. He showed no remorse, instead, he was extremely cheerful and commented how 'funny' the whole situation was. He became more serious the day before his scheduled hanging. At that time Coleman told of 23 other murders he had committed since he was 14 years old, growing up in the black ghettos of St. Louis, Illinois. In a dictated confession the night before he died, however, he only gave details of eight of those murders. The confession is said to still be in Missoula but inquiries have not found it. It is also believed that none of Coleman's confession was ever used to solve unsolved murder mysteries. Coleman had refused to be visited by the only local negro minister, Father Webster Williams. In the end, Coleman was baptized into the Catholic faith and accompanied to the gallows by Father Henry L. Sweeny. The gallows were specially built inside the jailhouse and the hanging was done in a very quiet, dignified manner with no news reporters and only a few invited guests. All former hangings had been conducted in the open jail yard with a stockade placed around the



1<sup>st</sup> foot of rope used in Coleman hanging along with invitation.

gallows and the infamous 'Gallop'n' Gertie' gallows used. The specially made gallows for Coleman's hanging were eventually located in a dusty old section of the Missoula County fairgrounds. They have since been re-located to the Fort Missoula Historical Museum.

Grave 3 – Lot 6 – Block 11A



Robert is buried alongside his spouse, Beryl. Their only son, Robert Jr., was buried in the Horace Frazier family plots.

