

FIRST DRAFT

Cowboys Isam Dart, Mat Rash are fatally linked to Tom Horn

Isam Dart walked out of his cabin on the morning of Oct. 4, 1900, and headed toward his corral. He didn't make it.

From behind a tree 120 yards away, an assassin fired a single rifle shot that struck Dart in the breast and severed his spine. The 42-year-old Dart died almost instantly, moaning "Oh my God!" as he fell.

History has held notorious gunman Tom Horn responsible for the murder of Dart, who was a well-respected Black cowboy. Even though Horn was never arrested or even investigated for the killing, there is significant evidence to tie him to the killings of both Dart and Dart's friend, Mat Rash.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Dart wasn't alone when he died. He'd spent the night with George and Sam Bassett, brothers of Ann and Josie Bassett. Additionally, a young cowboy named Louis Brown was with them in the cabin Dart had built on land owned by Jim McKnight, the recently divorced husband of Josie Bassett. The cabin was on Cold Spring Mountain, which forms the northeastern boundary of Brown's Park.

George Bassett was the only person with Dart when the shot was fired. He heard Dart's dying words, saw his friend collapse, then raced back to the cabin, afraid he might be shot.

After huddling inside, the Bassett brothers and Brown climbed out a window and made their way to a nearby cabin to spread the news of Dart's death.

The murder occurred four months after Mat Rash was shot to death while alone in his own cabin, five miles from Dart's home. His badly decomposed body was found July 10.

Rewards totaling \$700 from Routt County and from Rash's banker in Rock Springs, Wyoming, failed to turn up any evidence of who killed him.

After Dart was also assassinated, The Steamboat Pilot wrote, "There is certainly some fiend in human form somewhere in that section ... The killing was the boldest, most defiant, reckless and desperate ever committed anywhere."

It wasn't long until suspicion fell upon a man who called himself Tom Hicks, and who had recently moved into Brown's Park.

Hicks was an alias for Tom Horn, the one-time Pinkerton Agency detective who had been hired by large ranching interests to clear out suspected rustlers and small ranchers in Wyoming and northwestern Colorado.

Isam Dart and Mat Rash, both from Texas, each made his way north on cattle drives. They both migrated to Brown's Park and became part of the Bassett family's circle. Rash was engaged to Ann Bassett when he died.

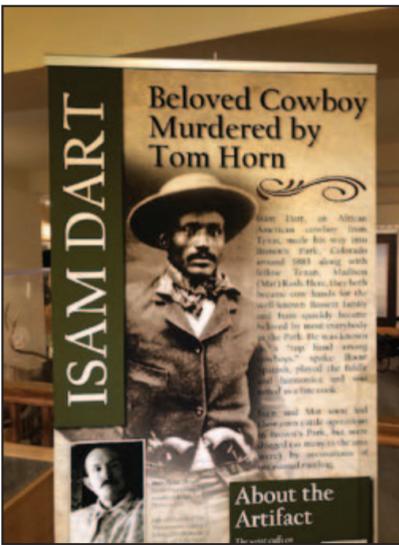
In the mid-1890s, both men had small cattle and horse herds. By 1900, both lived on Cold Spring Mountain, and Rash was president of the Brown's Park Cattle Association.

In 1899, a meeting of the cattlemen's Little Snake River Association occurred at the Denver office of one of its members, Ora Haley. Haley owned the Two-Bar Ranch just outside Brown's Park and had frequent conflicts with ranchers there, especially the Bassetts. His ranch foreman, Hi Bernard, was at the meeting, along with Haley and three other ranchers.

In 1917, Bernard described the 1899 meeting to fellow Brown's Park veteran, Frank Willis. Two ranchers present, from Baggs, Wyoming, said



Tom Horn braids bridal reins in 1902, while in jail in Cheyenne, Wyoming, awaiting trial for the murder of 14-year-old Willie Nickell.



MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO

A display at the Museum of Northwest Colorado in Craig discusses Isam Dart's killing by Tom Horn.



MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO

A display at the Museum of Northwest Colorado in Craig shows the leather wrist cuffs Isam Dart was wearing when he was murdered.

Brown's Park was a hangout for outlaws, Bernard recalled. They named Mat Rash and Jim McKnight as leading rustlers.

Bernard said the ranchers agreed to hire Tom Horn and that "Horn was to be paid five hundred dollars for every known cattle thief he killed."

Horn, aka Hicks, arrived in Brown's Park in early 1900, claiming to be a horse buyer. Neither Ann nor Josie Bassett trusted him.

Josie told her brother, Sam, "There's something wrong about him."

Even so, he befriended the Bassett boys and worked briefly for Mat Rash.

When cattle with a strange brand appeared in Brown's Park, Horn claimed they were stolen. He produced branded hides of slaughtered cattle that he said were found at Mat Rash's and Jim McKnight's ranches. But something else was afoot.

On May 6, 1900, a young rancher named Georg Banks was at a livery stable in Craig when he overheard a conversation between Hi Bernard and Tom Hicks (Horn) and another employee of Ora Haley.

In a deposition, Banks wrote, "I heard Mr. Bernard say now we have to get rid of these thieves and he says to Mr. Hicks: you kill Rash and that negro and (a rancher called Longhorn Thompson)." Someone also fired shots at

the Bassett cabin in December, 1900, but no one was injured.

On Sept. 26, Tom Horn, using his real name, signed an affidavit accusing Dart of stealing a horse from Jim McKnight. He listed McKnight as a witness.

It's unlikely McKnight was involved in the complaint, however. He was Dart's friend and he leased him land where Dart had built his cabin. Also, McKnight was moving from Brown's Park in the wake of his divorce from Josie Bassett.

Eight days after Horn signed the affidavit, Isam Dart was dead, and Horn felt secure enough to gloat.

In November 1900, the Wyoming Tribune in Cheyenne published an interview with Horn. He didn't admit to killing Rash or Dart, but he expressed his delight in their demise.

"I know Rash and Dart well, and two more notorious rustlers never infected the Rocky mountain country," Horn said. He claimed they were involved in massive rustling schemes and provided a hideout to bank and train robbers.

"Now that Brown's Park has been freed of its undesirable residents, respectable stockmen will go in there and settle the country," Horn said.

Not long after that, Horn encountered a former colleague, Pinkerton detective Charlie Siringo.

"He told me of killing two of these supposed cattle thieves,

one of them being a cowboy named Matt Rash," Siringo wrote.

But Horn's days were numbered. He was hanged on Nov. 20, 1903, for the killing of 14-year-old Willie Nickell in Wyoming. He is alleged to have killed 17 people.

Horn reportedly expected that his powerful ranchmen employers would get him released.

Instead, they were willing to let him die, and with him, any statements that could connect the ranchers to killings in the region.

The murders of Isam Dart and Mat Rash were never officially solved. Routt County Sheriff Ethan Farnham said he had insufficient reason to investigate, despite suspicions of Brown's Park residents and the calls of newspapers in Colorado and Wyoming for law enforcement to act.

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; "Confidentially Told," by Frank Willis, included as an appendix to "The Bassett Women"; Colorado Historical Newspapers; "A Cowboy Detective," by Charles A. Siringo.

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Colorado deaths surged in 2020 from COVID-19, liver disease and drugs

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Almost 9,000 more people than usual died in Colorado in 2020 from the COVID-19 pandemic and other causes.

COVID-19 either directly caused or was a contributing factor in 4,900 deaths, or more than half of the excess mortality, according to health officials.

Deaths from all causes jumped by more than 23%. Even accounting for population growth, mortality was up 18% compared to the five-year average.

Why more people died of some causes besides the novel coronavirus isn't clear, The Denver Post reported.

COVID-19 was Colorado's third-leading cause of death behind cancer and heart disease

last year. Chronic liver disease, Alzheimer's disease and drug overdoses accounted for more deaths than usual, according to an analysis of death certificate data.

People of color were especially hard hit in 2020. Age-adjusted death rates increased more than 30% for Latino, Asian American and Black communities in Colorado.

Deaths of white Coloradans increased 8% as fewer deaths from other causes offset mortality from COVID-19.

Deaths from influenza and pneumonia were 23% lower than would be expected. Researchers speculate widespread mask-wearing helped prevent viruses besides the coronavirus from spreading.

Steel mill furnace explodes, injures 7

PUEBLO — A furnace explosion at a steel mill in Colorado injured seven workers, three critically.

All seven were able to walk out and expected to survive after Saturday's blast at the EVRAZ Pueblo steel mill, Vice President of Operations Dave Light said.

Two of the more seriously injured workers were hospitalized with respiratory injuries. A third was hospitalized with hand and face burns. A cooling system failure at the furnace used to melt steel may have caused the blast, an official said.

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