

## **James B. Jackson**

Around the year 1876, the ranchers of a little settlement known as Horse Creek, located about 30 miles northwest of Cheyenne, Wyoming, needed a teacher for their little country school. The residents of the area met and elected a school board of three members, D. Clark, O. P. Goodwin and James B. Jackson. The school board met and hired Miss McArthur to teach the children. She was a Scot and a relative of Clark.

Miss McArthur took charge of the children's education and things ran smoothly for a few weeks. Then the children began to bring home tales of harsh treatment and the use of profane language in the classroom. The children sometimes came home with black and blue marks amid reports of the use of a club. The parents began to withdraw their children from the school until only one youngster was left. No one complained to the teacher because she had too many relatives in the Horse Creek area.

Some of the parents went to Mr. Jackson with their tales and shortly after the children were all withdrawn he called upon Miss McArthur and offered her one hundred dollars to leave the school. She refused to resign and Jackson threatened her with removal. She told Jackson she would neither resign nor be put out of the school.

The problem was solved three days later when the little country school house burned down. The cry of arson was raised throughout the small community. A large, rawboned cousin of Miss McArthur, Norman McQuaig, was accused of the deed. He responded that Jackson did it to get rid of McArthur. The two men had several meetings and cross accusations flew at all of them.

On March 29, 1877, McQuaig rode out to the Jackson ranch, dismounted, and walked into the yard. Jackson, unarmed and followed by his twenty-one-year old son, left the stable where they had been working and walked toward McQuaig. The latter pulled his gun and aimed at the father who broke for the house and his gun. McQuaig shifted his aim from the unarmed father and shot the son who fell dead. Mrs. Jackson had been watching from the house and ran to where her son lay dead. McQuaig, in a panic, aimed at the father and shot him through the heart, the breast, and the jaw.

McQuaig's horse, frightened by the shooting, broke loose and ran toward the Clark ranch with his murderous owner following on foot. He walked the three and a half miles to the Clark ranch without catching sight of the horse. In the ranch yard, Clark's nine-year-old son, Neil, told him the horse was in the corral. McQuaig shouted, "I'm going to need him, I just killed old man Jackson and his son." McQuaig mounted his horse and was last seen by Neil riding south in the direction of Cheyenne.

Mrs. Jackson, burdened with fear and grief, had to walk three miles with a younger son to get help from the nearest neighbor. A posse was organized to hunt down McQuaig, and a messenger was sent to Cheyenne asking for more help. The inflamed posse men, under the supervision of Deputy Sheriff Dalton of Cheyenne, put a noose around the neck of a prominent rancher they suspected of assisting McQuaig.

The rancher escaped hanging by convincing the posse he did not know McQuaig's whereabouts and joining in the search.

The Jacksons were buried side-by-side the next day in Cheyenne's Lakeview Cemetery. The mother, Mary, joined them in 1900 and the younger son in 1929.

McQuaig was never found. A rancher driving a herd of cattle from Oregon four or five years later recognized him and dismissed him when the herd neared Cheyenne. That was the last sighting of him. The state offered a five hundred dollar reward, and it stayed on the books for many years before it was transferred to another account during a routine audit. Miss McArthur was reported to have remained in the area for several days and then disappeared without a trace. It was rumored that the two cousins were romantically involved and the two of them later met elsewhere. Nobody knows for sure where either of them went or what happened to them. The Jacksons are just two more unsolved murders which was more often the rule than the exception in the Old West.



**Source: Old West Magazine Summer 1968 - *Murder at Horse Creek* by Bennett R. Pearce**