

FIRST DRAFT

Confusion surrounded fight with cattle thieves in 1882

People throughout Colorado, including Gov. Frederick Pitkin, were outraged when they heard in May of 1882 that Gunnison County Sheriff John H. Bowman and a deputy were killed during a shootout with cattle thieves somewhere near Grand Junction.

But neither Bowman nor the deputy was killed. It was a misunderstanding, apparently created when the leader of the cattle-rustling gang was shot and killed by Bowman.

Even so, two other men drowned while helping authorities trying to capture one of the cattle-rustling gang members.

1882 was Grand Junction's first full year of existence. And crime arrived with the settlers — listed as 524 people at the end of the year. Here are some of the other reported incidents:

■ In May, 22 wild cowboys rode into town, shooting their pistols and galloping their horses down main street. They charged into several saloons and shot glasses off shelves while demanding liquor.

■ In November, Town Marshal Jim Davis shot a man named Mike Dunn in the back as Dunn was running away from a saloon where he had attempted to shoot another man. Dunn died four days later.

■ Also in November, a man named William Wenzell was murdered in his tent-saloon along the Grand River 22 miles west of Grand Junction. Masked men entered the saloon, demanded money from Wenzell's partner, and shot Wenzell when he tried to reach for a gun.

At the time, there was no Mesa County. Instead, Grand Junction was part of Gunnison County. Sheriff Bowman of Gunnison was acting on a request from Utah authorities to track down cattle thieves who had crossed into Colorado to sell their stolen livestock.

Because Grand Junction did not have a newspaper until late 1882, nor telegraph lines initially, people elsewhere had to rely on the word of travelers for news from this area, who repeated rumors they had heard.

Typical of the initial reporting on the Bowman Affair was a headline in the Dolores News in early May, 1882, that said: "Another Sheriff Murdered."

The same article reported that Gov. Pitkin, acting on a telegram from Gunnison County District Attorney F.C. Goudy, was offering a reward for the capture of the killers.

Meanwhile, a wagon was sent from Gunnison toward Grand Junction to bring back the bodies of Bowman and Deputy Frank Brink.

However, it soon became known that Bowman and Brink were unharmed.

On May 6, the Gunnison Free Press could report that the lawmen were "Home Again," adding that "Sheriff Bowman and Mr. Brink Return, and are Received With Open Arms."

Other newspapers, not just in Colorado, provided reports of the incident. One of the most extensive was in the Salt Lake Herald Republican on May 27, 1882.

In that article, readers learned that Brink was actually a Utah stockman who, along with other Utah cattlemen, had lost a large number of livestock to a group of thieves known as the Howard Gang.

In February 1882, the Howard Gang had reportedly stolen more than 200 head of cattle near the San Raphael River in Utah, then driven them into Colorado to sell in mining camps.

Brink had served as a deputy marshal in Utah, assisting authorities there who were attempting to track down the cattle rustlers. He then traveled



MUSEUMS OF WESTERN COLORADO

The Grand Junction Coronet Band standing in front of the old Grand Junction News building at 536 Main St.

into Colorado, where he met and was deputized by Sheriff Bowman.

The two soon located a number of Brink's cattle, as well as George Howard, the leader of the rustler gang, whose real name was George Stuntz, according to the Salt Lake City newspaper.

Bowman ordered Stuntz to surrender, the paper said, but he responded by saying, "he would not 'by a d—n sight' and commenced firing at the officers" while running away.

Brink shot first at the fleeing outlaw, using a shotgun. But it was Bowman who stopped him.

"When about 75 yards distant, Sheriff Bowman seized a rifle, put it to his shoulder ... and without a moment's delay, fired," the Utah newspaper said. "Stuntz fell. The bullet had gone through his head as clean as a whistle."

Somehow, the brief gun battle led to the rumor that Bowman and Brink had been killed, the Herald Republican said.

Various newspapers placed the gunfight in different locations. One story said it occurred between Delta and Grand Junction. Another said near Grand Junction. Yet another said it was near the Utah-Colorado border.

In any event, with the death of Stuntz, one of his fellow rustlers, Samuel Clements, was captured nearby. Another man, John Richardson, was captured several days later in Rico, where the Howard Gang had been known to hang out.

Three other members of the gang were still on the loose at the end of May.

About 125 head of cattle belonging to Brink and others in Utah were tracked down; the remainder were still missing.

The Solid Muldoon newspaper of Ouray, often noted for its ascerbic rhetoric, offered this appraisal of Stuntz, known in Ouray as Howard.

The paper said, "He wielded a revolver with skill; a Winchester with accuracy and in short was a b-o-l-d b-a-d man."

A month before Stuntz was killed, two other men reportedly died while trying to apprehend Stuntz gang member Sam Clements.

Ben Scott and P.J. Gordon — had drowned while attempting to cross the Colorado River — then called the Grand River — while assisting in the search for Sam Clements.

Clements, it seems, had been arrested and jailed in Grand Junction for attempting to rob a local store. He had apparently helped move the stolen Utah cattle into Colorado and had time to engage in a little freelance criminal activity. Because the first jail in Grand Junction was a crude log structure and not very secure, it's not surprising that Clements escaped.

On the night of April 1, 1882, Scott and Gordon were part of a hastily organized posse to help Deputy Sheriff William

Town Shared Old West Shootin', But Law, Order Always Prevailed

Grand Junction has had its share of murders and other kinds of violent crimes over its 70-year history, but on the whole the city hasn't been what could be called a wild western town.

There was a short period in the late '80s when gambling and other forms of illegal activity got a good foothold. Along with that came a series of highly spectacular murders and gunfights. It even brought on one of the very few grand juries ever called in Mesa County.

Some of the articles were the ramshackle type and list the first marshal, Jim Davis, plenty boys, Charlie Haskell, a contemporary editor has said in his 1966 history:

"As a result, James Davis proved to be the right man in the right place. There at that time was no deputy in his position, and the law was in a remarkable degree."

But with the change of city officials in 1881, a new marshal was appointed. Either things remained the same or the new marshal didn't have the same spirit of law as the first marshal, A. D. Jackson. (Jackson in the spring of 1882 was an assistant marshal retained on his chief marshal and he and the



THE DAILY SENTINEL'S DIAMOND JUBILEE EDITION, SEPT. 15, 1957



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The Grand Junction Rifle Club in the year 1895 looked like this and could shoot even better. Marksmanship at the time was a handy skill, useful in a number of lines of work as well as in play. This Jubilee photo was provided Mrs. Warren F. Lane and she identified the figure on the extreme right as C.F. Bowman.

Nishwitz try to recapture Clements. The posse members believed Clements had managed to cross the swollen river.

According to an April 10 news report in the Gunnison News Democrat, Gordon and Scott were in a canoe with Nishwitz and two other men. But the river was raging with early spring runoff.

"When about one-third the way across, the boat sank, leaving those who could not swim to sink to the bottom of the river," the news account said.

Scott was burdened with a rifle strapped to his back and a belt loaded with ammunition and immediately sank out of sight. Gordon went under, managed to make it to the surface, then disappeared. Bodies of the two men were never recovered.

P.H. Gordon was 62, the paper said, and one of the earliest settlers in Grand Junction. He had 13 children. Scott was a single man of 27 who had recently moved to Grand Junction from Gunnison.

There was no word on what happened to Clements that night. Apparently he remained on the lam until the end of the month, when Bowman and Brink captured him after killing Stuntz.

Sources: Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection at www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org; Utah Digital Newspapers at www.digitalnewspapers.org; "Wicked Western Slope," by D.A. Brockett

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2021 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Now that the Legislature's Joint Budget Committee received its all-important March revenue forecast on Friday, the one quarterly economic report on which the next fiscal year's budget is based, the six-member panel can get serious about how to budget those expected revenues.

■ **Monday:** The Senate Finance Committee is to hear SB148, a bill that would create a new Financial Empowerment Office within the Colorado Attorney General's Office, which is to help Coloradans better plan for their financial futures.

■ **Tuesday:** The House Judiciary Committee is to discuss SB73, a measure partly introduced by Sen. Don Coram, R-Montrose, and Rep. Matt Soper, R-Delta, that would remove the statute of limitations on sexual assault.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Health and Insurance Committee is to debate HB1012, a measure partly introduced

by Coram and Rep. Janice Rich, R-Grand Junction, to expand the state's prescription drug monitoring program to include tracking all prescriptions and not just ones deemed to be controlled substances.

■ **Thursday:** The Senate Judiciary Committee is to hear SB176, a measure that expands workers' rights.

■ **Next week:** A Senate committee is to hear a bill introduced by Sen. Kerry Donovan, D-Vail, and Rep. Dylan Roberts, D-Eagle, that is designed to help spur more broadband development in rural parts of the state, focusing on projects in the most critically underserved areas.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at lege.colorado.gov. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

Colorado to relax mask mandate, capacity limits

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Colorado's health department is moving to relax its statewide mask mandate and limits on gathering capacity, saying the state's role in determining COVID-19 restrictions will lessen in favor of more local control as vaccination eligibility opens more widely.

The proposal announced Friday would allow local authorities and "private entities" in the counties with the lowest coronavirus infection rates to determine whether masks would be required. It would also end most restrictions on capacity for restaurants, personal services

providers, retailers, manufacturers, health care providers or outdoor events.

Gyms, bars and indoor events would still be subject to a limit on the number of people who can gather there. The proposed change would also not affect schools, as students aged 11 to 18 must wear masks for the rest of the academic year.

There are now only two so-called Level Green counties where this applies: the rural Crowley and Otero counties in southern Colorado, which means they have fewer than 15 cases per 100,000 people in a week.

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