

THE SAN BERNADINO SUN TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1925

**TWO GUNMEN CLASH IN DESERT FEWD, BOTH DEAD AFTER
“SHOOT OUT”**

The Mysterious Shooting of Matt Burts – 1925

By Harold L. Edwards

In 1897, Matt Burts rode into Cochise County, Arizona from New Mexico and secured work on cattle ranches in Sulphur Springs Valley, where he quickly earned a reputation as a tough but competent cowhand. He also became acquainted with Burt Alvord and Billy Stiles, the Constable of Willcox (AZ) and his Deputy. His friendship with Constable Alvord and his Deputy involved Burts in a train robbery that resulted in his serving a term in Yuma prison. After his release from the penitentiary Burts followed a path of violence and confrontational behavior that culminated in his death some three decades later when he was killed during a mysterious gunfight in California.

There was nothing in Burts beginnings to portend his trouble future and violent end. He was born in Hamilton County, Texas in 1870 to Henry and Elizabeth Burts. He was the fifth born child in the family, preceded by James, Nancy, Thomas, and George. His parents were of southern stock: his father born in Louisiana, and his mother in Arkansas. At the time of Matt's arrival, his father was a cattle raiser.

It is not known when or why the family migrated into New Mexico, where Matt learned the ways of the cattle ranges and became an excellent cowboy. He also learned to use intoxicating liquors liberally, and he became proficient in the use of firearms. His activities beyond working as a cowboy in New Mexico or Arizona is not clear.

In 1899 Constable Alvord and Deputy Stiles planned to hold up a Southern Pacific train in Cochise County (AZ), and they hoped their positions as law enforcement officers would shield them from suspicion. However, they needed assistance in accomplishing the robbery and they enlisted Burts and William Downing, two part-time deputies under Alvord. In September their plan was completed and set in motion.

On the night of September 9, 1899 the westbound train made a scheduled stop at Cochise Station, about twenty miles southwest of Willcox. Matt Burts and Billy Stiles with pistols drawn and handkerchiefs pulled up over the lower part of their faces, climbed in to the locomotive cab and confronted the engineer and fireman. The bandits ordered the train moved to a place about one and one-half miles down the tracks. When this was accomplished, the cars behind the express car were disconnected and left behind. The locomotive and the express car were taken about a mile farther to a spot selected by the bandits.

After the train was stopped the second time, the bandits ordered Express Messenger Charles Adair to open the express car door. Adair complied with the demand, and the bandits entered the express car and blew the safe open with dynamite. After taking an undisclosed amount of money from the safe, the bandits simply walked north from the railroad tracks and disappeared into the dark. When out of sight of the train crew, the bandits mounted horses that were either held for them by a third party or left there for them by William Downing.

As the bandits rode from the robbery scene, the locomotive engineer backed his part of the train to the disconnected cars and reconnected them. He then moved the train back to Willcox, where he reported the robbery to Constable Alvord, other officers, and to the Southern Pacific Company officials. Alvord notified Cochise County Sheriff Scott White in Tombstone of the robbery and then organized a posse to pursue the bandits.

While all of this went on, the bandits slipped into town and, according to their plan, left the robbery loot in the Alvord home. Afterwards, Burts and Stiles went to the business district and joined the posses search for the outlaws. The bandits' horses' tracks were found at the robbery scene by officers and traced into Willcox, where they were lost. The bandits were not identified, and the Cochise robbery went unsolved, although Wells Fargo's ace detective, John Thacker, continued to work on the case. During this time, Burts quietly left the area.

The loot from one train robbery didn't satisfy Alvord and Stiles, whose appetites were whetted by the success of their first robbery. They gathered another crew to help with their second holdup, and on the night of February 15, 1900 they attempted to rob a train while it was stopped at the Fairbanks Depot, about forty miles southwest of Willcox. However, Jeff Milton, a noted frontier lawman and gunfighter, was the express messenger at the

moment, and when several bandits tried to enter the express car he opened fire on the outlaws with his shotgun. Milton mortally wounded one of the bandits; however he was also seriously wounded during the ensuing gunfight. Nonetheless, Milton drove the bandits away and saved the money shipment.

The bandits were quickly identified and arrested, including Alvord and Stiles. Stiles quickly turned evidence for the prosecution, and implicated Alvord, Burts, and Downing in the Cochise Station robbery. Eventually all but two of those involved in the holdups were convicted and sent to Yuma Prison.

Matt Burts was located in Evanston, Wyoming, and on March 28, 1900, he was arrested by Cochise County Deputy Sheriff Bert Grover and returned to Arizona. On December 6, 1900, Matt Burts the first of the four defendants to stand trial as a result of the Cochise Station robbery, appeared before the district court and pleaded guilty to a charge of assault to commit robbery. He was sentenced to serve five years in the prison at Yuma. He entered the institution on December 14, 1900 as prisoner #1716. However, Burts did not serve his complete sentence because Arizona Governor Nathan Murphy pardoned him on April 18, 1901.

After his release from prison, Burts returned to Cochise County and became employed as a cowboy on Bob Warren's ranch near Willcox. During June 1901, while gathering cattle for shipment, Warren rode past Burts, who unexpectedly called Warren some vile names. *Burts accused Warren of making false and disparaging remarks about some of Burts' friends.* (See March 12, 1901 Los Angeles Herald article) Burts went on to say he had no use for Warren and challenged his employer to a fist fight because neither man was armed.

Warren tried to reason with Burts and avoid trouble, but Burts continued to pressure Warren for a fight. Finally, Warren accepted Burts' offer to fight, and both men dismounted from their horses. After taking off their gloves and spurs, Warren and Burts face off and in the ensuing brawl Warren handed Burts a sound thrashing. Burts said he had enough of fighting and that he and Warren should be friends. Warren agreed with Burts and the two men shook hands. Burts and Warren, and perhaps others of the crew, rode to the nearby Johnson ranch house, probably for rest and refreshment. While in the house, Burts unseen by the others, stole a loaded pistol and concealed it on his person.

While en route back to the cattle herd, Burts renewed his quarrel with Warren. The argument became heated, and Burts drew the revolver and threatened Warren. Without warning, Burts fired a shot at the cattleman. The shot struck Warren in his left arm but didn't knock the man from his horse. Warren challenged Burts to kill him, claiming that he was unarmed and helpless and an easy victim. Burts, apparently moved by Warren's defiance and courage, helped the wounded man from his horse and laid him on the ground. Burts used the wounded man's saddle to pillow his head, and he led Warren's horse to a position to shade the injured cattleman. Burts rode to the Johnson house and reported the shooting. He asked that Warren not be taken to Willcox for one hour in order to give Burts a head start in his escape.

As Burts rode away, rand hands took Warren to Willcox; however his wound was serious and he was transported to the hospital in Tombstone for treatment. Warren ultimately recovered from his wound, and he filed a charge again Burts of assault with the intent to commit murder. The Cochise County District Court issued a warrant for Burt's arrest, but the fugitive could not be located and the document was held in the Sheriff's files.

Burts was believed by some to be in Montana; however he had disappeared and for the next six years his whereabouts and activities remain unknown. As "Joe Wilson," Burts finally surfaced in Luna County, New Mexico, on June 4, 1907, when he shot-up the town of Deming. He was arrested and charged with drawing and flourishing a deadly weapon and drawing and discharging a weapon. He was released on bail pending his appearance in court during the November 1907 term. On November 20, the grand jury found a true bill and on November 22, Burts, whose true name was now known, pleaded guilty to the charges in the district court. Judge Frank Parker sentenced him to six months and one day in the territorial prison in Santa Fe.

Burts entered the prison on November 25, 1907 as prisoner #2227. At the time he was thirty seven years of age and in good health, weighed 170 pounds, stood 5'11" tall, and had light-colored hair and brown eyes. He was single and had supported himself since the age of fourteen. His parents were deceased, and he gave the name of his brother, Tom Burts as his nearest relative. Burts was a model prisoner and he was released on expiration of his sentence on May 8, 1908.

While Burts was in prison, Luna County sheriff Don Johnson asked all the surrounding county sheriffs, including those in Arizona if Burts was wanted for criminal offenses in their area. Cochise County Sheriff Don White responded that he wanted Burts on assault with intent to commit murder for the shooting of Bob Warren in 1901. As a result of this warrant, Arizona requested New Mexico to hold Burts for extradition to Cochise County for trial. However, Burts returned to Arizona voluntarily and pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Several witnesses were ready to testify against Burts in his approaching trial, and to avoid the trial a plea bargain was arranged whereby Burts would plea assault with a deadly weapon without the provision of intent to commit murder. Burts pleaded guilty to the amended charge and was sentenced to one year and one day in the prison at Yuma. He entered the prison on May 29, 1909. After his release from prison, Burts returned to the cattle ranges of southern Arizona where he was employed as a cowboy and stock detective.

For the next ten years Burts was employed at various times by the Arivaca Cattle Company, the Empire Cattle Company, and the La Osa Company. According to the *Tucson Citizen* of November 11, 1925 Burts was ostensibly hired by these companies as a cowhand, but his fighting abilities made him much more valuable to them in stopping cattle thieves that preyed relentlessly on the companies' herds.

According to this same article, at an unstated time in Pima County, Arizona, Burts and another Arivaca Company cowboy named Martin came upon some rustlers in the act of stealing cattle on or near the Mexico border. The rustlers' chose to fight, and Burts and his companion took cover behind some boulders. Somehow word of Burts' troubles was passed to the ranch headquarters, and cowboys were sent to help the besieged men. Also, the local military was advised of the trouble on the border. It was about eight hours before the cowboys and American troops arrived to relieve the besieged. At the moment of their rescue, Burts and Martin were covered with cuts and contusions caused by flying rock chips knocked loose from their barricades by the rustler's bullets; otherwise they were uninjured. It was believe several rustlers were killed during the fight, but apparently the outlaws carried their dead away when they fled.

After firmly establishing himself as a cowboy and stock detective who was handy with a gun, Burts took employment in 1919 with the Rock

Springs Cattle Company in San Bernardino County, California. He was posted by the company as a guard at Government Holes, a water well in the desert about forty miles northwest of Needles. The company owned the well and needed a guard to reside on site to keep other cattlemen from using the water because there no other range water nearby. Also, the owners needed a tough gun hand to curb the cattle rustling in the immediate area. It was a tough assignment for a tough man, and Matt Burts proved to be the man for the job.

Burts did an excellent job for his employers, but in 1923 he resigned from the position to range his own cattle in the area. He also prospected for minerals and was believed by local law enforcement officers to have manufactured bootleg liquor. He retained a room in the home of Mrs. L.A. Ridell, a seventy-two year old lady who resided in Lanfair with her sixteen year old grandson, C.H. Fulton. Ridell later recalled that Burts lived in her home about one year and that he was a fine man who respected women and called her “mother.”

In November 1925, C.H. Fulton secured a job with the Gold Valley Mine, which was located about twenty-five miles southwest of Lanfair. He was to report for work on the morning of November 9, 1925, but he needed transportation to the mine on the evening of November 8. Mrs. Ridell drove her grandson to the mine in her Model T Ford. Burts went up with them so Mrs. Ridell wouldn't have to make the return trip to Lanfair across the desert alone. En route to the mine, they would pass the cabin and watering corral at Government Holes, about seventeen miles southwest of Lanfair. Fulton drove the car, and when they arrived at Government Holes they stopped to fill the radiator.

Burts opened the corral gate, and Fulton drove the car into the yard. The cabin was occupied by the guard, J.W. Robinson, who had been hired by the cattle company some six months earlier. According to later newspaper reports, Robinson was hired because he was a man who “wouldn't run.” Several of the previous guards at the well had been chased away by someone who had fired shots into the cabin. Shots had also been fired while Robinson was in the cabin, but he wasn't intimidated so easily.

As Burts walked up to the cabin, Fulton saw Robinson framed in the cabin doorway and asked, “May I get some water?” Robinson answered, “Why sure.” Fulton walked to the well with a canteen, Burts entered the

cabin, and Mrs. Ridell waited in the car. Suddenly a number of shots were fired in the cabin, then silence.

Hearing the shots, Mrs. Ridell ran into the cabin and found Robinson lying on the bed and Burts sitting on the floor with his back against a wall. Both men were wounded. Robinson was conscious, and Mrs. Ridell asked him if Burts was dead. Robinson answered, "Get the hell out of here, and take that damned kid with you or I will kill you both." Robinson then added, "Go to that house over there and tell them there are two dead men here." Robinson didn't indicate any particular house, but since he was armed and hostile Mrs. Ridell didn't tarry and she and her grandson drove on to the Gold Valley Mine. At the mine, they deposited Fulton's belongings and got enough gasoline for the return trip to Lanfair. After they arrived in Lanfair, Mrs. Ridell and Fulton reported the shootings to Edward Farmer, who notified the county Sheriff's Office in San Bernardino.

Resident Deputy Sheriff Jack Brown of Ivanpah was contacted by his superiors and ordered to the scene to investigate. He was the first to arrive, and he found two dead men there as he had expected. At first however, he thought a third party had killed both men and was at large. He identified one body as that of Matt Burts, whom he knew. He didn't know who the other dead man was, although he had heard that was a guard at the well named Robinson. By telephone he reported his findings and theory of what had happened to Sheriff Walter Shay who was in San Bernardino.

Sheriff Shay dispatched Deputy Sheriff Jesus Amarias to assist Deputy Sheriff Brown in the investigation. On his way to Government Holes to meet Brown, Amarias picked up Deputy Sheriff James Lucas at Daggett, a rail stop some sixty miles northeast of San Bernardino. Sheriff Shay advised the San Bernardino *Evening Telegraph* of the shootings, and on November 9, 1925 the newspaper reported the incident stating Burts was a "cattle puncher, bootlegger, and two-gun man." The newspaper editor speculated on the motive for the shootings and dismissed robbery as the cause. He felt the murders could have been over a woman or a "cattle feud," perhaps meaning a dispute over the well water. At this point however, little was actually known about the double killings and the curious waited anxiously for the investigation to proceed.

Initially Deputy Jack Brown was certain R.H. Holiman had killed both Robinson and Burts because Holiman had a running feud with the Rock

Springs Cattle Company over the water well at Government Holes. Holiman was suspected by officers of shooting at the cabin to intimidate the guards but no proof surfaced against him. Holiman seemed to have a particular grudge against Burts, who had arrested him in 1923 for stealing a Rock Springs Company calf. Holiman stood trial on the charge, during which it was revealed Holiman's troubles with the cattle company went back two decades. In 1923 Holiman engaged in a gunfight at the Holes with the guard, Pat Woods. Holiman's gun jammed and he broke off the fight before anyone was killed or wounded. During his 1923 trial, Holiman openly stated Burts had been imported from Arizona specifically to kill him. Also Burts' reputation as a gunman was such that Holiman's attorney asked that Burts be searched for a weapon before he testified. Burts was searched, but no weapon was found. Holiman was released after the jury failed to arrive at a verdict. Deputy Jack Brown felt Holiman committed the murders out of revenge, but in short order he realized there was no third party involved and that Burts and Robinson had killed each other.

During the early morning hours of November 9, 1925, San Bernardino County Deputy Coroner Emmett Waters left San Bernardino for the murder scene to take charge of the victims' remains. He took two caskets with him. Later in the day, he held an inquest into the deaths, and the coroner's jury consisted of the Foreman, Z. Farmer, Edward Farmer, Frank D. Murphy, Charles A. Gayle, and Frank Davis. By this time, both bodies had been identified. Testimony was taken from Deputy Brown, Mrs. Ridell, and Fulton. Brown testified as to the positions of the bodies when he found them, Robinson on the bed and Burts on the floor. He also described the nature of the wounds in both bodies and that it appeared they had killed each other. He could offer no motives for the shootings.

Fulton related events leading up to the shootings. He testified he had filled his canteen at the well and put the water in the car's radiator. He was at the well again filling his canteen when the shots in the cabin erupted. Mrs. Ridell's testimony confirmed that of her grandson, but she differed by saying the shooting in the cabin began immediately after Burts entered. She told of seeing Robinson lying on the bed and Burts on the cabin floor. She mentioned Robinson ordering her from the cabin.

Burts had been shot twice in the body cavity near his naval, and one bullet had glanced off of his left cheekbone. His death had been instant. The coroner's jury found Burts' cause of death: "gunshot wounds in the abdomen inflicted by Bill Robinson with homicidal intent." Robinson had

died minutes after being shot. The coroner's jury found his cause of death: "by a bullet fired by Matt Burts which entered his front side by the left ribs, penetrated his body and exited his back about sixteen inches from his left shoulder blade. Death was inflicted by Matt Burts with homicidal intent."

The coroner's jury found no motives for the killing; however, the Sheriff's Office continued to investigate the murders because Sheriff Shay felt somehow Mrs. Ridell and her grandson were accessories to the killings. On November 11, 1925, Deputy Jack Brown arrested Mrs. Ridell and Fulton and lodged them in the San Bernardino County jail. Curiously, the prisoners had not been interviewed by officers since they testified in the coroner's inquest or before they were allowed interviews by newspaper reporters what they had testified during the coroner's inquest. Mrs. Ridell, however, went on to say she blamed the shootings on "cow county gossip."

She said a rumor had floated about the area that indicated Robinson had said he was going to kill Burts. The latter, according to Mrs. Ridell, didn't know Robinson and had seen him only once prior to their pistol duel. On that occasion, Mrs. Ridell and Burts were riding on the range in her car when they met Robinson, who gave them a cordial greeting and rode on. At this point, Burts said, "There goes the fellow they say is going to kill me." Burts added, laughingly, that he didn't believe Robinson had even said any such thing and it was all gossip.

Sheriff Shay informed newspaper reporters he was anxious to learn why Burts and Robinson, apparently unknown to each other and with absolutely no motive for shooting each other, met and blazed away with six-shooters at the sight of each other. Also, the lawman wondered why Mrs. Ridell and Fulton didn't report the shootings until after they returned to Lanfair when there was opportunity for them to report the incident earlier. He also questioned why Mrs. Ridell and her grandson differed as to the exact time the shootings occurred. Later, Deputy Jack Brown and Deputy District Attorney C.O. Thompson questioned the prisoners, but they made no comments about the interviews to newspaper reporters. In any event, the prisoners were not released.

On November 12, Matt Burts' brother Thomas Burts, who had been notified of Matt's death, arrived in San Bernardino County from Tucson to settle Matt's estate and to claim his brother's body, which was held in the mortuary at Needles. Thomas Burts also hoped to establish the motive for his brother's death. He interviewed Mrs. Ridell and others but failed to find

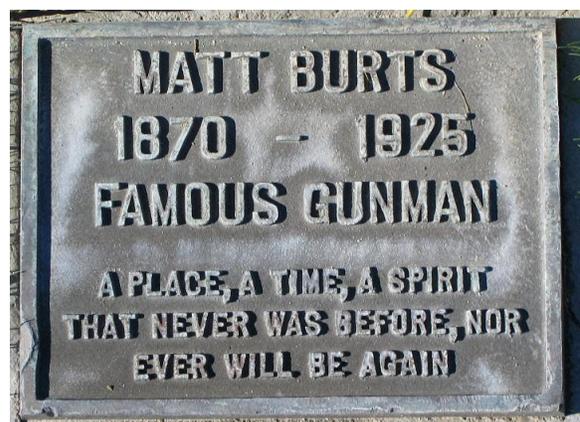
the reason for the shooting. He informed the press that Matt's estate would not cover the expenses of his burial. Thomas Burts had planned to have Matt's remains transported to Tucson for burial; after funeral services Matt Burts' body was interred in the Needles (California) Riverview Cemetery.

Apparently, Robinson's widow, who resided in Los Angeles, claimed Robinson's remains for burial in that area. Walter B. Greeming, President of the Rock Springs Cattle Company, informed newspaper reporters the company would arrange Robinson's funeral service.

By November 18, Mrs. Ridell and her grandson were still being held in the San Bernardino County jail. There were no charges filed against them, and Attorney Fred Wilson, who represented them, informed the press that if his clients were not released from jail immediately he would file a petition for writ of habeas corpus as they were held in custody illegally. Mrs. Ridell and Fulton were questioned once more by Deputy Sheriff Brown and Deputy District Attorney Thompson, but nothing new was learned from them and they were released from jail. No charges were filed against them.

Although several theories and speculations were advanced why the gunmen shot it out, the true reason or reasons for the pistol duel never became public knowledge, and the motive for the shootings remained an unsolved mystery. Matt Burts however received widespread notoriety from his violent death. Newspapers reported his colorful past, back to the days when he was a member of the Alvord gang in Arizona. He was described as "the last two-gun man" who died with his boots on as a result of an Old West-style shootout, a holdover from an earlier era. Undoubtedly Matt Burts was an anachronism; whose life and times was best described the inscription on his grave marker:

Matt Burts is buried at Riverview Cemetery in Needles, CA. A humble end to a notorious life.



Further Notes:

On 17 Feb 1899, M. M. Burts and Maria Ochoa got a marriage license according to Cochise County, AZ marriage records 1893-1901. There are records in the Arizona State archives for a Matt Burts, assault to rob, Dec 14, 1900, box 24 file #370.

On June 4, 1900 in Tombstone City, Cochise Co, AZ Territory listed under the Tombstone jail: Matt M. Burts, inmate born July 1870, age 29 listed as a Cowboy. He was born in Tennessee and his parents were both born in Mississippi.

The Tombstone Prospector, August 23, 1899

Three cattlemen named Matt Burts, Thomas Burts, and James Anderson were brought in today under arrest on charge of cattle stealing. The case is set for Monday before Justice Schuster.

The Fall (and Rise?) of Notorious Train Robber Burt Alvord

Excerpt from Arizoniana by Marshall Trimble, the state's official historian.

Burt Alvord was a big, strapping, swarthy-looking character with a bald pate and an I.Q. that was said to be considerably less than his age, which was about 30. Alvord did have a few positive attributes. He was usually cheerful, had a sense of humor and was a mighty popular fellow in Cochise County during the 1890s. He'd been a deputy for county sheriff John Slaughter, who'd pronounced him absolutely fearless.

Burt was also pretty good with a six-shooter. Old timers said he demonstrated his prowess at beer bottles hung from a tree limb by a string. He'd shoot the string with his right hand, then draw with the left and break the bottle before it hit the ground.

His major interests seem to have been poker, pool, horses, guns and practical jokes.

One time he and a crony, Matt Burts, sent a telegram to Tombstone announcing, “the bodies of Burts and Alvord will be arriving on the Bisbee stage this afternoon.” Naturally, the locals thought the pair had been killed in a gunfight. Kind words were said about the boys and a large delegation gathered to meet the stage. Mourning changed to chagrin when the mischievous pair emerged from the stage grinning, “Our bodies have arrived. We never go anywhere without ‘em.”

Burt wasn't opposed to a little larceny either. One time he and a little Irishman, Bidy Doyle, staged a fixed wrestling match in Bisbee. They recruited a muscular miner who was willing to take a fall for a reasonable fee. The only soft piece of ground suitable for the event was the manure pile outside the Copper Queen Mine. In physical appearance, Bidy was a David facing the Goliath of the hardrock bunch. The odds rose to about 20 to 1 in favor of the miner. Burt and Bidy stood to make a handsome profit in the outcome. Things might have gone better if the pair had rehearsed the match and not made the fix so obvious. However, early in the first round, Bidy rolled on top of the miner and shoved his face down into the manure. The big guy called it quits amidst a roaring outcry from the crowd who figured they'd been had. During the confusion, Burt and Bidy somehow managed to grab the money and hightailed it for Tombstone.

Burt was as good with his fists as he was with a six-gun, something that inspired the city fathers in the new rough and tumble town of Pearce to hire him as constable. In no time, he'd pacified the two-fisted miners. When things got out of hand at the rollicking cowtown of Willcox, Burt was called in to tame the town. Again; he was up to the task.

I reckon things were getting too easy for the good natured constable and he felt a need to broaden his dimensions. That's when he decided to go into the lucrative business of robbing trains. He could use his job as a peace officer to screen these nefarious activities and no one would suspect. Besides he was too well-liked by the local citizenry to be accused of a crime. Also, it might be added, no one figured him to be smart enough to pull off a robbery and get away with it.

Alvord rounded up a few cronies to assist in these endeavors. He'd plan the crimes and establish alibis while they'd execute them. The gang included a pugnacious kid named Billy Stiles; Bill Downing, a surly ne'er-do-well; Matt Burts, a not-too-bright cowboy; Bravo Juan Yoas and Three-

Finger Jack Dunlap, a pair of saddle bums who'd do anything for money except work.

The first robbery took place at Cochise Station on the evening of September 11, 1899. The take has been estimated as high as \$30,000 in gold.

Alvord's alibi was cleverly planned. He, Matt Burts, Stiles and Downing were playing poker in the back room of Schwertner's Saloon when the robbery occurred. Every few minutes, a porter would carry a round of drinks into the room and then emerge with a tray of empty glasses and announce to the local imbibers that Burt and the boys were having a serious game of poker behind those closed doors.

Meanwhile, Alvord and his pals exited a side window slipping into the darkness. Stiles and Matt headed towards Cochise Station while Alvord and Downing waited outside Willcox for their return. When the pair returned with loot in hand, they all returned to the saloon, re-entered through the side window and resumed their game.

When word of the robbery reached Willcox, someone suggested they notify Constable Burt Alvord, who was involved in a poker game at Schwertner's Saloon. Burt was noticeably shocked upon learning that the Southern Pacific had been held up. He immediately deputized his poker-partners and off they rode. Naturally, the trail was lost on the outskirts of Willcox.

Just to make sure the boys didn't start squandering their new wealth around town and arouse suspicion; Burt took the gold to a secret hiding place and buried it. He was feeling pretty good about his perfectly executed train robbery and the alibi he'd established. It sure looked like good ol' Burt had planned and executed the perfect crime.

However, Alvord didn't count on the persistence of Wells Fargo detectives and a suspicious lawman named Bert Grover. Grover suspected the constable of Willcox early on— perhaps he acted a little too innocent. Grover cajoled the porter at the saloon into confessing to his role in establishing Burt's alibi. But, before he could bring charges, his star witness got cold feet and left the territory. Having no other witnesses, investigators could only hope for a break in the case.

Meanwhile, Burt was feeling so confident about his debut as a mastermind of crime, he decided to plan another. This time he let Bravo

Juan, Three-Finger Jack, Bob Brown and the Owens brothers do the dirty work.

The daring robbery took place at the train station at Fairbank on the evening of February 15, 1900. This time something went awry. The outlaws didn't figure on the legendary Jeff Milton being in the express car. Posing as drunken cowboys, the five bandits opened fire on Milton as he stood in the open door of the car as it pulled into the station. Seriously wounded, Milton fell back inside. The experienced old gunfighter had the natural instinct to grab his trusty Wells Fargo shotgun as he dropped. The five desperados charged through the door just as Milton rose and cut loose with his ten-gauge. Bravo Juan saw it coming and turned his backside just in time. He caught a load of double-ought shot in the seat of the pants. He lit out on the run and didn't stop until he hit the Mexican border. Three-Finger Jack wasn't as lucky. He was hit full force.

The outlaws went away empty-handed, that is, if you don't count the Wells Fargo lead two of 'em were carrying.

Three-Finger Jack was mortally wounded; and a few miles from Fairbank, his compadres left him beside the trail to die. Back at Fairbank, a posse was organized. Trackers easily picked up the bloody trail leading to where Dunlap lay. Needless to say, the dying outlaw was much-chagrined at being left behind by his cronies and was only too willing to give testimony, not only for the details surrounding the Fairbank robbery, but the one at Cochise Station as well.

As a result of Three-Finger Jack's confession, Wells Fargo got the break they needed to crack the case and the citizens of Willcox had to find a new constable. Burt Alvord eventually did his time at the Yuma Territorial Prison. Incidentally, the recovery of the loot remains a mystery. Old timers around Willcox said that after Burt was released, he came back to town to say, "Howdy," to his old friends, then left for Central America where he bought a large cattle ranch. Who grubstaked him? *Quien sabe?* Although one can't help but wonder if he might have stamped a WF brand on the hides of those critters in honor of his unwilling benefactors. After all, Burt did have a grand sense of humor!

San Francisco Call, Volume 87, Number 93, 3 March 1900

STILES CONFESSES.

Special Dispatch to The Call.

TUCSON, March 2. — The preliminary examination of Burt Alvord and William Downing at Tombstone on the charge of holding up the Southern Pacific Railroad train at Cochise developed a sensation in the confession of Constable N. W. Stiles of Pearce, who confessed to the hold-up in company with Matt Burt. He implicated Alvord and Downing as the ones who furnished the horses with which they made their escape, for which they paid \$480 each, a fourth part of the proceeds of the robbery.

Los Angeles Herald, Number 168, 17 March 1900

Mystery Cleared Up

Mystery surrounding the train robberies recently committed in Southern Arizona has given way under confession by William Stiles, who admits having been implicated in both the Cochise and Fairbanks robberies. According to what seems to be conclusive evidence the gang holding up the train at Fairbanks was composed of Constable Burt Alvord, William Downing, "Bravo Juan," W. N. Stiles, the confessed hold-up, and the Owen brothers. The holdup of the Southern Pacific at Cochise last September is laid to Stiles and Matt Burts, a cowboy, although assistance was rendered by Downing, the cattleman, and Alvord, the constable of Wilcox. In a preliminary examination held at Tombstone reviewing the Wilcox robbery the defense offered no testimony and only cross examined one witness, William Stiles. Alvord has been released upon furnishing bonds to the amount of \$15,000, and Downing was held in the United States grand jury under bonds of \$10,000. The additional \$5,000 bonds exacted of Alvord were placed because of the fact that Alvord was not only held to the charge of train robbery, but was an officer at the time of the alleged incrimination.

COCHISE REVIEW, Saturday, December 8, 1900

Matt Burts Pleads Guilty.

In the District court at Tombstone Thursday morning, after a jury had been empanelled in the case of the Territory against Matt Burts, the defendant's counsel withdrew their former plea of "not guilty" and pled guilty. Burts was one of the actual participants in the Cochise train robbery, now an important historical event of Cochise County. Burts and Stiles were the two who held up the train, while Burt Alvord and Bravo Juan were accessories in the crime and shared in the booty.

It is believed that the termination of the Burts case will have some bearing on the Sid Page murder case which is to follow, as it is said that Burts was an important witness for the defense.

The Arizona Republican, Tuesday December 11, 1900

MATT BURTS, TRAIN ROBBER

Allowed to Plead Guilty to Felonious Assault

After much waiting and speculating as to the cause of the delay, court opened at 10:30. The names of the jurors were called, after which attorneys for the defense requested that the jury be allowed a recess for fifteen minutes, as they had something to present which must be done in their absence. The request was granted by Judge Davis. Immediately upon the retirement of the jury, Judge Barnes called the attention of the judge and prosecution to the fact that his client, Matt Burts, desired to plead guilty to the charge of assault with intent to commit robbery upon one Charles Adair, Express Messenger upon a train that was held up at Cochise. The prosecution allowed the plea, and Judge Davis fixed Friday, December 14th at 4 p.m. as the day that sentence should be pronounced on the prisoner.

Great surprise was shown in the faces of all present, and was especially noticeable among the jury, who was subsequently discharged. What the object in this move in what promised to be one of the most thoroughly

contested cases, is not know, and is a matter of general conjecture and surmise. The facts as seen by the ordinary man are that Burts pleading guilty will cause the rest to follow his lead, as was so in the case of the Owens brothers.

Looking at it in another light, the prosecution saw that there was no chance for an intermediate sentence. The penalty set is capital punishment. It was either guilty or acquittal, and as there might be a great difficulty and expense in getting a jury to make a conviction, where no lives were lost, they allowed the plea to be made, also knowing that other indictments still stand against them. Wm. Downing seems to be the only man who is anxious to fight his case.

Immediately after disposing of the Burts case the jury was discharged with instructions to assemble in the court room at 9:30 tomorrow. Following Judge Davis gave orders that a special venire be issued calling for twenty-five additional trial jurors, and that great care be taken that nothing but the most competent jurors in the county be selected.

The most severe sentence that can be applied to a crime of the nature pleaded guilty to by Burts is fourteen years in the territorial prison.

THE COCHISE REVIEW, Saturday, December 22, 1900

A Clean Up

Matt Burts was brought before Judge Davis at 3 p.m. Friday at Tombstone to receive his sentence for assault with intent to commit robbery to which charge he plead guilty. When asked if he had any reason why sentence should not be passed he quietly answered no, whereupon Judge Davis sentenced him to five years in the Yuma Penitentiary.

Geo. Wohschlegal who pled guilty to robbing a Fargo game at Bisbee was also sentenced, receiving five years. One motion of the District Attorney, the indictments and charges against Sam Finley were dismissed.

Matt Burts was sentenced to five years at Yuma for the part he took in the Cochise holdup.

Billy Stiles was taken back to Tucson Saturday morning from Tombstone. Downing is ill with rheumatism and could not return today but will be brought here as soon as he recovers sufficient to travel. Burts was taken to Yuma last night to begin his term of imprisonment.

The Arizona Republic, Monday, December 31, 1900

BURT'S BAD BREAK

Tried to Get Away From the Officers at Yuma

Matt Burts, the convicted train robber, made a bold break for liberty Thursday evening in the Southern Pacific Hotel lunch room at Yuma. With other convicts, he was en route to the territorial prison under the charge of Cochise county officials. The Yuma Sun thus describes the occurrence:

"Deputy Sheriffs John White and A. V. Lewis the latter the sheriff-elect of Cochise County had arrived from, Tombstone on the morning train in charge of six convicts for the penitentiary, including Matt Burts, the train robber, and Sid Page, a twenty-year man convicted of murder. The deputies were accompanied by J. C. Page and William Richey as guards. The two convicts named, fastened together by the left arm of the first and the right arm of the latter, were seated at the counter when Burts made his sensational break for liberty. Guard Richey, who was stationed at the door leading from the lunch room into the barroom, guarding the convicts, called to Burts to get down and allow room for the other men to eat. Burts, who was not far from the officer, took a desperado's chance, and pulling his companion with him, made for Richey and attempted to secure possession of the latter's gun. A scuffle ensued in which Burts was pushed backward, when he turned and tried to grab the firearm worn by Deputy White, who was advancing to the fray from the other end of the counter, where he had been eating. In the meantime Deputy Lewis, who is an exceedingly tall and powerful man, had grabbed Burts' free arm instead of shooting the man as most officers would have done, and dragged both him and his companion, who, however, was willing enough to go, into the barroom. Burts very

quickly decided that he was outclassed and gave up the contest. "It was an exceedingly sensational occurrence, and if the desperado had succeeded in getting hold of a gun there would have been plenty of bloodshed to satisfy the most excitement loving onlooker. Deputy Lewis' action is pronounced as having been very courageous. Those who witnessed the affray think Cochise has chosen a first-class officer for the coming two years.

San Francisco Call, Volume 87, Number 31, 31 December 1900

BATTLE WITH CONVICTS.

Sheriff's Deputies Have Desperate

Encounter at Yuma.

PHOENIX, Ariz., Dec. 30. — Matt Burts sentenced to the penitentiary for train robbery, made a desperate attempt to escape at Yuma on Friday. He had just been brought from Tombstone and was at a lunch counter guarded by deputies. He was handcuffed with Sid Page, a murderer. Seizing an opportunity Burts attacked Deputy Richey, and pulling Page along he tried to secure Richey's gun and a hard fight ensued. Deputy White mixed in the scuffle and Burts grabbed his gun and was about to use it when another guard grasped his arm. The convicts were then quickly overpowered.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXVIII, Number 162, 12 March 1901

ALVORD PURSUED BY THREE POSSES

Sheriff's Officers on Trail of the Train Robber

One Party of Three Men is Close on the Trail of the Fugitive and It is Believed Will Overtake Him Soon

(Special Correspondence)

TUCSON, A. T., March 9.—There are now three posses in pursuit of Burt Alvord, the train robber and fugitive from justice, who entered Arizona a few days ago and held up the Warren Ranch, where he secured five horses. The posse which is following the trail of the desperado is composed of three men, and the second posse left Naco yesterday, headed by Burt Grover. The third posse is headed by Tom Turner, Sheriff of Santa Cruz County. The Mexican border line is being guarded at the places where Alvord is most likely to cross, with the hope of turning the desperado back into Arizona. Sheriff Del Lewis is holding a fourth posse at Tombstone, ready to take the trail in case Alvord turns back, and in Tucson, Sheriff Frank Murphy has been notified to be ready to go out with a posse from Tucson.

Nothing has been heard from the posses, and as they are far from telegraphic communication no word will be received for several days. It is believed that the posse which is on the trail of Alvord is pressing him closely, and the desperado will find the border line guarded when he attempts to cross into Mexico. The officers are of the opinion that Alvord will make a desperate fight in case he is met with but an effort will be made to take the desperado alive if possible. Swink, the cowboy who was held up by Alvord at the Warren ranch, says that the desperado has grown much stouter since he has been out, and seemed to be confident that he would not be taken by the Arizona officers.

Alvord told Swink that he visited Willcox, a town on the Southern Pacific road, last Saturday and there met a brother of Matt Burts, the train robber who was sent to Yuma at the last term of court to serve a sentence of five years. The business of Alvord is a surprise to the officers here, and it is generally believed that his last stand will result in his downfall as a fugitive.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXVIII, Number 191, 10 April 1901

STATE ROBBER LOSES HIS NERVE

Had Expected an Acquittal by His Jury On Way to Jail He Tears His Clothes Like a Crazy Man-Proclaims His Innocence After Receiving a Ten Year Sentence

(Special Dispatch to The Herald.) TUCSON, April 9,—William Downing broke down completely when the jury that tried him returned a verdict finding him guilty of attempting to rob the United States mail at Cochise.

He had been indicted in connection with the hold-up, together with Stiles, Alvord and Matt Burts, and was released from jail on a bond of \$3000. Downing believed that he would be acquitted since the jury acquitted him of complicity with the robbers in the hold-up of an express car.

The verdict came as a great surprise and his nerve gave way. He began to tear clothes from his body when he was taken to jail and acted like a crazy man. This afternoon Downing was brought before Judge Davis for sentence, and when asked if he had any reason to give why sentence should not be passed, Downing began to approach the Judge's bench, but was motioned back by the Judge. Downing said: "Judge, I am innocent, and you'll know it someday."

Judge Davis sentenced him to ten years in Yuma prison.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXVIII, Number 199, 18 April 1901

Train Robber Burts Pardoned

PHOENIX, A. T., April 17.—Governor Murphy today Issued a pardon to Matt Burts serving a term in the penitentiary at Yuma for complicity in train robberies on the Southern Pacific and Cochise road more than a year ago. The granting of the pardon was according to an understanding between Burts and the authorities when he gave the evidence recently that led to the conviction at Tucson of Bill Downing and others.

Bisbee Daily Review, Tuesday, July 14, 1903

ALVORD'S TRAIL COMMENCED YESTERDAY

The trial of Burt Alvord was called in the Federal Court at Tombstone yesterday afternoon at 2 o'clock. The court room was filled with spectators desirous of hearing the testimony in the notorious case, which has been

pending against Alvord and his associates for the past five years. Judge Doan, from the bench, called court to order promptly at 2 o'clock.

Alvord sat in the group at one of the tables, apparently the least perturbed of any in the courtroom, despite the fact that to him the ending of this trial is of more import than to any of the others.

That his attorneys intend to make a stubborn fight to save the man against whom practically the whole territory is set, was evident when Tom Flannigan arose immediately upon the convening of the court and moved for a continuance on the ground that the witnesses Jim Melton, William Hildreth, Matt Burts, Billy Stiles and Henry Jones were not present. This motion was denied by the court, and the work of selecting a jury for the case then commenced.

After one of the most searching selections ever made in an Arizona court room, the following jury was finally agreed upon: T.S. McClellan, A.V. Stone, A. Aesely, Wayne Bursley, C.T. Beavis, C.R. Cassell, William Ramsey, J. Bingham, Frank Murray, B.R. Michea, H. Prall and Michael McCullogh.

It was late in the afternoon when the first witness, R.E. Brown, was called. Brown is one of the quartette taken from the pen as a witness in this case, and is now serving a term for his part in the Fairbank holdup. Attorney Flannigan was on his feet in an instant with an objection to the witness being heard at this time, and he was withdrawn.

William Downing, another of the convicts from Yuma, was then put on the stand, and his testimony proved most damaging to the interests of Alvord. He testified that at 2 o'clock on the morning following the Fairbank holdup, both Alvord and Stiles came to his house at Pearce, and told him that Three-Fingered Jack, Bravo Juan, the Owens boys and R.E. Brown had gone out to hold up a train. The next day, according to the testimony of the witness, Alvord asked him to go to Willcox and help out the boys, as they might need their assistance.

But I refused to go with him,” said Downing. “After the holdup, Brown came to my house at Pearce, and I saw Alvord give him the money with which to leave the country.”

At this point the prosecution’s examination rested, and the cross-examination of Downing was postponed until this morning at 9 o’clock.

Attorneys Nave and Campbell are making a hard fight to convict Alvord of the crimes charged against him, and have left no stone unturned to make the government’s case a strong one. They are prosecuting Alvord on the indictments found against him on the Fairbank holdup alone. As yet there has been no mention of the Cochise holdup.

The record of Burt Alvord before and since his implication and subsequent arrest for train robbery has been about as checkered as could be imagined.

ALVORD AT WILLCOX

When Burt Alvord went to Willcox that town was completely in the hands of the wild-and-woolly cowboys; the citizens and every officer in the place had been completely buffaloed by these devil-may-care fellows. Every saloon and store in the place they had ridden into and “shot up” at one time or another, and conditions had become unendurable. Finally it was learned that Burt Alvord could be induced to go to Willcox and act as a peace officer. He had the reputation of having plenty of nerve and being a dead shot with a gun. A public meeting was held, attended by the business men of the town, and an invitation was extended to Alvord to there and act as town marshal. The invitation was accompanied with the guarantee of the best men in the place that they would stand by him in any trouble he might encounter in the work of taming the gun-packers who made the town almost uninhabitable.

After Alvord went to Willcox there was no serious trouble; it seemed to be understood that he was there to kill the first man who stepped outside of the line of good behavior. Alvord killed one man in Willcox, but he was exonerated for it. No one knew just how this killing occurred. The man killed had made some ugly threats. One day he came to town and he and

Alvord were seen walking around to the rear of a saloon; a shot followed, and when the crowd got there the man was dead, shot by Alvord. Alvord certainly kept Willcox in a peaceful state while he was there, and his arrest for train robbery was regretted by many of the citizens, who admired him for his courage.

The Arizona Republican, Friday, December 18, 1903

THE WAY IT WAS DONE

Marshal McCord's Story of the Tombstone Jail Break.

United States Marshal McCord returned yesterday morning from, the south. Speaking of the jail break at Tombstone on Tuesday night in which Burt Alvord and William Stiles, two United States prisoners, escaped, with seventeen other prisoners of the county, he said that it was the most comprehensive jail delivery in the history of the territory. The marshal was not at Tombstone when the break was affected. If it had been delayed twenty-four hours Alvord would not have profited by it, for on Wednesday morning Deputy Marshals Welles, Foster and Porterie were going to take Alvord to Yuma along with Bill Downing and Robert Brown, who had been brought from the penitentiary to testify against Stiles and Alvord. Downing and Brown had taken part with them in the Fairbanks holdup and were convicted three years ago.

The marshal is inclined to believe that the outlaws are either hiding in the Chiricahuas or are trying to work their way north. He does not share the general opinion that they will go into Mexico for Col. Kosterlitzky of the rurales has given out that they will be captured. It has usually happened that when Kosterlitzky has said that a thing would be done it has come to pass.

Jim Bennett, one of the fugitives, is probably with the two outlaws for he is as tough as either of them. He had been arrested for smuggling Chinese into the country. His case had been continued and he had given bond. A few days before the jail break he gave a Mexican two dollars to smuggle a

chisel and a saw into the jail. The Mexican took the money and the tools and turned them over to Sheriff Lewis, and told him where he got them. The Sheriff went out and captured Bennett and threw him in.

The marshal said that the escape was not discovered for over an hour. The force at the jail consisted only of the jailor and a turnkey more than seventy years old. Both had gone to supper and the prisoners were not locked in their cells but were allowed together in the corridor.

They had evidently been working on the bars and the wall for several days and had probably received their tools from one of the persons who had been admitted to see Stiles.

Before the beginning of the term of court Marshal McCord had wired to Washington for permission to employ eight guards for the removal of Stiles and Alvord to Tombstone and to watch them while they were there. When Alvord pleaded guilty and was sentenced to the penitentiary and when Stiles, on the United States charge, had been granted a change of venue to this county, the authorization of the marshal to hire guards ceased.

At the time of the break Deputy Sheriff Porterie was guarding Browning and Brown in the city hall. They not been locked up in the county at all, for Alvord and Stiles had threatened to kill them if they could get at them. When the news of the break spread, it was reported that the outlaws were going to kill the two convict witnesses before they took to the hills. The city hall was soon fortified and bristled with guards armed with sawed off shotguns.

The first four days after Alvord was taken from Phoenix to Tombstone he was not locked up in the jail at all but was guarded in the office of the Sheriff by Deputy United States Marshals. During that time he showed no disposition to escape. The marshal believes that if he and Stiles had not been finally put together the escape would not have been planned.

There are perhaps in the United States no two more picturesque criminals. Before they engaged in crime both were peace officers and good ones. So far as is known the Cochise holdup was their first offense. Alvord did not

take an active part in that robbery but he planned it. It was carried out by Stiles and Matt Burts. Alvord was at that time a Constable and Deputy Sheriff and Stiles and Burts were trusted assistants of Detective Thacker of Wells Fargo & Co. They also happened to be the men Thacker sent out to look for the robbers. They spent some weeks hunting for themselves and finally gave up the search as hopeless.

These three were not seriously suspected of the crime until after the Fairbank robbery. Burts, Stiles and another man planned the robbery of the Southern Pacific train at Benson. Stiles, as usual, took the lead. At the last moment his confederates weakened and as he was about to mount the engine, he looked around and could see nothing of his companions. He did not get on.

After the first escape of Stiles and Alvord from the Tombstone jail they did not leave the country but stayed around in the hills and amused themselves by sending impudent messages to the officers who were supposed to be hunting for them. The next to the last time that Stiles was captured was at Casa Grande, where he was living quietly with his wife, relying upon the promise by the officers that he would not be prosecuted after having turned state's evidence. One night just as he was about to start out to arrest a party of cattle rustlers the Sheriff of Cochise came upon him and at the point of a gun put him under arrest. Stiles was shackled. While the Sheriff was waiting for the train he took Stiles into a saloon and meeting several other persons there he invited the house to drink. When the crowd had lined up at the bar, Stiles embraced the opportunity to sneak out into the darkness. He somehow got the shackles off and took refuge with friends in the Sierritas, where he remained for several months. During this time he used to come to Tucson at night and tell stories to the newspaper reporters.

Tombstone Epitaph, Sunday, September 15, 1907

DOWNING TO BE RELEASED

Famous Cochise County Episode Recalled—Completes His Sentence

William Downing, one of the old Alvord-Stiles gang of train robbers, who is serving a term of ten years in the territorial penitentiary at Yuma, will be released from that institution the latter part of September, having completed his sentence.

Downing was convicted in the United States Court in Tucson, April 8, 1901, of the crime of attempting to rob the United States mail and was sentenced to serve a term of ten years. With good behavior that he is entitled to, Downing will be release about September 20.

Downing was indicted with Burt Alvord, William Stiles, and Matt Burts, charging them with the hold-up of the Southern Pacific train at Cochise Station, in Cochise County , one night in September, 1899, the details of which are familiar to the public.

While Downing took no actual part in the commission of the robbery it was shown that he was one of the conspirators and was fully advised of the plans of the parties before they were carried out.

Downing's wife, who stood by him faithfully during his trails, died in Tucson several years ago.

Of the others of the gang who were connected with the two hold-up's the Owens boys, Lewis and George, have served their time and have been out for over a year ago and are in Benson. Matt Burts left the country, and was last heard of in Montana. Stiles is still at large, and is thought to be down in Sonora, and it is a well-known fact that he was seen in Casa Grande a few weeks since. Alvord served two years in Yuma and his release from there caused quite a stir.

Through some mistake in the date he was released before his time had expired and the Mexican authorities, who wanted him and were ready to make a demand for him upon his release were frustrated. Alvord went to

Los Angeles and when he learned that the Mexican authorities were after him disappeared and has not been heard of. He and Stiles are wanted in Sonora for the holding up and robbing of a mining man named Tener of several bars of gold bullion.

BISBEE DAILY REVIEW, Tuesday, November 26, 1907

Sheriff Jack White and District Attorney Shelley have begun proceedings toward bringing back to Cochise country from Grant County, New Mexico, Matt Burts, who is wanted in this county on a charge of an attempt to commit murder on Bob Warren, in the vicinity of the Sulphur Springs Valley, near Cochise station several years ago. Burts was recently arrested in Deming by the local officers on a charge of having shot up the town and is now being held in the county jail of Grant County New Mexico, at Silver City, awaiting the action of the Grand jury on the charge, it being made a felony under the statutes of New Mexico. A letter was received by Sheriff White a few days since from Sheriff Don Johnson of Grant County, asking if Burts was still wanted in this county for the alleged shooting of Warren. Johnson being Deputy Sheriff in the county under Dell Lewis at the time the alleged offense was committed.

The grand jury of Cochise County found an indictment against Burts shortly after the shooting took place and it was found among the files in the office of the District Clerk's Office. The officials are now at work on the papers for extraditing of Burts. Several of the witnesses to the alleged attempted murder are still in the county as is Warren and they can be easily reached or summoned to give their testimony in the event that Burts is brought back here.

THE BISBEE DAILY REVIEW, Wednesday, November 27, 1907

Word was received at the Sheriff's Office on yesterday from Sheriff Don Johnson in Silver City, New Mexico, stating that Matt Burts had entered a

plea of guilty to the indictment that had been found against him by the grand jury and had been sentenced to serve a term of six months in the territorial penitentiary at Santa Fe. He advised Sheriff White that if he wished to extradite Burts, the matter should be taken up direct with the prison authorities at Santa Fe. Burts is wanted in this county, as was stated yesterday, for the crime of an assault with intent to commit murder on Robert Warren several years ago.

The Arizona Republican, Thursday November 28, 1907

MATT BURTS, BANDIT IN THE TOILS AGAIN

Former Member of the Alvord Stiles Gang Could Not Keep Out of Trouble.

Sheriff White and District Attorney Shelly have begun proceedings toward bringing back from Deming, N. M., one Matt Burts, who is wanted in this county on a charge of an attempt to commit murder on one Bob Warren in the vicinity of the Sulphur Springs Valley, near Cochise Station several years ago. Burt was recently arrested in Deming by the local officers on a charge of having shot up the town of Deming and is now being held at the county jail at Silver City, awaiting the action of the grand jury of that county.

A letter was received by Sheriff White from Sheriff Johnson of Grant County, N. M. asking if Burts was wanted here. The indictment charging Burts with the attempted murder on Warren was found in the records of the District Clerk's office and the officials are now preparing papers for extraditing Burts. Several of the witnesses to the alleged attempted murder are still in the county, as is also Warren, and will be summoned to give their testimony in the case should Burts be brought back.

Matt Burts was one of the members of the old Alvord-Stiles gang and was one of the principal actors in that outfit. He, with Stiles, did the work at Cochise station at the time the train was held up and the Wells-Fargo safe blown open and several thousand dollars of money as well as watches taken. He was sentenced to serve a short term in Yuma for his connection

with the affair and was out but a short time when he had the trouble with Warren at a round-up in the northern part of the county. Immediately after the shooting, Burts left the country and was supposed to have gone to Montana, having been away from this country for a number of years.

The Arizona Republican, Sunday, April 12, 1908

MATT BURTS, BAD MAN – IN NEW MEXICO PEN

Governor Kibbey Issues Requisition for His Return to Arizona to Answer Indictment for Assault to Kill

On the application of District Attorney Shelly of Cochise County, presented by Sheriff J.F. White of that county, nominated by the District Attorney as a proper person to be entrusted with such a commission, Governor Kibbey yesterday afternoon issued a requisition on the Governor of New Mexico for the custody of Matt Burts. Burts is now in the New Mexico penitentiary and is wanted in Cochise County to answer to an indictment charging him with assault with intent to kill Robert Warren,

The incident recalls the stirring times about the end of the nineteenth century, when Arizona was engaged in rooting out the last organized gang of train robbers and all round bandits, that is known to infest the territory. There are still outlaws of one kind and another and some bad men but most of them are operating singly or in some special line of criminality, while the old Stiles gang was of the somewhat picturesque order of frontier outlaws of the sort that form the basis of dime novel literature. This gang participated or executed at least two train robberies and some other deeds of notable irregularity.

In the course of time the leaders of the gang, Billy Stiles, Burt Alvord, a man named Downing and Matt Burts were all arrested. Burts turn states evidence and was discharged. Alvord and Downing went to the penitentiary from which both have graduated and resumed less eventful careers. Stiles before trial escaped from the Tombstone jail and is still at

large though he has been “located” many times and as often eluded capture.

Shortly after his release Matt Burts went to the Horseshoe Bar Ranch in the Sulphur Springs Valley where he obtained employment. One day while driving cattle he became engaged in a quarrel with Robert Warren, a fellow cowboy, and securing a weapon, while the two men were riding heard together Burts rode alongside of Warren and seizing the latter’s horse by the bridle rein held him while he began pumping lead. Warren being unarmed. Warren’s horse ran with him some distance and in some manner the latter with a broken arm, became dismounted, either thrown or climbing down himself. Burts had pursued, firing as he did so and when he came up with Warren tried to fire at the latter as he lay helpless on the ground, but his gun was empty and he no more ammunition. Up to this time Burts had been accounted a brave man but it was then construed that he was not possessed of true bravery, even though he lived the career of a “gun man.”

That is the story of the incident as related from memory yesterday by one who lived in the southern country at the time the incident occurred. Burts fled but the grand jury at its next session indicted him on the testimony of Warren. He has never been located until recently when Sheriff White learned of his incarceration in the New Mexico penitentiary last October or November, under a sentence of six months and one day, and immediately began steps for bringing him back to Arizona to answer the charge of assault to kill Warren.

BISBEE DAILY REVIEW, Friday, May 8, 1908

THROUGH WITH PRISONER.

Sheriff Jack White passed through the city yesterday on his way from Santa Fe to Tombstone. He had in custody Matt Burts, who is wanted on a charge of assault with intent to murder. The charge is an old one. Burts has just completed a sentence in New Mexico.

THE BISBEE DAILY REVIEW, Thursday, May 28, 1908

Matt Burts Pleads Guilty

Matt Burts, who was brought back a few weeks since by Sheriff Jack White, from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to answer to a charge of an assault with intent to commit murder on Bob Warren several years ago, took a change of heart and withdrew his plea of not guilty to the charge and entered a plea of guilty to a charge of an assault with a deadly weapon. He will hear the judgment of the court in the morning at 9 o'clock.

The Death of William Downing – August 5, 1908

By State Historian Marshall Trimble

WHIPPED WITH HIS OWN PISTOL

WILLIAM "BILL" DOWNING was one of the most disliked fellows in Old Arizona. He was moody, morose, bad-tempered, sullen, and surly. And that was when he was sober. He got downright mean and ugly when he was drinking.

Bill was so unlikeable that even members of his gang couldn't stand him. He was a member of the Burt Alvord gang around Willcox, and he spent a few years in the notorious Yuma Territorial Prison after his capture for train robbery.

After his release in 1907, he returned to Willcox and opened a saloon called the Free and Easy. It soon became a hangout for all the nefarious rascals in that part of Cochise County. That same year, the Arizona Territory had passed a law banning women from "loitering" in saloons, but that didn't stop Bill. He employed an assortment of shady ladies to drink with the customers. He also trained them each to be highly skilled pickpockets, a trade he'd learned in prison.

Their victims were always reluctant to complain because of Bill's reputation as a gunslinger. The law was chomping at the bit to arrest him, but the folks around Willcox were so terrorized that none would come forward and press charges. That changed, however, when he beat up one of the girls, Cuco Leal, and she complained to the town marshal, who issued a warrant for his arrest.

The best time to serve a warrant to a rascal like Bill was early in the morning while he was still groggy from the previous evening's imbibing. Arizona Ranger Billy Speed just happened to be passing through Willcox, and the Marshal enlisted his help in making the arrest. On the morning of August 5, 1908, the two lawmen stood in front of the Free and Easy Saloon and called on the old outlaw to step outside.

He'd just bellied up to the bar demanding more of the "hair of the dog that bit him" from the night before and ignored the lawmen. After Ranger Speed called a second time, Bill emptied his glass, turned, and headed for the back door. He was going to come around from behind the saloon and get the drop on the two lawmen. Billy Speed anticipated his move, and armed with his .30-40 Winchester, he headed in the same direction. The two turned the corner at the same time and faced each other in the classic Old West confrontation. Bill reached for his pistol. The Ranger, seeing the outlaw's hand go toward his hip, raised his rifle and fired. Much to Bill's surprise and chagrin, his holster was empty. Somebody had beaten him to the draw a few moments before the fight. A coroner's verdict ruled the killing justified, and locals cheered Bill's demise.

What had happened was this: Bill had bullied those folks so many times that they were just waiting for a chance to turn the tables on him. So while he was leaving the bar, someone slyly picked his pocket -- er, holster.

The incident was the inspiration for an axiom that still holds true, don't reach for your six-shooter unless you know it's there.

THE BISBEE DAILY REVIEW, Friday, August 7, 1908

LAST TRAIN ROBBERY IN THE TERRITORY

Death of Bill Downing With His Boots on at Willcox on Wednesday Recalls Daring Holdup.

ARREST OF OUTLAWS AND ESCAPE FROM JAIL

Alvord and Stiles Later Assisted in Capture of Mexican Outlaw Chacon.

The death of W.F. Downing, who was killed yesterday morning at Willcox by Ranger William Speed, recalls the last successful train robbery that ever occurred in Arizona. One other train robbery was attempted at Fairbank within a short time after the Cochise robbery but it was not successful. Jeff Milton, the Express Messenger, made a brave fight at Fairbank, mortally wounding Jack Dunlap, better known as "Three Fingered Jack," and was hit by an outlaw bullet, which shattered his right arm from the wrist to the elbow. Homer Prickett, now proprietor of the Roy Hotel in Douglas, was conductor of the train at Fairbank. Dunlap and other outlaws expected to get the express box which they believed contained the money to pay the soldiers at Fort Huachuca. They did not get the express box and if they had secured it they would have been disappointed, as the money for the soldiers had passed over the road the day before.

The affair at Fairbank occurred only a short time after the robbery at Cochise Station and was the last attempt ever made to rob a train in the territory.

The Cochise Robbery

The robbery of the passenger train occurred nine or ten years ago and four men were implicated in it. The actual robbery was committed by Billy Stiles and Matt Burts, while Burt Alvord, who was at the time a Deputy Sheriff at Willcox and W.F. Downing, Constable at Pearce, and were accessories before and after the crime. The two officers were to receive the booty which was delivered to them within a few hours after the robbery. Burt

Alvord was at home in Willcox when news arrived from Cochise, only ten miles away. Downing was also at Willcox on the night of the robbery. Between the duties of caching the booty secured by Stiles and Burts in the robbery and organizing a posse to take the trail of the robbers, Alvord and Downing were kept very busy on the night the robbery occurred. Detectives hurried from San Francisco, headed by William Thacker, Chief of the Wells-Fargo force. Alvord had enlisted Billy Stiles as one of his special aides, and soon various clues were run down in various directions.

Von Arnim Has Visitors

Downing and Stiles finally confided to Chief Thacker that they believed the robbers belonged to cattle rustlers on Blue River, who were at that time engaged in branding and rebranding calves on the Hampson Ranch, of which E.A. Von Arnim of Douglas was General Manager. Late one evening Downing and Stiles arrived at the Hampson Ranch, 150 miles north of Willcox, and made themselves at home with the Double Circle boys until next day at noon, when Stiles took Von Arnim to a quiet spot under a mesquite tree and asked if he had seen any suspicious characters about the ranch. "Von" told Stiles that nearly all the visitors to the Hampson Ranch were more or less a mystery to him; they dropped in and made themselves at home and then disappeared without making their business known. Stiles then told Von Arnim that there had been a train robbery down on the S.P. and that he and Downing were in the employ of the Wells-Fargo Company and were hunting the robbers. They left the Double Circle Ranch next day.

Stiles Makes Confession

When Stiles and Downing returned from their trip to the Hampson Ranch they were empty handed, not even finding a clue among the cow thieves on the Double Circle range. In the meantime Thacker had heard something which led him to believe that Stiles and Alvord were not ignorant of the identity of the robbers and he at once began to get confidential with Stiles and it was not long until he had the full story. In the meantime, Matt Burts had not stopped to play hide and seek with the detectives, but had pulled

out of the country, going to the state of Washington. Thacker and Stiles procured a warrant for the arrest of Alvord and Downing, who were taken from their several posts of official duty and placed behind the bars and there it was made known that Stiles had made a full confession and would go on the stand at the trial and tell the whole story Stiles was given a commission as Special Officer for the Wells-Fargo Company and was at Tombstone where he had permission to go into the jail at will.

Stiles Changes His Mind

If the arrest of Alvord and Downing created a sensation in Cochise County, the release of Alvord from the jail by Stiles, his accuser, created a greater one. After Alvord and Downing had been in jail for probably two weeks Stiles went into the jail one day at noon when the courthouse was practically empty and demanded the key to Alvord's cell from George Bravin, the Jailor. Bravin made resistance, but was shot down by Stiles, who secured the keys, and liberating Alvord, they took what arms and ammunition they could find about the Sheriff's Office and fled to the mountains. The news of the jail delivery quickly spread throughout the territory and again the San Francisco detectives began to swarm around the towns of southern Arizona. The outlaws were reported seen here and there for several weeks. They even wrote joking letters to Scott White, who was then the Cochise County Sheriff, mailing them, or causing them to be mailed from Casa Grande, which had been the home of Stiles. Finally Stiles and Alvord tired of the Arizona hills and went into Mexico where they remained for several years. In the meantime Downing was tried, convicted and sent to the penitentiary, where he served seven years.

Delivered Up Chacon

After Alvord and Stiles had been in Mexico for several years it became known that they had become acquainted with and intimate with Juan Chacon, a murderer who had escaped from the Graham County jail a week before the day set for his execution. Captain Bert Mossman, first Captain of the Arizona Rangers, succeeded in making a date with Burt Alvord in Mexico and at the conference it was agreed that if Stiles and Alvord would

induce Chacon to come across the line so that he could be captured the officers would use their influence to have prosecution of the old train robbery charge against them stopped. Alvord and Stiles in a short time proposed a visit to the pastures of W.C. Greene, near Hereford, on a horse stealing exhibition to Chacon, who agreed to accompany them. Stiles went into Naco and notified Captain Mossman who went to the camp of the outlaws where he succeeded in arresting Chacon. Soon afterwards Stiles and Alvord surrendered to Sheriff Del Lewis at Tombstone and both were released on bond. Alvord was afterward tried on some charge and sent to the Yuma penitentiary for two years. He is now said to be in South America. Stiles was never tried for robbery, but soon after returning from Mexico he went back to that country and held up a mining man who was on his way to his mining camp with money to pay to employees. Afterward a part of this money was recovered where it had been buried on the Stiles Ranch near Naco. The whereabouts of Stiles is unknown but he is supposed to be in Mexico or perhaps in South America with Alvord.

The Death of Billy Stiles

In the long run, Billy Stiles fared much better as a criminal than as a lawman. He escaped death many times while running from the law, but died while trying to enforce it. Stiles was born in 1871 and grew up near Casa Grande. He served twice as an Arizona Deputy Sheriff, but spent much of his early days as a train robber, bank robber and killer.

He teamed with Cochise County Sheriff Burt Alvord in a train-robbing scheme, was arrested several times, broke out of jail several times, fled to Mexico several times and eventually left the country. But he came back and that was his downfall.

While acting as a lawman in Nevada, he was shot and killed while trying to serve a warrant in 1908. Since he was using William Larkin (his middle name) at the time, there was some confusion about who he really was at the coroner's inquest. A woman claiming to be his sister-in-law finally appeared and said the dead man was definitely Billy Stiles.

Later, the woman was identified as his wife, who had left Stiles several years before. There was never a reason given for the deception.