

# THE FLUME

The Park County Republican & Fairplay Flume

## Fact or Fiction: The Reynolds Gang and buried loot

The search goes on By Marianne Mogon Correspondent

December 2020



Map from "Hands Up! or Thirty-five Years of Detective Work in the Mountains and on the Plains" by David J. Cook.

The "Old West" is defined somewhat by legends and tall tales. Some are even embellished with hints of still buried treasure or booty of ill-gotten gains. Park

County has its own version of a legend and the possibility of buried treasure hidden by a notorious gang.

During the years of 1861 to 1865, America was heavily involved in battling the Civil War. The war was fought in thousands of different places, from southern Pennsylvania to Texas, from New Mexico to the Florida coast. Most of the battles took place in Virginia and Tennessee.

The territory of Colorado was created in 1861, just before the Civil War began and Colorado was considered as a marginal pro-Union territory. Colorado was strategically important to both the Union and Confederacy because of the gold and silver mines. Both sides wanted to get their hands on the valuable minerals. One campaign, the New Mexico Campaign, was an attempt to gain control of the Southwest, including the gold fields of Colorado, the mineral-rich territory of Nevada and the ports of California. This Confederate campaign was intended to invade Colorado and to cut the supply lines between California and the rest of the Union. However, the Confederates were defeated in New Mexico, thus ending that campaign.

In the late 1850s, many Southerners had migrated to Colorado seeking their fortune in gold. When the War broke out, many returned to the South to defend their homes. Some of those who stayed formed militia groups in Fairplay, Leadville, Denver and Beulah. These Confederate Partisan Ranger units operated in Colorado Territory from 1861 to 1865, raiding supply wagon trains, disrupting communications lines, recruiting volunteers and skirmishing with Union troops.

In July 1864, things got a bit interesting in South Park. However, it is important to keep in mind that much of the remainder of this story is built on innuendos and embellishment, creative recollections, some verifiable history, and possibly plain mistruths. However, it makes for an interesting tale to tell.

The story begins in July of 1864 when Jim Reynolds and eight Confederate raiders terrorized South Park. Reynolds and his group were members of Company A of Wells' Battalion of the Confederacy with official orders to disrupt Union supply trains and gather Confederate recruits from the mining camps. Reynolds and company showed up at the Guiraud's ranch (now Bison Peak Ranch at Garo). One account says Reynolds and Adolphe Guiraud were old acquaintances. Reynolds told Guiraud he had written letters and needed to mail them. Guiraud told him a stage would be stopping near where Como is today.

However, other accounts claim that the gang attacked the Guiraud Ranch, stole horses, cash and molested Mrs. Guiraud.

The gang headed to Dan McLaughlin's stage station, about eight miles out of Fairplay. They stole about \$3,000 in cash, a gold watch and the horses. Then, heading over Kenosha Pass toward Denver, they robbed the Michigan House stage stop, taking more horses and cash.

This is where things start getting interesting and convoluted due to several different versions found and sketchy information. A gentleman by the name of Mr. Berry began to warn every one of the Reynolds gang and their thievery and tried to raise a posse without success. Not to be deterred, Mr. Berry followed the gang as far as the Omaha House stage station near present-day Conifer. From the Omaha House, the gang headed toward Shaffer's Crossing.

Finally, a posse was organized, and on July 30, 1864, the outlaws were spotted camping in a forest in or around Geneva Gulch. A gunfight quickly ensued, leaving one outlaw, Owen Singletary, dead. The remaining outlaws escaped. One posse member, a Dr. Cooper, supposedly cut off Singletary's head, took it back to Fairplay, preserving it in alcohol, where it supposedly remained for many years until it disappeared. One story claimed that quite a few years later, there was a fire in one of the mines near Fairplay and a severed head was found, which was identified as that of Singletary.

It was also said that after the gunfight, the gang buried their loot and split up. It was estimated that the gang had taken somewhere between \$5,000 and \$100,000, and area locals blamed them for every robbery within miles.

Yet another account said the gang was captured except for John Reynolds and Jack Stowe. Jim Reynolds, the leader of the gang, was one of the ones captured. They were taken to Fort Lyon, the first stop on their way to Denver, for a military trial. However, they were subsequently executed while shackled to a tree. One account said it was a makeshift and reluctant firing squad under a Sergeant Williamson. One of the outlaws, John Andrews, was shot in the chest and left for dead. He managed to crawl to a nearby cabin and eventually healed and made his way to New Mexico to find John Reynolds and Stowe. He found them, and while attempting to steal some horses from a ranch, Stowe was killed in the skirmish and later a posse caught up with them and Andrews was killed. Reynolds managed to escape to Santa Fe and live under the assumed name of Will Wallace. After a few years, he became bored with his new lifestyle and met

Albert Brown. The two of them went back to the holdup business until they decided to head to Denver to avoid getting caught.

While Reynolds and Brown were attempting to steal some horses near Taos, N.M., Reynolds was mortally wounded. On his deathbed, he shared the story of how the gang had buried their loot, to fellow outlaw Albert Brown. He supposedly drew a map which showed the site of the ambush and the vague location of the treasure. The story claimed that Reynold's said, "find the horse, find the loot," among his final words. It was purported that Brown and partners traveled to the South Park area, trying to find the treasure. When they arrived at the site, they were disappointed to find that a forest fire had destroyed many of the landmarks. One account claimed they found an old white hat that supposedly had belonged to the decapitated Singletary. They also found a headless skeleton and horse bones in a swamp, but they were unable to find the rock-in prospect hole. Brown and his partners made three more attempts to find the treasure before giving up.

During the time of Reynolds' activity, a lawman named David J. Cook, who was appointed City Marshall of Denver, wrote of these events in his memoir, "Hands Up! or Thirty-five Years of Detective Work in the Mountains and on the Plains." He chronicled the story of the Reynolds gang collaborating most of the story with a few extra details.

In his memoir, Cook tells that Albert Brown was arrested after an attempted robbery and ended up in Denver jail. Somehow, Cook ended up with the story and the map before Brown escaped from jail and later died in a drunken brawl in Laramie City, Wyoming Territory.

Cook provided the following quote of John Reynolds as told to Albert Brown: "Jim and me buried the treasure the morning before the posse attack on Geneva Gulch. You go up above there a little ways and find where one of our horses mired down in a swamp. On up at the head of the gulch we turned to the right and followed the mountain around a little farther, and just above the head of Deer Creek, we found an old prospect hole at about timberline. There, we placed \$40,000 in greenbacks, wrapped in silk oilcloth, and three cans of gold dust. We filled the mouth of the hole up with stones, and ten steps below, struck a butcher knife into a tree about four feet from the ground and broke the handle off, and left it pointing toward the mouth of the hole."

It's uncertain just what parts of the story are true, or if it's another tall tale knitted and embellished from actual facts. But, by all accounts, the money remains buried somewhere in the South Park area.