

Fingerprint drove search for murderous gang in '20s

Modern crime scene investigators have an arsenal of technology to identify criminals, but the fingerprint continues to be their prime weapon, as it has been for over 100 years.

Seventy-seven years ago, the Federal Bureau of Identification and its new boss, J. Edgar Hoover, were beginning to catalog crime-scene fingerprints when a bank robbery which eventually involved four murders occurred in Lamar, Colo., on May 23, 1928.

The bloody heist became a celebrated case where a single fingerprint led to the identification, arrest, conviction and execution of

members of the infamous Fleagle Gang.

A new book by N.T. (Tom) Betz, editor of *The Goodland Star-News*, "The Fleagle Gang: betrayed by a fingerprint," begins with the robbery and follows lawmen on the trail of the gang who killed the bank president, his son, a Dighton doctor and a kidnapped teller. Over 50 men were arrested across the country, but none of them matched the fingerprint taken from a window of the murdered doctor's car.

The case had many firsts, including an air search with a Colorado National Guard plane, plus planes from Denver, Dodge City and other

towns used to search the plains of western Kansas. It was the crew of the National Guard plane that spotted the doctor's car in a ravine north of Scott City, where his body was found.

The true crime story is filled with twists and turns. While researching the book, Betz talked to descendants of the people involved and researched the official court documents, now on exhibit at Big Timbers Museum in Prowers County, Colo., as well as newspaper accounts and stories published over the past 77 years.

"The Fleagle Gang, betrayed by a fingerprint," is published by

Authorhouse, and is available through Knott Just Books in Goodland. A book signing is planned for 2-5 p.m. on Friday, May 20. (Call 890-7105 to reserve your copy.)

"I heard stories about the bank robbery when I was growing up," said Betz, a Lamar native, "and began collecting information while in high school. After a Buick, reported to be the Fleagle getaway car, was given to the Prowers County Historical Society, I helped research the claim.

During that effort, the city editor of the *Lamar Daily News* and I talked to Fred Fleagle, who would not say much about the events except to confirm it was a Buick the gang members were driving when they robbed the First National Bank of Lamar.

"The book became a reality when the Prowers County District Court

turned the trial records over to the historical society in the summer of 1997, and I began reading the records to create an exhibit for the county museum.

While most of the trial records were missing, the hidden treasure was in the statements filed to divide the \$14,000 in reward money for the capture of the gang."

Betz has spent a lifetime in journalism and on the Great Plains. A veteran of the U.S. Navy and a graduate of the University of Colorado, he started his career delivering papers for his family's newspaper in Lamar, Colo. He won the first of many journalism awards as a teen-ager.

He grew up on stories of the Fleagle bank robbery, originally reported on by his grandfather, Fred Betz Sr.

A past president of the Colorado

Press Association, Betz has written countless newspaper and magazine articles. He has spent much of his free time exploring the history of the Great Plains.

There will be a book signing in Lamar on Saturday, May 21, during the Lamar Day celebration. In the morning, Betz will be at the Barry Patch, in the old First National Bank building.

Bullet holes still mark the wall of the president's office. In the afternoon, he will be signing books at Big Timbers Museum north of the city on U.S. 50-287.

The Finney County Museum in Garden City has the book for sale and it is available on-line from Amazon.com, the Tattered Cover in Denver and Barnes & Noble. For information, check the Fleagle Gang web site www.nwkansas.com/home/fleaglegang.

Paintings, photos make vivid display



"Metamorphosis No. 4," (left) an acrylic painting in vivid blues, purples, reds and oranges, by Sarah Saddler is a bold contrast to her husband Doyle Saddler's black and white photographs on display at the Carnegie Arts Center. Above is "Dream On," a portrait that was among the four that received the "Accolade of Excellence Award" from a panel of international judges at the Wedding and Portrait Photographers International Convention in Las Vegas. Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

Couple welcomed back by snow

It is good to have Roberta and George Luckert back from their trip to Brazil. They spent most of the month of April at the home of George's sister, Beulah, and her family near Sao Paulo.

Naturally, when they returned home, it snowed shortly thereafter. I'm not saying they brought it with them; it just seems like there is always some strange weather to help us realize we are in Kansas again.

According to Roberta, they traded orchids for snowballs. It doesn't sound like a fair trade to me.

Marjorie Westover is still in Colorado, celebrating her 80th birthday. Her family was going to have a surprise birthday party for her Sunday, April 24, even though the big day wasn't actually until the 30th. We do hope her special day was just what she wanted it to be and are glad she will be home to tell us about it soon.

Talking about special days, I called "The Grill" to see what the plan was for Mother's Day, and they will be serving prime rib.

The senior center had a great bake sale, and I want to thank all the people who supported the center by



sally michael

• brewster beacon

making terrific items and buying them. We thinned out a lot of the craft supplies, and we'll leave the table up for a while in case there is something else that might help someone out later.

I am getting excited about putting the chairs we've selected out, so they can be enjoyed.

I think they will be good looking and comfortable, so be sure to give me your opinion, especially if it is good.

The graduations are closing in on us, and there will be a lot of activities in the next few weeks. The high school graduation is Saturday, May 14; the kindergarten and eighth grade graduations will be Monday, May 16; and the last day of school will be Wednesday, May 18.

And another school year goes by with amazing speed, just like all of

them have since I graduated many years ago.

We want Bud and Tess Luckert to know that we have them in prayer after the loss of

their son Clark on Wednesday, April 27. He had lived in Dodge City for the last several years.

Ruth and Duane Jones were going to spend a few days in Greeley with their daughter Linda Hoffner and family, but Linda sent word that she is battling a virus that she didn't think they would want, so they will go at a later date.

Ruth rescheduled her eye exam, so they will have that taken care of soon, and she'll also be able to enjoy the visit with kids, grandkids and great-grandkids.

We have Reva Eicher in prayer for a healing of whatever is attacking her. She and Jon were in Colby moving more of their things to Paola, when she suddenly took ill. It sounds like she is on the mend now, and we hope she stays that way.

Crab apples' mess can be prevented

Though many gardeners enjoy the brightly colored fruit produced by some crabapple trees, others find the fruit messy and would like to prevent it from forming.

Fortunately, there is an easy way to accomplish this. Sevin (carbaryl) not only controls insects but can cause apples and crabapples to drop while small.

Check the label for this use. Not all Sevin labels mention fruit thinning on the label.

Sevin should be applied soon after the blossoms have dried on the trees. Do not apply Sevin during bloom because it is toxic to bees.



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• ag notebook

fective for about 35 days after full bloom, though the fruit will become more difficult to

remove as it increases in size. Note that Sevin is specific for apples and crabapples and will not prevent fruit formation on other trees.

Dana Belshe is agricultural agent for Sherman County with Kansas State University Research and Extension.

matters of record

Accidents

The following accidents were reported to the Goodland Police Department:

April 22 — Victor Crouse was backing a 1994 Ford pickup when

he struck a gas meter at 909 Walnut. The pickup and trailer were moved before officials arrived.

Notorious 'Fleagle Gang' Fingerprint ends nationwide '20s manhunt

True crime from the roaring 20s, "The Fleagle Gang, Betrayed by a fingerprint," begins with a brazen daylight bank robbery of the First National Bank in Lamar, Colo. on May 23, 1928. Four men are dead, and the robbers escaped.

The author Tom (N.T.) Betz, editor of *The Goodland Star-News*, has spent a lifetime in journalism and on the Great Plains.

Knott Just Books of Goodland, Kan. will hold a book signing from 2-5 p.m. on Friday, May 20. Bookstore owner, Linda Knott, said people can call 890-7105 to reserve a book. She said several people have called or come in to reserve the book and purchase the copies she has been ordering.

"It seems to have stirred up some interest," she said.

"The Fleagle Gang" details the case which hinges on a single fingerprint found on a murdered Dighton, Kan., doctor's car. The fledgling FBI and new boss J. Edgar Hoover play a crucial role in turning the fingerprint into solid evidence used to find, arrest and convict members of the Fleagle Gang. The book includes photos taken from the court files and places where the gang robbed banks.

A U.S. Navy journalist and a graduate of the University of Colorado, Betz started his career delivering papers for his family's newspaper in Lamar, Colo., winning the first of numerous journalism awards as a teenager.

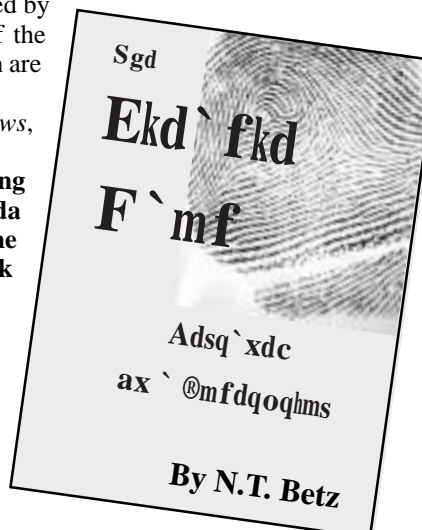
The Fleagle Gang robbed banks and trains in Larned, Kinsley, Marysville, Ottawa and McPherson Kan., Lamar, Colo., Eugene, Ore., Pittsburg, Calif. and countless others of over \$1 million in the 10 years they operated.

Three gang members — Ralph Fleagle, George Abshire and Howard Royston — were "jerked up" at the Colorado Penitentiary a little over two years after committing the Colorado bank robbery. The fourth, Jake Fleagle, was shot on a train in Branson, Mo. in Oct. 1930.

"The Fleagle Gang" is available at Knott Just Books in Goodland (Call 890-7105). A book signing is planned for 2-5 p.m., Friday, May 20.

Betz will be signing books from 9-11 a.m., Saturday, May 21, at The Barry Patch in Lamar, Colo., which is the site of the original First National Bank of Lamar. The book is available at the Finney County Museum in Garden City, and online from the publisher Authorhouse.com, and other book stores.

Check out "The Fleagle Gang" web site at nwkansas.com/home/fleaglegang.



MOTHER'S DAY BUFFET

Treat Mom to an elegant buffet featuring her favorite selections like beef Wellington with mushroom sauce, crab stuffed chicken breasts, scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, rice pilaf, baked potato, Bavarian bread, baby cheesecakes, 3 layer carrot cake, sunrise punch. Serving from 11 to 2 p.m.



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