



DIAMONDFIELD JACK. Painting by Mrs. Hester Murray, of Hagerman, Idaho.

By the time his ordeal with the law was over, Range Rider, Jackson Lee Davis, had lost his appetite for mutton and even beef. For those meats were the basis of range wars which at the turn of the century were politically tainted.

Dark, mustachioed and strongly built, Davis hired on as a hard riding keep 'em back for Sparks-Harrell, a Nevada-Idaho cattle outfit in the Hollister-Rogerson vicinity. "Keep 'em back" meant sheep. Increasing bands from Northern Utah were pushing into parts of Idaho. Deadline Ridge was as far as the cattlemen would tolerate close-cropping sheep.

About dawn one day in 1896, Davis came upon an apparently encroaching sheep camp. He fired his rifle from a distance. The sheepherders scrambled, and Davis rode on. During a frolic in Wells, Nevada, he boasted about the incident.

Sometime later two sheepherders were found murdered at their camp on a sagebrush knoll 20 miles northeast of what is now Jackpot, Nevada. The sheep were in cattle country. The finger was pointed at Davis, known among his wide-open-space comrades as "Diamondfield Jack" because he was bent on mining precious stones in the Owyhee desert. The stones however turned out to be worthless Zircons.

DIAMONDFIELD JACK BEST KNOWN IDAHO GUNMAN

The trial was held at Albion, sheep country, and Diamondfield was convicted. The strongest testimony against him was his loose talk at Wells during one of his regular pleasure trips. .44 caliber pistol slugs had killed the herders, and it was brought out that Diamondfield, having run short, was using the shells in his .45. It was also alleged that Diamondfield had ridden on the day of the murders from the Shoesole ranch near Kimberly to Boar's Nest ranch in Nevada - 54 miles - in something like 5½ hours. William E. Borah, hired as prosecutor said the timing put Diamondfield in the vicinity of the camp. The defense led by James Hawley, rebutted. Before the summer trial was over each side made test rides. The murders however, occurred on February 4th, when the snow was too deep on the pass for a horseback rider. Debate over whether the ride could have been made received much publicity.

Sentenced to hang, Jack sat around the Albion jail making friends and proclaiming his innocence. Twice dates of execution were reprieved. Defense attorney, Hawley, who was to become governor of Idaho, kept searching for new clues, while prosecutor Borah, destined as the "Lion of Idaho" in the U.S. Senate, remained firm. Finally the foreman and another cowhand from the Sparks-Harrell ranch confessed to the killings. They were brought to trial but strangely acquitted.

Diamondfield spent about six years in the jug, while his case became a political thing resulting in State dominance by the Democrats. He was finally pardoned and released in 1902.

Diamondfield ended up in Nevada where he was associated for a time with the then Governor John Sparks in gold and silver mining. When Sparks died, Jack lost his position. Diamondfield lived into his mid-seventies. Menial tasks bought his meal tickets in Las Vegas until he stepped off a curb and was struck and killed by, what may have been symbolic...a taxi cab that was backing up.

Diamondfield Jack has become quite a legend in the annals of Idaho history. The truth of his guilt or innocence is still shrouded in controversy. An annual commemorative ride is sponsored by the Horseshu, Cactus Pete's, and Club 93 - casinos of Jackpot - and is held each October. The winner of the first event in 1973 made the distance in three hours and ten minutes. In 1974, Mrs. Hanne Hollander, 33, of Powell Butte, Oregon, won the five hundred dollar first prize, traveling the 54 miles in three hours and twenty minutes. **Carl Hayden**