

## FIRST DRAFT

## Jail-break artist's denouement remains a mystery

On July 23, 1898, The Aspen Tribune began its account of a jail break the previous day this way: "Pitkin county's jail is empty and Sheriff Fisher's star boarders have gone." Dave Lant and Harry Tracy had escaped, the paper said, and "Jailer Jones bears on his head the marks of their parting caresses."

It was the pair's third jail break in less than a year. After being captured in March near Brown's Park, in northwestern Colorado, they were transferred to Pitkin County because it was believed to have the most secure jail in the region.

Tracy reappeared in the Northwest. He was imprisoned in Oregon in 1899, escaped in 1902, then killed himself rather than be recaptured.

But David Lant simply vanished.

He was born David Barnabas Lant September 14, 1874, in Payson, Utah, south of Provo, to a respected Mormon family. His father, David T. Lant, would later serve on the Payson City Council.

David Jr. left home at age 16 and worked as a shepherd in the Vernal area, but likely returned to Payson regularly. He reportedly had a girlfriend there, and may even have fathered a son with her. The girl's angry father forced Lant to leave town.

His life of crime lasted less than two years, beginning with a saloon brawl in Vernal in early 1897 when he was shot

in the arm by a bartender. No charges were filed and he recovered quickly. However, in August he and two other men were arrested after breaking into a store in Woodruff, Utah, northwest of Vernal, and stealing clothes. In September, Lant was sentenced to eight years in the Utah penitentiary.

There he met Harry Tracy, who was also in prison for stealing clothes. On Oct. 17, 1897, while on a work detail outside the prison, Tracy, Lant and two others somehow obtained a gun and surprised the only guard overseeing them to escape.

Tracy and Lant fled to Park City, then back toward Vernal. But after several near-brushes with sheriff's posses, they left Utah for Wyoming.

They were with several others at ranch just north of the Colorado border in Wyoming when, during a card game on February 16, 1898, an outlaw named Pat Johnson shot and killed 15-year-old William Strang.

Ranch owner Valentine Hoy, whose headquarters were in Brown's Park, organized his neighbors to chase the killers. About the same time, two Utah lawmen showed up, tracking Pat Johnson for cattle rustling. All were soon on the trail of Johnson, Tracy and Lant, and they found the fugitives holed up in some rocks.

A siege ensued, during which Hoy was killed by Tracy. In the meantime, John Bennett, a friend of Johnson's who had been present when Strang



David Lant, left, and Harry Tracy after their arrest near Brown's Park in March 1898. The two outlaws escaped Pitkin County Jail that July. Tracy resurfaced in the Northwest and was imprisoned in Oregon a year later, only to escape in 1902 before killing himself. Lant, however, simply vanished.

was killed, was captured at the Bassett Ranch in Brown's Park. He was hanged there by vigilantes on March 2, 1898.

On March 4, a posse of roughly 60 people, including lawmen from Colorado, Utah and Wyoming forced the three fugitives to surrender.

Johnson was taken to Wyoming to stand trial for the murder of William Strang, while Tracy and Lant were sent to Hahn's Peak, to face charges for Hoy's killing. Brown's Park was then part of Routt County, with a jail at Hahn's Peak.

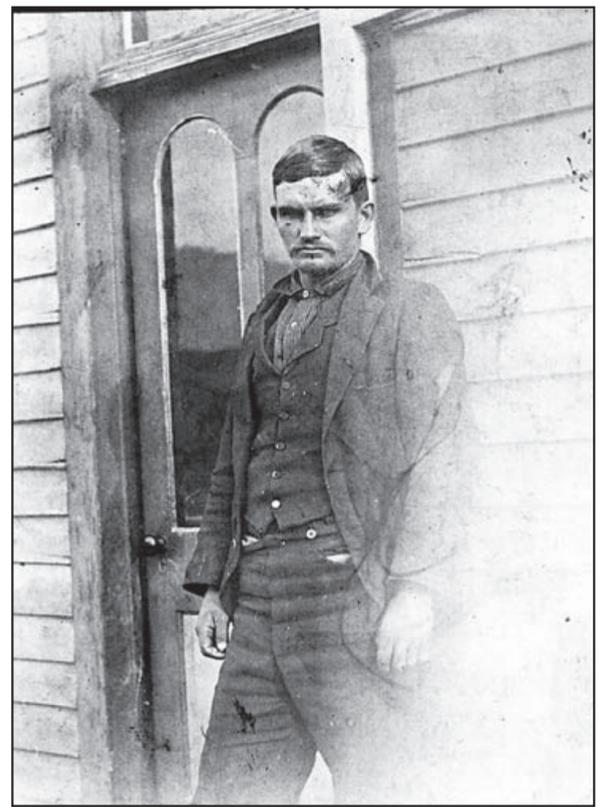
Their incarceration lasted 12 days. Then Lant attacked Sheriff Charles Neiman and beat him unconscious. Lant and Tracy locked him in a jail cell, stole two horses from a nearby stable and galloped into the night.

Neiman recovered and organized a posse early the next morning. At a ranch south of Steamboat Springs they found the nearly frozen men, who surrendered without a fight.

They were returned in chains and special leg shackles to Hahn's Peak, then quickly transferred to the Pitkin County Jail. According to The Aspen Tribune, it was nearly escape-proof.

The jail had a secure room between the prisoners' cells and the guard area, where meals were delivered and plates recovered without the guards having direct contact with inmates. Using levers outside the cells, the guards could open the door to the secure area, drop off the food, then retreat and open the cell door to allow the prisoners to gather their food.

Lant and Tracy overcame



Photos by MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST COLORADO IN CRAIG/Special to the Sentinel

Some said Tracy killed Lant, fearing he would surrender again. Another story said he was decorated in the Spanish American War, although the war ended in December of 1898. Other sources say he lived a long life as a shepherd named Dave Stillwell in northwestern Colorado. It's possible he even reconnected with the sweetheart of his younger days and helped her out financially.

this system by jamming something in their cell door so it didn't latch properly. When jailer Bob Jones delivered their evening meal on June 22, 1898, the two pushed open their cell door, attacked Jones with an iron poker, took his gun and escaped.

They eluded searchers and made their way to Breckenridge, where they robbed a saloon. At Kokomo, 15 miles from Breckenridge, they robbed another saloon and a homeowner.

After that, they were ghosts until Tracy was arrested in Oregon in February of 1899.

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lived a long life as a shepherd named Dave Stillwell in northwestern Colorado. It's possible he even reconnected with the sweetheart of his younger days and helped her out financially.

Like Butch Cassidy, David Lant is an outlaw whose final chapter remains a mystery.

Information for this article came from *The Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection*, from Kathryn Jenkins Gordon's book, "Butch Cassidy and other Mormon Outlaws of the Old West," Erin Turner's book, "Badasses of the Old West: True Stories of Outlaws on the Edge," and [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

Bob Silbernagel can be reached at [bobsilbernagel@gmail.com](mailto:bobsilbernagel@gmail.com).



Colt revolver taken from Harry Tracy when he was arrested in March 1898.

## Shuttle driver's condition led to fatal crash Tribal leaders criticize delegation on proposal for Utah monument

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — A University of Utah shuttle driver is dead after a medical condition caused a crash.

KUTV-TV reports 72-year-old James Lamb was pronounced dead Saturday at the scene of the collision. No other injuries or damage to vehicles were reported.

University communications director Maria O'Mara says the shuttle appeared to have hit the wall at a slow impact. There was minimal damage to the shuttle and wall.

Information from: KUTV-TV, <http://www.kutv.com/>

## BLOTTER

COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Criminal activity reports were not available as of Sunday night.

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — Tribal leaders in the Southwest said that they will no longer meet with Utah's congressional delegation on a proposal to designate a section of southeastern Utah as a national monument, and instead will take their interests to the White House.

A five-tribe coalition has accused Utah representatives of lip service and a failure to engage. A failure to release a draft bill by a Dec. 30 deadline was the last straw, tribal officials said in a letter sent late last week to Republican Reps. Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz.

"Our strenuous efforts to participate in the (Public Lands Initiative), and related proceedings before that over the course of the past six years have been consistently stonewalled. We have never been taken seriously," the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition wrote. "Our five sovereign tribal nations, and our

carefully drafted comprehensive proposal, deserve far more than that."

The group said Utah delegates are refusing to include a conservation vision for the landscape bordered by San Juan County's Cedar Mesa and Abajo Mountains into the public lands initiative. They will now focus on petitioning President Barack Obama directly in regards to the proposed Bears Ears National Monument, The Salt Lake City Tribune reported.

Other grievances include insincere lip service to their interests, noncommittal reassurances and a refusal to engage tribal representatives.

Chaffetz told The Associated Press on Sunday that the group's assertions were "holer in nature and void of fact."

"We've had over a thousand meetings, literally a thousand meetings," Chaffetz said. "I spent an hour with them in Washington, D.C., just 30 days

ago."

Chaffetz said he doesn't understand why tribal officials are giving up discussions when a bill hasn't even had a chance to be introduced.

"I don't know why they would walk away from the table when we haven't finished the process. But it's their choice," Chaffetz said.

Bishop said the coalition's agenda doesn't incorporate the wishes of Utah Navajos.

"One of our efforts has been to reconcile this proposal with what Utah Navajos want, and a monument is not the solution," Bishop said in a statement. "A structured conservation area would allow Native Americans who live in the area to use this land, and have the ability to maintain their traditional activities with the least amount of federal interference."

The proposed Bears Ears National Monument is named for twin buttes that overlook Cedar Mesa.

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