

Robbery on rails revealed



Gary Miller of Rifle shows how his father, the late Western artist Jack Roberts, might have asked a model to act as the artist depicted a gunman taking control of a train from its crew, in the painting at right, in Parachute in 1904. Roberts completed three paintings of the robbery, which were commissioned by a Battlement Mesa couple who later moved away and donated the artwork to Grand Valley Historical Society. The work can now be seen at Parachute Town Hall. The train robbers were after a safe containing gold, but they had the wrong train.

By [Dennis Webb](#)
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PARACHUTE — The details of a failed train robbery 107 years ago in Parachute so captivated the late Jack Roberts that it took the artist three oil paintings rather than one to adequately convey it.

Those depictions — which had remained under wraps, much like the answers to some of the mysteries that continue to surround the crime — are now available for public viewing at the Parachute Town Hall.

“This is just a perfect site for us. These paintings have been in storage, have been wrapped up for 10 years,” said Judith Hayward, the town’s mayor pro tem and also president of the Grand Valley Historical Society.

The story of Roberts’ renderings is becoming its own epilogue to the story of the robbery itself, which occurred in the early hours of June 7, 1904. An armed man commandeered a westbound Denver & Rio Grande train in Parachute and forced it to a stop a few miles to the west, where two accomplices waited at a bonfire.

They dynamited a safe on board, thinking it contained \$150,000 in gold, but it turned out the treasure had been on an earlier train.

Two never found

They then fled by boat across the Colorado River and rode off on three horses. A posse caught up with them later in the East Divide Creek area near Silt, where one of the robbers took his own life with his gun after being wounded in a shootout.

The two others escaped, their identities never discovered. Meanwhile, debate ensued over whether the dead man was Harvey Logan, also known as Kid Curry, who had been part of Butch Cassidy’s gang.

“It’s all part of the mystery of our history,” Hayward said.

Roberts, an accomplished painter of Western scenes who lived his later years in Redstone, completed his portrayals of the robbery in 1996. Battlement Mesa residents David and Jeanette Truog initially were interested in having him do one painting, but commissioned him to do three when Roberts said three were needed to do the subject justice.

Interestingly, Roberts at first didn't want to paint the robbery at all. But he was persuaded partly through the urging of Hayward's late husband, Lee, who as a local historian helped Roberts learn more about the robbery.

When the Truogs moved out of state about a decade ago, they kindly donated the paintings — appraised to be worth \$25,000 in total — to the historical society. But it stored them because it had no place to display them. Hayward said when she helped pull them out and hang them earlier this month for an initial open house, she got “just chills, just goose bumps, because they're spectacular.”

Said Roberts' son, Gary Miller of Rifle, “Each painting has a narrative, which, really and truly, that's the story right there.”

Mode of escape

The first depicts the first robber taking over the train, and the third shows the three riding their horses off into the night. But Miller seems particularly struck by the second, which depicts the unusual circumstance of train robbers escaping by boat, something perhaps not particularly well known about the incident.

With the paintings being presented in public, “I just think you're going to start to see more awareness of the robbery and how it took place,” Miller said.

Roberts died in 2000, a few years after the death of Lee Hayward, who had become his good friend thanks to the long-ago actions of three mysterious outlaws who robbed the wrong train.
