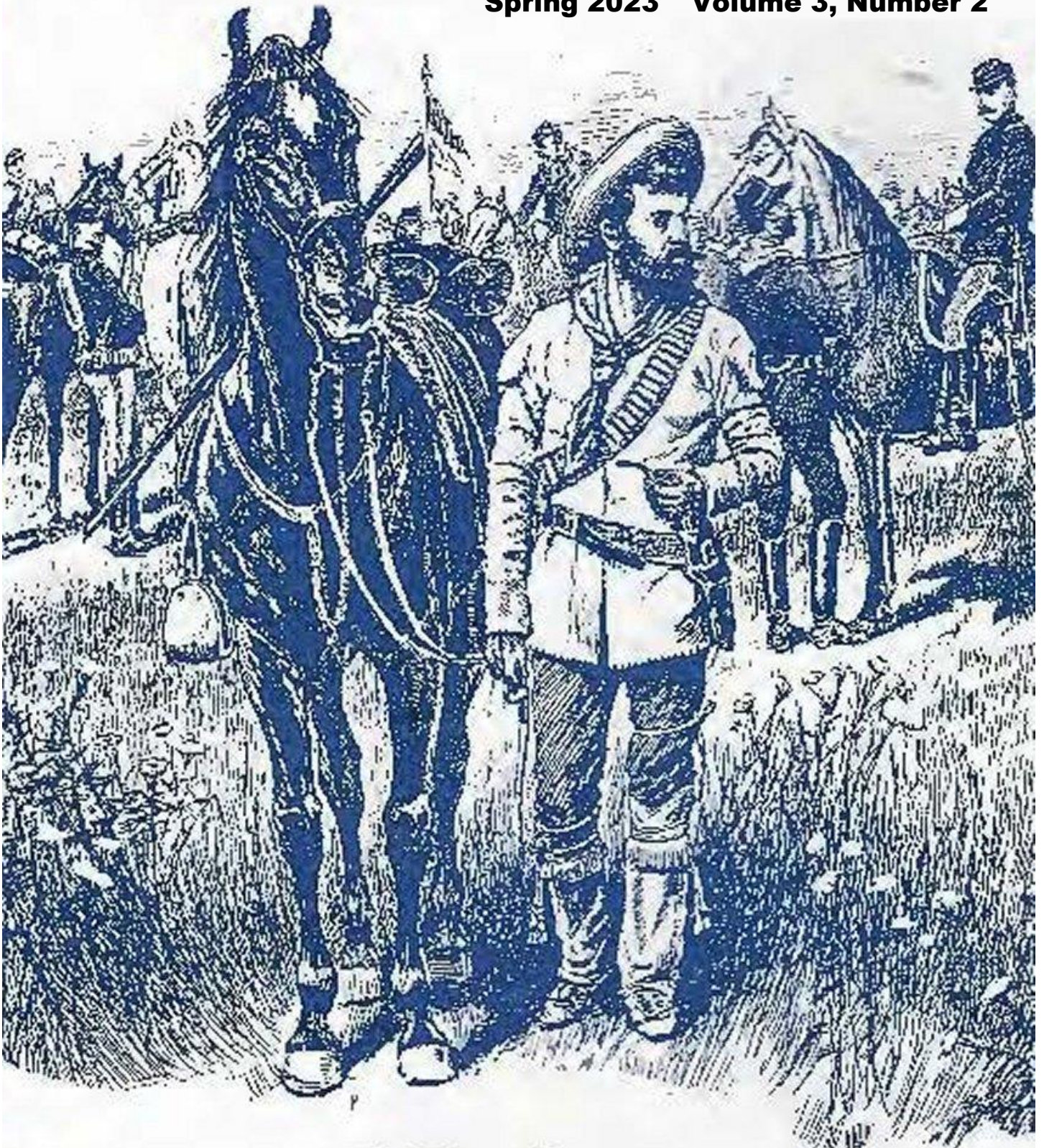


THE
Cochise Corral
County
WESTERNERS

The Border Vidette

Spring 2023 Volume 3, Number 2



Ink Slinger (editor)

Doug Hocking

doug@doughocking.com or inkslinger@cochisecountycorral.org

Printer's Devil

Jonathon Donahue

jon404@outlook.com

COCHISE COUNTY CORRAL

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Deputy Sheriff	-	Jon Donahue
Recorder of Marks and Brands	-	Cindy Lehman
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The *Border Vidette* is published quarterly by the Cochise County Corral of the Westerners. The Corral meets at 7 p.m. the first Thursday of each month at Schieffelin Hall, Tombstone. Schieffelin Hall was built in 1881 as a theater and lodge of the Freemasons. King Solomon Lodge Number 5 still meets upstairs. The Corral is dedicated to preserving Western Frontier History and Legend and to having a good time while doing so. Membership in the Corral is \$20 and entitles the Ranch Hand to attend talks on the Old West, join us on Trail Rides (by automobile) to sites of historic interest, and to our publications: *The Fremont Street Mail*, a monthly newsletter, and the *Border Vidette*, our journal. More information about the Corral can be found at www.CochiseCountyCorral.org and about Westerners International at <http://www.westerners-international.org/>

The *Border Vidette* accepts **interesting** articles about Western Frontier History no matter how short. Articles should be sourced and accompanied by endnotes. An unlimited number of photos (JPG preferred) may accompany the article. If the author has the rights to the article, the *Border Vidette* is willing to republish it. The journal is only published on-line and may be distributed as a PDF via email. Please contact us if you think you have something interesting to share. Contact us at InkSlinger@CochiseCountyCorral.org

A vidette is the term used in the 19th century for a mounted (cavalry) lookout.

Cover: Buckskin Frank Leslie on patrol with the U.S. Cavalry

The Border Vidette

Published by the Cochise County Corral of the Westerners

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Things Are Happening

By
Doug Hocking, Inkslinger

As the *Border Vidette* enters its third year of publication, things are stirring in our neck of the woods. The Butterfield Trail that passes all through the northern part of our county has received Historic Trail designation and now comes under the control of the National Park Service for development. At the same time, national and state Butterfield Trail Associations are forming. You can see that the Overland Mail is again highlighted in this edition.

We are as always looking for good articles. The *Border Vidette* is focused on *preserving elements of the frontier West that might otherwise be lost*. We are also anxious to promote the work of our Ranch Hands encouraging their scholarship and writing. No story is too short. On occasion we also promote the writing of our novelists.

Southern Overland Trail (Butterfield)

By
Gerald Ahnert

Butterfield Trail Historic Trail Designation update

The Resource Study Act summation, by The National Park Service to support the Historic Trail Designation for The Butterfield Trail, listed the historian who was the authority for Butterfield's Overland Mail Company in each state. For Arizona it listed "Gerald T. Ahnert." For fifty-three years I have been researching the Overland Mail Company's history and the Butterfield Trail in Arizona. I am a member of The Southern Trails Chapter of The California-Oregon Trails Association. I have written articles for their publications. I am also a member of the Arizona Historical Society, Cochise County Historical Society, Cochise County Corral of the Westerners and many other historical societies.

Kirby Sanders had the Congressional authority for the Resource Study Act. From 2009 to his death in 2015, I was his consultant for Arizona. After his death, Frank Norris, historian National Park Service (NPS), asked me to help him out to further pinpoint some of the California station sites. I have since aided other historians for Butterfield stage station history in states all along the Butterfield Trail from Missouri to California. I was told that local historians in each state would share the responsible with the NPS for the erection of interpretive markers along with the support of local organizations such as historical societies.

Immediately after the bill was signed into law, Helen Erickson, University of Arizona (U of A), started a committee to establish historical markers along The Butterfield Trail in Arizona, interpretive kiosks, a virtual image for Dragoon Springs Stage Station, and an overall trail guide with supporting photographic images. The committee consists of myself, Helen Erickson (U of A), and Jenna Leveille (Arizona Preservation Foundation). I will be responsible for the wording on the Interpretive markers. Besides obtaining grants, Helen and Jeanne will start sub-committees to accomplish the other tasks.

Dragoon Springs Stage Station, as the only surviving ruins of a Butterfield stage station in Arizona, will be the center-piece in Arizona. For about ten years I have been working on a project for new interpretive markers at the station. By coincidence, just before the Butterfield Trail bill was signed, site manager archaeologist David Mehalic notified me of his plan to grade the road into the site, erect a kiosk, and replace the old markers with new markers based on my new information. I had already started a file for the station's dimensional details. Helen is going to assign a U of A graduate student to develop a virtual model of the station based on my info. Other graduate students with applicable disciplines will be assigned other tasks. One will be a student versed in GIS mapping to develop an overall Arizona map of the trail based on my own individual GIS maps showing the trail and station locations. A virtual trail map guide will also be developed by a graduate student with supporting trail photos from my files. Doug Hocking will also be involved for some of the wording on the markers at Apache Pass Stage Station and Dragoon Springs Stage Station.

On May 20, the newly formed Butterfield National Trail Historic Association will meet at Springdale, Arkansas. The recently chartered association will have a chapter in each state that the Butterfield Trail passed through. Each chapter will have dues paying members, their own newsletters, and events. Our own Gerald Ahnert and other state historians will be members of the individual chapters. The May 20 meeting will finalize the structure for this new association. Mr. Ahnert will be taking copies of his proposals to the meeting which includes his drawing of a common marker logo for Arizona (see above in this issue).

Editor Dan Judkins and Mr. Ahnert consider an article upcoming in *Desert Tracks* (Southern Trails Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association) to be one of his most important and significant about the Southern Overland Trail. Dan is planning on it being in the fall issue. Note that it is about "trails" and not just the Butterfield Trail. It is extensive and titled "The Pima-Maricopa Nation--An Oasis of Safety on the Southern Overland Trail."

If archaeological excavation is ever undertaken at the Seneca Station site, the archaeologists may uncover part of the original adobe Butterfield structure below the later rock foundation. As shown in the 1960 excavation of Gila Ranch Stage Station (which is an example of Butterfield's standard design for adobe stations), a foundation of adobe bricks about 2 bricks high was constructed below ground on which was built the rest of the adobe station.

The Clear Blue of it All

A Travis Cooper Tale

by Lewis Kirts

Lewis Kirts is a member of the Cochise County Corral of the Westerners. This is an introduction to the character Travis Cooper. If you want to read more, you're encouraged to purchase the book.
Inkslinger

Mama, all five-foot-one of her, feigned indifference when, once again, Papa, her husband of eighteen years, informed her he had to go north for a few weeks to help at the stockyards up near Fort Grant.

With both hands on hips, Papa took his stance. “Now, Millie, you know it’s the only job out there. We need the income and this is the best way I can figure to provide. I’ll bring home a beef and a few coins. I always do, don’t I?” Papa peered over at me, then back to Mama. “I think Travis should take a week off of church goin’ and help me again this time out.”

Mama huffed, stirred the stew she was cooking, then pointed the soup ladle at him. “And who is gonna help me out around here? I need Travis here to tend the mule and get me to church. He’s missed enough of his bible lessons as it is.” She commenced to stirring while shaking a finger at him. “That boy needs his learnin’, and the best way to get it is through the word of our Lord.”

Papa pointed toward the north. “He’s closer to God out yonder — under the clear blue of it all — than he is in the damn church of yours!”

“That’s it, Miles! Go! But you’re not taking Travis with you.” She threw the soup ladle into the dishpan. “There’s jobs right here in Pomerene. I don’t see why you have to go north. I think you just go to avoid gettin’ a good Christian education.”

I pushed my bowl away, glanced at Mama, then spoke to Papa. “I know enough about your line of work, and while I want to help with providing, I think Mama needs a little help with gettin’ the garden planted before the heat sets in, and for hitchin’ the wagon for church.”

Mama smiled at me, then turned to Papa. “He stays here this time.”

More than two weeks passed with no word from Papa, and I wondered if he’d turned bad for good. I’d been with him a time or two, for his *job*, and I didn’t think his way of life was what I wanted for myself. I figured there must be a better way to take care of Mama, and when we got word of Papa’s untimely death, I knew what task lay ahead. I aimed to make a living at setting things straight for Mama, and for anyone else who’d lost a loved one, a fortune — or even two bits — to anyone dealing from the bottom.

My first task was to sell our small spread, move Mama into Benson, and get me a good horse and outfit. A few more dollars spent and I had me an old, but reliable, revolver. What I needed now was backup.

Like I said, I'd ridden with Papa on a few occasions, and while he'd taught me a bit about his line of work and how to read people, I wasn't sure about the other side of things and how to go about dealing with the law.

I thought on it and decided to put it all on the line and find someone I thought might hear me out and back me up.

I made sure Mama had food, a few extra dollars, and a warm room in the boarding house, then I hit the road for Bisbee — the headquarters of the Arizona Rangers. I figured that might be a good place to start.

Just two miles south of Benson, I ran into a group of Arizona Rangers. Their captain, a man by the name of Fitzsimmons, heard me out.

Fitzsimmons shook his head. "I don't know, kid. I think you should leave this to Sheriff McLeod. Come on to Benson with us and I'll help you make your case."

I shook my head and looked at the ground. "Can't do that, sir." I sighed and looked him in the eye. "I have to settle this myself so I can get on with things."

Fitzsimmons worked at talking me out of my plan, but when he realized I wasn't gonna heed his warnings, he offered his hand.

I accepted, we shook, and he gave me the information I'd need to get him behind me once I figured out who was behind Papa's demise.

At fifteen, still way shy of sixteen, I now had a line on a new way to provide for Mama. I just had to prove myself.

I found a job on a ranch just outside of Benson. An honest outfit with honest work. Twenty and found would provide what I needed and would put money in the bank for Mama. Two months in and I got a day off to visit her. She was happier than I'd seen her in a while, and I think a warm bed, three squares and a roof that didn't leak — even during monsoons — was the cause. Not to mention a church just down the street. But I sensed her gay mood was more for my benefit than reality.

I got a few dollars out of the bank, took her shopping, and then to supper in her brand-new dress. I think it might have been the first dress she hadn't made, or at least repaired from a hand-me-down she'd received through the church.

Mama finished her meal, politely put her cloth napkin on her empty plate, sat up straight and looked me in the eye. "I'm trustin' you, Travis. I was never sure about your papa and his jobs, and

maybe I'll never know the truth about his death, or if that was really him they buried, but I hope I've taught you well— me and the Lord, that is.” She leaned back, sighed and looked down at the plain gold band Papa had placed on her hand all those years ago. “I loved that man. I truly did. I just wish life was a bit easier for him. I'm glad you left word at the old place, just in case they hear anything more about what happened to him, and I hope he taught you a bit about life and how to get along in this world, before he left it. I think the Lord provides for all — but four-fold for those who try to provide for themselves.”

I reached for Mama's hand. “I've been providin', and I'll continue. And I promise you this: If I get word about Papa's death, I'll make sure any wrongdoing against him will be dealt with. So, if you don't hear from me for a bit, don't worry. Money — *honest money* — will be put into your account as best I can. I'll visit when possible, and send postcards often. If you need anything, you get word to me. I hear the sheriff here in Benson is a good man, so let him know and tell him where I work. He'll get word to the ramrod and I'll come runnin'. I love you, Mama, but I gotta head back. Let me walk you to the boarding house.”

Mama seemed a bit frail for her age, and I wondered if it was because she missed Papa. With Mama settled in her room, I took leave. On the way out, I spoke with Mrs. Riches, the owner of the boarding house. “Here's an extra bit of money. Please make sure Mama has anything she needs. She gets chilled easy, so an extra blanket might help. Get word to me of any of her needs. She's not likely to complain or ask for anything.”

She put her hand on my arm. “You're a good son. I hope you're a good man. I've heard rumors about your papa. Seems he was in a bad bunch and paid the price.”

She had piqued my interest. “What did you hear... and where?”

“I was in the mercantile and overheard a rancher from Dragoon talking about a gang your papa had ridden with. Miles Cooper, right?”

I nodded and she proceeded to tell me what she'd overheard regarding a man by the name of Jed Bigler. I listened. I planned. I figured to send a postcard to Bisbee to see if that ranger, Fitzsimmons, would back me.

I thanked Mrs. Riches for the information, tipped my hat and started for the door. She grabbed my arm again.

“Travis — your mother puts on a good show, but from time to time, I hear her crying. She's hurting, and I don't think there is a thing in this world that will help her get over the loss of your papa.” She let go of my arm. Her expression sorrowful. “I just thought you should know.”

I left with an uneasy feeling about Mama. I just hoped she would overcome her grief and enjoy life, if just a bit. And I hoped she would understand that justice had been done once I'd taken care of those who'd murdered Papa. Maybe, then, anguish would be replaced with joy.

I got a postcard and addressed it to Captain Robert Fitzsimmon in Bisbee, outlining my plan. I had a good idea of where to find this Jed Bilger. When you work as a ranch hand, you hear stories about rustlers, their tactics and their hunting ground, and that name had come up a time or two. From what I gathered, there were four in that bunch, and all of them were said to be ruthless.

Impatience, being a fault of mine, might have gotten the better of me if it were not for Sheriff Joe McLeod. I'd spoken with him about my plans and he urged me to wait for the rangers. As much as I wanted justice for my father, I knew McLeod was right and I'd have to bide my time.

I booked a room in the hotel and had a meal at Café Bonita. I tried, but couldn't sleep, and at four in the morning, gave up. I headed down to the hotel lobby, procured a table in the dining area, and ordered buttermilk biscuits and sausage gravy.

Just as I was taking my first bite, Captain Fitzsimmons pulled up a chair and joined me.

We ate in relative silence — but he was watching me. I think he was sizing me up — trying to decide if I was fit for the task.

Plates cleared and coffee refilled, Fitzsimmons sat back. He eyed me for a moment. “You sure about this, kid?”

I leaned back, I was relaxed and confident about what I was planning to do. “I'm sure.”

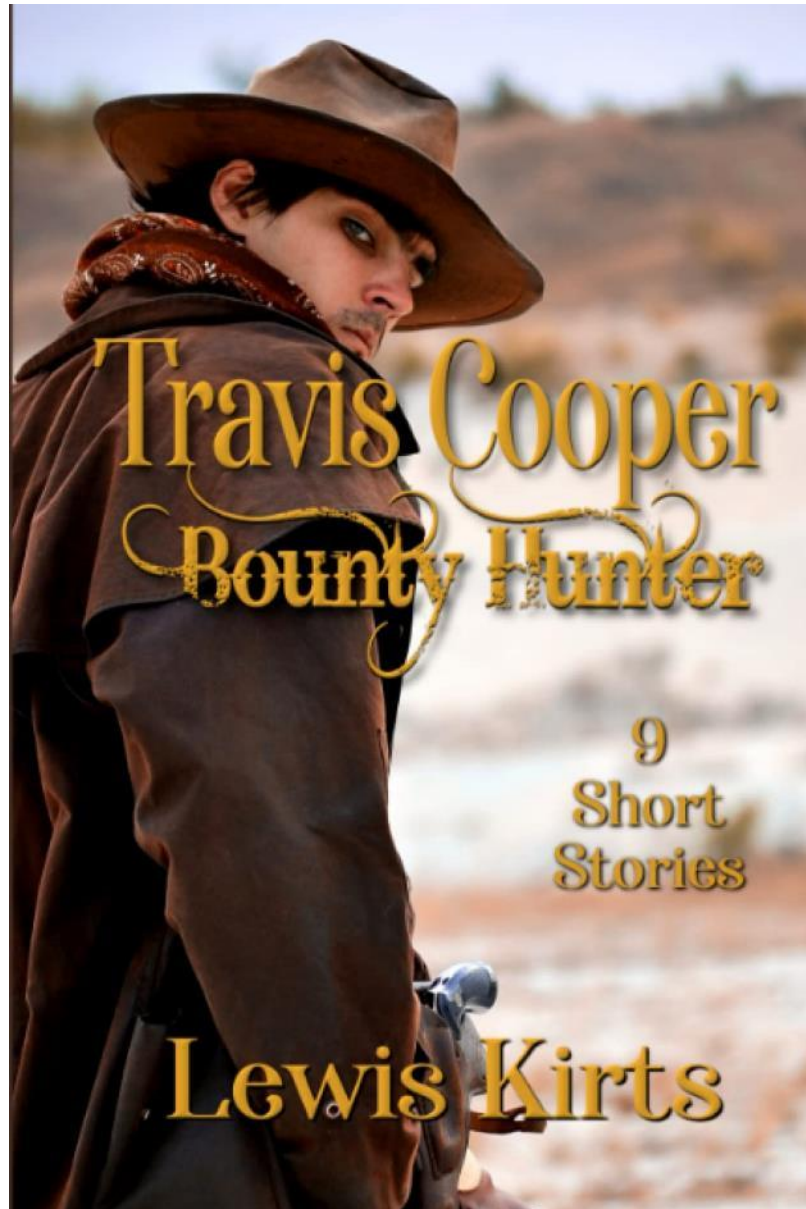
“I've got three men with me. We'll back you as long as we think you've got this figured right. If we think this isn't working the way you planned, we'll step in and get you out of there. Sound fair?”

“Just don't give up on me. Stay back and I'll signal when I'm ready for you to bring down the wrath of God on them. I might be able to take one, but the other three are all yours.”

Fitzsimmons stood. “I'll introduce you. Wouldn't want one of my men thinking you're one of them. Follow me.”

Introductions were made, concerns voiced — and dealt with.

I was heading out, and hoping that everything Mama, *and Papa*, had taught me would help me while I was under the clear blue of it all.



Murder and Torture at Kenyon's Stage Station

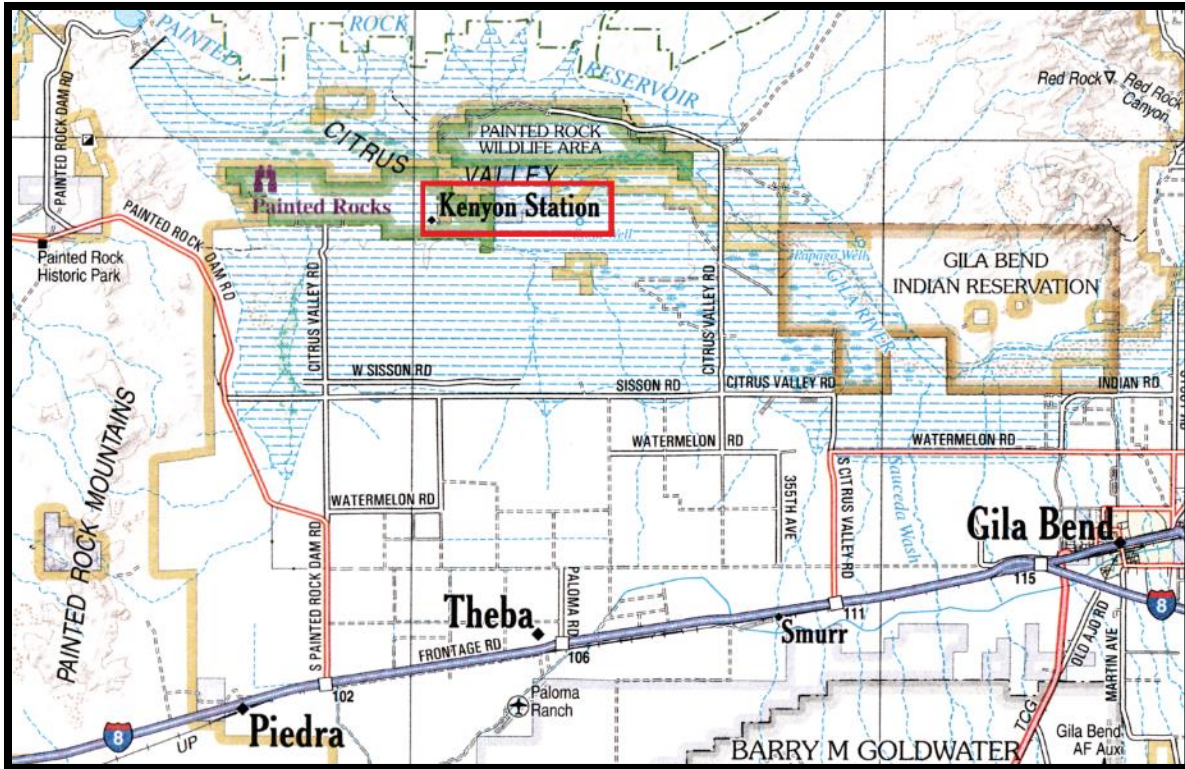
The Outlaw Manuel Subiate Hanged

by
Gerald T. Ahnert

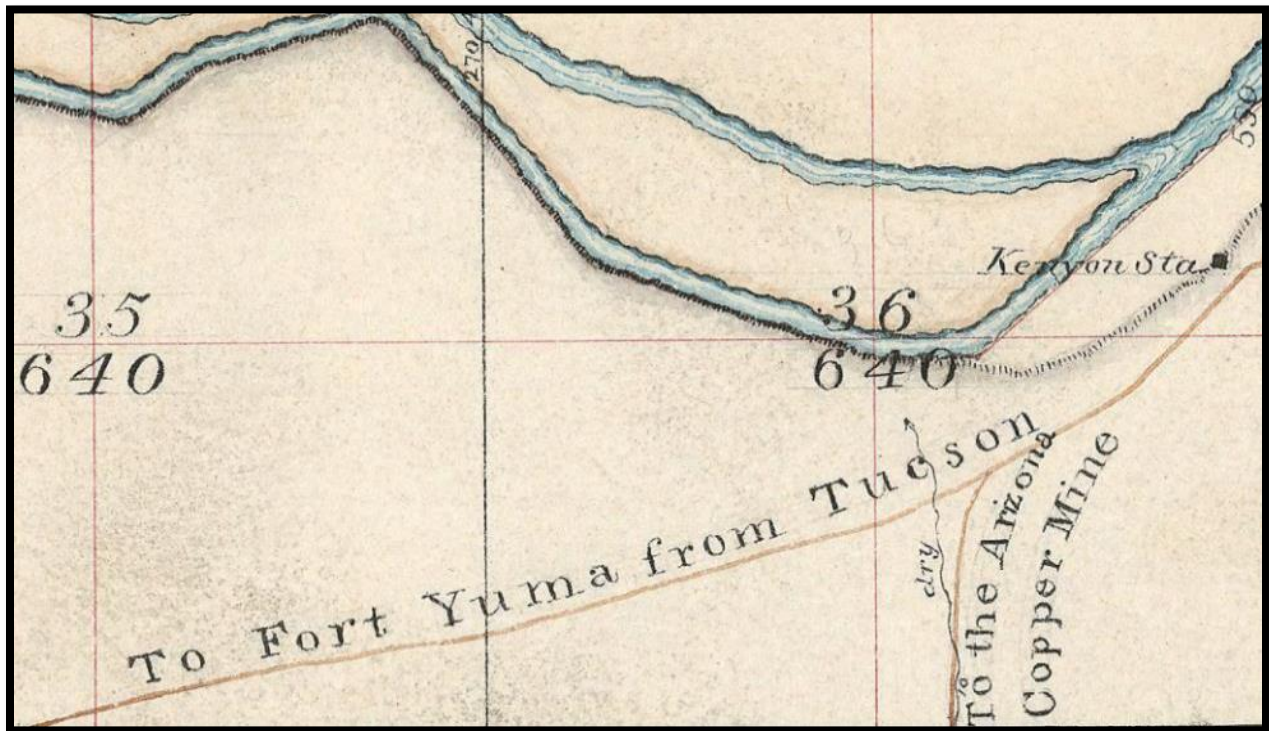
The Arizona frontier was not kind to its victims. Along the Southern Overland Trail in Arizona there are many unmarked graves. Their identity and location may never be known. At Kenyon's Stage Station site there are six known graves. One was brutally tortured and killed; one was stabbed; one was executed by firing squad; one was hanged by a lynch mob; and two died of exposure.

September 1849, on the site of the future Kenyon's Stage Station, Elijah Davis and his guardian George W. Hickey were on their way to California. While camped on the site, Davis stabbed Hickey to death in a fit of passion. This incident was witnessed by members of a passing wagon train and they held a trial, found him guilty, and executed Davis by firing squad. They buried the bodies on opposite sides of the trail. To passing travelers on the Southern Overland Trail the site became known as "Murderer's Grave."

In 1858 Goddard Bailey, Special Agent for the Post General, was on the first Butterfield stage heading east. It was his assignment to inspect the 2,700-mile-long Butterfield Trail to see if the mail contract requirements could be met. In his report, he gave the name of Murder's Grave for the Butterfield stage station on the site. Although this name was first used for a short time, it was given the name of Kenyon's Stage Station by the architect for the trail. In early 1858, Butterfield employee and director Marquis L. Kenyon, Rome, New York, and line superintendent John Butterfield Jr., Utica, New York, rode on mule-back from San Francisco, California, to Tipton, Missouri, selecting the route of the trail and the station sites. Kenyon's Stage Station appears in most later accounts.



The site of Kenyon's Stage Station is on the flooded plain of the Painted Rock Wildlife Area.



Kenyon's Stage Station from GLO map Township No. 4S, Range No. 7W, surveyed in 1871.

The Gruesome Torture and Murder of Edward Lumley

August 18, 1873, Kenyon's station-keeper for the Moore & Carr stage line would meet his fate at the hands of two Mexican outlaws. Traveler Dr. Decker had left the station shortly before the grizzly act would take place. He met two Mexicans on the trail who were going toward the station on foot. After the murder, the investigation found that it appeared that Lumley prepared supper for them and laid down in front of the station and fell asleep. It was then that the Mexicans overpowered him and tied his hands together.

The San Diego Union and Daily Bee, September 30, 1873, in an article titled "Murder on the Gila" continued the story:

"He was then removed to the rear of the house where he was stabbed many times in the back. It is though that the first wounds inflicted were not mortal, but administered merely as torture in order to make him tell the whereabouts of the money. There is evidence of a hard struggle at the rear of the house. Finding their victim was determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, they finally finished him by cutting his head open with a hatchet, and his bowels were cut out with their knives. The murderers then gathered together all the valuables they could find about the house and taking two of the Stage Company's horses that were there, made their escape. They pursued the road leading to Sonora. Governor Safford, as soon as he learned of the murder, offered a reward of \$500 for the arrest of the assassins and Mr. John Murphy, partner of Lumley's, has offered a like amount."

The Pursuit of the Killers

The gruesome torture of Lumley was big news and the details were published in Arizona and California newspapers. Lucas Lugas and Manuel Subiate, the two Mexican outlaws, were seen heading west on the trail. Under Sheriff Andrew Tyner left Yuma in hot pursuit. The Southern Overland Trail dipped into Mexico about seven-miles below Yuma and then formed a fifty-six-mile arc through Mexico around the sand dunes and entered California at New River.

The Killing of the Outlaw Lucas Lugas and Capture of Manuel Subiate

The San Diego Union and Daily Bee, September 9, 1873, published a full account:

"Tyner's Affidavit. That the 28th of August [1873], Sheriff Goodwin placed in my hands a warrant for the arrest of Lucas Lugas, and another man [Manuel Subiate], name unknown, accused of the murder of Edward Lumley at Kenyon Station, A. T. I started in company with Mr. Burkhardt of San Diego county, Cal., on the California road, where I had information that the murderers were traveling.

Saturday morning [August 30], at 2 o'clock, we arrived at Indian Wells [stage station], and learned that two men answering to description were there. There were several other Mexicans encamped there, and the men whom we wanted were in company with them. It was dark and raining slightly, so that we could not see which of the men in camp were the ones we wanted. We therefore concluded to wait until daylight. But after an hour or so the men in camp commenced stirring around as if making preparations for a start; so, Mr. Burkhardt, who spoke

good Spanish, asked one of the Mexicans in camp to point out the me we were looking for. The Mexican addressed replied that we had better see the leader of the party, and I went among the campers, and said something to two men were sleeping at the end of one of the wagons. In a few minutes these two men rode out of camp—one of them went round behind the wagon, and the other rode up in front of the fire as he knew him by the horse he was riding—that he was on the murderers. He ran off at full speed on his horse, and called to the other man not to leave him. It was at that time so dark that we could not trail them, so we remained at the station until daylight. I sent and got some Indians and put them on the trail. In about half an hour the Indians returned bringing a horse with them, which we recognized as being one of the horses stolen from Kenyon's Station, where Lumley was murdered. The horse was wounded in the shoulder and neck with buckshot. The horse is a bay, and branded with the letters 'M C' [Moore & Carr Stage Line]. I offered the Indians \$20 to trail them up for us. The Indians consented to do so, saying that both men had mounted one horse. We took the trail immediately and followed it some twenty miles, and found the man [Manuel Subiate] (who is now a prisoner at Yuma) in a tree in a dense growth of arrow-weed. The man jumped out of the tree and ran. Mr. Burkhardt fired at him with his pistol—we had tied our horses—and I ran after him on foot. I ran about half a mile before I caught him. In coming back toward Indian Wells with the prisoner we struck the trail of the other man, who had left the man we had captured about half an hour before we captured him. The prisoner was wounded by a buckshot in the back, and a small shot in the head and one in the point of his nose. The track of the other led toward Indian Wells, and kept the main road for some distance until within about two miles of Indian Wells. We found our horses unable to travel further without rest, so I wrote a note to Mr. H. N. Horn at New River, giving him a description of the man Lugas, and offered a reward for his capture, telling him that I thought that he would find Lugas at a camp of some Mexicans."

The Killing of the Outlaw Lucas Lugas

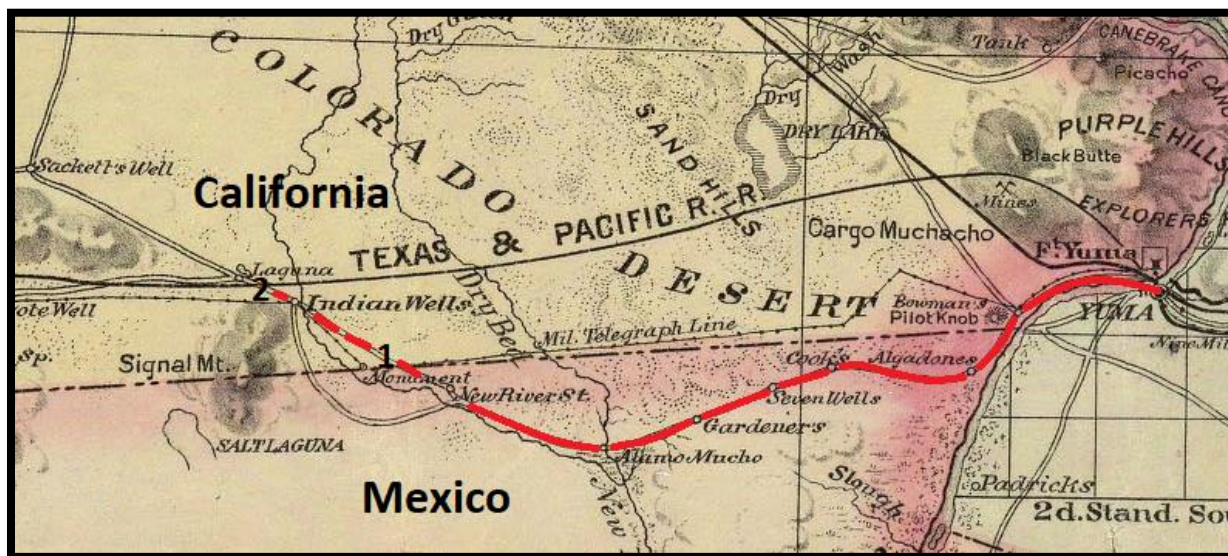
“Mr. Horn's Affidavit. That on the 30th of August, 1873, I received a description of a certain party who was accused of the murder of Edward Lumley, of Kenyon Station, Maricopa county, A. T., and was making his escape from justice. The Indian who brought me the note from the Under Sheriff of Yuma county, Mr. A. Tyner, containing the description of the murderer, put me on the track about one-fourth of a mile from New River Station on the San Diego road. I followed the track with my companion, Henry Gray, about five miles on the road leading to Smith's Ferry. We came up to a camp where some Mexicans were staying. As we rode up to the camp on one side, the murderer Lugas rode up on the opposite side. We recognized him as the man we wanted by his answering to the description, and also by the description of the horse and dog he had with him. I dismounted at once, and tied my horse to the wheel of a wagon. My companion rode round and came into camp behind the man Lugas. I ordered him to stop, probably half a dozen times. He threw his hand on his pistol and spurred his horse into a gallop, making for the brush. Myself and companion both fired on him. I with a shot gun once, and my companion with a pistol twice. We found the horse almost 100 yards from where we fired on him in the woods. As it was then getting too dark to follow the trail, we returned to New River Station and remained during the night.

Early Next Morning, (Aug. 31st), in company with Henry Gray and George Hantz, the station-keeper, I started on the trail again—where we found the horse before. We saw blood on the

saddle, by which we knew that we had wounded the man. We took the trail where we found the horse the evening before, and found on the trail blood, in considerable quantities. We followed this trail about 15 miles from where we had wounded him, and found the trail leading into a thick undergrowth, where there was a slough. We could not get into the brush with our horses, so they (Gray and Hantz) ‘drew straws’ to see which of the two should go into the brush after the man with me. Hantz drew the ‘short’ straw; so, he (Hantz) and myself crawled through the brush part of the way on our hands and knees. We got within about ten feet of the dog and a bulk of something else which I knew to be the man. The man was lying about six feet from the bank of the slough. I called to Hantz to come with me under the cover of the bank of the slough. At this time, I heard him making through the brush, and the next I heard was he accosted me with, ‘*Que quiere, cabron!*’ He came toward us on the bank of the slough, with his knife in one hand and a pistol in the other. Hantz had only three or four loads in his pistol and fired rapidly at the man. The last shot Hantz fired struck the man in the pit of the stomach, but did not knock him down. The man then ran after Hantz, who was making down the bank of the slough. Lugas was snapping his pistol all the time. When he had passed me a few yards, I fired on him, and hit him in the back of the head which knocked him over at once, and in about half an hour he died from his wounds. At the time I fired he was in the act of striking Hantz with the knife.

About 3 o’clock Sunday morning, August 31st, I received the annexed note from Mr. Horn, announcing that they had found the man, fired at him, wounded him, and got his horse.

I went to New River with the prisoner. When I got there, Mr. Horn and two others (Messrs. Gray and Hantz) had gone on the trail. They returned about 8 p. m. of August 31st, bringing with them the horse, clothing, and dog, of the man Lugas.”



The escape route of the outlaws Lucas Lugas and Manuel Subiate. 1 is the Mexican Camp. 2 is where Lugas was killed not far from where Subiate was captured. *Mallery's 1877 Map.*

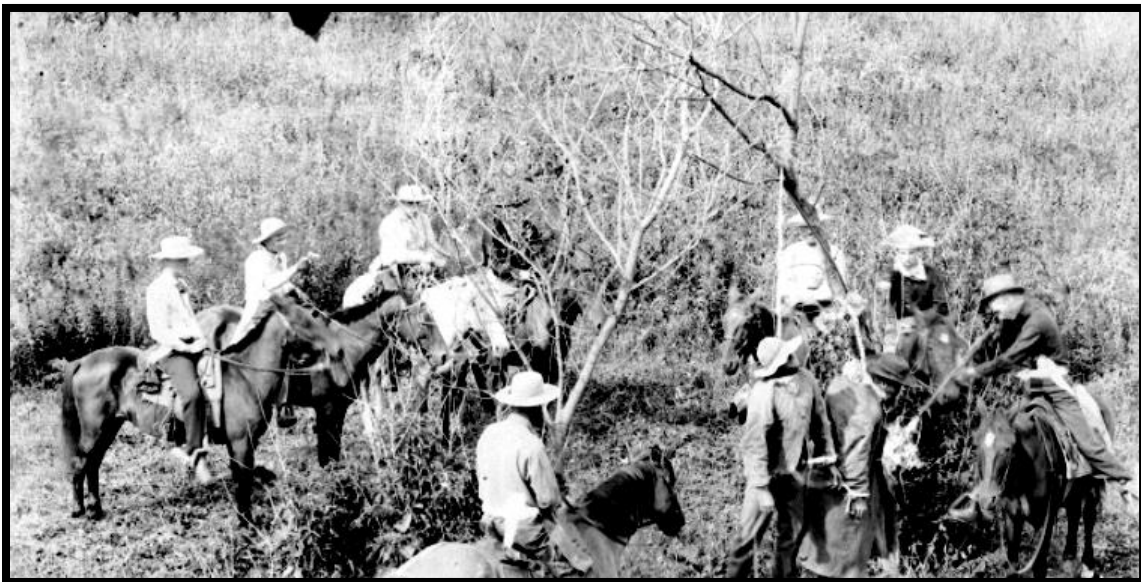


Indian Wells. The outlaw Lucas Lugar was killed near this site. *Library of Congress.*

Then Return of the Outlaw Manuel Subiate to the Scene of the Crime and His Lynching

Sacramento Daily Union, September 23, 1873:

“Arizona News—Lynch Law. Manuel Subiate, one of the murderers of Lumley, was wounded and captured, being taken from Yuma by the Sheriff of Maricopa county. When the stage was near Kenyon station, the Sheriff fearing an attempt would be made to lynch him, got out and started to make a circuit of the stage station on foot with the prisoner. When the stage reached the station some fifteen men were gathered there. They took the way-bill, and found the Sheriff and prisoner’s names entered. They scattered in search and found them. The prisoner was hanged to a tree immediately” Thus, lynch law brought justice to the outlaw Manuel Subiate for the grizzly torture and killing of Edward Lumley.



This scene of a lynching in the 1870s is similar to the 1873 hanging of Manuel Subiate at Kenyon’s Stage Station. *Library of Congress.*

The *Sacramento Daily Union*, July 17, 1877, published an article about two more graves at Kenyon's: "Bishop, a stage driver, died from ...exposure, debility and heat... and was buried at Kenyon Station; also, a stage passenger."

Historians are continuing to make an attempt to locate the graves. But, although the approximate site of Kenyon's Stage Station is known, all traces have been eradicated by the flooding of the Gila River and is now occasionally being covered with water by the backing-up of the Painted Rock Dam built in 1960. Because of the flooding the area is covered with silt.

These lonely graves will be added to the many unknown locations of many others buried along the Southern Overland Trail.

Stagecoach Technology aided John Butterfield's Contract Requirement— Speed!!!

By
Gerald T. Ahnert

While researching the history of Butterfield's Overland Mail Company, I found that there was uncertainty for the manufacturer of the Butterfield stages. My research took me on a winding path that solved this mystery, which involved the technology for the leather thorough-brace suspension and construction for the wheels.

The earliest attempt to have an efficient all-American mail land route connecting the east to the west was in 1857 by the San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line (Jackass Mail). There were those that didn't think it had accomplished that purpose, as it went "from no place through nothing to nowhere." On September 16, 1857, contract No. 12,578 was awarded to John Butterfield for a more comprehensive trail with stations and water sources at regular intervals. There was much debate that it would be impossible to establish a 2,700-mile stage line through the frontier and deliver the mail in twenty-five days, as the contract required. The genius of John Butterfield's understanding of stagecoach technology would give his line the speed to accomplish the task.

In January 1858, Marquis L. Kenyon and John Butterfield Jr. started out from San Francisco to select the route for the trail and station sites. Once this was done, the trail had to be stocked with livestock and a spare stage at approximately every other station.

Past historians have stated that the Butterfield stages were manufactured by three companies. They were Abbot-Downing Co, Concord, New Hampshire, John Goold Co., Troy, New York, and Albany Coach Company, Albany, New York. Also, many report that he used 250 stagecoaches. Actually, he used approximately thirty-four mail stagecoaches and sixty-six stage (Celerity) wagons, all made by J. S. & E. A. Abbot, Concord (to become in 1865 Abbot-Downing Co.), New Hampshire. But why did he choose this company?

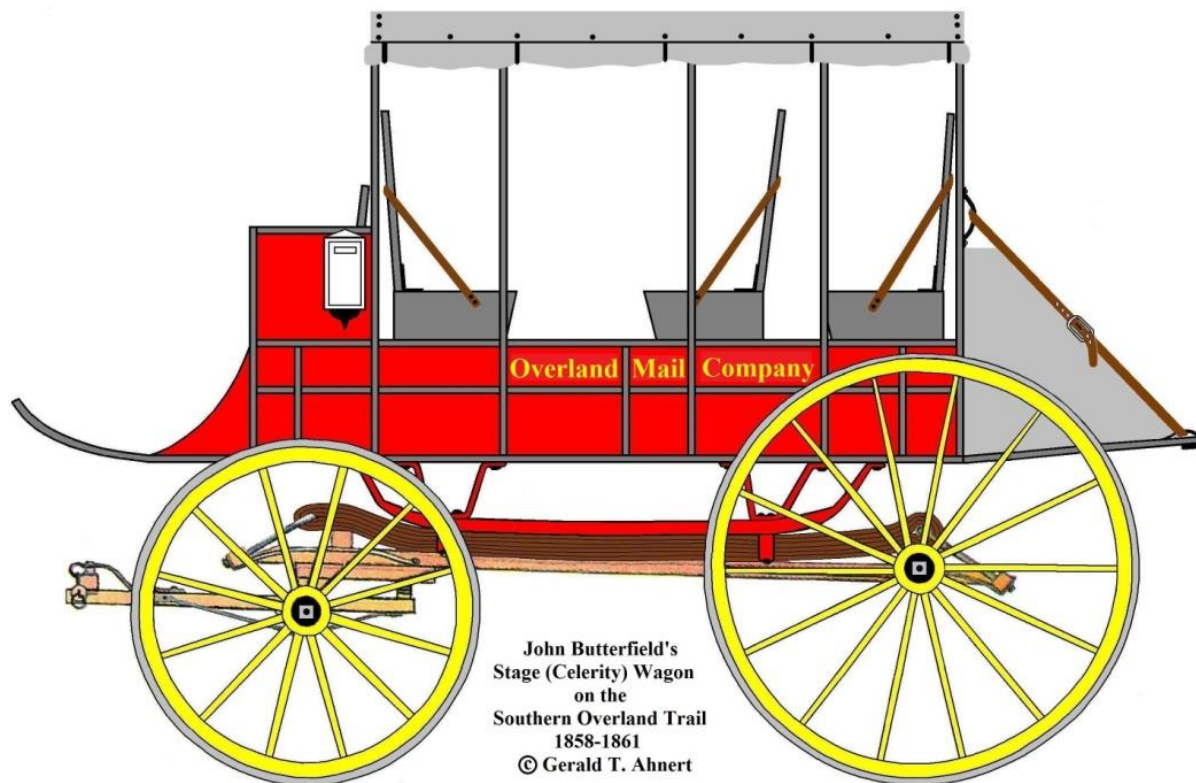


The only known photographic image of a Butterfield stage is this reproduction of a daguerreotype showing a stage (Celerity) wagon at the Texas-New Mexico border early 1861. The driver is David McLaughlin. Courtesy: Robert N. Mullin Collection, Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library, Midland, Texas.

An article in *The Memphis Herald*, July 13, 1858, tells of six stage wagons, designed by John Butterfield, delivered by the riverboat *Lady Walton* to Fort Smith, Arkansas, for distribution to Texas stations by Superintendent Glover. This article identified the maker of the stages as being from Concord, New Hampshire, which was J. S. & E. A. Abbot Co., the maker of the most famous of all stagecoaches. The article went on to state that sixty more were to be delivered. We know that there were 100 stages distributed along the trail from a report by *New York Herald* correspondent, Waterman L. Ormsby who was the only through passenger on the first stage to leave Tipton September 16, 1858. My recent visit to the New Hampshire Historical Society archives, in Concord, New Hampshire, produced no results finding the record for his stagecoaches and stage wagons, as the original order book for 1858 was missing.

As the mastermind for putting in place this historic Old West enterprise, John Butterfield knew that speed was the key for meeting the requirements of the contract for the mail to be delivered in twenty-five days—or a penalty would be levied. As a stage line entrepreneur for thirty-eight years, he knew that the leather thorough-brace suspension made it the least stressful for the horses or mules to pull the stages, therefore giving a greater speed. There was good reason for Butterfield

choosing the maker of his stages to be the J. S. & E. A. Abbot—that reason was because they were the only company that could build stages for the southwest deserts.



The leather through-brace suspension, shown in brown, on one of John Butterfield's stage (Celerity) wagons.

He had J. S. & E. A. Abbot modify their Australian Wagon to his specifications and named it “Celerity”—swiftness of speed. These stage wagons were used on the 1,920-mile trail through the frontier from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Los Angeles California. The mail stagecoaches were used on the settled ends of the trail. Features to keep his stage wagons at a lower center of gravity were smaller diameter wheels than the stagecoaches and having the driver's-conductor's seat not elevated, but on the same level as the passengers. To save weight, a canvas top was held up by light staves, which could not support baggage or passengers. Although some historians call these "mud wagons," the term was not used by J. S. & E. A. Abbot. These stage wagons were in use from September 1858 to March 1861 on the Southern Overland Trail. In early 1861, because the Confederate Army had confiscated many of Butterfield's stages, only eighteen of the original stage wagons managed to make it to the Central Overland Trail to continue the six-year contract.

John Butterfield chose the 3 1/2" wide leather through-brace, over a fixed metal spring suspension, to serve two purposes. The first was for the comfort of the passengers, although it was not ideal for some who were susceptible to motion sickness. This suspension would not only give a swaying motion from front to back, but also from side to side. His mail stagecoaches also used this suspension and in his 1861 book *Roughing It*, Mark Twain described his ride, on a stagecoach

on the Central Overland Trail, that used the thorough-brace suspension as like "a cradle on wheels."

A more important purpose was for the efficient control of the mules or horses pulling the stage. Captain William Banning's book *Six Horses* gives this:

"Thorough-braces—two lengths of manifold leather straps of the thickest steer hide—suspended this heavy structure, allowed to rock fore and aft, and, incidentally, to perform a vital duty beyond the province of any steel springs.

...For thorough-braces, while they served the purpose of springs to a very adequate extent, had *the prime function of acting as shock-absorbers for the benefit of the team*. By them violent jerks upon the traces, due to any obstruction in the road, were automatically assuaged and generally eliminated. It was the force of inertia—the forward lunge and the upward lurch of the rocking body—that freed the wheels promptly from impediment, and thus averted each shock before it came upon the animals. Passengers could tolerate a little buffering, while the coach itself had been made to withstand any shock that the road could impose, and to survive this punishment through a lifetime at least, given the usual care."

Another important reason John Butterfield chose J. S. & E. A. Abbot was that they were noted for making wheels that would survive in the low relative humidity of the southwest desert. Many of the wagons and stages that were used in the west were made by northeastern companies where the relative humidity averaged 50 to 60 percent. In the southwest deserts it would often be under 10 percent. The wood would dry out and shrink causing the iron tires to come off.

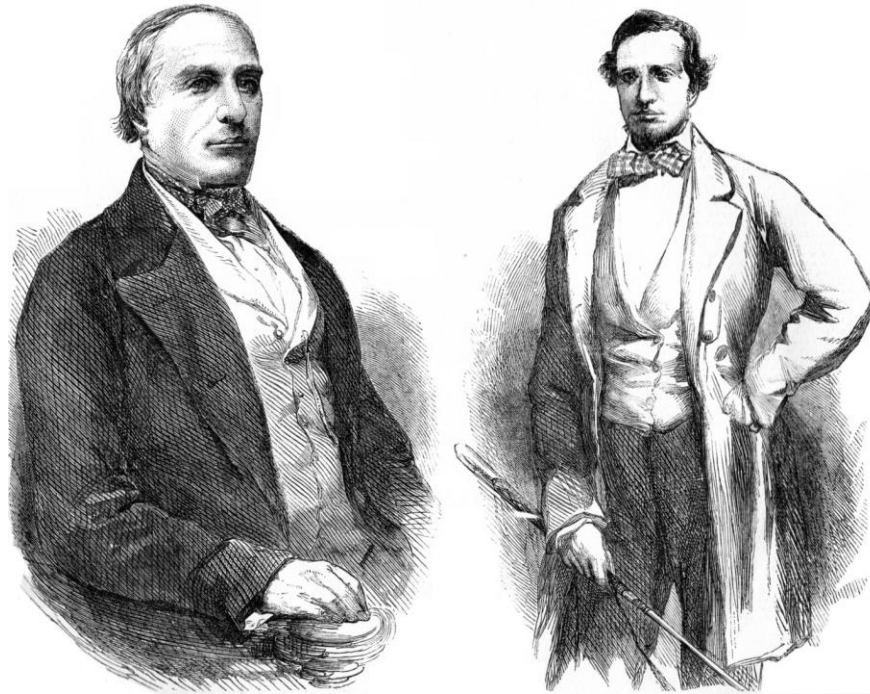
In *Six Horses* was the reason Abbot's stages were favored:

"Each spoke of the Concord wheel, hand-hewn from the clearest ash, was the result of a series of painstaking selections, carefully weighed and balanced in the hand, and fitted to rim and hub (where eyes could not stray) as snugly as any surface joint in the best of joinery. So well-seasoned was the whole that it was practically insensible to the climatic changes in any part of the world. Africa proved the fact for Major Frederick R. Burnham, who saw the wheels of many wagons shrink, warp, and go to pieces, the Concord wheel standing alone and holding its shape. Such qualities of durability in a coach weighing about 2,500 pounds may not appear at once to be the soundest capacity, and few enough of any capacity, ran as easily over the average road, there is little more to be said."

The mail was carried 160 miles by train from St. Louis to Tipton, Missouri, where it was loaded onto a mail stagecoach. At Fort Smith, Arkansas, it was changed for a stage wagon for travel through the frontier. The stage wagon was changed at Los Angeles for mail stagecoach and then on to San Francisco.

According to *Six Horses* the horses pulling the stages were more important than the passenger's comfort: "The horse was the vital consideration. The less taxed, the more he could pull and the faster he could go. The coach that could run the easiest with the greatest load was the best for the horses."

In *Six Horses* it states that the method of harnessing was determined by the leather thorough-brace: "Misconceptions as to the modes of driving fostered by the American coach are as prevalent as those pertaining to the coach itself. For, as it happens, the principle of the thorough-brace as described had some bearing upon the methods of harnessing the team, and hence upon the driving of it."



John Butterfield Sr. and John Jr. at Tipton, Missouri, just before they boarded the first Overland Mail Company mail stagecoach headed west on September 16, 1858. John Jr. was the driver. They both disembarked at Fort Smith, Arkansas, where they took the first Butterfield stage that arrived from San Francisco, to return to Tipton and then by train to Utica, New York. From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 27, 1858.

John Butterfield's success for establishing the world's longest stage line was the result of his thirty-eight years of experience and running forty stage lines in Upstate New York. There were eighty-three of his stages coming and going every week from his hometown of Utica, New York. Because of this experience, he knew that J. S. & E. A. Abbot Co. was the right company to make the stages for his Overland Mail Company—and that reason was because of their use of the leather thorough-brace suspension and unique wheel construction.

Buckskin Frank Leslie Murdered Johnny Ringo

By
Doug Hocking

Johnny Ringo was probably a suicide. The coroner's jury . . . There really wasn't one. A group of local men gathered together on a hot, humid July day, about 24 hours after Johnny's demise to consider a corpse that had already begun to stink. They wanted to get that thing in the ground and return to their occupations. There was no law officer present and no coroner. Both were in Tombstone two days' ride away and no one wanted to wait three or four more days for them to arrive and then perhaps spend additional days hearing from witnesses. These men were not trained in forensics and the first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, was still five years in the future. Some of them had likely seen bullet wounds before, but seeing a wound and examining it as a forensic scientist would be two very different things.



Michael Biehn as Johnny Ringo in 1993's *Tombstone*

Walter Noble Burns wrote a very convincing historical novel, *Tombstone, An Iliad of the Southwest*, 1927, in which, he quotes some of the men on that "jury" as saying that suicide was the simplest conclusion, and any other "verdict" would have involved more time and bother. No one cared to devote more time to the issue. Burns did extensive research in and around Tombstone, at the University of Arizona, and at the Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society, now the Arizona Historical Society. Much of what Burns wrote rings true but it's undocumented, so we can't trace his sources, and thus can't be entirely trusted. It's a shame because so many of these things could have been true. His account of the letter to the coroner and the death of Billy Claibourne closely match newspaper accounts of events adding tidbits to the story that might well be real. Burns thought Buckskin Frank Leslie killed Ringo.



The tree where Ringo died in Morse Canyon

Much has been written about Ringo's death. I worked with Ben Traywick on the rerelease of his book *John Peters Ringo, Mythical Gunfighter*.¹ Ben had a lot of things right although he was certain Wyatt Earp had killed Ringo. Maybe, but he'd have had trouble getting to Morse Canyon (now known as Turkey Creek Canyon) from Colorado. It could have been done if he'd been notified that a drunken Ringo was on his way from Tombstone to Galeyville and if someone had delayed Johnny along the way, as Burns wrote. Michael Hickey, *John Ringo: The Final Hours, A Tale of the Old West*, built on Burns's account adding the efforts of Fred Dodge, sending a telegram from Tombstone to Wyatt, although Fred doesn't mention this.² He may have had reason to keep the secret. All Hickey offers is supposition and imagination. Wyatt's biggest problem would have been remaining unseen and unrecognized from wherever he left the train on the long ride, at least 50 miles, to Turkey Creek.

There are mysteries and anomalies that have confounded other authors. It is for them that I feel compelled to write. Many of their false assumptions and anachronisms need to be corrected. Johnny Ringo was not about to die of thirst. He died in Arizona in July, the wettest month of the year and it had just rained. His body was found near Turkey Creek. He was not going to die in the desert because his horse had run off. He was a quarter of a mile from a ranch house where the shot that killed him was heard. Help was nearby. When cowboys settle in for the night, the first thing they do is unsaddle their horse and rub him down with dry grass. Horses sweat under the saddle. The saddle goes on the ground. Cowboys don't hook their boots to the saddle to keep out scorpions leaving the horse saddled. People who intend to kill themselves don't usually tell people about it. That's a cry for help and attention. Ringo was not wearing a Buscadero rig with a built-in scabbard. It's not even clear that he had a scabbard for his pistol. He was wearing two cartridge belts, one for rifle, one for pistol. The one for pistol ammunition was upside down. Johnny had taken off his

shirt and undershirt and then redressed himself in shirt and cartridge belts and carefully wrapped his feet in socks and undershirt.



Ringo's Grave near where he was found

One of the most reliable sources on John Ringo's death is the *Epitaph* article that repeats the letter sent to the coroner in Tombstone. There are so many details to be considered that it is worth repeating here in full.

“Sunday evening intelligence reached this city of the finding of the dead body of John Ringo near the mouth of Morse’s canyon in the Chiricahua mountains on Friday afternoon. There was few men in Cochise county, or Southeastern Arizona better known. He was recognized by friends and foes, as a recklessly brave man, who would go any distance, or undergo any hardship to serve a friend or punish an enemy. While undoubtedly reckless, he was far from being a desperado, and we know of no murder being laid to his charge. Friends and foes are unanimous in the opinion that he was a strictly honorable man in all his dealings, and that his word was as good as his bond. Many people who were intimately acquainted with him in life, have serious doubts that he took his own life, while an equally large number say that he frequently threatened to commit suicide, and that event was expected at any time. The circumstances of the case hardly leave room for doubt as to his self destruction. He was about 200 feet from water, and was acquainted with every inch of

the country, so that it was almost impossible for him to lose himself. He was found in the midst of a clump of oaks, springing from the same stem, but diverging outward so as to leave an open space in the centre. On top of the main stem and between the spreading boughs, was a large stone, and on this pedestal he was found sitting, with his body leaning backward and resting against a tree. He was found by a man named John Yost, who was acquainted with him for years, both in this Territory and Texas. Yost is working for Sorgum Smith, and was employed in hauling wood. He was driving a team along the road, and noticed a man in the midst of the clump [sic] of trees, apparently asleep. He passed on without further investigation, but on looking back saw his dog smelling of the man's face and snorting. This excited curiosity, and he stopped the team, alighted, and proceeded to investigate. He found the lifeless body of John Ringo, with a hole large enough to admit two fingers about half way between the right eye and ear, and a hole correspondingly large on top of his head, doubtless the outlet of the fatal bullet. The revolver was firmly clenched in his hand, which is almost conclusive evidence that death was instantaneous. His rifle rested against a tree and one of his cartridge belts was turned upside down. Yost immediately gave the alarm, and in about fifteen minutes eleven men were on the spot. The subjoined statement was made by the eye witnesses to Coroner Matthews:

“TURKEY OR MORSE’S MILL CREEK.

“**Statement for the information of the Coroner and Sheriff of Cochise county, Arizona:** There was found by the undersigned, John Yost, the body of a man in a clump of oak trees, about twenty yards north from the road leading to Morse’s mill, and about a quarter mile west of the house of B.F. Smith. The undersigned viewed the body and found it in a sitting posture, facing west, the head inclined to the right. There was a bullet hole on the top of the head on the left side. There is, apparently, a part of the scalp gone, including a small portion of the forehead and part of the hair. This looks as if cut out by a knife. These are the only marks of violence visible on the body. Several of the undersigned identify the body as that of John Ringo, well known in Tombstone. He was dressed in light hat, blue shirt, vest, pants and drawers. On his feet were a pair of hose and an undershirt torn up so as to protect his feet. He had evidently traveled but a short distance in this foot-gear. His revolver he grasped in his right hand, his rifle resting against the tree close to him. He had on two cartridge belts, the belt for revolver cartridges being buckled on upside down. The undernoted property was found with him and on his person; 1 Colt’s revolver, calibre 45, No. 222, containing five cartridges; 1 Winchester rifle octagon barrel, calibre 45, model 1876, No. 21,896, containing a cartridge in the breech and ten in the magazine; 1 cartridge belt, containing 9 rifle cartridges; 1 cartridge belt, containing 2 revolver cartridges; 1 silver watch of American Watch company, No. 9339, with silver chain attached; two dollars and sixty cents (\$2.60) in money; 6 pistol cartridges in pocket; 5 shirt studs; 1 small pocket knife; 1 tobacco pipe; 1 comb; 1 block matches; 1 small piece tobacco. There is also a portion of a letter from Messrs. Hereford & Zabriskie, attorney-at-law, Tucson, to the deceased, John Ringo. The above property is left in the possession of Frederick Ward, teamster between Morse’s mill and Tombstone.

“The body of deceased was buried close to where it was found.

“When found deceased had been dead about twenty-four hours. Thomas White, John Blake, John W. Bradfield, B.F. Smith, A.E. Lewis, A.S. Neighbors, James Morgan, Robert Bolter, Frank McKenney, W.J. Dowell, J.C. McGray, Jhon Yoast, Fred Ward.

“From Fred Ward, who arrived in the city on Sunday evening, an EPITAPH reporter learned that the general impression prevailing among people in the Chiricahuas is that his horse wandered off somewhere, and he started off on foot to search for him; that his boots began to hurt him, and he pulled them off and made moccasins of his undershirt. He could not have been suffering for water, as he was within 200 feet of it, and not more than 700 feet from Smith’s house. Mrs. Morse and Mrs. Young passed by where he was lying Thursday afternoon, but supposed it was some man asleep, and took no further notice of him. The inmates of Smtih’s house heard a shot about three o’clock Thursday evening, and it is more than likely that that is the time the rash deed was done. He was on an extended jamboree the last time he was in this city, and only left here ten days ago. He had dinner at Dial’s in the South Pass of the Dragoons one week ago last Sunday, and went from there to Galeyville, where he kept on drinking heavily. We have not heard of his whereabouts after leaving Galeyville, but it is more than likely that he went to Morse’s canyon. He was subject to frequent fits of melancholy and had abnormal fear of being killed. Two weeks ago last Sunday in conversing with the writer he said he was as certain of being killed, as he was of being living then. He said he might run along for a couple of years more, and may not last two days. He was born in Texas and is very respectably connected. He removed to San Jose, California, when about sixteen years old, and Col. Coleman Younger, one of the leading citizens of that town is his grandfather. Ringo was a second cousin to the famous Younger brothers now in the Minnesota penitentiary, for their partnership with the James boys. He has three sisters in San Jose, of whom he was passionately fond. He was about thirty-eight years old, though looking much younger, and was a fine specimen of physical manhood. Many friends will mourn him, and many others will take secret delight in learning of his death.”³

From the above we learn that when John Ringo was found, he had his pistol firmly clenched in his right hand. Television forensics inform us that suicides always drop the gun. This is not the case. The Bexar County, Texas, Medical Examiner informs us that “the gun remained in the deceased’s hand in 24% of the cases. In 69% of the cases, the gun was on or near the body but not in the hand.”⁴ Those examining the body thought that the gun clenched in hand indicated that Ringo had died instantly.

There was a hole “large enough to admit two fingers halfway between the right eye and ear, and a hole correspondingly large on top of his head.” There is no mention of stippling, burning of flesh or hair. It may not have occurred to this untrained jury that this was important and so they didn’t include it. The weapons of the day were fueled by black powder and black powder burns slowly so that some of it is still burning as the bullet leaves the barrel. As Marty Robbins sang in the *Ballad of Mr. Shorty*: “The Forty-Four spoke and it sent lead and smoke and seventeen inches of flame.” Had the muzzle been close to Ringo’s head, the side of his head and his hair would have been scorched. The large entrance wound may indicate that the weapon firing the fatal shot was close by, though not necessarily that it was touching his head as it would have been if he had been holding it. A rising trajectory indicates only that the weapon was below the point of entry firing at

an upward angle. This could have been achieved by someone firing from the hip, or from shoulder height if the deceased had been standing. If he was sitting, the shot might have come from someone standing below on the bank of the nearby stream.



John Ringo

Walter Noble Burns implies that in the 1920s, he interviewed Henry Smith, one of those who examined the body.

“I found no traces of powder burns around the wound in Ringo’s temple, though I looked carefully for them,” said Henry Smith. “If Ringo had shot himself, holding the muzzle of his gun against his head, the flesh around the wound would have been flame-burned and black with powder.”⁵

Henry was a member of the family whose ranch house was so nearby but not a member of the “jury.” Whether this statement can be accepted at face value or not, the question of the distance from which the shot was fired remains open.

There were five cartridges in the pistol. Many men carried a spent cartridge under the hammer as a protection for its pin or left one chamber empty as a safety measure against accidental discharge. The letter doesn’t say “five cartridges and a spent cartridge.” The writers may have thought that a sixth spent cartridge was implied.

The men who examined the body wrote that a piece of the scalp was missing as if cut out by a knife. This is interesting. It sounds as if someone took a trophy, pointing towards murder. John Yost (or Yoast) discovered the body about 24 hours after what is presumed to be the fatal shot was heard. Within fifteen minutes, those who would inspect the body and sign the letter to the coroner had arrived. It’s unlikely that anyone in this group took a souvenir.

We have a list of what was found with the body. Conspicuously missing from this list are Johnny’s coat (it was the 19th century, he would have had one), boots, horse, and saddle. A son of B.F. Smith, perhaps Henry, found the horse.

“A son of Mr. B.F. Smith, says the Tombstone Independent, found John Ringo’s horse, on Tuesday [July 25] last, about two miles from where deceased was found. His saddle was still upon him with Ringo’s coat upon the back of it.”⁶

Ben Traywick spent years talking to old timers and gathering what amounts to oral history documenting very little. Ben adds that one boot was found near the horse, but the other was never located. We’ve no reason to doubt him. Thus, we may conclude that coat and boots were suspended from the saddle.

In death, Ringo was oddly attired. He had apparently stripped off his two cartridge belts, vest, shirt, and undershirt as well as his boots. Whether he’d taken off his socks is uncertain. He was wearing them under his undershirt when found. Having stripped, he redressed in shirt, vest, and cartridge belts, getting one on upside down. This would have been easy to do as there is no mention of a scabbard for his pistol. He may have carried it tucked in a belt, pants, or cartridge belt, or even carried it in a pocket. He then wrapped his feet in the undershirt. Having taken pains to redress, he then shot himself in the head. There is no mention of whether his hat was on or off. He probably took it off to save wear and tear. This behavior should strike you as odd. Johnny had been on a binge for a week and perhaps more. He had two bottles of whisky when Billy Breakenridge encountered him at South Pass in the Dragoons. Johnny may still have been drunk at Morse Canyon but it seems more likely that he was in the throws of a roaring hangover.

The *Epitaph* recounted in the article quoted above that “Many people who were intimately acquainted with him [John Ringo] in life, have serious doubts that he took his own life, while an equally large number say that he frequently threatened to commit suicide.” As noted, telling people that you want to kill yourself is like saying: “Give me your sympathy; stop me.” The writer in the *Epitaph* also notes that John Ringo had “had abnormal fear of being killed. Two weeks ago, last Sunday in conversing with the writer he said he was as certain of being killed.” Being paranoid

does not mean that people aren't out to kill you. Ringo may have had reason to believe that there were people to desired to see him dead.

I'm going to present a scenario that I think accounts for all the facts. On a hot, humid July late afternoon, John Ringo was riding into Morse Canyon. He would soon seek shelter at one of the nearby ranches. Like many Arizona streams, Turkey Creek is intermittent. In the canyon it flows above ground while out in the prairie it flows underground. He'd finished the last of the whisky early in the day and now a grand hangover was setting in. He was sweaty and stank from days of drinking. He and his horse were both thirsty, so Johnny selected a spot where the water flowed deep and cool and rode his pony down the long, steep bank to the stream. Once there he wanted to cleanse his upper body and drench his face, so he took off his boots and socks, placing them on the saddle. Coat, vest, shirt, undershirt, and cartridge belts followed as he waded into the cool water. The horse, startled by noise in the underbrush, perhaps a bear the horse might have thought, started to rear. Johnny grabbed for his clothing only catching up some of it before the horse broke away. Ringo, as worried about the sounds as his horse, knowing that he would have to chase the horse, started up the bank. The Arizona ground was unforgiving and hurt his feet. Johnny stopped sitting in the lap of an oak tree to put on his clothes, socks, and to wrap his feet in his undershirt. Sitting there, he died suddenly.

The historical record provides the historian with data of varying degrees of reliability. There are eye-witness accounts of the untrained who may have overlooked or unintentionally concealed items that would interest modern readers as well as items of hearsay records decades later. Discarding anachronisms and serious misunderstanding of the terrain and what Arizona was like in 1882, the scenario given above accounts for all the elements of what we know about John Ringo's death. It does not tell us whether the death was suicide or murder, leaving open the possibility of either. It provides a likely explanation for the seemingly odd condition of the body. If any factual element were in conflict, it would be disproven.

John Ringo carefully redressed himself. A man about to suicide might do that wanting to be found decently attired. Only a man about to set out on a hike to recover his horse would take the time to carefully dress his bootless feet against injury. He'd picked an odd spot to suicide. It is a pretty, shaded spot, but it's within sight and earshot of a major road or trail and, as it proved, within earshot of a ranch house. It was close enough to significant population that more than eleven men were able to gather within fifteen minutes. This was not a lonely, forsaken spot. Ringo was near the homes of people who knew him. As noted above, many who knew him considered him an unlikely candidate for suicide. Other had heard him threaten to kill himself, but threatening is a crying for help, not a definitive statement of intention. He was concerned that someone was going to kill him.

Walter Noble Burns gives an account of Ringo's drinking spree.

“Ringo's boon companions on this ten-day drinking bout were Buckskin Frank Leslie and Billy Claibourne. Buckskin Frank still tended bar at the Oriental. . .

“On a blazing hot day in the latter part of July, John Ringo, with two bottles of whisky in his pockets, rode out of Tombstone on a drunken trail to mysterious death. Buckskin Frank

Leslie and Billy Claibourne followed him. The three met again at Antelope Springs, nine miles from Tombstone, and continued their spree for three days in the saloon of Jack McCann, who formerly had kept the Last Chance, between Tombstone and Charleston . . . Next, the three pottle companions went to Soldier Holes and then to Myers Cienega in the Sulphur Springs Valley.”⁷

Billy Breakenridge mentions the two bottles of whisky.

“I met John Ringo in the South Pass of the Dragoon Mountains. It was shortly after noon. Ringo was very drunk, reeling in the saddle, and said he was going to Galeyville. It was in the summer and a very hot day. He offered me a drink out of a bottle half-full of whiskey, and he had another full bottle.”⁸



Nashville Franklyn "Buckskin Frank" Leslie

The Breakenridge account and that of Walter Noble Burns became the basis Michael Hickey's extended account of Ringo's final drunken adventure in company with Billy the Kid Claibourne and Buckskin Frank Leslie. The Antelope Spring as we know it today is south of Gleeson near Gold Camp. Antelope Spring is one of those names given to every fifth spring, so in 1882 there might have been another. The modern one is about eight miles south of South Pass in the Dragoon Mountains and not on the direct route between Tombstone, South Pass, Morse Canyon, and Galeyville. There is no reason that Ringo might not have proceeded to a watering hole at Antelope Spring. He did not seem to be in any hurry to return to Cowboy haunts in the San Simon Valley. Ringo, Leslie, and Claibourne were friendly. The former two were heavy drinkers. Burns may have lifted the two bottles from Breakenridge's account. The rest is hearsay gleaned from the recollections of old timers in the 1920s. Nonetheless, there is nothing here that is surprising or unlikely.

The trail then seems to have taken the trio to Soldier Holes about nine miles northeast of Antelope Spring and from there, according to Traywick, to Lost Water.

“Will Sanders claimed he saw Ringo later than that, drifting along near Lost Water on the trail to Galeyville. He spoke to him, but Ringo did not answer. Sanders also said that he saw Buckskin Frank Leslie on the same trail a few miles away.”⁹

Another account puts Leslie in the vicinity of Ringo. In a 1961 article in *True West*, Tom Bailey claimed to have interviewed, decades before, a man claiming to be Buckskin Frank Leslie.

“The way Buckskin told it, it was not a suicide. They had met that day and in spite of some difference between them over a woman, they had gone on a toot together, visiting various places, finally ending up in the Turkey Creek Inn where they parted, according to history. Buckskin told me he left Ringo only briefly and came up to him by the tree. Ringo, who was pie-eyed drunk, threatened to shoot him. He grabbed for Ringo’s gun and it went off killing Ringo instantly.”¹⁰

Had events transpired this way, there might have been powder burns. However, two men struggling over a weapon, the pistol might have remained some distance from Johnny’s temple. Then again, Frank might have fired his own weapon while lower down on the embankment while still some ten or twenty feet from Ringo. We simply don’t know if Ringo’s weapon had been recently fired or simply carried an empty cylinder or expended cartridge. Frank had demonstrated exceptional shooting skills. Having murdered Ringo, Frank might well have been unwilling to confess to this unmanly deed. As told, the murder became self-defense.

This was not the only time Frank Leslie claimed to have killed Ringo. Breckenridge had heard him say so but discounted it.

“Frank Leslie tried to curry favor with the Earp sympathizers by claiming it was he who killed Ringo in self-defense, but the evidence proved this to be a lie. We all knew that Leslie would not care to tackle him even when he was drunk.”¹¹

Tombstone researcher Donald Chaput recounts that there is evidence that Leslie, in the 1890s, while incarcerated at Yuma Territorial Prison, told people that he had killed John Ringo. He continued to make these claims into the 1920s and in the presence of Breckenridge, Wyatt Earp, Alex Robertson, and other Tombstone personalities.¹²

Walter Noble Burns provides hearsay evidence of Billy Claibourne claiming that Leslie had killed his friend John Ringo. He wrote that William Lutley told him:

“[W]e ran into Billy Claibourne and asked him what he was doing there [Globe, Arizona].

“‘I’m working double-shift in the smelter,’ he answered, ‘to get enough money to go to Tombstone and kill Frank Leslie.’

“We were dumbfounded at this statement. We asked him what Leslie had ever done to him and why he intended killing him.

“‘Never done nothin’ to me personal.’ Claibourne responded. ‘But I aim to kill him for murderin’ John Rongo.’

“The story that Leslie had killed Ringo was not news to us. We had all heard it. But we felt a little like laughing at Claibourne’s seriousness. He was a pretty tough young fellow, but the job he had picked out for himself struck us as a pretty big one for him to tackle. As bad men, Claibourne and Leslie were not in the same class. Leslie was a professional, Claibourne an amateur. We knew that, in a fair fight, Claibourne would have no ore show against Leslie than a puppy dog pitted against a gray wolf.”¹³

On November 14, 1882, George Parsons wrote in his journal:

“Frank Leslie was to go with us and may yet if he is not detained in killing matter of this morning, he ought not to be. He shot and killed the notorious Kid [William] Claiborne this a.m. at 7:30, making as pretty a cent shot on the Kid as one could wish to. The Kid threatened and laid for him near the Oriental [Saloon] with a Winchester, but Frank got the drop on him, being quick as lightning and used to killing men, and the Kid has gone to Hell* I say so because if such a place exists and is for bad men, he is there as he was a notoriously bad egg and has innocent blood on his head. I state facts. Frank has done the County a service. . .”¹⁴

Colin Richards wrote that Henry Smith was one who spread it around after the shooting, and out of Leslie’s hearing, that Billy had accused Frank of murdering John Ringo, having made the accusation with his dying breath. Henry claimed to have been in attendance with doctor as Billy died.¹⁵

The Epitaph published the Coroner’s Report.

“Tuesday morning about 7 o’clock another tragedy was added to the already long list that have dotted with crimson the history of our city. The causes which led to the affray, as far as known, are fully detailed in the testimony elicited at the coroner’s inquest. The survivor of the sad affair, Frank Leslie, or “Buckskin Frank,” is well known throughout the county. William Claiborne, alias the “Kid,” who precipitated the affray which led to his sudden and untimely taking off, has in the past gained considerable notoriety by his connection with desperate characters and participation in deeds of violence. . .

[begin excerpt from Coroner’s Report]

“STATEMENT OF FRANK LESLIE.

“I was talking with some friends in the oriental saloon when Claiborne came in and pushed his way in among us and began using very insulting language. I took him one side and said, “Billy don’t interfere, those people are friends among themselves, and are not talking about politics at all, and don’t want you about.” He appeared quite put out and used rather bad and certainly very nasty language towards me. I told him that there was no use of him fighting me, that there was no occasion for it, and leaving him joined my friends. He came

back again and began using exceedingly abusive language, when I again took him by the collar of his coat and led him away, telling him not to get mad, that it was for his own good, that if he acted in that manner he was liable to get in trouble. He pushed away from me, using very harsh language, and as he started away shook his finger at me and said, "That's all right Leslie, I'll get even on you," and went out of the saloon. In a short time a man came in and said there was a man waiting outside to shoot me, but I didn't pay much attention to it. A few minutes later another man came in looking quite white and said Claiborne was waiting outside with a rifle

"TO SHOOT FRANK LESLIE

"I then went out, and as I stepped on the sidewalk saw about a foot of a rifle barrel protruding from the end of the fruit stand. I stepped out in the street and saw it was Claiborne, and said "Billy, don't shoot, I don't want you to kill me, nor I don't want to have to shoot you." Almost before I finished he raised the gun and shot, and I returned the fire from my pistol, aiming at his breast. As soon as I shot I saw him double up and had my pistol cocked and aimed at him again when I saw, or thought I saw, another man by him, putting his hands around him, and I lowered the pistol, and when it was discharged the bullet went in the sidewalk. After I fired, I advanced upon him, but did not shoot, when he said, "Don't shoot again; I am killed," which I didn't but watched him, with my pistol at full cock, as I didn't know what game he might play to get me off my guard. At that moment Officer Coyle came up and took hold of my pistol hand. I told him to be careful, as it was at full cock. I then uncocked it and gave it to him, and said I would go with him. I told him I was sorry; that I might have done more, but I couldn't do less. He then placed me under arrest. . .

"JOHN J. REILLY,

"being duly sworn, says: I reside in Tombstone; occupation laborer. My attention was directed to Claiborne with a carbine or rifle in his hand. His remaining so long in one position on the sidewalk of the Oriental saloon close to the fruit stand caused me to watch him. He remained possibly ten minutes in the same position; gun pointed downward. When a man emerged from the middle door of the Oriental saloon on Fifth street, Claiborne raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The attacked party at once stepped off of the sidewalk back to me and began firing. . .

"E. H. DEAN,

"being duly sworn, says: I reside in Tombstone; occupation, barkeeper at the Oriental saloon. Mr. Leslie came into the Oriental saloon about one hour previous to the shooting. He and three others were standing at the end of the counter talking, when Mr. Claiborne came in. Mr. Claiborne stepped up to them and interfered in their conversation. He made a remark about Dave Neagle, and said that any one that would vote for Ward was a son of a b---. Mr. Leslie told him to go away from them, as they were not talking politics. He said he would not go away. Mr. Leslie took hold of him and pulled him away and told him he was liable to get into trouble with the other parties. He said that he wouldn't stay away.

Leslie took hold of him the second time and threw him towards the opening into the other room. Claiborne told him he would allow no man to handle him in a manner of that kind.”¹⁶

The statement of E.H. Dean is included because it gives reference to the nature of the discussion into which Billy Claiborne intruded. In their book, *They Called Him Buckskin Frank: The Life and Adventures of Nashville Franklyn Leslie*, DeMattos and Parsons maintain that Billy was upset over the outcome of an election in which Dave Neagle was involved.¹⁷ Billy was drunk at 7:30 a.m., and he was spoiling for a fight with someone. I find attributing a serious interest in politics to Claiborne less than compelling. He’d come into the Oriental spoiling for a fight. Frank ejected him. This may have been enough to send him into a murderous rage. Then again, Billy may have been imbibing “Dutch courage” with the intent of picking a fight with Frank Leslie.

Both Leslie and Ringo were womanizers who had little regard for what other men might have considered their prerogatives. Such things can lead to misunderstands and violence and in the case of Leslie often did. In Tom Bailey’s article he mentioned a difference between Ringo and Buckskin over the attentions of a lady. On July 6, 1880, Frank married the widow May (Mary Jane Evans) Killeen, delaying the wedding a full eight days following the death of her previous husband who had departed this earth on June 28, after a June 22 shooting scrape with Leslie. May’s marriage to Killeen had lasted almost 90 days. Marriage, including his own, never stopped Buckskin Frank from paying attention to the ladies.

Johnny Ringo was similarly devil-may-care when it came to the ladies even resting his attentions on Big Nose Kate during the brief period in November 1881 when Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp were incarcerated. According to Kate:

“‘I kept close to my room at Mrs. Fly’s during the Earp-Holliday trial hearing before [the] justice of the peace,’ Kate recalled years later. ‘John Ringo visited me there twice. I gave him a tumble both times. the second time he advised me to leave the camp, but I told him I did not have enough money to go back to Globe as Doc had lost all my money playing against faro while were in Tucson.’”¹⁸

Roving journalist and correspondent, Charles F. Lummis, captured the side of Leslie that his drinking and trail companions knew expertly penetrating the façade that Frank maintained. He was charming with women until he got them home. This is how Lummis summed him up.

This man Leslie is a peculiar case - one of the types of a class not infrequently met on the frontier. A man apparently well educated, gentlemanly and liked by all who know him; with as much “sand” as the country he ranges - but a novelist who can make a little truth go as far as any one in the Territory. As much fact as you could pick up on a pin point would last him a year. But there is one thing about it, his prevarication's are all harmless. He never lies to hurt anybody - and least of all to hurt Frank Leslie. It is the prime ambition of his existence to figure as a scout - and a scout he will be, if wild-cat dispatches from Tombstone can make him one. He was for a few weeks connected with Capt. Crawford’s command, hunting Geronimo but was directly discharged because of his inability to tell a trail from a box of flea powder. Therein lies his claim to distinction as a celebrated scout. But though no scout, he is no dude. He has killed his two men, under circumstances of

Arizona propriety, is a fine shot, and can ride farther and harder in a day than any other white man you can rake up with a fine-toothed comb. As to his “enjoying Gen. Crook’s confidence,” I guess it isn’t necessary to say anything - but you ought to have heard the quiet old General laugh when I showed him that dispatch. Well, so much for that sort of news-fodder.¹⁹

With a flourish, Charles Lummis, author of *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, rendered judgment on Buckskin Frank Leslie. Frank was a popular raconteur around the campfire or across a saloon bar. There were those like diarist George Parsons who thought him “quick as lightning and used to killing men.”²⁰ Parsons did not witness the gunfight referred to which depended more on a willingness to kill than on speed, although the diarist noted that Frank didn’t lose so much as the ash from his cigarette. In that fight, Frank had two advantages. Billy was drunk and fixated on the front door of the saloon. Frank left the saloon by the side door and Billy had to reorient after Frank called out.

Nashville Franklyn Leslie was about 35 when he arrived in Tombstone but we don’t really know when was born, when he died or where he was born. Chaput speculates that Frank Leslie was an alias dreamed from the then popular *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* to go along with his buckskin coat and scout persona. Nashville suggests a connection to Tennessee while rumor had it that he was born in Texas. Frank Leslie does not seem to have existed prior to 1878 when one of the folks in Tombstone met him pushing drinks across a bar in San Francisco.



Blonde Mollie’s Grave

Frank claimed to have been an army scout in the Dakotas, Oklahoma, and Texas in the 1870s,²¹ although, so far, no concrete evidence of this has emerged. His expertise as a scout seems to have been primarily self-proclaimed and mocked by General Crook. While he participated in some scouts against Geronimo, he didn’t last long in any position.

A popular man at campfire and in saloon, he was also liked by the ladies. He was none too careful about who else might be attached to a lass and took no notice of wedding rings. At the same time, once he had staked his claim to a lady, he was willing to defend it to his adversary’s death. His shootings were not walk downs or proper duels. On more than one occasion murder was suspected. Once he had a woman in his thrall, he would become abusive. One has to wonder if a sudden name change and appearance behind a saloon bar in San Francisco was not perhaps made a necessity by

some mistreatment of a lady, even another's spouse. We do know that ultimately what brought him to the attention of Sheriff John Slaughter was the murder of Blonde Mollie, his mistress, and the attempted murder of her presumed paramour, James Neal, a ranch hand.²²



Silhouette Girl, his wife May. Undoubtedly, not how it happened. From *True West Magazine*

On June 22, 1880, May, who became Frank's wife, had been married to Mike Kileen (or Killeen) less than 90 days when Frank started courting her. Leslie escorted her back to the Cosmopolitan Hotel where both May and Mike were staying. They sat out on a balcony with Frank's friend George Perine (Perrine or Perinn) when Mike entered the scene. Frank told one story, Mike who spent days dying, passing away on July 6, told another, and Perine, who may have done the shooting a third. Frank and George were cleared. On August 5, Frank married May. And in August, Mike's death was brought before the courts again and a new set of stories emerged. The plethora of stories is enough to suggest that something wasn't on the up and square. "Nobody except the

participants really knew who killed Mike Kileen, but what people did know is that Buckskin Frank had sparked Kileen's wife, Kileen got mad, and either Buckskin Frank or his loyal friend Geroge Perine shot and killed Kileen."²³

Frank began to abuse May as he seems to have done other of his ladies. He dallied with other women. "During the 1920s and 1930s, when many old Tombstoners were yet around, they recalled many incidents of this brutality."²⁴ May earned the title "Silhouette Girl" having at least once run to the neighbors saying a drunken Frank had fired shots around her demonstrating his marksmanship. May "lived in constant fear" according to the neighbors. Mrs. Cowan who lived next door reported that Frank shot around his wife's head, and "it scared her stiff and she would go to Mother Cowan's in tears and seek sympathy."²⁵ In July of 1886, Frank had illicit relations with Birdie Woods, a singer and perhaps soiled dove. Divorce was granted on June 3, 1887.

The husband of one of Frank's love interests was found with his head bashed in. Frank was suspected but no evidence linked him to the murder.

Sometime in 1887, Frank became interested in a soiled dove known as Mollie Williams, Blonde Molly, Mollie Bradshaw, or Mollie Edwards, based on past presumed marriages and liaisons. Frank installed her at "his" Magnolia Ranch in Leslie Canyon of the Swisshelm Mountains. Frank was now in his mid-forties and Mollie considerably younger. Frank prospected and took on jobs that kept him away from the ranch while spending his free time carousing in Tombstone 35 miles from the ranch. Mollie may have grown bored. On July 10, 1889, after days of carousing and quarreling in Tombstone, Frank and Mollie returned to the ranch continuing the quarrel as Frank knocked her about. He soon went to the neighboring ranch of William Reynolds and threatened to kill him. Returning home he shot Mollie and a young ranch hand named James Neal. Believing Neal dead, Frank went to Tombstone to report the shooting as murder and self-defense blaming Neal. But, Neal was not dead and got there first. Frank was sent to Yuma Territorial Prison where he generally got a soft ride as friends of his were running the place.

While in prison and in years after, Frank Leslie told Billy Breakenridge, Wyatt Earp, Alex Robertson and others from early Tombstone that he had killed John Ringo.²⁶ Breakenridge doubted him because he thought Ringo too tough for Leslie, but Ben Traywick called Ringo "the gunfighter who never was." Leslie was the scout who never was. Both had exaggerated reputations. We are told that Billy the Kid Claibourne went after Frank for killing Ringo which seems a better excuse than simply being tossed out of a saloon at 7 a.m. for being drunk and disorderly. Perhaps the whisky was "Dutch courage." Folks claimed to have seen Frank on Johnny's trail and to have witnessed a falling out over a woman.

John Ringo descended to Turkey Creek for much needed water taking off his upper clothing and boots to wash and cool himself. While at his ablutions, something startled his horse and perhaps Johnny as well. The horse got away with his coat and the boots he'd taken off so as not to ruin them in the water. He proceeded back to the tree where he sat to dress himself and wrap his feet in preparation for running if only after his horse. While he sat there, Buckskin Frank ascended the streambank and fired, accounting for the upward angle of the shot that slew Johnny. Then Frank, in the tradition of scouts like Buffalo "first scalp for Custer" Bill Cody, took a scalp lock. Perhaps he planned to brag of killing Ringo in a fair fight. Placing Ringo's gun in his hand would have

enhanced the appearance of a fair fight. The letter to the coroner robbed him of the opportunity. He would then have concealed his prize. Taking the scalp would have been entirely in keeping with the legend Buckskin Frank built around himself. A drunken or hungover Ringo, seated, and wrapping his feet, would have been just the advantage Frank would have sought.

If this were science, we would pose the issue as a testable hypothesis that can be disproven. If Buckskin Frank Leslie was somewhere else, that would disprove this statement. In a court of law, we look for proof, not disproof, and we may be short of that, although there is evidence that Frank was nearby. The test results must be empirical. The statement is straightforward and does not depend on supposition such as “Frank wasn’t in Johnny’s class and was afraid of him.” It must be repeatable. We could reenact the events as I’ve hypothesized that they may have occurred to see if they are repeatable. Finally, we’ve accounted for all the facts, so if another theory equally well accounts for them, we apply Occam’s Razor. The theory that is most elegant is best. Elegance is difficult to define but we might say that it means the fewest adjustments and exceptions.

The hypothesis presented starts with the facts, not with a theory as so many others do. If we theorize first, we tend to cherry pick our facts excluding those that don’t fit and finding excuses to dismiss them. Buckskin Frank had the means and the opportunity to kill John Ringo. The peculiarities of the condition of Johnny’s body are accounted for by assuming he first made a trip to the stream to cool and wash himself on a hot, humid July day only to be surprised by Frank’s approach. Motive is always an attempt to read what was in a man’s mind. Frank may have been angered over Johnny’s attention to a woman. His behavior towards women makes this a possibility and at least one source says they had a falling out. Frank was a glory hunter. Killing Johnny Ringo in a presumably fair fight would have brought him infinite glory. Later in life, he would lay claim to that glory.

¹ Traywick, Ben. *John Peters Ringo, Mythical Gunfighter*, 2nd ed. Tombstone: Red Marie’s Bookstore, 2015.

² Dodge, Fred, and Carolyn Lake, ed. *Undercover for Wells Fargo: The Unvarnished Recollections of Fred Dodge*. New York: Ballantine Books, (1969) 1973.

³ “Death of John Ringo.” *Tombstone Weekly Epitaph*, 22 July 1882.

⁴ Garavaglia, J.C. “Weapon Location Following Suicidal Gunshot Wounds,” Pub Med, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10208326/>

⁵ Burns, Walter Noble. *Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999, p 267.

⁶ “John Ringo,” *Tucson Citizen*, 30 July 1882.

⁷ Burns, Walter Noble. *Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999, pp 261-263.

⁸ William M. Breakenridge, *Helldorado: Bringing the Law to the Mesquite*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (1928) 1982, p 313.

⁹ Traywick, Ben. *John Peters Ringo, Mythical Gunfighter*, 2nd ed. Tombstone: Red Marie’s Bookstore, 2015.

¹⁰ Hickey, Michael M. *John Ringo: The Final Hours, A Tale of the Old West*. Honolulu: Talei Publishers, Inc., 1995, p 252-253.

¹¹ William M. Breakenridge, *Helldorado: Bringing the Law to the Mesquite*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (1928) 1982, p 315.

¹² Chaput, Donald. “*Buckskin Frank*” Leslie. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999, p 54.

¹³ Burns, Walter Noble. *Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999, pp 272-273.

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- ¹⁴ Parson, George W., and Lynn R. Bailey, ed. *The Devil Has Foreclosed, the Private Diary of George Whitwell Parsons: The Concluding Arizona Years, 1882-87*. Tucson: Westernlore Publications, 1997, p 38.
- ¹⁵ Hickey, Michael M. *John Ringo: The Final Hours, A Tale of the Old West*. Honolulu: Talei Publishers, Inc., 1995, p 223, quoting Colin Richards. *Buckskin Frank Leslie, Gunman of Tombstone*, 1964.
- ¹⁶ "Leslie's Luck." *Tombstone Weekly Epitaph*, 18 November, 1882.
- ¹⁷ DeMattos, Jack, and Chuck Parsons. *They Called Him Buckskin Frank: The Life and Adventures of Nashville Franklyn Leslie*. Dallas: University of North Texas Press, 2018 (Kindle).
- ¹⁸ Enss, Chris. *According to Kate: The Legendary Life of Big Nose Kate, Love of Doc Holiday*. Guilford: TwoDot, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, p 92.
- ¹⁹ Lummis, Charles F. "Some Arizona Saloon Celebrity," *Los Angeles Time*, 17 April 1886.
- ²⁰ Parsons, George W., ed. Lynn R. Bailey, *The Devil Has Foreclosed, the Private Diary of George Whitwell Parsons: The Concluding Arizona Years, 1882-1887*. Tucson: Westernlore Publication 1997, p 38.
- ²¹ Thrapp, Dan L. *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*. WA: Arthur H. Clark and Company, 1988.
- ²² "A Terrible Tragedy," *Arizona Daily Star*, 14 July 1889.
- ²³ Chaput, Donald. "*Buckskin Frank*" *Leslie*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999, 34.
- ²⁴ Chaput, Donald. "*Buckskin Frank*" *Leslie*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999, 82. Here Chaput relies on Colin Richards, "'Buckskin Frank' Leslie," *Southwestern Studies*, (Summer 1964), pp. 23-24 and Douglas D. Martin, *Silver, Sex and Six Guns: Tombstone Saga of the Life of Buckskin Frank Leslie*. Tombstone: Tombstone Epitaph, 1962, pp. 42-43.
- ²⁵ Chaput, Donald. "*Buckskin Frank*" *Leslie*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999, p 82.
- ²⁶ Chaput, Donald. "*Buckskin Frank*" *Leslie*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999, p 54.

Hoppin' John

From Sam Arnold's *Frying Pans West*, 2011

Hoppin' John is an old recipe that originated in South Carolina and is traditionally cooked on New Year's Day for good luck – as well as any other time during the year. It was carried West because its ingredients travel well.

Serves 6 to 8

½ lb. Slab Bacon
2 cup Black-eyed Peas, cooked, canned, or frozen
1 cup Long Grain White Rice
½ cup Shredded Coconut, sweetened

In a large pot cover the bacon with 4 cups of water and bring to a boil over high heat. When the water boils reduce the heat to medium and simmer for about 30 minutes.

Add the black-eyed peas and rice to the pot, stir, and let the mixture return to a simmer. Cook at a simmer for about 20 minutes or until the rice is cooked and the peas are soft. Lift out the slab of bacon and set aside.

Stir the coconut into the mixture and simmer over very low heat for 15 minutes longer.

Pre-heat the oven to 350.

Drain peas and rice in a colander. Transfer the Hoppin' John to an oven safe dish and bake for six or eight minutes until the rice is fluffy.

Slice the reserved bacon into piece ¼ to 1/3 of an inch thick. In a large skillet fry the bacon over medium high heat until nearly crisp. Drain on paper towel and cut into 1-inch long lengths.

Serve the Hoppin' John with bacon scattered over the top.

Book Reviews

Let us hope these are not the last book reviews by Rosanna Baker. Her husband Gene Baker, now 93, has been in and out of hospital over the last few months and the strain on Rosanna has been great. At this writing, she is ill as well. Keep both of these Ranch Hands in your prayers. Meanwhile, we welcome book reviews from other ranch hands.

Ahnert, Gerald T. "The San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line, The Jackass Mail." Self-Published Booklet, 2019.

May be found by typing in your Search Engine the title and author's name. On July 1, 1857, the Post Office Department awarded the first Trans- Continental Mail Contract to James E. Birch. This history lesson contains information about the very beginnings of the stage line, the changes in ownership, and the hardships experienced along the way. This was a mail and passenger wagon line from San Diego to San Antonio pulled by mules during the years of 1857-1861.

Rosanna Baker

O'Neil, Harry. "Tres Alamos: A Place Forgotten," *Cochise County Historical Journal*, Fall/Winter 2005.

This Journal can be found through your Search Engine and the entire article can be read. The Journal's story of Tres Alamos will reveal the ancient history and take you up to 1875 when Tres Alamos was the largest settlement in what eventually became Cochise County. Gene Baker found the area and took the Cochise County Corral (then the Bisbee Corral) on a trail ride to Tres Alamos. The author joined us and was pleased to see the place he had written about.

Rosanna Baker

Traywick, Ben T. *John Henry, The "Doc" Holliday Story*. Tombstone: Red Marie's Bookstore, 1996.

This is a history that gives one a more complete understanding of John Henry's life from the very beginning of his ancestry and the development of his personality with his many experiences and people he encountered along the way. Ben sorts out some differences between myth and facts that have been written. There are references at the end of each chapter. This book is well written and fascinating to read.

Rosanna Baker

Cleere, Jan. *Outlaw Tales of Arizona*. Guilford: Morris Book Publishing LLC, 2006.

You will enjoy these condensed stories of Arizona's Most Famous Robbers, Rustlers and Bandits of Arizona. Her research includes what has already been written about the well-known as well as some information included that you may not have read about. She states that not everything can be proved beyond a reasonable doubt leaving the reader's imagination to decide how much to believe and what should remain as a good tale.

Rosanna Baker

Utley, Robert M. *After Lewis and Clark*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

The history of the mountain men and the paths to the Pacific is well researched and written in chronological order for a good understanding of how the West was developed. This is a book for the serious historian as well as anyone interested in the subject. These fascinating stories

include the mountain men, trappers, dealings with the Indians and immigrants that began the move westward. Robert Utley has long been regarded as the “Dean of Western Historians,” and his passing on June 7, 2022 marks the end of an era. He will be greatly missed.

Rosanna Baker

Lowe, Sam. *Mysteries and Legends, Arizona*. Guilford: Morris Book Publishing, LLC, 2010.

These are true stories of the unsolved and unexplained. This is not meant to be a reference book, but a collection of stories based on fact dealing with myths, mysteries and legends. You will read about stories you may have already read about as well as ones that are not as commonly published. The well written and easily read stories are delightful and you will not be disappointed in this book.

Rosanna Baker

Trimble, Marshall. *Arizona Adventure!* Phoenix: Golden West Publishers, 1982.

Do you want a quick way to learn some basic history and action-packed concise stories about Arizona? Marshall Trimble has written this book for a quick study of the happenings in Arizona during the early years. Place names, battles, gun fights and stories of famous people make this book come alive for a better understanding of what took place and why these stories seem to be here stay.

Rosanna Baker

Barr, Betty. *A John Slaughter Kid*. Sonoita: Brocking J Books, 2011.

May Watkins Burns grew up on the Slaughter Ranch and wrote in her memoirs about life on the ranch and her relationship with John Slaughter. John loved kids and May was one special child of his. She names the families that lived there and share cropped as well as the people that worked for John Slaughter. You will get an insight into the daily activities around the ranch and how they all ate together for the evening meal. John and his wife, Viola, were truly pioneers with courage and had a great talent for business. Betty Barr was privileged to work with some of the descendants of May Watkins Burns and through research wrote this interesting winner that adds to the legacy of John Slaughter.

Rosanna Baker

Bailey, Lynn R. *The Unwashed Crowd*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 2014.

This history book is well worth having in one’s library for references about the stockman, ranches of the San Simon and Sulphur Spring Valleys, Arizona Territory from 1878 to 1900. The reading tells in detail how the ranches began, how they developed and what was needed to keep them going. You will read about the successes, failures, squabbles and fights that took place during the early days along with the stories of famous people that have been written about. Cochise County Livestock Association set a code of conduct for its members and put into the office of Sheriff, John Slaughter, a Texas frontiersman who warned the rustlers, “Get out of Cochise County or be killed.”

Rosanna Baker

Bell, Bob Boze. *Bad Men, Outlaws & Gunfighters of the Wild West*. Peoria: Try Star-Bose Publications, Inc., 2021.

This book begins in the year 1836 and relates timeless information year by year of the robberies, gunfights and killings to the late date of 1999. The illustrations are timeless by Bob Boze Bell as well as the unique way it is written. The quick study of bad men and bad men that became good as well as unusual findings of the era is a fun way to read western history.

Rosanna Baker

Eppinga, Jane. *Arizona Sheriffs, Badges and Bad Men*. Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2006.

The book is written about Arizona sheriffs and some of the episodes they were involved with. Two familiar stories include the Pleasant Valley War and The Power Shoot-out. The law evolved as each sheriff held office and eventually came to what it is today. Towards the end of the book you will find a list of sheriffs county by county and a list of the sheriffs that were killed during duty. Years of research made possible this well written book.

Rosanna Baker

Bailey, Lynn R and Don Chaput. *Cochise County Stalwarts*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 2000.

This book is probably for the serious historian that wants to learn more about who was important in the territorial years for the progress and development of Cochise County. There are two volumes, A-K and L-Z. The names are listed in alphabetical order throughout the book. The index is extensive and includes names of persons, businesses, occupations, places and subjects. The history and stories are well developed for each of the above subjects. This is truly an excellent reference book.

Rosanna Baker

Cady, John Henry, ed. Basil Billon Woon. *Arizona's Yesterday being the Narrative of John H.*

Cady, Pioneer. Tucson: Adobe Corral, 1915.

One thing is absolutely certain. John Henry Cady was an early Arizona pioneer and lived through quite a bit. His insights of some of the individuals who inhabited Arizona are useful as is his account of what it felt like to live in Arizona. His recollection of events is usually without chronological reference and if he did not directly participate in them completely unreliable. I'm uncertain if Cady set out to impress greenhorn Woon, if Woon set out to sensationalize an otherwise unimportant memoire, or if the two participated in passing on their version of Ned Buntline's Wild West. Nonetheless, it's an interesting book that is fun to read and published by a sister Corral.

Doug Hocking

Wilson, R. Michael. *Tragic Jack: The True Story of Arizona Pioneer John William Swilling*.

Guilford, CN: TwoDot Press, 2007.

Jack Swilling had a history in Arizona dating back to the 1850s. He opened the ancient canals that made Phoenix a thriving agricultural center and may even have supplied the names for Phoenix and nearby Tempe. He rode with the first Arizona Rangers fighting Apaches and protecting settlers. The entire command was involuntarily enlisted into the army of the invading Texans. Later most of them deserted. Did Jack desert or was he captured? It's unclear. He did serve as a scout for the Union thus fighting for both the Confederacy and the Union. Along the line, Jack received a head injury that caused severe headaches. He treated these with alcohol and opium and when inebriated by one or both, his behavior could become bellicose and unpredictable. Jack was eventually accused of a stage robbery and the evidence against him seemed damning including

that of a friend who claimed Jack had confessed. Before trial the friend was killed while acting as a deputy trying to quell a lynch mob. Through some obscure legal maneuvers Jack arrived in the Yuma County Jail (not the territorial prison which was much nicer) where he died shortly after of ill health. Later, other men were accused of the same robbery leading to the question, was Jack guilty? Although attempting to show Jack as a tragic figure, in pain, drug and alcohol addicted, and dying before he was arrested, who was wrongly accused, the author convinced me that Jack was probably guilty. A supposed manipulation of events by both Jack and his accusers seemed a bit farfetched.

Doug Hocking

Chaput, Don. *“Buckskin Frank” Leslie*. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999.

Chaput’s tome remains the classic and most reliable source on Nashville Frank Leslie. Contemporary news writer, Charles Lummis summed him up best as “a man liked by all who know him . . . but a novelist who can make a little truth go as far as any one in the Territory . . . Therein lies his claim to be a celebrated scout. But though no scout, he is no dude.” N.F. Leslie arrived in Tombstone about 1880, a man of about 35 years, wearing a fancy buckskin jacket and claiming to have been a scout some twenty years. He was probably born in Texas but before Tombstone there is little evidence of his existence especially as a scout. Leslie was a great companion around a campfire although he could apparently be somewhat nasty when drunk. From the evidence presented, I’m not sure Leslie deserves much credit as a scout. He was on some expeditions in Arizona and Mexico but seems to have functioned mostly as a dispatch rider bringing incorrect news reports to Tombstone and at least once getting fired. Leslie killed one man and shortly after married his widow only to abuse and cheat on her. Ultimately, he killed Blonde Molly for uncertain reasons and as sent to Yuma Territorial Prison where the warden and guards turned out to be old chums. He did easy time as a model prisoner and was soon pardoned going to marry and abuse several more women.

Doug Hocking

DeMattos, Jack, and Chuck Parsons. *They Called Him Buckskin Frank: The Life and Adventures of Nashville Frankly Leslie*. University of North Texas Press (Kindle), 2018.

This new biography adds a few details. Leslie may have emigrated to San Francisco in 1869 and then disappeared from the record until found tending bar in 1877, disappearing again until his arrival in Tombstone. Clearly, he wasn’t a scout before he arrived in Tombstone in a buckskin jacket. This leaves unanswered the question of how such a flamboyant soul managed to fly under the radar for almost 20 years of his adult life. In his one real gunfight, Frank dispatched Billy the Kid Claibourne. Billy was drunk and fixated on the front door of the saloon while Frank approached from a side door, gave warning, then shot him dead. I take exception to the idea that Billy wasn’t a friend of Johnny Ringo who blamed Frank for killing him. Instead, Billy was presumed angry over being excluded from a political debate. This seems out of character for volatile Billy. Frank threw him out for drunkenly trying to intrude on a private conversation. Angered, Billy went a got a gun and returned intending to kill Frank. These authors make Frank more of a scout and less of the woman abuser than he was. Otherwise, this is much the same story Chaput told though better documented.

Doug Hocking