

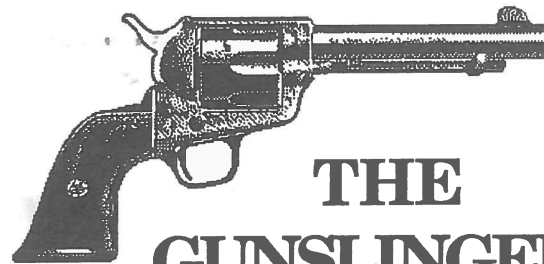


"WE TRY TO STAY AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE REAL THING."

When the nation was young, there was a time when there was more space than a guy could use. The year was 1865. The United States had barely made it through the rough waters of the Civil War. Now the rush was on, to make a new start, forget your past. Make your fortune in hills of gold. Go West, boy, go West!

It was a flood of people. A flood that brought the good and the bad, all out to make his or her mark, by pick and axe, or by gun and steady nerves. They were loners, the outcasts of society. They were the gunfighters, men and women out of the Civil War. Too used to killing in the war, angry, or just insane, they set out for a life of crime that would be immortalized by history, romanticized by movies and books that are being written to this day, and cut short by the long arm of the law.

Butch Cassidy and the Hole in the Wall Gang, Isam Dart and the cattlemen and the sheepmen, Harry Longbaugh, Harvey Logan, Harry Tracy, Tom Horn, and the list goes on -- all were right here in Routt County. Some just passed through, some hid here, some spent time at the county jail; Harry Tracy



THE GUNSLINGERS

by Seann Smith

and David Lant even broke out. For my story, I interviewed Ron Ross, President of the Gunslingers.

About 12 years ago, Bob McLaughlin and Ken Jones decided to recreate the excitement of the old gunfights. They called themselves Doc Holiday and Bat Masterson, after some of the more famous characters of the old West. It caught on, attracting people from all walks of life; miners, ranchers, cowboys, guides, drivers, cooks, a gunsmith, a weaver, a seamstress and electricians, all with one common trait, a love of the old West.

They are regular people like you and me, but how do these regular people become gunslingers? Well, first they meet the core group of seven or eight gunslingers. Then they are shown videotapes of gunfights and go to see performances. From that, they decide what character from the old West they would enjoy playing, based on their personality, and from the many informative books available.

Once a character is chosen, it is time for a costume that fits the character. Ron Ross, president of the



"SOME JUST PASSED THROUGH, SOME HID HERE."



THE ORIGINAL GANG

Gunslingers, says, "We use old photographs for costume ideas. We try to stay as close as possible to the real thing. Zippers and snaps are a no-no. The Fair Exchange and Maude's are good locations to find old clothes. Carol, one of our members, is a seamstress who also makes some of our costumes. We have a few years' collection of old West costumes and we assist new members with some needed items. Depending on the character you are playing, you can have five or six costumes and you are always looking for more. I stop in The Fair Exchange or Maude's at least once a week to see if something new has come in.

"Bat Masterson, Tom Horn, Wild Bill Hickock, Diamond Lil, Doc Holiday -- the list goes on. Most



**"WE USE OLD PHOTOGRAPHS
FOR COSTUME IDEAS."**

new members usually take a while, but after a time they will find a subject that they can relate to. A lot of groups don't choose characters for themselves, but we have found that if a member goes into a show with an identity, he or she puts on a much better show. They are a part of yesterday for a period of time."

With costumes and characters squared away, it is time for the invention that really started the whole thing, the gun. Mr. Ross told us, "Most of the guns are cap and ball reproductions of 1851 Colts and 1858 Remingtons. We also have and use 1873 Colts and 1875 Remington cartridge types. We try to use

NOTICE

STEAMBOAT GUNSLINGER'S
ARE WAITING ON THE TRAIN



HELP PUT PASSENGER
RAIL SERVICE BACK IN
THE YAMPA VALLEY

reproductions as much as possible, because dropping a 1873-vintage Colt on the cement is not a wise thing to do. We use some old shotguns and Winchester rifles as well. We try and stay within the post-Civil War, the 1860 to 1900 period. We are always on the lookout for firearms from this period to be able to preserve a bit of history."

Every effort is made to keep the gunfights authentic. However, first and foremost is safety and common sense. In constant cooperation with authorities, they make sound checks to ensure the loud report of the guns is at a safe decibel level. The police are given constant updates of the performance times and locations. Gunfire tends to attract a lot of attention. Then extra precautions are taken for guns and observers.



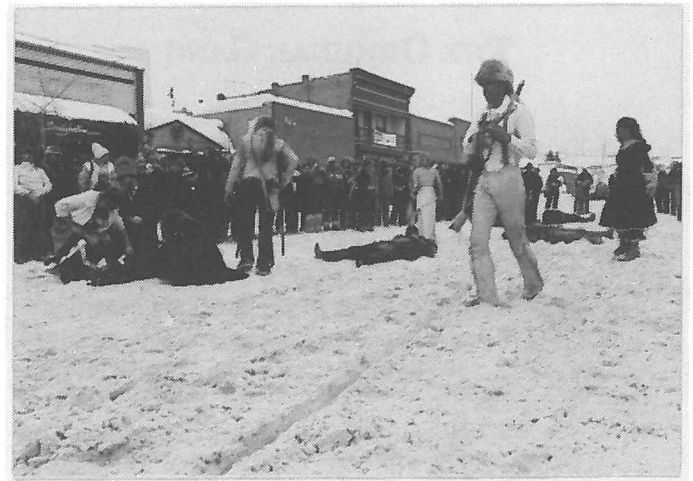
"IT TAKES APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR OF PREPARATION FOR A FIVE-MINUTE SHOW."

Mr. Ross continues, "All the loading is with black powder, Styrofoam and Crisco. Loading is different for an indoor and an outdoor show. For safety reasons, loading is done by one qualified person. All firearms are brought to the shows empty. The guns are assembled in one place and are loaded and kept by the loader until the show. Two or three safety officers are assigned to keep everyone away from the firearms and black powder, and later to keep observers at a safe distance.



"THIS TOWN ISN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR THE TWO OF US."

"Before the show, a member of the Gunslingers warns the observers of loud noises from the guns. A safety area is set up (the distance between the Gunslingers and the observers). No gun is ever pointed at another person; rather, it is pointed right or left or above or below the subject. After the show, all guns are collected and inspected to make sure all rounds were expended. No one leaves the area with any blank rounds in his or her firearm. It takes approximately one hour of preparation for a five-minute show. I have worked eight to ten hours getting ready for a large show that might be over in 15 minutes or less."



WHEN IT'S ALL OVER, EVERYBODY GETS UP AND WALKS AWAY.

When all is said and done, it is a labor of love and it all pays off. It's showtime, it's time to have fun. "This town isn't big enough for the two of us," "Them's fightin' words," and "Draw!" are often-heard expressions. For an instant, these men and women return to childhood and play a little cops and robbers. Guns blaze, people fall, and like always, the good guys somehow win. Then when it's all over, everybody gets up and walks away, a marked improvement on the real version.

Mr. Ross said, "When doing a gunfight, we have no script. They are basic ideas with very little or no lines. Most lines are off the cuff. People forget lines and miss their cues. They get nervous and make mistakes. We know, for example, that if some man holds up a stagecoach, human nature is going to tell him what to say. When the marshal and his deputy try to stop them they will know what to say, and of course, the guns speak for themselves."



**TAKING A FALL
FOR WINTER CARNIVAL**

Most that have seen the gunfighters have seen them only during Winter Carnival. They also do shows for private organizations like the Sheraton, Torian Plum, and Red Barn Ranch. They spent the past summer in Idaho Springs. They have held up buses coming into town (all valuables were given back, again a distinct difference from the old West), and just recently they added one wedding to their large variety of shows.

"We do shows for large and small groups, as many as 300 to 400 people in a convention center, to the small wedding party of 10 to 15 people. A couple of years ago, we put 35 gunfighters on Lincoln Avenue during Winter Carnival with the help of a gunfighter group from Denver and Laramie, Wyoming. With the help of a couple of local ranchers, we have used wagons, stagecoaches and horses."

Though it does cost to hire the Gunslingers, they are not in it for the money. The Steamboat Gunslingers are a non-profit group. Any monies received for any



\$200

REWARD

Will be given to anyone furnishing information leading to the arrest and conviction of party or parties unlawfully killing, Stealing or defacing brands on livestock belonging to members of this association.

The life of this reward is limited to June 1, 1928 and the following are brands belonging to members of this association;-

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 C † C † Z\ OO 7IH
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The Hayden Stockgrowers Association
Hayden, Colorado By C. T. Roberds, Pres.

Courtesy of Farrington R. Carpenter
Notice of reward issued by The Northwestern Colorado Stockgrowers for information relative to larceny of livestock.

shows go for the cost of powder, caps, costumes, accessories, and insurance. "We are not out there for money. First and foremost, it's fun for us and hopefully for the people we are playing for," Mr. Ross said. "It gives us a chance to become a part of our history, to relive a part of our near and distant past."

However, if you were to watch their shows, you would realize, as I have during the writing of this story, that the Gunslingers are one of the great treasures of Steamboat, to be yet truly utilized. They introduce us to our past, attract vacationers, and keep the Western heritage of Steamboat as strong as ever.

