

FIRST DRAFT

Black cowboy demeaned by fictional representation

Google the name "Isom Dart" and you will find numerous sites that say Dart was an alias for Black cowboy and outlaw Ned Huddleston.

They claim Huddleston was born into slavery in Missouri or Arkansas and began his outlaw career on the Texas-Mexico border before moving to Wyoming and Colorado, where he became more violent.

But this version of Dart's story is almost entirely fiction, created by an author in the 1920s and repeated by many since.

The man in question was born "Isham Dart." His first name was shortened to "Isam," not "Isom." It is usually pronounced "Eye-some."

Dart's life began about 1858 in Guadalupe, Texas. It's not clear whether he was born into slavery, or if his parents, Cyrus and Indianna Dart, were among the free Blacks living in Texas.

The 1870 census for Guadalupe County listed Isam as a 12-year-old in his parents' household. He had two brothers and a sister.

Isam grew up in a community of Blacks, whites, Hispanics and Indians. In his teens, he was hired to help round up wild cattle.

In 1881, he had joined a cattle drive north and ended up in Wyoming, where he began wrangling horses for a large ranch. By the mid-1880s, he had moved to Brown's Park in Colorado, where he worked for Elizabeth and Herb Bassett.

The Bassetts had three sons. But it was their two daughters, Josie and Ann Bassett, who later became famous. Both were friends with Isam Dart.

Dart developed a reputation as a top cowhand and skilled horseman.

His friend, Joe Davenport, told a Rock Springs newspaper in 1929, "I have seen all the great riders. But for all-around skill as a cowman, Isom (sic) Dart was unexcelled and I never saw his peer."

Davenport added, "He was fond of watching bucking contests and often attended (bucking horse contests) at Grand Junction. He could outride any of them, but never entered a contest."

He once reached from his galloping horse to grab the tail of a runaway steer and flip it off its feet.

Dart also was a great cook, and he could play both the fiddle and harmonica. He was fond of children, and often acted as babysitter for the sons of Josie Bassett and her first husband, Jim McKnight.

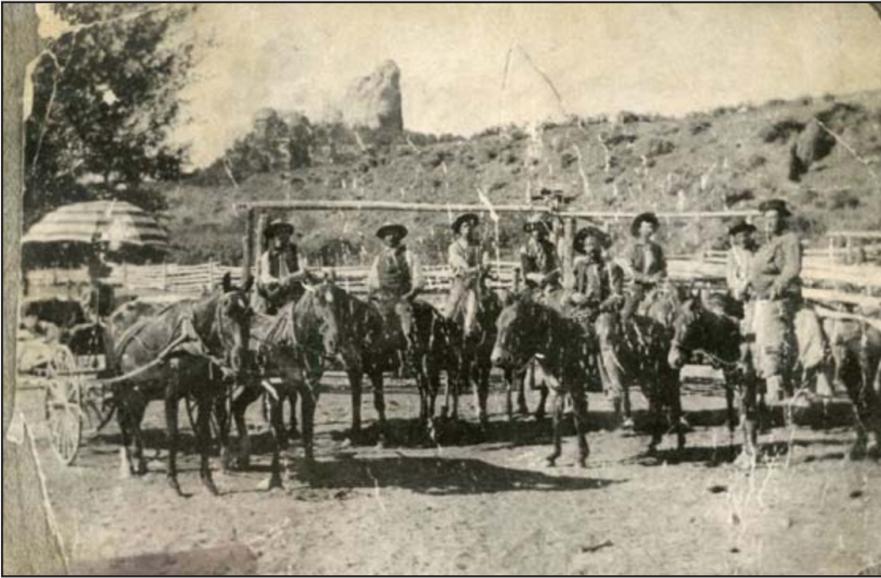
So, how did this kind and talented man end up in the historical record as a notorious outlaw, called "overbearing," "unscrupulous," and someone who "killed for no reason"?

In 1927, a book called "Outskirt Episodes," written by W.G. Tittsworth, was privately published in Iowa. It greatly exaggerated the author's life beginning in the 1870s. One modern author said his book was at least two-thirds fiction.

Tittsworth later had a ranch near Brown's Park, but by the time the book was published, he was living in Iowa.

One of the main characters in "Outskirt Episodes" is Ned Huddleston, who is usually named with the racial epithet "NNed." The author has him speak in atrocious minstrel-show dialogue.

The book variously described Ned as a coward, a kleptomaniac who couldn't stop stealing, and a deadly shot. It says he changed his name to Isom Dart when he moved to Brown's



MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO

Among a group of cowboys, Isam Dart is believed to be on a mule in the center. His friend, Joe Davenport, is the rider on the far left. The date and location are unknown. A notation on the back of the photo says they were at the Maxwell Ranch, working for Mr. Seeley.



MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO, ORIGINAL AT DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY.

A studio photograph of Isam Dart taken in Denver about 1890.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

The Bassett Ranch in Brown's Park as it looks today. Isam Dart worked at the Bassett Ranch frequently. The outlaw, John Bennett, was lynched here in 1898.

Park and attempted, unsuccessfully, to go straight.

It also claimed Dart despised fellow cattle rustler and Brown's Park resident Nat Rasper, a thinly disguised reference to a real rancher named Mat (sic) Rash. Rash was actually a friend of Dart's and was Ann Bassett's fiancé.

Until Tittsworth's book, there appears to be no record of a Black cowboy named Ned Huddleston living in Wyoming or Colorado.

Nor was there any record of a man named Tip Galt or Gault, the supposed leader of Huddleston's outlaw gang. Yet, according to Tittsworth, Galt and two other members of the gang were killed in a fiery shootout with cattlemen in Wyoming.

Tittsworth's book wasn't widely read. But in 1938, Charles Kelly published the first edition of his book, "The Outlaw Trail," primarily about Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch.

That book has been criticized for inaccuracies, and it incensed Ann Bassett for its depiction of nearly all Brown's Park residents as cattle rustlers.

Kelly also adopted Tittsworth's story of Ned Huddleston/Isom Dart. Subsequently, several other books on the region's history repeated the Huddleston story.

In a 1952 letter to a friend, Ann Bassett said she could not support anything taken from either Tittsworth's or Kelly's books. She added, "The story of Mat and Isam is false, very cruel and I will have no part of it."

Modern writers who have researched Brown's Park and the Bassett family, such as Grace McClure and especially Diana Allen Kouris, have taken pains

to debunk the Huddleston story.

Dan Davidson, director of the Museum of Northwest Colorado in Craig, has spent 25 years researching Isam Dart and has obtained several important Dart artifacts for the museum.

He is certain that Ned Huddleston was a figment of Tittsworth's imagination. He noted that the only official records related to Dart — census, probate and court documents — make no mention of Huddleston. They refer only to "Isam" or "Isham" Dart.

It is true, however, that Dart had several run-ins with the law.

In September of 1888, he was indicted in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, on three counts of illegally branding others' cattle.

A deputy sheriff traveled to Brown's Park and arrested Dart. He was released on bond, and charges were later dismissed.

Dart filed a civil suit against the deputy, arguing he had no authority to arrest Dart, and seeking \$5,000 in damages. The case went on for months, until a jury ruled against Dart.

In September 1890, Dart was arrested, along with two other men, charged with arson for the burning of Harry Hoy's barn. The three were also charged with larceny and the theft of three horses. Hoy had been feuding with Dart's friend and employer, Elizabeth Bassett, when his barn burned.

The suspects were jailed at Hahn's Peak, then the county seat of Routt County. The night before trial, Dart disappeared.

He remained absent from Brown's Park for some time.

But he was back in the park by 1894. He was there in 1898, this time on the side of the law, during one of the most notorious events in the park's history.

A teenager named Willie Strang was shot and killed in the park. The man involved and a friend rode away and met up with two other men wanted for cattle theft.

When a posse that included Dart cornered the outlaws on a rocky hillside, bandit Harry Tracy killed Valentine Hoy, Harry's brother.

Another outlaw, John Bennett, surrendered and was taken to the Bassett ranch. There he was held until a band of masked men rode up, grabbed him and lynched him. The other outlaws were eventually captured and sent to prison.

Nothing indicates that Isam Dart was among the masked vigilantes. But two years later, he was again accused of rustling. That charge would lead directly to Dart's murder.

Sources: "Nighthawk Rising: A Biography of Accused Cattle Rustler Queen Ann Bassett of Brown's Park," by Diana Allen Kouris; "The Bassett Women," by Grace McClure; interviews with and documents from Dan Davidson, Museum of Northwest Colorado; "Outskirt Episodes," by W.G. Tittsworth, online at www.archive.org; www.coloradohistoricnews-papers.org; "Isom Dart - Killed for Cattle Rustling," www.legendsofamerica.com.

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THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Although House Bill 1232 no longer calls for creating a state-run public option plan for Colorado's health care marketplace, the bill still calls for the Colorado insurance commissioner to set targets for premium reductions. The bill has cleared the House, and the Senate is to take it up this week.

Today: The House Agriculture, Livestock and Water Committee is to debate SB204, a measure that narrows the focus and puts more money into a new state program designed to help boost economic development in rural areas of the state or communities hard hit by large-scale job losses, such as the closure of a coal mine or a manufacturing plant.

Tuesday: The House Appropriations Committee is to hear HB1189, a measure that would expand protections against air toxins.

Wednesday: The Senate Business,

Labor and Technology Committee is to discuss HB1071, a measure that would allow local governments to use ranked choice voting in nonpartisan elections.

Thursday: The House Education Committee is to hear SB116, a measure that would ban the use of Native American mascots in public schools.

Next week: Although it's unknown just yet when the Legislature will end this year's session, it is clearly beginning to wind down. Normally, it would have completed its work last week, but this year's session was delayed in late January and early February because of the pandemic.

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

Bodies of 2 missing jet skiers found

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — The bodies of two men reported missing after going jet skiing on Utah Lake were found Sunday, authorities said.

Searchers found the body of one man about 9:30 a.m. and found the second man soon after. The men, brothers believed to be in their 30s, were wearing life vests for the outing on the state's largest freshwater lake, Sgt. Spencer Cannon of the Utah County Sheriff's Office told KTVX-TV.

"We don't know yet if there may have been some kind of injury involved, that precipitated before them going into the lake, or if they simply fell off their watercraft," he said.

According to Cannon, there was some wind on the lake at night but it was not severe. The water temperature is about 57 degrees, making it difficult to do well in the water for very long, he said.

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