

## Emerson "Mig" Wells

Josie Bassett was the sister of Ann Bassett, known as Queen Ann, the "Queen of Rustlers." Josie's fourth, of five husbands, Emerson "Mig" Wells, with two or three other men, left their Willow Creek Ranch (Tom Davenport Ranch) in Brown's Park to attend a New Year's Eve dance being held at Linwood, Utah, some forty miles to the west. When they arrived, the hotel-boarding house was full, and they were put up in a small house belonging to Willard Schofield.

According to one unpublished newspaper report, Mig was "said to have been on a drunk the day and night before and, early in the morning of the first, his wife gave him a drink from a bottle of whiskey. In a very short time he was seized with convulsions and one followed the other until he died a little after eight o'clock." There were neither available officers nor physicians near at the time and the body was conveyed to the Well's home on Willow Creek, near Brown's Park.

It is the opinion of those who saw Mig just before he died that he swallowed poison, perhaps strychnine, as his actions were similar to the actions of men who had been known to die of the effects of an overdose of that drug. It is possible that in a fit of remorse, rage, or discouragement, he committed suicide, but people who ought to know do not believe it. Mrs. Wells is said to have made the statement that her husband was subject to convulsions or fits.

The men folk were drinking a great deal during the day and Mig took on too much. When dance time came he was in bed and asleep. The others got ready to go to the dance hall and before leaving they covered the sleeping man up and left him. He didn't sleep very long and as soon as he awoke he got up and went over to the dance to fetch his wife back to the room. When they reached the little rooming house they are said to have had a fuss. She returned to the dance and he went back to bed. When the dance was over Mrs. Wells returned to the room, sometime between one and three o'clock on New Year's Day, January 1, 1913. Her husband, who was awake at the time, or soon afterward, called for a drink of whisky which she gave him according to information received. In a few hours he was dead. Whether he had taken a drink before or after has not been learned.

The snow was so deep that no outside authorities could be brought in, and Josie had the local constable, Justice of the Peace, Ed Tolten, "wrapped around her little finger." She then did a strange thing: she had Mig's body taken outside where it was frozen stiff. Then Josie ordered the corpse loaded onto the wagon to be taken back to Brown's Park for burial. Karl Talley loaded the body onto the wagon, and Jose Bueno (known as "Joe Good"), one of her hired men, drove her back to Willow Creek.

A few months before his death, Mig was arrested along with Peter Derrick, on the charge of removing marks from sheep. Mig was bound over to the District Court in the sum of \$500. He was to have had his trial at the next term.

Mig Wells was buried on January 7, in the Lodore Cemetery adjacent to the Lodore School. A few days later, however, a cowboy found the grave open and the coffin empty.

After Josie had left the boarding house at Linwood, Minnie, the maid, began tidying up the room, and found a small vial of poison which she turned over to George Stephens, later sheriff of Daggett County, Utah. An inquiry was held, to which Josie was summoned to appear. She did, with a six-gun strapped to her waist and rifle in hand. This intimidating posture, coupled with the disappearance of the corpse, caused the inquiry to be prudently dropped.

After Mig's death, Josie ran a hotel in Baggs, Wyoming, for a time, and then moved to Rock Springs, where she had a reunion with Butch Cassidy and Elzy Lay. In 1919, she homesteaded a place several miles up the Green River from Jensen, Utah, a few miles east of Vernal. She lived there for the rest of her life without electricity or running water. In 1936, she was arrested and tried on a charge of cattle rustling, reminiscent of that of her sister, Queen Ann, a few years before. After two hung juries the prosecutor dropped the charges.

In 1963, she fell when a horse knocked her down, breaking her hip. She died a few months later at the age of 90. She was the last remaining associate of the Wild Bunch gang, and the last direct source of information about its members, their personalities, traits and demeanors. Josie is buried in the Bassett family cemetery. The cabin on her old homestead still stands in a beautiful setting and is open to the public.



**Emerson "Mig" Wells' marker**