

# Three of Park County's most SENSATIONAL MURDERS

*Alcohol, guns make a mix for murder in the 1800s*

By Christie Wright

Park County, one of the 17 original Colorado Territorial counties created in 1861 by Colorado's First Legislative Assembly, has its very own version of the "Wild West."

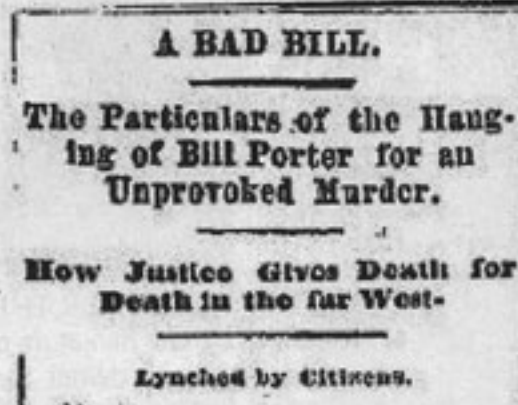
Many gold miners who came into the county with Colorado's 1859 rush stayed on after that first boom, establishing local towns and businesses. The influx brought in many constructive, contributing citizens as well as the usual array of questionable characters.

Although the likes of Butch Cassidy and Billy the Kid did not make a name for themselves in Park County, other gun-wielding desperadoes committed their "dastardly deeds," the details of which lie buried deep within old yellowed newspaper stacks. Three of the most sensational 1800s Park County killings were recently dug out and are brought to light here.

## **Committed, tried and executed – all in one hour**

### **■ Alma, Colo., 1880 ■**

"Jerk me up quick!" gasped William Porter, the last words he would utter



#### **PORTER'S DEMISE**

The *Janesville Gazette* announces Porter's demise at the hands of Alma vigilantes. (Source: *The Janesville Gazette*, April 5, 1880, via Newspaper Archives. The *Janesville Gazette* is still in print.)

on the night of March 24, 1880. Literally at the end of his rope, the irascible miner knew he would be "performing on the tightrope" any second, suspended from – of all places – the ridgepole of the small jailhouse in Alma, located in northwestern Park County.

"Wild Bill" – as he was referred to in his Janesville, Wis., hometown – had just shot and killed a man in cold blood on Alma's Main Street,

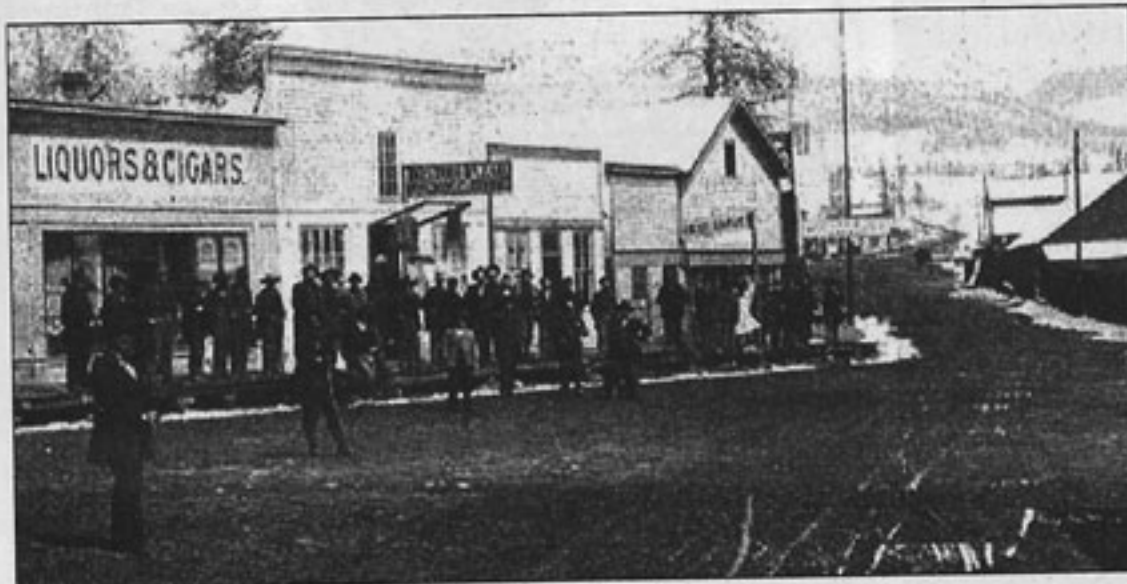
and the local citizenry was literally up in arms. Only two months earlier, Cicero C. Sims committed the identical crime when he gunned down a friend in front of an Alma saloon. Over in Fairplay, a few miles to the south, two murders had been committed in one night a mere nine months earlier. Honest, upstanding men could turn into mob vigilantes when a clear message needed to be sent to local "roughs" and when court was held only twice a year. The messenger that evening was a half-inch coiled noose.

Porter's victim was a young miner named Thomas Carmody, a quiet, unassuming Irishman. After the two argued briefly about religion in a saloon, Porter suddenly pulled out his gun and shot the poor fellow as he stepped outside. Carmody managed to stagger across the street, collapsing in a nearby hotel lobby. The time was exactly 7 p.m.

By coincidence, well-known Town Marshal Lewis "Lew" Link was nearby, and he immediately whacked Bill Porter hard with a cane on the side of the head, causing the suspect to fall down unconscious and bleeding. Literally dragging the ruffian to the jailhouse, Link was keenly aware of the large group gathering nearby, agitating for Porter's neck. Thronging to the jail, several of the men wrested the keys from the good marshal, then stormed Porter's cell. The vigilantes quickly dragged Porter up and out into the chilly night air, where he stood "a bloody but defiant spectacle," according to the *Fairplay Flume* of March 25, 1880.

"What'er yer final requests?" hollered an anonymous fellow from the group.

"I have some money coming from the mine where I've been working, and I want \$31 paid to Old Man Fuller at the Southern Hotel," Porter responded.



#### **ALMA STREET SCENE**

A typical Alma street scene in the 1800s, where Porter shot a fellow miner, shows a lot of people hanging about. (Source: Park County Local History Archives)





#### OLD ALMA JAIL

Porter may have been lynched at this jail in Alma, although the photo is undated. (Source: Park County Local History Archives)

To some familiar faces, the doomed man made another request: "Write to my folks and tell them I'm dead, but not that I was hanged." He also asked that his two young sons not be told of his true demise. The slipknot was laid on Porter's shoulder like a snake poised to strike.

"You got anything further to say?" piped up another voice.

"Damn you – pull up your rope, boys," was his final retort, according to the *Weekly Register-Call* of March 26, 1880.

Or, according to the April 5, 1880, *Janesville Gazette*, his final words were: "Jerk me up quick."

And with that, Bill Porter was flung into eternity, dying "without a whimper," according to the *Weekly Register-Call* story.

The hour was exactly 8 p.m. The entire affair was committed, tried and executed all within an hour – and at no cost to the county to boot.

The boarding houses were probably still serving dinner at 8 p.m. at the conclusion of Porter's 52 years of life. Whether the patrons still had appetites after the evening's double deaths is another matter.

Porter's body was left up throughout the next day as a stern warning to anyone else entertaining any thoughts of indiscriminate pistol practice. It was a gruesome sight indeed, according to a local reporter writing for the March 25, 1880, edition of the *Fairplay Flume*. He penned the following details:

"One of the hands had lost a thumb,

an ear had been bitten off in some fight; the broken jawbone had bled profusely from the blow given by the Marshal's cane, and the blood had run over and besmeared the dirty, pallid features, while the neck had stretched to twice its natural length."

A coroner's inquest was held on both bodies, but no one was identified as responsible for Porter's death, as their final ruling indicated:

"We, the jury, find that the deceased, William J. Porter, came to his death on the evening of March 22nd, 1880, in Alma, Park County, Colorado, by hanging at the hands of persons to the jury unknown."

Lew Link was later presented with a pearl-handled revolver as a token of the town's appreciation with the inscription: "Presented to L.M. Link by the citizens of Alma, for his prompt and fearless performance of duty on March 22nd, 1880."

Was the lynching effective? Not a single murder was committed in town for another 21 years. It involved a saloon shooting between the establishment's two owners while discussing finances.

#### Shot in the back and left for dead

#### ▪ Hall Valley, Colo., 1883 ▪

Today's County Road 60, at the eastern base of Kenosha Pass in northern Park County, is the entrance to the



#### COLONEL JAIRUS HALL

This is a portrait of Colonel Jairus Hall in Union uniform around 1880. (Source: Park County Local History Archives)



#### HALL VALLEY STORE

Perhaps Campbell's saloon was near this Hall Valley general store. (Source: Park County Local History Archives)

original Hall Valley Mining District, founded in 1872 by Col. Jairus W. Hall. A highly decorated Union Civil War general, he preferred the lesser title of colonel. The large Whale silver mine, atop the valley at nearly 12,000 feet, was the reason the Colonel developed the area, which quickly grew into a booming mining camp headquartered in the valley. Many townsfolk typically spent their evenings in George Campbell's popular saloon, enjoying rounds of whiskey and decks of cards.

On Oct. 13, 1883, a young newcomer from Missouri came into the camp looking for work, and there was plenty of it. A big man at over six feet tall, Amos Brazille's size was tempered by his congenial personality, although he was overly fond of liquor. He quickly fit in with Campbell's drinking cronies.

Five days later, Amos met up with a mine manager named Jacob Byard, or "Big Jake." Byard promised Brazille a job up on the Ypsilanti Mine, one of the smaller but profitable mines near the Whale. The two then began drinking and playing poker until an argument began over who could "whip" whom, raising their voices within earshot of owner George Campbell and other bar patrons. Their differ-





#### VIEW OF HALL VALLEY

The harsh reality of life in Hall Valley is evidenced in this photo of the town, sometimes referred to as Hall's Gulch, Hallstown or Hallsville. (Source: Park County Local History Archives)

ences apparently resolved, the two continued their game until "Big Jake" suddenly shoved his chair back and strode outside to get some fresh air. His recently purchased .44 revolver was close at hand. "Go and get that poor boy; I believe he is drunk," joked Amos with the bartender, unaware of what his acquaintance's next move would be.

Byard returned all right – standing on the back steps shouting: "Damn you – take that!" as he fired and shot his pal in the side. Brazille's back was partially turned at the time – the lowest form of killing in the unwritten code of the west. Collapsing on the wood floor, the victim implored Campbell and the bartender to notify his father that "I am killed." Campbell immediately wrested the gun away from the murderer who walked out the door, leaving Brazille to die a painful, lingering death.

After hiding out all night, Byard headed for the nearby town of Webster the next morning after learning Brazille had expired. However, he was soon apprehended in the bushes by two armed citizens who promptly hauled him via wagon into Fairplay's awaiting jail confines.

Byard had just missed the most

recent term of district court, and that meant a six-month jail stay until the next scheduled session in May of 1884. Spying a small saw hidden in his cell by its former occupant,

the determined inmate planned his escape while methodically filing through the bars. Breaking free into the cold night air on March 19, 1884, he disappeared into the dark woods, easily eluding a posse that was gathered to find him and a second escapee.

Five hundred dollars in reward money prompted Deputy Sheriff George W. Nyce to trail the outlaw up to Buffalo, Wyo., where he was supposedly hiding out with family members. "It is said that he and his relatives are heavily armed and will no doubt make a desperate resistance," warned the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* on April 22, 1884, conjuring up images of an honest-to-goodness Western shootout. Although the same newspaper issue implies the culprit was captured, the trail soon grew cold. No trial is ever mentioned in the local *Fairplay Flume* and Byard is not listed as an inmate in Colorado prison records, even under similarly spelled last names.

Byard's fate is unknown, but the memory of his deed might be recalled with a drive down County Road 60, also called Hall Valley Road.



#### STOCK CERTIFICATE

This is an unsigned stock certificate from the wealthy Whale Mine. It says there was capital stock of \$500,000. (Source: Christie Wright)

## Bad Blood in Park County ▪ Geneva Gulch, Colo., 1897 ▪

In 1897, a nephew and his uncle fled their home state of Kentucky, ultimately landing in Geneva Gulch, the location of today's Guanella Pass Road, also known as County Road 62. It joins Grant, in northeastern Park County, with Georgetown, in Clear Creek County.

Both men were wanted for murder. While drunk, nephew Jay Draughn had shot and killed a man named Ben Cunningham during an argument over a woman. Uncle Dolph Draughn was a former deputy sheriff, still considered one of the "good guys" by most, even though he had killed a man who murdered a friend of his. Both the Draughns decided it was best to get out of eastern Kentucky, where rival family gangs frequently ruled the area and both their lives were in danger.

Assuming aliases, Jay Draughn established a sawmill about seven miles up Geneva Creek, called Baker's Mill. After drinking wine in a Grant saloon on Aug. 18, 1897, the pair started back home via wagon, providing two lady friends of Jay Draughn's wife a ride up the road to pay Mrs. Hattie Draughn a visit. The men soon began arguing over Jay Draughn's failure to pay Dolph Draughn his wages owed, a sore point that had been eating at the older relative for some time. Furious at his nephew and fueled by liquor, Dolph Draughn hopped out of



### TRAIN STATION SCENE

This is the Rocky Mountain News version of the train station scene. (Source: Rocky Mountain News, Sept. 14, 1897, via 19th Century Newspaper Database)

the wagon and walked uphill all the way home.

Just as everyone sat down to dinner, he burst in, rifle cocked and pointed at his nephew. To the horror of the womenfolk and young children, the uncle shot his nephew in the shoulder, but the younger, wounded man was able to squeeze off a round at his uncle, which hit him in the abdomen. Staggering outside, the older Dolph Draughn clutched his gut, hollering in pain. He died alone on the ground hours later. Jay Draughn was taken to the Fairplay hospital with serious injuries; his shoulder was shattered. A coroner's investigation later absolved him of any wrongful intent, meaning

criminal charges would not be filed against him.

When word was received back home of the uncle's demise at his nephew's own hand, Dolph Draughn's son John vowed revenge. To this end, he traveled all the way to Denver and met with Governor Alva Adams in person, obtaining the necessary paperwork to transport his cousin Jay Draughn back home. His goal was to return Jay to their home state to face his old murder charges there, where he could at least be held accountable for one killing.

John Draughn waited patiently for two weeks until his cousin was declared medically fit to travel – via stretcher – back to Kentucky by train. This created quite a spectacle at the Denver train station with the cousins, surrounded by Mrs. Jay Draughn (Hattie Draughn) and her children pleading with John Draughn to allow them to remain in Colorado.

Jay Draughn was convicted at trial in Kentucky and sentenced to 10 years in prison, only to receive a pardon by Kentucky Governor J.C.W. Beckham two years later.

Ironically, the released man later worked in law enforcement as the Hazard, Ky., town marshal until he was shot and killed in the line of duty on Dec. 17, 1913.

Dolph Draughn was 46 when he died; his nephew was only 45. Both met an early death at the wrong end of a gun.



**DOLPH DRAUGHN**

Dolph Draughn – a one-time Kentucky deputy sheriff, was gunned down by his nephew, Jay Draughn, in Geneva Gulch. (Source: Emma Alverti Draughn Goodpaster Collection)



**JAY DRAUGHN**

Jay Draughn managed to squeeze off a round after being shot in the shoulder by Uncle Dolph Draughn. (Source: Emma Alverti Draughn Goodpaster Collection)



**JOHN DRAUGHN**

Dolph Draughn's son, John Draughn, vowed vengeance on his cousin Jay Draughn after his father was killed. (Source: Emma Alverti Draughn Goodpaster Collection)