

## History group explores robbers and murderers An evening with the Reynolds Gang and the Espinosa Brothers

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### Bandits and posses

*Nearly 120 people attended the Park County Historical Society presentation of, "An evening with the Reynolds Gang and the Espinosa Brothers," March 14, 2015. Christy Wright, president of the Park County Local History Archives, pictured at the front of the room, details the reign of terror perpetrated by these 1860s bandits. (Photo courtesy of Wade Waldrup)*

The peace was shattered as the Reynolds Gang and Espinosa Brothers rode into the upper fellowship hall of Shepard of the Rockies Lutheran Church in Bailey March 14.

They came at the request of the Park County Historical Society and Christie Wright's "Robbers and Murderers of Park County" presentation.

Wright is president of the Park County Local History Archives and author of "All That Lies Beneath" and "South Park Perils."

Using text and pictures from historic newspapers and numerous books, Wright spun a tale of greed, revenge and murder

and she ended with the answer to a mystery, "Where is the Reynolds' lost gold?"

The Reynolds Gang was a band of Confederate raiders who rode and robbed from Cañon City to Como.

Jim Reynolds was born in Texas in the 1840s and he entered Park County in 1863. Possibly commissioned by the Texas Confederate Forces, he had plans to steal all that Union gold and donate it to the Confederate treasury.

Commissioned or not, Reynolds quickly realized it was much more lucrative to keep the booty for his gang and himself. At the time, it was said that almost every robbery in Colorado, large or small, was at the hands of the Reynolds Gang.

There were several posses out of Fairplay looking for the gang. Reynolds knew the territory well and he sent his men up Handcart Gulch, near Kenosha Pass, with all their loot. Somewhere up the gulch or in one of the nearby gulches, they hid their gold.

When one of the posses caught up with the gang, Reynolds and three others were captured and Reynolds's brother escaped to New Mexico.

The Rocky Mountain News headline Aug. 26, 1864, read, "Newspapers report Captain Reynolds was captured however his brother (John Reynolds) and several others escaped."

When the captured bandits were being taken to Fort Lyon by a military detail, some say a fight broke out. All of them were killed, except two who managed to

escape. Another story recounts how the detail was running low on food and decided to execute all the bandits.

And then Wright told us what she found out about the missing treasure. "No one really knows where it's at," Wright said.

In current terms, Felipe and Vivian Espinosa would be known as terrorists. They were certainly one of the first serial killers in America.

The brothers were born in the Santa Fe area of the New Mexico Territory. Legend says the brothers were out to avenge the death of six family members during the Mexican-American War.

Felipe claimed to have had a vision of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who told him to murder 100 white men for every family member that was killed. That vision was strangely different from most of the benign pronouncements of the Virgin Mary.

According to the Legends of America website, "The brothers' first victim was found in May 1863, his corpse mutilated and the heart hacked out of his chest. During that summer, 25 more people were attacked and killed in similar fashion."

The brothers and the gang killed 32 people before the end of their reign of terror in central Colorado. A posse from Park County was finally able to track the gang to an area southwest of Cañon City.

Vivian was shot and killed and Felipe escaped. He recruited a 14-year-old cousin named Jose and Jose tried to resume terrorizing. Well-known tracker Tom Tobin resumed the search and gunned down the two men, beheaded them and brought their heads back to Fort Garland.

After all, it was the Wild, Wild West.

Wright's book, "South Park Perils," is available at <https://sites.google.com/site/parkcountyhistorystories/south-park-perils>)