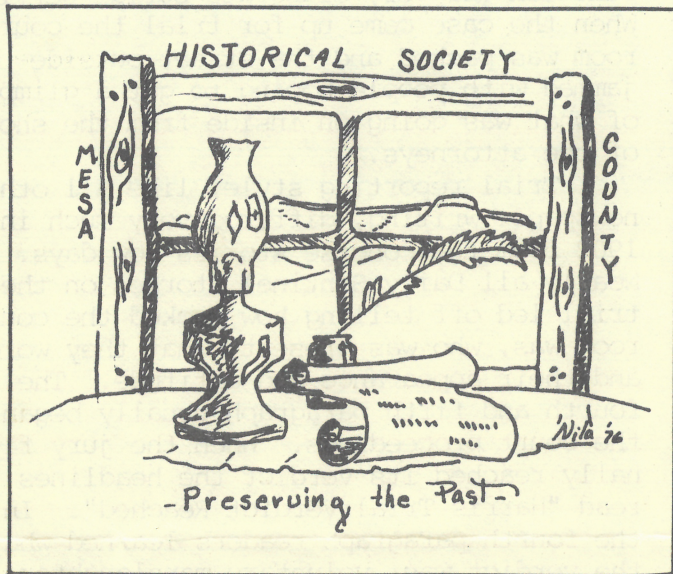


MESA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Early Development of Law Enforcement in Mesa County

By
Ruth G. Moss

Grand Junction has had its share of murders and other kinds of violent crimes over its 100 year history, but on the whole the city has not been what could be called a "Wild Western Town". Some of the settlers were rambunctious and kept the first marshal, Jim Davis on his toes. As marshal, James Davis proved to be the right man in the right place. Nerve at that time was required in his position and this he possessed in a remarkable degree. Nervy Jim was able with his guns. He kept the peace well until November 10, 1882 when a man by the name of Mike Dunn got too frisky and Davis killed him.

Separation of the area from Gunnison County and formation of Mesa County in 1883 brought the first sheriff to Grand Junction. Prior to that time Sheriff Bowman of Gunnison had this whole vast area to cover. Rustlers in the spring of 1882 were the sheriff's chief trouble. He and his posse killed the leader of one bandit band in Whitewater, south of Grand Junction.

With the change of City Officials in 1883, a new marshal was secured. Either things worsened or the new marshal did not

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have Davis's nerve, for he was given an assistant marshal, J. D. Jackson. An assistant marshal remained on the city payroll until 1885 when violence apparently had calmed down and only one was needed.

On December 30, 1885 two horsetheives being held in the local jail, attacked jailer H. C. Bucklin when he came into their cell to bring their evening meal. As soon as Bucklin had removed their shackles he was assaulted by one of the prisoners named Fogarty. While struggling with his assailant, the second prisoner, a powerful man named Pierce, struck him on the head with a bottle. Stunned by the blow, Bucklin was bound and gagged by the prisoners. Also, they appropriated his gun, knife, watch, and money then took blankets from the jail. Before leaving however, they dressed and bandaged Bucklin's wound as best they could. When the jailer recovered consciousness soon after, he went for assistance. A search for the fugitives was organized and a week later they were captured on Pinon Mesa by Sheriff William Innis and two deputies, Barrett and Spencer. Pierce and Fogarty pleaded guilty to charges at the next term of court and each was sentenced to seven years in the state penitentiary at Canon City. Bucklin, the jailer, was described as "in terrible condition" when he staggered from the jail in search of help. He presumably recovered from his wounds.

A Range War ended colorful career of Charles Sieber in 1902 when he was shot by a former employee. Mr. Seiber, a short, stocky built man with mustache, struggled to reach the top. Born one of ten children in Germany in 1846, he moved to Canada when still a child. As was the custom in those days when parents could not support their large families, young Sieber was "bound out" to a master, whom he worked for until he became of age. In the 60's he drifted to Canon City area with other German settlers. When Colorado joined the Union in 1876, Mr. Seiber was elected a representative to the first legislature. He had been engaged in farming and ranching at the time. Another colonizer, Henrietta



Mesa County Sheriff Charles Lumley
(Photograph Courtesy of The Museum of
Western Colorado)

Palmer, became his bride in 1869. Her New York Dutch family had crossed the country in covered wagons in 1864 from Steuben County, New York. After crossing the divide, Sieber and family decided to homestead on the Little Dolores Creek on Pinon Mesa.

The Sieber Cattle Company was formed in 1897 just five years before his death. About this time, Joe Harris had been hired by the firm. He and Sieber did not get along very well to say the least, so Harris quit in a few months. From then on both Sieber and Harris accused each other of branding each other's cattle. Harris had his Headquarters at Westwater, Utah. The day of the fatal shooting found Harris riding across Siebers land near his summer camp 35 miles southwest of Grand Junction. He ran across Siebers, the two immediately started up their long standing argument. Stories vary on what happened from then on, but Harris claimed he shot after Sieber obtained a gun and charged him. Harris had pulled his gun first, though. All of Sieber's 11 children, except one married daughter, were at the camp during the shooting. The body was taken to Grand

Junction for very elaborate burial services. When the case came up for trial the court room was packed and the street outside jammed with people hoping to get a glimpse of what was going on inside from the shouts of the attorneys.

Trial reporting style, like all other newspaper writing, differed very much in 1902 from the concise stories now days. Nearly all Daily Sentinel stories on the trial led off telling how packed the courtroom was, who was present, what they wore and their appearance and attitude. The fourth and fifth paragraph usually began the court proceedings. When the jury finally reached its verdict the headlines read "Harris Trial Verdict Reached". In the fourth paragraph readers learned what the verdict was, voluntary manslaughter. Harris went to jail and dropped out of the news for a few years. Then around 1908 a Sieber employee, seeking revenge for his boss's murder, shot Harris at his ranch at Westwater. A few years later, in 1910, the Sieber Cattle Company closed, ending an epoch in Western Colorado cattle raising.

Several other murders, sensational for the period, kept attention on the Sheriff and police officers during the formative years of Grand Junction.

One of the most exciting events in the early history of Grand Junction came September 27, 1906 when George McGarvey sneaked up behind Ed Innis and slammed a 2 by 4 down on his head. Innis was deputy under Sheriff Will Struthers and had just taken the evening meal to jail inmates. If he had been on his toes he would have recalled the two horsethieves captured back in 1885 when they hit the jailer over the head with a bottle and escaped. McGarvey, held on a rape charge, took Innis's revolver and fled. He was captured October 1 near DeBeque and three days later had a hanging sentence.

Meanwhile, in the city, the law enforcement staff had risen to three, Marshal Charles H. Wallis and two patrolmen. One of them was the well known officer, Andy Halligan. In 1909, the city adopted the commission form of government and the first actual police department came into being. It was administered under the commissioner of public affairs and had G. Burdette Welch as its chief.

Other than the normal number of violent deaths, Grand Junction oldsters re-

member few outstanding events. One of the most respected Sheriff ever to hold office in Mesa County took over in the late 1920s. Charles Lumley was in his seventh term as sheriff when he died in 1941, probably the longest reign of any sheriff. One thing which made Lumley the widely-known beloved sheriff that he was lay in his handling of juveniles. Lumley's philosophy was to keep youngsters out of jail if possible. Even today many of Grand Junction's solid citizens can respectfully remember hearing the calm voice of Sheriff Lumley straightening out their thinking and actions.

If any period in Grand Junction history could be considered the wide open, free-wheeling under-world era, it was 1937-1938 period when gambling ran more or less in the open. Prostitutes were known for their generous donations to needy families at Christmas. A house in the 100 block of Colorado Avenue had a sordid reputation as "one of the notorious resorts...where underworld night life of the city had continued to flourish for years," as reported by the Sentinel.

In December 1938, a grand jury was called to investigate gambling and liquor law infractions. Two days after the call for the grand jury went out, E. J. Eames was fatally injured in a fruitless holdup of the Biltmore Club over what is now the old J. C. Penney store. Eames, a friendly, congenial person, was manager of the club, one of the more widely known gambling lay-outs. A private detective from Denver was called in to investigate all the series of murders and the underworld activities. He was Walter Byron who worked with Fritz Becker and Joe Keith, who later became police chief, and with other officers. Byron was able to virtually clean up the gambling activities in Grand Junction as well as several murder cases.

In these early days, before trial could begin, the Judge would send the sheriff out on the street to round up people to serve on the jury. The barber shop and pool hall were good places to find them. If, after the attorneys challenge, there were not enough jurors then the sheriff would be sent out again to round up some more.

From The President.....

Once again, those who missed the Membership Meeting in Fruita on March 21st missed the most interesting program. A talk by Paul Britton, the last Secretary of the Uintah Railroad, about his experiences with the railroad was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Paul said he was especially liked on payday because he was pay master. Charles Teed then gave some more details of the history of the Uintah Railroad and showed Roy McCoy's slides which showed many of the engines, cars, and some of the switchbacks on the track.

Our program committee of David Sundall and Charles Teed have done an outstanding job this year in presenting great programs. If you miss them, you have missed something very worthwhile.

The program lined up for our May meeting is early day law enforcement. There will be speakers and an opportunity to see some of the gun collection at the museum. The meeting will be held at the museum, 4th and Ute, at 7:30 p.m. on May 23rd. Plan to be there.

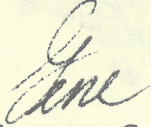
We are also looking forward to our July meeting when the new officers will take over headed by President elect Howard Roland. This will be a picnic covered dish affair in Collbran. There will be another very interesting program on various facets of early day life in Plateau Valley.

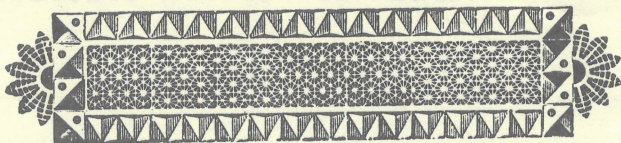
We had several new members join at the Fruita meeting and welcome them to our membership. Each member can help by bringing a guest to the next meeting.

We are enclosing renewal notices for the membership dues for the 1983-84 year which starts July 1st. You can help out the Society greatly by paying your dues before the July meeting so that new membership lists can be made up for the new year. The Board voted that those members who joined in March will be credited for dues through June of 1984.

I shall look forward to seeing all your bright and shiny faces at our May 23rd meeting. If you face is not bright and shiny, bring it anyway!

Sincerely,


Eugene C. Vories





On The Agenda.....

1983

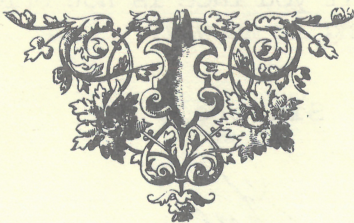
The next general meeting of the Mesa County Historical Society will be held at 7:30 on Monday, May 23. The meeting will be held in the Programs Room of the Museum of Western Colorado in Grand Junction at Fourth and Ute Streets. The program will feature several speakers, including Dave Fishell, Karl Johnson and ~~Don MacKendrick~~, and will cover the development of law enforcement in Mesa County.

Panel:

*Johnson, Karl, James Carter
and Dave Fishell*

Address Inquires To:

Mesa County Historical Society
P. O. Box 841
Grand Junction, CO 81502



Mesa County

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