

FIRST DRAFT

# FATE UNKNOWN

Gunman, marshal, artist and killer Bob Meldrum still missing

A \$2,500 reward awaits anyone who can successfully locate Bob Meldrum. There is one problem, however: Meldrum disappeared 100 years ago. He was last seen in December 1926, after a fire destroyed his leather shop in Walcott, Wyoming, north of Interstate 80 and east of Rawlins, Wyoming.

The reward is offered by the Museum of Northwest Colorado in downtown Craig, Colorado, which has an extensive collection of Meldrum-related artifacts and documents.

Robert “Bob” Meldrum, also known as R.D. Meldrum, is believed to have been born in England around 1866. When he arrived in the American West is unknown. He was barely over 5-feet 6-inches tall, but had a quick temper. Some sources say he killed more than a dozen men.

By 1899, he was in Dixon, Wyoming, east of Baggs, Wyoming working at a saddle shop. He was also a deputy sheriff of Carbon County, and when he attempted to arrest a man named Noah Wilkerson, Wilkerson was shot and killed. Meldrum collected the \$200 reward.

Not long afterward, Meldrum may have joined forces with another famous gunman, Tom Horn. A letter from Horn to Meldrum is preserved at the Carbon County Museum in Rawlins.

In the 1901 letter, Horn tells Meldrum, “I think I am going to need your help to do some work shortly.” However, Horn adds, “Don’t say any thing to ANY ONE about coming to me if I should send for you. I will certainly want you.”

Horn is believed to have murdered ranchers Mat Rash and Isam Dart in Brown’s

Park, Colorado, in 1900. And in July 1901, he reportedly killed 14-year-old Willie Nickell near Iron Mountain, Wyoming. Horn was convicted of murdering Nickell and was hanged in 1903.

It’s not clear whether Meldrum assisted Horn in any of those killings, but the timing and the secretive nature of the letter are suggestive.

By the time Horn went to the gallows, Meldrum was working as a guard for the Tomboy Mine during the Telluride miners’ strike. He soon developed a reputation for brutality, sometimes beating striking miners with his pistol.

He was also known for his fast gun. A 1932 newspaper article in Buffalo, New York, highlighted several gunfights of the Old West. It said that in Telluride, Meldrum captured two men at the striking miners’ headquarters, while 25 armed miners watched. One of the miners later explained why no one tried to stop Meldrum from making the arrests.

“We knew that Bob Meldrum had five cartridges in his revolver,” the man said. “That meant he could get five of us before we could get him. Nobody wanted to be among the five.”

Meldrum killed two men while in Telluride. In 1904, he shot unarmed Olaf Thissell in the abdomen when the two men got into a struggle. Meldrum was charged with manslaughter, but the case was dismissed for lack of witnesses.

In 1907, Meldrum shot and killed David Lambert, who was suspected of killing a Tomboy Mine guard. Meldrum was again charged with a crime, but again, the case was dismissed.

For his efforts, the Tom-



BOB SILBERNAGEL



CARBON COUNTY MUSEUM,RAWLINS,WYOMING

Bob Meldrum made this drawing of a horse with fancy tack in 1914 while awaiting his first trial for the killing of Chick Bowen. Note the similarity to the horse he is riding in the photograph on page 20b.

boy Mine owners rewarded Meldrum with an ivory-handled, engraved revolver. It was briefly on loan to the museum in Craig, but it is now owned by a private collector.

Meldrum also spent time in Cripple Creek and Boise, Idaho, during labor strife in those areas. But by early 1909, he was back in Wyoming.

One Colorado newspaper said he was hired by cattlemen between Craig and Baggs to clean out rustlers. The job pitted Meldrum against multiple armed outlaws. But, the newspaper said, “Those who know ‘Bob’ Meldrum have no fears as to the outcome.”

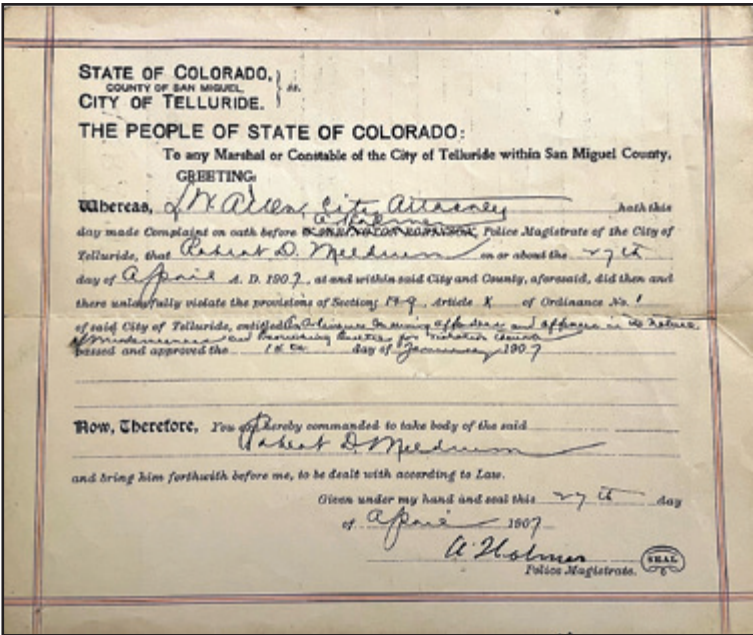
Meldrum also became marshal of Baggs, and in 1912 he shot and killed an unarmed cowboy named John “Chick” Bowen, who had been singing loudly and shouting outside a Baggs saloon. Meldrum demanded Bowen accompany him to jail, and Bowen reluctantly agreed. But when Bowen bent down to pick up his hat, Meldrum shot him three times. Bowen died the next day.

Once again Meldrum went to trial for murder, but the trial in Rawlins ended with a hung jury.

During his time in jail, Meldrum began drawing pictures such as the one on this page. He also drew from memory an actual shooting that occurred in a Baggs saloon.

After the trial, he was released on bond, but he disappeared as appeals were filed on his behalf.

In 1916, Meldrum surrendered in Fort Worth, Texas. He returned to Wyoming



MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO IN CRAIG

This warrant for the arrest of Robert D. Meldrum was issued in Telluride in 1907, following the killing of David Lambert.

and a new trial was held in Cheyenne. He was found guilty of manslaughter for killing Chick Bowen and was sentenced to seven years in the Wyoming State Penitentiary. He was released after 18 months.

Not long afterward, Meldrum moved to Walcott, which was then a small but bustling ranching town. He opened a saddle shop, which also served as a gas station and auto parts store.

In December 1926, a fire in a pool hall spread to Meldrum’s business and destroyed both his leather shop and his gas station, the Wyoming Reporter newspaper said.

What occurred after the fire remains a mystery.

In 1961, a man who grew up in Baggs told the Frontier

Times magazine he’d heard stories about Meldrum as a young man. “Some say Bob went to New York City to look for his lost relatives, dying in that city a few years later,” the man said. “Others say he went north to Montana and died there.”

The Buffalo Evening News article suggested that in 1932, Meldrum was “following a sheepman’s peaceful pursuit” somewhere in Wyoming.

Ann Bassett Willis, better known as Queen Ann of Brown’s Park, told another story about Meldrum’s disappearance that is probably fictitious, but is fascinating, nonetheless.

One day, an attractive woman visited Meldrum’s

See MELDRUM, page 20B ➤

\$1,000 REWARD



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INVESTIGATIVE  
ANYWHERE

THE ETHICS OF HONORABLE DETECTIVE BUSINESS GOVERN US IN ALL OUR TRANSACTIONS

Leavenworth, Kan., March 15, 1916



BOB MELDRUM

APPROXIMATE DESCRIPTION.

BOB MELDRUM. Age 48 yrs., Height 5 ft. 8 1-2 ins. Eyes, dark blue, well set in, deep creases around nose, Hair gray and very heavy. Teeth all gold except three, described as follows: two teeth, upper left jaw and one lower left jaw are natural. He is very deaf and uses left ear mostly when being spoken to. When last seen, February 1916 he was smooth shaven, wore a grayish crusher cheap hat, dark coat and vest, grayish striped trousers, tan lace shoes, dark gray, light-weight over coat.

Write or wire all information to, RUBIE RIVERA, SHERIFF, Rawlins, Wyoming or GLYNN'S DETECTIVE SERVICE Leavenworth, Kansas.

Please post in a conspicuous place

MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO IN CRAIG

A Kansas detective agency put out this wanted poster for Bob Meldrum while he was on the run before he gave himself up in Texas in 1916.



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## MELDRUM:

➤ Continued from **page 1B**

saddle shop in Wallcot, Willis wrote. She and 60-year-old Meldrum became close friends and they soon rode out into the nearby hills together. The woman returned, but Meldrum did not.

“She paid her hotel bill and went away that evening,” Willis wrote. “A note left in her room stated simply that she was Miss Bowen, a sister of Chick Bowen.”

Meldrum’s body was found a few days later “with his head bashed in,” she wrote. Local officials made no effort to track down the woman.

It’s a wild story, but no evidence of an event like that appeared in any newspapers of the time, and Ann didn’t mention the fire at the saddle shop, which was reported in newspapers.

In the years after he disappeared, newspapers in Colorado and Wyoming gave no hint of what might have happened to Meldrum. As far as the Museum of Northwest



**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, GEORGE GRANTHAM BAIN COLLECTION**

R.D. Meldrum, aka Bob Meldrum, on a horse with a fancy saddle and wearing cowboy apparel. Date and location are unknown.

Colorado is concerned, Meldrum’s whereabouts are still unknown and the \$2,500 reward remains unclaimed.

**Sources:** Meldrum files, Museum of Northwest Colorado in downtown Craig; Author interview with Paul Knowles, Executive Director,

Museum of Northwest Colorado;

“Bad Bob Meldrum: Lawman, Artist, Killer,” by Paul Knowles, Craig Press, June 2019; Letter from Tom Horn to Bob Meldrum, courtesy of the Carbon County Museum, Rawlins, Wyo.; “The Autobiography of Queen

Ann Basset,” by Ann Bassett Willis, Colorado Magazine, April 1952; historic newspapers at [www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org](http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org), [www.ppc-historicnewspapers.org](http://www.ppc-historicnewspapers.org) and [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com).

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