THE GAY NINETIES 1890 - 1899

June 27, 1890

A small flame erupted in the back room of the only drug store in the town of Morrison. The drug store was located in the middle of the block, and like the rest of the structures, was made of wood. The second largest community in Jefferson County, Morrison boasted twenty three businesses on main street, all without the protection of a fire department. When the small flame kindled into a large fire, G.T. Harris, the owner of the drug store, couldn't call out the alarm fast enough. The flames exploded through the roof of the building and blew all directions in the wind. A runner was sent to Golden to find the Sheriff and the local fire department, as well as a runner sent to Denver. Two saloons, the library, the barber shop, the hotel, Evan's restaurant, Stricland's Clothing Store, the Post Office, the church, and all the rest of the buildings downtown burned to the ground.

December 9, 1891

Throughout the Summer of 1891 three men campaigned for the Office of Sheriff. Carlos W. Lake, who was a Deputy Sheriff for John Belcher in 1878 and since then operated a stagecoach line and grocery store: John W. Lunnau, a new comer: and Samuel S. Poe, a new comer but a popular man in Jefferson County. On November 3rd, Samuel S. Poe defeated Lake and Lannau by receiving 983 votes to Lake's 720 and Lannau's 132. Today, Poe and Carlos Lake made public the money they expended in the race for Sheriff. Lake spent $150.00 on cigars and liquor for his bid for the office, while Poe only spent $50.00 on the same items, and still won.

November 26, 1893

It was bitter cold this Winter morning at the McCurdy residence in Golden, where all the family were apparently asleep, except one, who lay on his bed and moaned. Arthur Beery, the stepson to John McCurdy, was just now beginning to feel the intense pain and his moans were turning into shrieks of dispair. Mrs. McCurdy awoke and heard her stepson shrieking in his bedroom and immediately awakened her husband. It was four o'clock in the morning. The two parents, dressed in robes, hurried to the bedroom and tried to open the door. It was locked from within. John McCurdy called aloud for his son to answer. The reply was an increase in the cries of suffering. Now worried about their son's welfare, the two adults went outside and John climbed the wall to the bedroom window of Arthur's room. John got inside and then helped his wife up the wall and into the room. Together they found their eighteen year old stepson wallowing in a large pool of blood. Arthur screamed for help as blood poured out of his bed clothes and stained his mattress and floor. His head was bruised and bleeding, and a large welt could be seen underneath the hair line on the front of his face. On the floor lay a razor sharp knife, covered with blood.

John McCurdy pulled back the young man's bed clothes and blankets. He staggered back in shock when he saw that Arthur had been castrated. In a brief moment Arthur grabbed his step mother and told her that Alex, his step brother and her real son, was responsible for this outrage.

Doctor Passler was summoned to the McCurdy house by John McCurdy's other real son, Delos. The Doctor carefully dressed the wounds and made Arthur as comfortable as possible. As Arthur rested, Constable Hendricks of Golden and Sheriff Samuel poe were brought in to examine the crime scene.

Sheriff Samuel S. Poe

By daylight, the two lawmen had pieced the following story together:

Alex McCurdy suspected Arthur of having romantic inclinations toward his wife, which supposedly caused their marriage to crumble. Alex's wife had since moved back East several weeks ago. Even though witnesses who were interviewed by Sheriff Poe indicated that Alex seemed very friendly to Arthur during the past several weeks, it appeared logical that Alex was indeed responsible for this crime.

Sheriff Poe issued a warrant for the arrest of Alexander McCurdy and gave the document to Constable Hendricks who caught the next east bound train for Denver. Hendricks met with no success in locating Alex and returned to Golden in the evening. A large crowd had gathered at the Lakewood Depot just east of the Courthouse anxiously awaiting the return of Hendricks and the monster, Alexander McCurdy. Utter contempt floated through the gathering mob as a hanging was the word that passed in the night. Sheriff Poe stood by and waited with the crowd. When the evening train arrived, and Hendricks stepped out alone, the crowd peacefully moved off, mumbling their oaths of revenge.

June 2, 1894 Saturday

Sheriff George Kelley went home late last night leaving the Jail in command of his Undersheriff Alexander Kerr. Kelley had been elected Sheriff of Jefferson County when he soundly defeated Sam Poe last November 7th by over 400 votes. When he took office in January of this year, George Kelley was made very familiar with the mayhem which occurred at the McCurdy home last Winter. Alexander Kerr was also quite familiar with the case. He and his son, Gary, (who would be elected Sheriff of this County twenty seven years later,) were assigned to pay close attention to their most important prisoner, Alexander McCurdy.

In February of 1894 Alexander McCurdy had been found and brought to trial. After several days of testimony he was found guilty of mayhem and sentenced to three years in the State Penetentiary. The trial exposed the fact that Alex had climbed through Arthur's window in the middle of the cold Winter night, bashed him unconscious with a club and then castrated his step brother with a sharp knife. All of this was for retaliation for a supposed love affair between Arthur and Alex's long gone wife. After Alex was sentenced, Sheriff Kelley took custody of the prisoner and locked him up in the County Jail while the preparations were made to transport the thirty five year old inmate to Canon City.

At two o'clock this morning, a crowd, all masked, stormed the Jail and tied up the Undersheriff and his young son. Alex McCurdy was bodily removed from his cell and escorted down the slope to the east of the Courthouse. Meanwhile, the Undersheriff broke free of his bonds and ran to get Sheriff Kelley before the mob had a chance to do its dirty work.

The mob forced Alex McCurdy to climb the new Lakewood extension bridge next to the Cambria Fire Brick Works. Alex screamed for the crowd to spare his indignation of having his pants removed, but to no avail. With torches blazing, two men took a knife and castrated Alex as he stood atop the railroad trestle. As he bled and screamed, a rope was thrown over his head and he was pushed over the trestle to his death.

Sheriff Kelley had arrested the two men who had castrated Alex McCurdy and pushed him off the railroad trestle, but no one was to bring charges against these participants in the lynching. The incident was forgotten.

May 17, 1897

Benjamin Killum lived alone in his small cabin in Wheatridge. For several months now he had secretly met with one of his neighbors, Mary Vancar, in the middle of the night to demonstrate his romantic inclinations. This perhaps was acceptable, but Mary Vancar was a married woman, therefore, the midnight "conversations" held between these two consenting adults was considered highly irregular. No matter how discreet the two lovers attempted to be, all of Killum's other neighbors knew of these interludes and someone decided to call the Sheriff.

Tonight, Killums neighbors awaited the midnight arrival of Mary to young Benjamin's cabin. Mary did show up and slipped into Benjamin's cabin for their perceived secret rendezvous. At the appointed moment, the neighbors burst into Killum's cabin and dragged a startled Mary from the embraces of her lover and paraded her outside to be publicly viewed. Sheriff Kelley arrived

shortly thereafter and took custody of the two lovers. Both Mary and Benjamin were locked up in the Jefferson County Jail on the charge of Fornication and bond was set at $300.00 each. Killum's father arrived early this morning and bonded Mary out, but decided to leave his son in Jail for a while to keep him safe from the wrath of one highly aggitated husband.

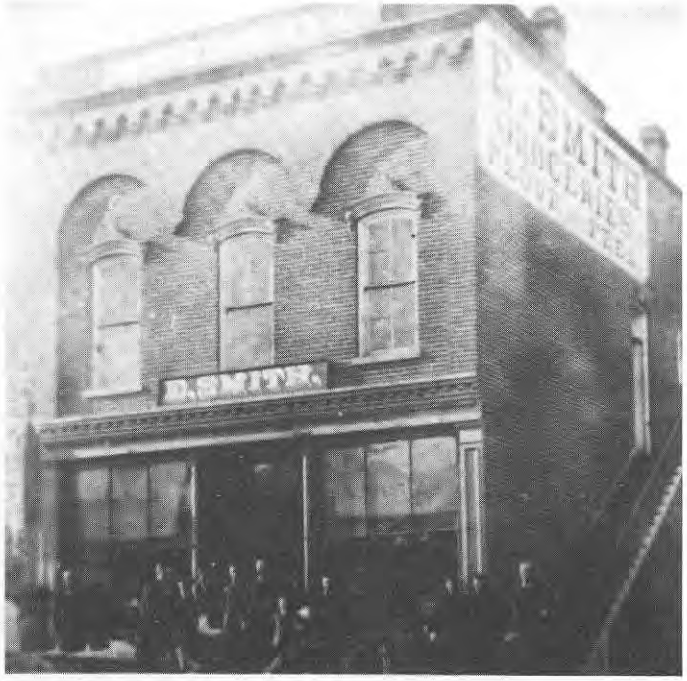
November 2, 1897

Today Carlos Lake is elected Sheriff of Jefferson County. He also announced his choice of Undersheriff, Tom Hoagland, and his Deputies, Dave Maynard, Harper Orahood, Lee Wise, J.W. Green, W.W. Wilmore, and Joseph Dennis (who would himself be elected Sheriff in 1910.)

Sheriff Carlos Lake

September 19, 1899 Monday Night

Dave Maynard was the Deputy on duty in the Jail. A.R. Foster, a prisoner incarcerated by Sheriff Lake for cattle rustling is calling for a cup of water. Maynard pours the inmate a cup and strolls up to the bars and slides the keys into the lock. When he opens the door, Foster leaps out and strikes the Deputy behind the ear with his fist and runs out the front door. Sheriff Lake later forms a Posse to hunt down the escapee but returns without him.



In 1899 Joseph Dennis was employed as a driver of merchandise for Smith Grocery Store. Dennis is seen on the wagon seat. This building is now Wood's Mortuary.

November 22, 1899

On November 8th the Republicans swept the election, except for the office of Sheriff. John Nicholls, the man elected for one term as Sheriff in 1883 lost on an unofficial ballot by two votes to William "Billy" Barrick.

Today the official results of the November 8th election were made public. John Nicholls and Billy Barrick both received 1760 votes. Barrick ran as a Democrat while Nicholls ran as a McKinley Republican. Several of the 1760 votes received by each candidate were written in as a straight "fusion ticket" and the election judges gave all the "fusion ticket" ballots to Nicholls, therefore the Republican was awarded the election. Barrick immediately found several lawyers and filed a law suit in Jefferson County Court. Nonetheless, John Nicholls would become the next Sheriff of Jefferson County in January 1900.