THE DIRTY THIRTIES
1930 - 1939

June 5, 1930 Thursday

Today Federal Judge J. Foster Symes dismissed the indictment charges against Sheriff Walter H. Johnson after United States Attorney asked for another continuance in the case. The two witnesses for the prosecution, Joe Clark, who was found murdered last year, and the other who was being sequestered pending prosecution of other suspects in the bootlegging circles, hampered the ability of the United Stated Attorney to continue the case.

Sheriff Johnson, who felt that the Federal indictment was a frame up from his political enemies, announced his bid for re-election as County Sheriff as soon as he stepped out of the Federal Courthouse in Denver.

September 9, 1930 Tuesdey

The primary elections were held today for all County officials. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties endorsed Walter H. Johnson for Sheriff, but at the last minute, the Republicans also entered another man for the contest, James G. Biggins, Jr. Both men would have two chances to win this year for the office of Sheriff. However, today, Biggins soundly defeated Johnson by over two thousand eight hundred votes.

November 8, 1930 Tuesday

Today the general election was held and James G. Biggins clearly won the race for County Sheriff, defeating Johnson 5,120 votes to 4, 319.

January 1, 1931

With the advent of the new year, James G. Biggins took over the Office of Sheriff from Walter H. Johnson. Biggins was born in Sorento, Illinois in 1892 and educated in the public schools in Pirth, Indiana. In the early 1920's Biggins attended Denver University to achieve some education in business. Since 1910 Biggins had been working as a laborer in coal mines in Montana, New Mexico, and in Leyden, Colorado. In 1917 Biggins became a non commissioned officer in the United States Army and served his tour of duty in World War I. After the War Biggins returned to Leyden, Colorado and worked the coal mines until 1924 when he dropped everything to travel the United States. From 1925 to 1927 he returned as mine foreman at Leyden and did some contract work with the new Victor radio company. In 1927 Biggins became a Deputy County Assessor serving in this capacity until 1931 when he took over the office of Sheriff.

This morning Biggins named Vernon Downing of Edgewater as his Undersheriff. As his Deputies, Biggins named H.A. Smith, Ray Fuller, Art Schoech, Fred Lloyd, Willis Morris (who would be elected Sheriff in 1936), and Clarence Bunch Fugate.

Sheriff James G. Biggins

January 26, 1931 Monday Morning

Twenty three peace officers from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and Denver Police Department raided the La Palmarte Road House on West 38th Avenue in Wheatridge. Twenty five men were arrested and separated to be transported to the Denver City and Jefferson County Jails.

The twenty five men were holding a secret conference in order to come to a "gentlemen's" agreement on the distribution and price of bootleg liquor in the Denver Metro area. They had just agreed upon selling moonshine at ten dollars a gallon and two dollars a pint when Sheriff Biggins, his Undersheriff, Deputy Willis Morris, and twenty other cops broke through the door. All were charged with vagrancy.

July 8, 1931 Wednesday

In a test to outlaw all types of slot machines in Jefferson County, Sheriff Biggins confiscated all machines recently delivered to many stores throughout the County that vend a package of candy when a nickel is inserted. District Court Judge Henry Clavert advised the Sheriff Biggins that any machine that vends candy was not to be considered illegal, and therefore, he was to return all the confiscated machines to their owners.

March 7, 1932 Monday

Sheriff Biggins was well acquainted with Plainview resident, 33 year old Robert Edwards. Throughout the Summer of 1931 Biggins had been involved time and time again with this crazed man who liked to beat up his father, put poison in the coffee of his neice, and assault on several occasions visitors to his home. Last Friday night, March 4, Sheriff Biggins responded to Edwards' home on a report of the man starving his cattle. When he got there with Deputies Lloyd and Morris, Edwards threatened him with a gun and the law men backed off to allow the man to calm down. Sheriff Biggins assigned Deputy Schoech to watch Edwards all weekend from a distance and report back to Golden periodically with any information regarding the mental state of the man. Yesterday, Sheriff Biggins received permission from Edward's parents to arrest their son and hold him on a mental health charge.

Sheriff Biggins (holding the horse), followed by Deputy James Gough and Undersheriff Vernon Downing, wade through drifting snow in Coal Creek Canyon on a rescue mission in April of 1933.

This morning, Sheriff Biggins, Deputy Lloyd, Deputy Morris, and Deputy Schoech standing guard at the roadway to prevent the intrusion of unwanted visitors, drove up to the front of Edwards' home. Edwards was not around. The front and back doors were found locked, so the three law men crawled through an unfastened window and hid themselves in the kitchen. Suddenly, Robert Edwards, armed with a rifle, burst into the kitchen screaming obsenities. Sheriff Biggins discharged an Army gas grenade in front of the crazed man, but the gas had no effect. Edwards rushed the Sheriff. Biggins retreated through the house with the other two Deputies just ahead of their boss. Outside, the law men ran to the rear of a nearby chicken house and took cover. Edwards came outside with his rifle and instantly charged the Sheriff once again. Edwards fired his rifle. Biggins heard the bullet strike something soft behind him and Deputy Lloyd made a gasping sound.

Sheriff Biggins stepped out from behind his cover and shot Edwards once in the chest, but the man kept charging.

Deputies Lloyd and Morris opened fire with their rifles on the advancing man hitting him seven times. Edwards fired his rifle three more times before he fell dead. Some of Edwards' bullets singed the shirts of the Deputies, but they came away from the shootout unharmed. The first bullet fired by Edwards did draw blood from Lloyd, but the wound was only superficial.

May 5, 1932 Thursday

Sheriff Biggins assigned Wilford Hartz to the first motorcycle patrol duty regulating traffic today in Department history. He is to patrol, in uniform, the highways leading in and out of Morrison. It is unknown what type of uniform Deputy Hartz will wear, but his transportation will consist of a Harley Davidson with side car for appropriate balance.

July 12, 1932 Tuesday

Today a warrant was issued for the arrest of ex-Deputy Dorsey Trew, and he was subsequently arrested in Deadwood, South Dakota. The charge was related to further indictments from the Federal Grand Jury relating to conspiracy to violate prohibition laws. Walter H. Johnson and his other Deputy, Clyde Hocking, had been previously cleared of any wrong doing. However, a large whiskey still was located at the home of Trew, who now lived in Lafayette, and this discovery naturally led to the indictment.

November 8, 1932 Tuesday

The general election was held today with encumbent James G. Biggins contesting a familiar opponent, Walter H. Johnson. Once again, Biggins defeated Johnson 6,115 votes to 5,867 votes. In July of 1931 Johnson had been appointed Director of

Sheriff's Department in 1933. Sheriff Biggins on the far left, then Deputy Wilford Hartz, Deputy Cotton, Deputy Gough, and Undersheriff Vernon Downing on the far right.

Sheriff Vernon Downing and his 1935 Dodge patrol car.

the Reformatory at Buena Vista, and had left the post when the Civil Service Commission would not ratify his appointment. Today, when Johnson was defeated by Biggins, he was appointed Public Trustee for Jefferson County. A year later, in July of 1933, Johnson would be appointed once again the Director of Buena Vista and would remain in that position for the next seven years. Johnson would die on December 31, 1940 in the Red Cross Hospital in Salida after suffering a heart attack at work.

January 4, 1933 Thursday

James Biggins announces that Vernon Downing will continue as his Undersheriff. The Great Depression has settled over Jefferson County, beginning in early 1932 when the crops began to fail. County employees took a pay cut in order to stay employed last year. Deputy Sheriffs were now making $150.00 per month as opposed to $175.00 per month one year ago. Sheriff Biggins had his Jail food budget cut from ninety cents a day per prisoner to seventy cents. Today the Sheriff had his own salary cut from $3,000.00 a year to $2,500.00 a year.

July 5, 1934

Camp George West opened up by order of General Neil Kimball to house eight hundred homeless men looking for work. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration asked the Sheriff of Jefferson County to provide security over the road gangs hired by the Federal Government to pave certain highways through the County. Deputies W.D. Bennetts and E. Coslett were assigned by Sheriff Biggins to watch the road gangs and to enforce traffic control around these construction gangs.

August 9, 1934

Vernon Downing resigns from the Sheriff's Department today, and Sheriff Biggins appoints Willis Morris as his new Undersheriff. For two months, Downing travelled Kansas and Nebraska before returning to Jefferson County to place his name on the ticket as candidate for Sheriff. Today the primary election was held and Vernon Downing defeated his Republican rival, Willis Morris, by eleven hundred votes. He would run against Democrat George W. Brayfield this coming November.

January 1, 1935

Vernon Downing carried the election in November of 1934 and today took over the Office of Sheriff from James G. Biggins who would be taking over the management of the White Ash Mine in Golden in March of this year. Later in his professional life, James Biggins would serve as Mayor of Arvada (1936-1938) and Jefferson County Commissioner (1937-1938). Today, Sheriff Vernon Downing appointed Fred J. Welke as his Undersheriff. Downing added to his Department only three more Deputies, which would bring the total Departmental strength to seventeen law men.

Sheriff Vernon Dowing dusting for fingerprints from the safe after a brutal assault and robbery at the Golden Freight Depot in 1934.

January 30, 1936 Thursday

During the last several months, many homes in the Bergen Park, Genessee, and Filius Park areas, were being burglarized, and some ranchers were now losing cattle to midnight thieves. Sheriff Downing announced today that his was going to take drastic measures in combating crime in the mountains. "If necessary," he said, "we will arm every man in the hills. This sort of business must stop. It they don't we are going to show them some of the old time spirit of pioneer life, and somebody will get hurt."

For the first time in Departmental history, a night shift was added to the patrol schedule. This was done to prevent these nighttime raids on cattle herds in the Mountains.

Cattle rustling came to an end in the hills.

November 3, 1936 Tuesday

Today Willis Morris defeated Vernon Downing for the office of Sheriff.

January 14, 1937

Vernon Downing left the Sheriff's residence today and headed east to Wichita, Kansas to take over the management of Preuss-Downing Distributors firm, a wholesale distributing company for Coors Beer. Willis Morris then became the twenty eighth man to be Sheriff of Jefferson County. He was born in Jefferson County, Colorado in 1896 and attended Wheatridge High School. A big game hunting enthusiast, Morris was in the farming and cattle business in this County and Eagle County prior to becoming a Deputy for James Biggins in 1931.

Today, Sheriff Willis Morris announced that Clarence B. Fugate would serve as his Undersheriff, and would add Delotus Babcock, Mel Comer, and Dean Putnam as Deputies to the already growing staff.

November 18, 1937 Thursday

For some time, KLZ radio station out of Denver had been broadcasting a morning program called the "Rocky Mountain Roundup" to the mountain ranchers and communities to the west of Denver. Starting today, KLZ radio, at 6:00 am each morning, will broadcast to all mountain area Deputy Sheriffs in Jefferson County (who have an AM radio in their cars) any calls for service called in by the ranchers. This program was designed to assist mountain area law enforcement respond quicker to reports of cattle rustling cases in remote places.

November 8, 1938 Tuesday

Today Sheriff Willis Morris defeated his old opponent, Vernon Downing, for the office of Sheriff during the general election.

June 17, 1939 Saturday Night

Deputy Sheriff Ray Osteen was on duty at the Tiny Town Dancehall when a fight broke out between Ed Kidd and Harold Brumbaugh. Osteen stepped between the two battling men to quell their tempers but failed to see the knife flashing in the hand of Mr. Kidd. The blade sank deep into Osteen's chest, just above the heart. Tonight, the Deputy lies at St. Anthony's Hospital in critical condition. He would survive.

September 16, 1939 Saturday

Edison Aday, Fred Schwartz, and Fleet Parsons were hiking this morning on top of North Table Mountain when the seventeen year old Schwartz saw Calvin Phillips, known as the crazy hermit of North Table Mountain, approaching. Warning his friends of Phillips' temper, the three boys hid behind a pile of rocks hoping that the crazy man would walk by and not see them. Phillips did walk by and the boys scrambled for a better hiding place, finding one in a small wooden culvert. In just a few moments, Phillips peeked his head over the culvert and found the boys hiding there. Terrified, Fleet Parsons started to climb out of the culvert. Phillips suddenly pulled forth a rifle and fired into Parson's body. Phillips fired a second shot into the culvert hitting Edison Aday in the leg. Parsons had fallen back into the culvert on top of Schwartz with a bullet hole through his arm. Phillips tried to fire once again into the culvert but his rifle jammed and turned about and walked away.

Sheriff's Department in January of 1935. Left to right: Deputy Wilford Hartz, Deputy C.R. Cotton, Sheriff Downing, and Undersheriff Fred Welke.

Just after dark Sheriff Morris, with Deputies C.B. Fugate and D.H. Babcock, surrounded the cabin where Calvin Phillips was holding out with two rifles. While the Sheriff and Deputy Babcock flanked the cabin, Deputy Fugate stepped through the front door and began to talk with Phillips, asking him to surrender. In a few moments, Deputy Fugate and Phillips came out of the cabin and the crisis was over. Undoubtedly the courage of Deputy Fugate unnerved Phillips and caused his surrender, however, the crazy man of North Table Mountain was astonished to discover later that Undersheriff Fugate never carried a gun.

November 29, 1939 Wednesday

Calvin Phillips was found guilty today of two counts of assault and was being held for mental health evaluations.