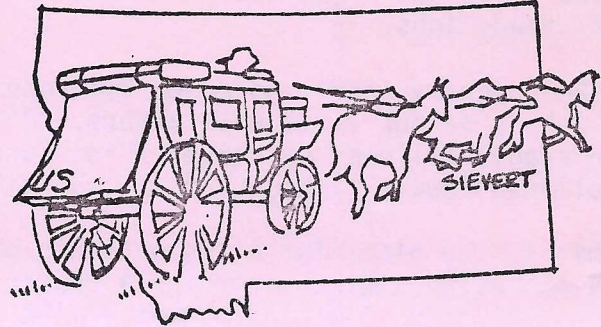


MONTANA GHOST TOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWS



MONTANA GHOST TOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY
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CHARACTERS OF LANDUSKY

Joel F. Overholser

Landusky is one of those Montana ghost towns with more lives than a cat. Other mining camps have had one or two heydeys and expired peacefully. Not Landusky, nor its nearby companion, Zortman. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised to any day see an item to the effect that Pike Landusky had kicked the cover off his coffin to see what in hell the town named for him was doing now.

Johnny Ritch, later Montana Historical Society Librarian, was quoted that you could hear Landusky long before you could see it around 1900. Queried about the remark about 1939, Mr. Ritch claimed he was misquoted. It was "audible long before visible."

One anonymous gambler, of which there were ample numbers, claimed you could swing a pint tin cup around in the street on a lively evening and catch a quart of bullets. Those were the good old days.

The late Boo MacGilvra, his memory should be blessed by anyone interested in any kind of preservation, fondly recalled 1910 when a pair of friends livened up a cat called Mustard with apricot brandy and tossed the clawing result through a cabin window onto Boo to awaken him to an earned hangover. Warren Berry remembered the 1911 Christmas the cook liberally laced the mince meat pie with brandy and the celebrants never made it to Jack Lusk's saloon for an after-dinner drink.

Granville Stuart's Stranglers, rounding up rustlers in 1884, had a hand in Landusky's origin. Hard cases were riding speedily north out of Judith Basin and to Dutch Louis Meyer it seemed that all his sudden guests would draw undue attention of the Vigilantes, so he joined the exodus. Dutch Louis picked up friends Pike Landusky and Frank Aldrich, and in July, 1884 they found placer gold on Alder Gulch. It didn't compare with the original Alder Gulch, but it was sure better than an empty belly, what with all the unemployed freighters and such toughing it out around Fort Benton. The stampede drew a couple of thousand -- some lucky ones did better than bacon and beans.

One handicap was that the Little Rockies, in fact everything north of the Missouri and Marias, was Indian reservation in 1884. The miners played fox and hound with the soldiers, leave under escort and sneak back. None of the gulches was any big deal; about

the best stake was \$1200 for four months of hard work. Miners generally had traded with Tom O'Hanlon at Fort Benton, probably out the back door; with Milt Marsh at Rocky Point; or with Gil Norris at Fort Claggett at the Judith. In 1887 the reservation was opened to whites and everyone headed north of the Missouri.

Some good mining leads changed the pattern. Pike Landusky and Bob Orman located the Gold Bug in 1890 and three years later the August, named for the month it was found in. In June, 1890 Landusky exploded into its riotous career, although some historians use the term "the place was organized." This time the goal was hard rock mining, and there were lots of steady jobs.

Pike Landusky wasn't to enjoy his fame for long. December 27, 1894 he was relaxing in Jew Jake's saloon along with others. Jim Thornhill and friend Loney Curry entered to set the stage, followed by Harvey (Kid) Curry. The latter had a grudge. In the fight that followed Powell (Pike) Landusky was killed and the Currys were on the run.

This is the place for a few outlines of careers. First, mine host Jacob Harris, who by 1894 was using a Winchester for a crutch. Jake starved out of Fort Benton as a gambler when the freighters lost employment in '84, moved to Great Falls and was soon in a fracas where a fellow came at him with a knife and Harris plugged the chap. He tried Helena, lost in another fracas but beat an undertaker out of a job. Back in Great Falls he had a misunderstanding at a rail station with Chief of Police Treat, shot him three times and was wounded twice. A couple of spectators were hurt and Jake finally lost his leg, hence the useful crutch. The River Press couldn't understand all the didoes, saying, "here he was regarded as a peaceful citizen." Which reminds me of the old story about the 6'6" chap who rode a grizzly into a saloon with a live rattler for a whip, mountain lion loping alongside like a dog, hollered for a glass of sulfuric acid straight, then explained, "Up in Benton they run all the sissies out."

Pike Landusky came to Montana in 1868, with his nickname for the county of his origin. He never lost a fight until his last. The big quarrelsome Missourian hated Indians after one shot out part of his jaw and three teeth at a trading post on Flat Willow in the Judith Basin in 1881. He didn't count dead Indians but never killed a white man, though he put his mark on dozens, including Kid Curry, the cause of one of Montana's most celebrated homicides.

There were those who say that Henry, Johnny, Loney and Harvey Logan -- they changed their name to Curry in Montana -- drifted in with a stolen herd, unproven. Henry beat the odds and died a natural death fairly soon. Johnny got into a fracas with a Dutchman and had his arm shot off in 1892. It didn't improve his disposition none; he picked a fuss with Jim Winters in 1896 and went under. The remaining pair were on the dodge. Kid Curry joined the Wyoming Hole-in-the-Wall gang, led by Butch Cassidy. Cassidy had the distinction of never killing anybody while engaged in his profession; he cashed his six shooter in banks and specialized in abrupt train stops. Chouteau County didn't want Loney too bad; he hadn't committed any homicides. So along about 1899 he and cousin Bob Lee or Curry bought a Harlem saloon and paid cash. At that time when the national bank notes came into the Stockmen's Bar in Fort Benton they were signed by local bank officials. They sent the things in for investigation -- serial numbers proved them part of loot from a Rock Creek, Wyoming train robbery. Somehow Loney and Bob got word, and between dusk and dawn they sold their bar to George Ringwald for the \$300 he had in cash and an awful liberal figure for the balance. Bob Curry was soon jailed in Wyoming, while Loney was killed in March, 1900 attempting to escape arresting officials. That made the Kid the survivingest Curry.

Kid Curry was one of the top hands at the much overrated occupation of gun fighting. He killed at least seven men, eight if one adds Jim Winters (who got the best of Johnny Curry) shot on his cabin doorstep some hours after Montana's most celebrated train robbery. One analyst rated Kid Curry about fourth from the top in homicides. July 3, 1901 A Great Northern train was stopped near Wagner Siding west of Malta by armed men led by the Kid, with Butch Cassidy, Camille Hanks, Ben Kilpatrick and perhaps Jim Thornhill assisting. It was the last major success of the Wild Bunch who soon scattered. Henry Longabaugh

(Sundance Kid) was already on his way to South America.

The outlaws made the train crew uncouple baggage and express cars and pull the rest of the train ahead, under gunpoint supervision. A young girl was wounded by warning shots to keep the passengers aboard. It took the outlaws four dynamite charges to blow the safe. The chief loot was \$40,000 in unsigned bank notes such as put the Harlem saloon on the auction block. There is also a shaky Montana legend that cupped silver dollars were passed a day or two later at the Mint in Great Falls. The Bunch got clean away. Walt Coburn, then a button, said he provided them with remounts.

Old outlaws die hard. The Pinkertons later claimed Kid Curry a suicide after a fumbled robbery attempt in Colorado; the Landusky area's second and third generation will pass along the belief that the Kid lived to a ripe old age, revisiting his old stomping grounds a time or two. Charley Siringo, noted man hunter, agreed. Same goes for Butch Cassidy. As to Ben Kilpatrick, the "Tall Texan," there is little doubt. About 1910 he checked into the hereafter as a result of an ice mallet in the hands of a Railway Express messenger half his size.

The wild west stuff may be overrated; many of the homicides were on unarmed victims. There's an argument over whether Pike Landusky was heeled in his quarrel with Kid Curry. In some fights the dead man didn't even have a good set of teeth. But Lewistown had a Fourth of July in 1884 that makes the gunfight at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone look like a church auxiliary tea party. In 1884 Lewistown had been rather recently renamed from Reed's Fort and was pitching its first shindig. A couple of the celebrants were Edward "Longhair" Owen and Charles Fallon who carried the sobriquet "Rattlesnake Jake." They picked the tough way to enter Montana history, getting loaded with redevye and divested of cash by horse races, and suffering consequent impairment of temper and judgement. Owen developed a sudden dislike of a young man dressed as Uncle Sam and hit him over the head, knocked him down, then with a cocked revolver made him crawl in the dust. When Owen expressed a desire to "clean out this town" the two mounted and rode up and down the only street firing revolvers. Townsman met the challenge, grabbing rifles off the T. C. Powers store rack and getting set. One wounded Owen twice. Rattlesnake Jake, riding ahead, looked back and saw his partner in the dust and turned around. They made their last stand in front of a photographer's tent; he cashed in on the picture sales later. Owen and Fallon were in the center of the street and bullets were coming in from all directions. Two men made the mistake of crossing the street and one was killed. When the bullets had settled there were nine holes in Rattlesnake Jake and eleven in Owen, anyone of which would have proven fatal. It was just as well. Granville Stuart and his Vigilantes were after them.

Rumor has it that it was a quarter century before Lewistown had a Fourth of July celebration again, and they must have lived happily ever after. Nobody ever heard of the town again.

Editor's note: Mr. Overholser, retired editor of the Fort Benton River Press gave the foregoing paper at our annual meeting. We thank him for agreeing to let us print it here and share it with all our members.

FROM THE EDITOR

It is impossible to find words to convey my pleasure in the success of our recent annual meeting in Fort Benton. The speakers were outstanding and the food excellent. Highlights on Sunday were the visit to the Loma Museum (they have one of the finest rock and mineral collections I have seen) and the float trip. The float trip included a great luncheon and considerable excitement as ^{w²} were stuck on sandbars and crashed into one great boulder. The trip gave us a small taste of the rigors of river travel in the early days. A few of us were not smart enough to dress warmly. My personal thanks to our speakers: Gar Woods, Joel Overholser, Jack Martin, Hank Pope; tour guide Sue Lepley; and boatmen Jack and Gayle; and especially to Butch Taylor who made all the arrangements for the meeting.

The attendance at the Fort Benton meeting was the best we have had in several years. The Board of Directors has chosen Deer Lodge for the site of the 1983 meeting. It has a lot of interesting attractions; start planning for it now. In another action, the Board elected Bob Culbertson of Billings as our new secretary-treasurer. Director Ken Sievert reported on his observations following an inspection trip to Elkhorn. He believes the Fraternity Hall roof is too high and difficult for volunteers to tackle. However, the State Preservation Office has suggested that we apply for a grant through the Montana Historical Society that will administer cultural and aesthetic grants to be made by the Legislature. President Jan O'Brien will appoint a committee to write the grant proposal.

In our last newsletter the problem of Garnet was outlined. Director Ike Leigland reported that they have arranged funding for a caretaker for one more winter. I understand that a couple of weeks ago a "Clean Up Garnet" day was held and about 70 people pitched in to pick up and clean up the site. Congratulations, Missoula.

One disappointment: efforts to save the very historic stack at the Great Falls smelter have failed. I hope such a dramatic loss will serve to inspire our preservation efforts. The great stack in Anaconda seems likewise slated for demolition.

I would like to solicit articles from all of you for the Newsletter. Articles could range from a story about a mining camp to early pioneers, family history, a historical event, modes of early day travel, etc. Would you send me a story? The pay is extremely poor -- but the publicity is great.

THE PREZ SEZ

Our annual fall meeting, held in Fort Benton this year, is over. And from the reaction of those I talked to .. it was a complete success! We were pleased at the huge turnout (largest since the meeting in Virginia City) participating in the lectures, meetings and the walking tour around the city. Even the boat for the float trip was filled to capacity. Although I'm told that due to low water some of the floaters had to get out and push, everyone enjoyed the beauty of the area traveled. I would like to thank Butch Taylor, on behalf of everyone who attended, for the excellent program he put together and for allowing us to come into his house (editor's note: the old Conrad Kohr's home) during the walking tour.

At the Board of Directors meeting Robert Culbertson of Billings was elected as the new Secretary-Treasurer. It was also decided to hold our 1983 meeting in Deer Lodge. Ike Leigland and I will be putting the program together; already we have a number of ideas for it. Watch for more details in upcoming issues and get ready to join us for a fun-filled September weekend!!

We would like to welcome the following new members into the Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society: William Ciesla, Fort Collins, CO (and look for an article by Bill in Montana Magazine next spring); Lola Opitz, Missoula; Mr/Mrs Everett Fraser, Bozeman; Mr/Mrs Wallack Klockler, Helena; Mr/Mrs S. V. Frohlicher, Great Falls; and Carol Barclay, Bozeman. Also, honorary one year memberships were given to our guest speakers: Mr/Mrs Gar Woods, Missoula; Mr/Mrs Joel Overholser and Mr/Mrs Jack Martin, Fort Benton; and Mr/Mrs Hank Pope, Loma. Thanks to you all.

MONTANA GHOST TOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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