

FIRST DRAFT

Telluride's Jim Clark was as much myth as marshal

When former Telluride Marshal Jim Clark was assassinated on the town's Main Street in August 1895, newspaper readers around the West were informed that Clark was a former member of Quantrill's Raiders, the infamous Confederate guerrilla group that operated during the Civil War. News accounts also said he rode with Jesse and Frank James.

That part of the Clark myth has been debunked by several Western outlaw researchers.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Clark, it seems, was confused with a man known as "Windy Jim

Cummings," who did ride with William Quantrill and the James brothers. The confusion stems from the fact that Clark's mother married a man named Cummings after Clark's father died.

But Clark also fed the confusion, claiming the Quantrill and James Gang connection in conversations with friends, apparently relishing a bad-boy image even as he served as a lawman for the rough mining town.

He also claimed to have helped Butch Cassidy in a bank heist and said he planned a famous Denver bank robbery.

Clark remains a mystery. Was he a tee-totaling, anti-gambling lawman who hated prostitutes but loved children and looked after poor widows? Did he maintain law and order while robbing miners in his spare time?

Could a man who stole from miners also be a friend of laborers who was killed for his pro-union views?

As Western writer and Butch Cassidy expert Dan Buck put it, "He was either a major-league bandit or a major-league raconteur. Or both."

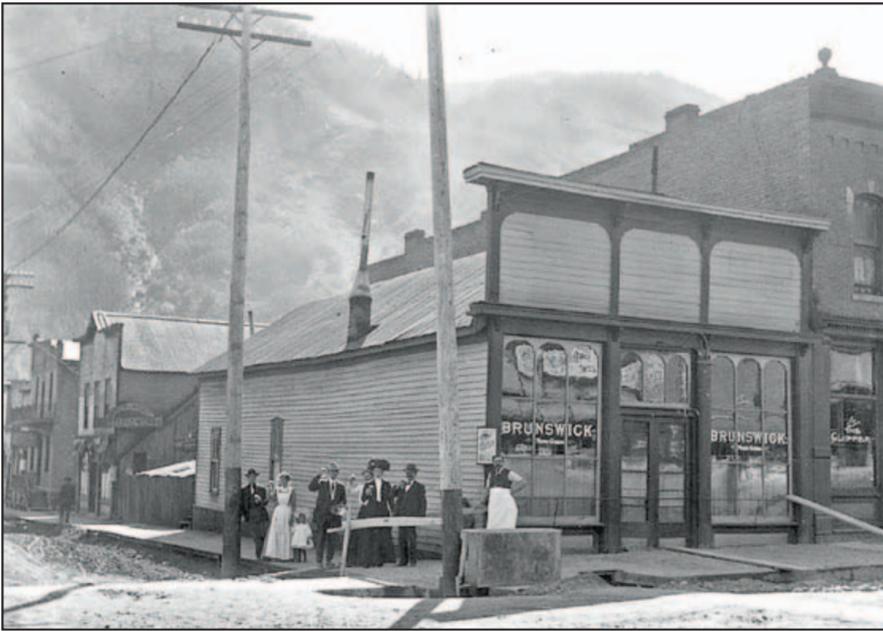
Much of what we know about Jim Clark comes from famous Colorado lawman Cyrus "Doc" Shores, who described Clark as a friend and one of the best lawmen Shores knew, despite Clark's alleged outlaw activities.

But Shores wrote his memoirs many decades after Clark died, and some of what he wrote — such as about Clark's involvement with Quantrill and the James Brothers — is nearly identical to stories printed in regional newspapers after Clark's death.

Other stories Shores recounted either came directly from Clark himself, or Shores made them up — something few believe Shores would have done.

Shores met Clark about 1890, when Shores was Gunnison County sheriff and Clark came there to track down a Telluride horse thief. Shores helped Clark successfully capture the man, then Clark assisted Shores in breaking up a cattle rustling ring near Cimarron. Later, Clark protected Shores when friends of a criminal Shores had arrested threatened to kill Shores.

Shores described Clark as a large, mustachioed man who handled many outlaws with



PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTOS

The Brunswick Saloon in Telluride, about 1900.

his fists. But he was also one of the best shots in Colorado with either a rifle or a pistol.

Shores said he witnessed Clark practicing his shooting by galloping his horse at top speed on a road near Telluride, leaning far forward and shooting under the horse's neck. When Clark unexpectedly injured a small bird, he was distraught about the unnecessary violence, Shores said.

The most notorious story Shores wrote about Clark was that he assisted Butch Cassidy, Tom McCarty and Matt Warner when they robbed the San Miguel Valley Bank in Telluride on June 24, 1889.

Clark claimed he aided the bandits by being conveniently out of town when the midday robbery occurred. Shores said Clark showed him a wad of bills that was part of the \$2,200 payment he received from the bandits.

But there are problems with Clark's story. First, both Matt Warner and Tom McCarty later wrote autobiographies in which they discussed the Telluride bank theft and their escape. But neither one mentioned assistance from Clark.

Additionally, researchers going through Telluride town board minutes discovered that Clark wasn't the town marshal when the robbery occurred. He was appointed as a night deputy on July 2, 1889, more than a week after the robbery. He became the full-time marshal on July 11.

Even so, Buck said, it's possible that Clark knew the bank robbers and that he assisted them in figuring out the best time to conduct the holdup or helping plan their escape route.

More difficult to believe is Clark's claim, as recounted to Shores, that he planned the holdup of David Moffatt's First National Bank in Denver three months before the Telluride bank heist, and that Clark received a \$10,000 bank note in the robbery.

It is generally believed that Tom McCarty, acting alone, planned and executed the March 1889 Moffatt bank



This drawing of former Telluride Marshal Jim Clark appeared in the Rocky Mountain News shortly after his murder in 1895.

to spend, unless changed at a bank. And that would have raised unwanted suspicion.

In any event, Shores never saw Clark's alleged \$10,000 note, and it never turned up again.

On another occasion, Shores said Clark showed him a fake beard, dark hat and coat that he claimed to wear when he robbed miners on their way into Telluride.

The miners deserved such treatment, Clark said, because they would only spend their funds on alcohol, gambling and prostitutes.

After Clark was killed, Shores said he visited Clark's cabin near Telluride, dug the bandit garb out of its hiding place and burned it to protect Clark's reputation.

Shores also told of walking the streets of Telluride with Clark one day when a prostitute approached and asked Clark if he could take her ailing dog out into the woods and put it out of its misery.

Instead, Clark pulled his revolver, shot the dog dead in front of its owner, then walked away without speaking to the woman, while casually telling Shores how much he hated whores.

We know little about Clark's early years. He was apparently born in Missouri about 1841. As a teenager, he allegedly stole his stepfather's mule, went to Texas with another youngster,

and stole some horses there before returning home with gold from his thievery.

He was a big 20-year-old when the Civil War began and may have served the Confederacy in some capacity. In Telluride, he often voiced his support of the Southern cause.

By the late 1870s he was in Leadville, where he was a miner and may have engaged in some banditry.

He went to work as a miner in Telluride in 1887. He won the marshal's job because his predecessor was doing little to halt crime in the rough-and-tumble mining town. Citizen Clark reportedly hauled several rowdy miners to jail using only his fists, no gun. That impressed town officials enough to land him the positions as night deputy, then marshal.

By 1895, however, town officials had grown tired of Clark. They fired him and replaced him with his deputy.

Perhaps there was enough truth to his outlaw stories that town fathers grew tired of such activity, or the crude way he dealt with people. Maybe, as later stories suggested, his pro-union sentiments were too much for a local government dominated by supporters of mine owners.

Clark didn't help his cause by threatening to kill those who had fired him.

On Aug. 6, as Clark walked down a Telluride street with a man called Mexican Sam, a rifle shot rang out. Clark was hit in the breast and died soon afterward.

No one was arrested for the murder.

Jim Clark, outlaw and lawman, man of mystery and "major-league raconteur," is buried in the Telluride cemetery.

Sources: "Memoirs of a Lawman," by Cyrus Wells Shores; "A Formidable Fighting Man, Jim Clark Served as Marshal of Telluride," by R.K. DeArment, Wild West magazine, April 2014; Author conversations with Dan Buck.

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Company to map oil, gas under Loveland

LOVELAND — A petroleum company plans to search for oil and gas deposits underneath a Colorado city.

Crews from Anadarko Petroleum plan to place seismic sensors in areas around the east side of Loveland.

Trucks belonging to the company will then vibrate the ground. Vibrations picked up by the sensors will help to create maps of the underlying geology. The work will take place over the first two weeks of December.

— Associated Press

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BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Rock, knife, scissors?

An unidentified male who is known to the Grand Junction Police Department reported Thursday that he was stabbed in the 300 block of South Avenue.

An investigation into the matter, however, revealed that the man was not stabbed. He was hit in the head with a rock.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

- Thomas Schaecher, 60, was issued a summons Nov. 21 on suspicion of careless

driving and driving under the influence of drugs in the 1200 block of North Avenue.

- Items valued at less than \$50 were stolen Wednesday in the 1000 block of Grand Avenue.

- An unknown man attempted to break into a vehicle Friday in the 800 block of Ouray Avenue.

- A burglar entered a building Oct. 27 in the 2800 block of Aviators Way and burglarized a vehicle in the building.

- A thief stole property valued at less than \$2,000 from a home in the 700 block of Texas Avenue Friday.

- Andrew Heil, 34, was jailed Friday on suspicion of child abuse, harassment, third-degree assault and criminal mischief in the 1100 block of Bookcliff Avenue.

- Stewart Piero Damain, 21, was jailed Friday on suspicion of unlawfully entering private property in the 2800 block of Hill Avenue.

- John Branstiter, 49, was jailed Saturday on suspicion of driving a motor vehicle without a valid driver's licence, failure to use a turn signal, possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of a controlled substance.

Pick 3 Midday Sunday: 0-4-8 Evening Sunday: 4-2-5

Cash 5 Sunday: 5-11-12-15-18

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