

# The Cochise County Historical Journal

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## FEATURING:

- The Remarkable Billy Fournier
- The Graves of the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre and the Gray Ranch Outlaws
- My Great-Grandfather Billy Fournier
- History of the Willcox Masonic Lodge
- Book Reviews & New Books!

**The Graves of the Victims of the  
Guadalupe Canyon Massacre  
and the Gray Ranch Outlaw Experience**

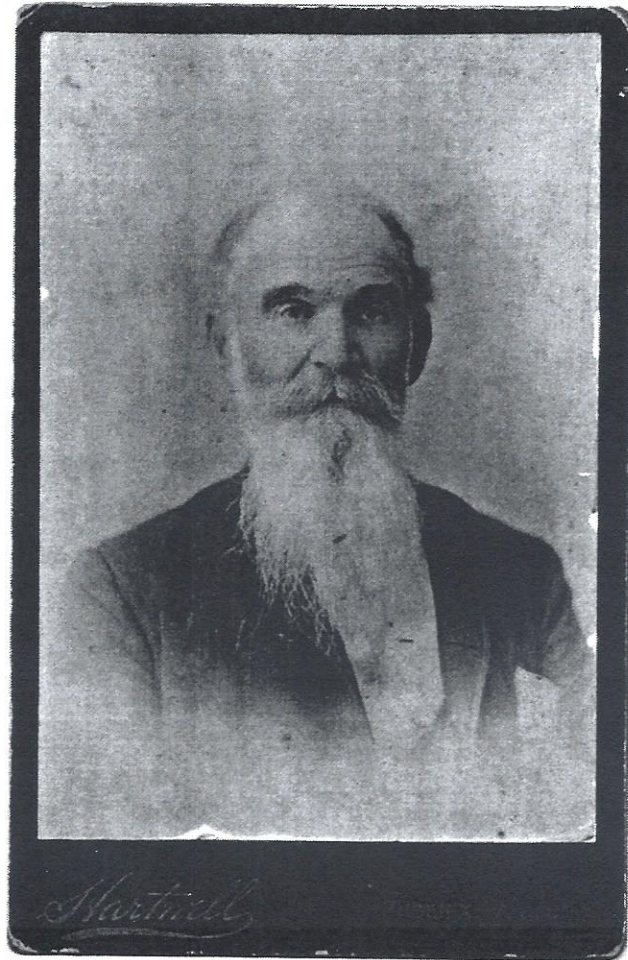
by Michael Eberhardt

INTRODUCTION

While no single biographical work has ever been written about my great-great-uncle Michael "Colonel Mike" Gray, there is a significant body of written materials about various aspects of his life. This article deals with only a two year window in Mike Gray's life while he ranched in the boot heel of New Mexico from 1881-1883. It was during this period when Mike's youngest son, Richard "Dixie Lee" Gray, was murdered in the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre.

The rest of Mike Gray's life was noteworthy in terms of various accomplishments. They included:

1. service with Sam Houston in the Mexican War (The Gray family knew Houston well when Mike's father, Pleasant Gray, founded Huntsville, Texas before the family moved to California in 1849 as part of the Gold Rush.)



Michael Gray  
*Courtesy of Mrs. Barbara Schierenberg,  
Sacramento*

2. election as sheriff in Yuba County, California
3. service as Sergeant at Arms for the California Assembly
4. owner of a hotel in Mazatlán, Mexico
5. service as Justice of the Peace in Tombstone and as the Clerk to the Common Council in Tombstone
6. co-owner of the *Way-Up* mine in Tombstone and litigant with the Tombstone Mill and Mining Company in a landmark mining law 1883 case where the Arizona Territorial Supreme Court ruled in the favor of the *Way-Up* owners
7. operator of a hotel and restaurant in Tombstone
8. part owner of the infamous Tombstone Townsite Company
9. appointment to the four-member executive committee in Tombstone to manage militia affairs in response to the Apache attacks in 1881
10. election to the Arizona House of Representatives in 1886, 1892, 1898, and 1900
11. candidate for U.S. Marshal in the Arizona Territory in 1893
12. owner of the abandoned Camp Rucker in the Chiricahua Mountains where he ran a cattle ranch from 1883-1896 and where he frequently fed Army troops chasing Geronimo before his final surrender (Soldiers escorting Geronimo stopped at his Rucker ranch following that final surrender.)

With these and other experiences, it is not difficult to understand why Mike Gray was characterized, in the words of historian Lynn Bailey, as “[a] mover and shaker in Tombstone and Cochise County for decades.” He was also described by Lynn Bailey as “one of the most fearless men in Arizona.”<sup>1</sup>

**Search For the Graves of Richard “Dixie Lee” Gray,  
Newman “Old Man” Clanton, Jim Crane, Billy Lang,  
and Charlie Snow**

It was my discovery in 2007 of the memoirs of John Plesent Gray, Mike Gray’s oldest son, that led me to begin the search for information relating to the most tragic aspect of Gray family life while the family operated what came to be known as the Gray Ranch in the



Newman Haynes  
"Old Man" Clanton

boot heel of New Mexico from 1881-1883. Perhaps no part of Mike Gray's life involved more tragedy than the murder of his 19 year old son, Richard "Dixie Lee" Gray, during what has come to be known as the "Guadalupe Canyon Massacre" on August 13, 1881. Dixie Lee and four other men—outlaw Jim Crane, Newman "Old Man" Clanton (patriarch of the Clanton family), rancher Billy Lang, and ranch hand Charley Snow—were killed when they and two other men were ambushed on that date apparently by Mexicans, according to the initial published account given by one of the two survivors, Billy Byers. It is unclear whether the Mexicans were part of the Mexican police (*Rurales*) or whether they were Mexican rustlers operating near the border of New Mexico.

My search for the location Dixie Lee's grave, which had never been previously established, was most notably enabled by some clues from John's memoirs, which were written in 1940 but not publicized until 1998 when W. Lane Rogers wrote his book entitled *When All Roads Led to Tombstone: A Memoir of John Plesent Gray*.<sup>2</sup>

My discovery of Dixie Lee's grave, and those of the other four murdered men, used John's clues, along with some old fashioned detective work, the chance meeting with a remarkably knowledgeable and delightful woman who grew up on the Gray Ranch, a recent brush fire, and some simple good fortune.

Before I describe the circumstances that led to my discoveries of the graves, let me acknowledge the abundance of information, some of it unpublished, surrounding Mike Gray's life in Cochise County, Arizona and the boot heel of New Mexico from 1879-2000. Besides John Plesent Gray's 1940 memoirs, the most noteworthy materials—many of which touch on events relating to the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre—include those published by authors Lynn Bailey, Roy Young, Ben Traywick, Alden Hayes, and Henry P. Walker. John Gray's memoirs have also been published and annotated by author Neil Carmony. Unpublished materials include those written by archeologists William Gillespie and Mary Ferrell relating to the Camp Rucker site and surrounding areas, and a history of Camp

Rucker by Ellen Predore. (See Sources at the end of this article.)

Some of these materials, along with several contemporaneous newspaper accounts regarding the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre, helped me frame the task of searching for graves. Three published newspaper accounts are most insightful. <sup>3</sup> The *Tombstone Epitaph* published the following story on August 16, 1881:

#### *MORE BORDER TROUBLES*

*Mexicans on a Raid – five men killed including the notorious Jim Crane*

*About half past four o'clock last evening news reached town that Dick Gray, youngest son of M. Gray of our city and well known here, had been killed together with four others by Mexicans near the town of Gillespie, New Mexico. The news caused considerable excitement and knots of curious inquirers gathered about the streets eager to hear the particulars. About an hour later Andy Aines and Joe Trebble arrived in town from the scene of the murders and confirmed the news. There are several reports as to the causes that led to this lamentable affair. The immediate particulars are about as follows: A party consisting of Wm. Lang, Dick Gray, Jim Crane, Charlie Snow, the senior Clanton, Wm. Byers, and Harry Ernschaw camped last Friday night in Guadalupe Canyon about one hundred and ten miles east from Tombstone and very near to the Mexican line. Early on Saturday the party was attacked by Mexicans and Lang, Gray, Crane, Snow and Clanton were killed. Byers escaped with a wound in the abdomen while Ernschaw ran away amidst a shower of bullets, one of which grazed his nose. It is estimated that the Mexican party numbered from 25 to 30 men. The condition of the camp indicated that the attack was made just as the murdered men were about getting up; one had evidently been killed while yet laying down.*

*Jim Crane, it would be remembered, was involved in the murder of "Budd" Philpot. He joined the fated party, we are informed, at midnight Friday and was only camped with them for the night. He was a fugitive from Justice and an outlaw and the six bullets that struck him were certainly well expended. Wm. Lang was a young*

*man about 22 years of age and had been in that section of the country with his cattle about three months. In conversation with his father last evening, our reporter learned that the two came to Arizona from Kansas about five months ago. They are men of large capital, have had an extended experience in the stock business and intended putting about 10,000 head of cattle on their range had it not been for these border troubles. The son was bringing in some beef cattle for the Tombstone market when killed. Mr. Lang leaves today to see that his son's body is properly buried and to move the cattle.*

*It is certainly lamentable that the good should be slain with the bad and yet this was nothing more than was to be expected as a result of the raids from both sides of the line. For example, we understand that a party of "rustlers" as they are called, went down into Mexico last month and rounded up some cattle. They were followed by the Mexicans who got so close upon them that they were obliged to abandon the stock. This was done in the vicinity of the late murders. The Mexicans took the stock and started back for home; at the same time picking up such cattle and horses, as they chanced to meet. The stock was missed and a party of 16 Americans started in pursuit, overtook the Mexicans, had a fight with them, and retook the stock. This occurred during the latter part of July. If this is true, it is probable that the recent raiders were some of the same party defeated last month.*

Another article, which narrates Billy Byers' account in more detail, appears in the *Arizona Weekly Star* on September 1, 1881:

#### STORY OF AN EYEWITNESS

*One of the ill-fated Lang party tells how they were murdered.*

*Billy Byers, one of the two who were fortunate to escape at the time of the murder of the Lang party, near the Chihuahua line, by Mexicans, came into Tombstone Monday, bringing with him the wagon which the party had with them at the time. It had some 30 bullet holes in it, showing that a large number of shots were fired and that the attacking party were far from being good marksmen. Byers is rather under the medium size, has light hair, a fair com-*



*plexion, and a quiet determined look. He came from Leavenworth, Kansas, last spring. A Nugget reporter interviewed Byers, who gave the following version of the killings.*

We pitched our camp in a small swag between three low hills, which formed a sort of triangle around the camp, and at about day-break the cattle appeared uneasy and showed signs of stampeding, when Will Lang said to Charlie Snow, who was guarding the cattle, 'Charley, get your gun. I think there's a bear up there, and, if so, kill it.' Charley then rode up one of the hills when the Mexicans opened fire, shooting him and pouring a volley into the camp. At the time they fired Dick Gray, Jim Crane, and myself had not got up, but Will Lang, 'Old Man' Clanton, and Harry Ernshaw were up or dressing. Gray, Crane and Clanton were shot at the first fire, and almost instantly killed. When they first fired and killed Charley Snow I thought the boys were firing at a bear, jumped out of my blankets, and as I got up the boys around me were shot. As soon as I saw what was up, I looked for my rifle, and not seeing it, grabbed my revolver, and seeing them shooting at us from all sides, started to run, but had not gone forty feet when I was shot across my body, but I didn't fall, and in a few more steps was hit in my arm, knocked the pistol out of my hand and I fell down.

When I went down, Harry and Will passed me both running for the canyon. Soon Will fell, shot through the legs and he then turned his revolver loose, and I think killed one Mexican and wounded another, as one man was killed and another badly wounded and he was the only one that did much fighting.

You must remember that the reason we had no chance to fight was that the Mexicans had crawled up behind the low hills mentioned, and being almost over us fired right down among us. We could see nothing but little whiffs of smoke. Soon after, I saw some Mexicans coming from the direction Will and Harry had run, wearing their hats, and then I thought they had been killed or had lost their hats in getting away.

When I saw the Mexicans begin stripping the bodies, I took off what clothes I had, even my finger ring, and lay stretched out with my face down and I was all bloody from my wounds, I thought they would pass me by thinking I was dead, and had already been

stripped. I was not mistaken, for they never touched me, but as one fellow passed me on horseback he fired several shots at me, one grazing my head and the others striking at my side, throwing dirt over me. But I kept perfectly still and he rode on. They stripped the bodies, cup open the valises, took all the horses and saddles, and, in fact, everything they could, possibly getting altogether, including money, \$2,000.

The only way I can account for Harry's escape is that when Will began shooting at them, they turned most of their guns on him and that gave Harry a chance to get away. After they rode off I waited a long time, thinking they might come back or were watching. Finally, I crawled to where my pistol was and secured that, and then I heard someone and cocked my pistol determined to shoot if it was a Mexican, but it was one of the boys from the ranch, who having heard the shooting, rode over. He put me on his horse and took me over to the canyon, saying he would come back for me at night, but he didn't and I started for the ranch and was not found until the next day.

Finally, another account published in the *Sacramento Daily Record Union* on August 19, 1881, adds some perspective as to who was responsible for the killings:

*Tombstone August 18th*

*General Adolfo Dominguez has just arrived from the frontier of Sonora, where he holds the position of Adjutant under General Jose Otero, now in command of the troops on the Mexican frontier. General Dominguez said:*

Our people have been great sufferers. We have lost many citizens killed and much property stolen. We are therefore taking active steps to protect our citizens and repel raiders. There are 200 regulars, besides the militia, on the line, and three forts and supply camps are to be established at once. Every precaution will be taken to protect both our own citizens and such Americans as are engaged in legitimate industry within our lives. I hope to effect an arrangement by which a most thorough harmonious and efficient co-operation may exist between the American and Mexican troops operating

on the border. We can only drive out these thieves and murders by united action. We are not only willing but very anxious that such united action should exist.

Affairs have gradually been growing more desperate. It is estimated that within the last month more than ten citizens have been killed and upward of \$20,000 worth of property taken.

*Two companies of the Sixth Cavalry have been ordered from Camp Huachuca to Camp Grant, the nearest post to the scene of trouble.*

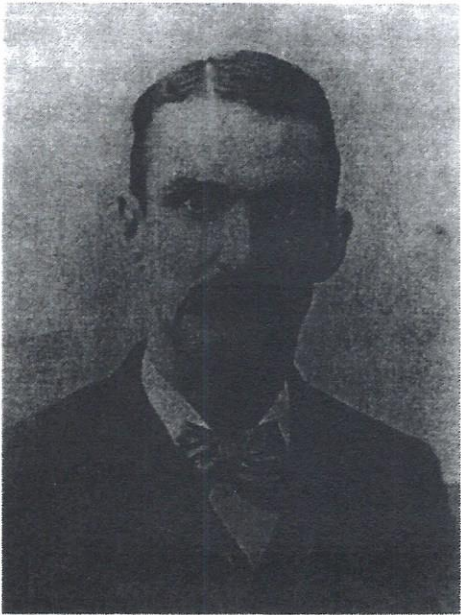
*General Otero has ordered Captain Carrillo, with his company, to the line where the raiders were expected to cross with their plunder, as the courier had ridden day and night, Captain Carrillo thought he must be some distance ahead of the raiders. It is not improbable that the killing in Guadalupe Canyon might have been done by the Mexican regulars under Captain Carrillo, as they were headed in that direction. Carrillo has about fifty men in his company.*

Dixie Lee's murder in August 1881 occurred shortly after Mike Gray, with the assistance of his sons, sought to establish their title to thousands of acres in the vast rich grasslands in the Animas Valley of southwestern New Mexico. The Gray's claim was "acquired" earlier in 1881 when Mike paid the outlaw William "Curly Bill" Brocius \$300 for his "squatter's rights" to what would become today a ranch of over 300,000 acres. It is still referred to as the Gray Ranch even though Mike Gray owned it for less than three years. This "acquisition" process is simply described as one where men like Gray, seeking to own cattle ranches in New Mexico, would claim or acquire "squatter's rights" and then perfect title through the New Mexico "preemption" laws that ultimately provided a right to ownership if the acquirer built and maintained a residence on the property.

Curly Bill Brocius was no stranger to Mike Gray; while Gray was Justice of the Peace in Tombstone, Curly Bill had appeared before him as a defendant on at least one prior occasion, but the actual circumstances of how Mike Gray came to negotiate the \$300 transaction are not known.

Some 50 miles from Tombstone, the Gray Ranch was in New Mexico with hostile elements—outlaws seeking refuge from Arizona lawmen and cattle rustlers from both sides of the border. In addition, the Clanton family had a ranch nearby the Gray Ranch, as did the McLaury family. Both families obviously acquired their own notoriety at the gunfight at the OK Corral which occurred only three months after the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre.

While Mike Gray and his two sons built the ranch house and started their cattle operations in order to perfect their legal claim to the Gray Ranch, there were frequent trips back and forth to Tomb-



John Plesent Gray

stone where they maintained their original residence on Fremont Street. As John recounts in his memoirs, Dixie Lee was about to embark on one of these trips back to Tombstone from the ranch when, at the admonishment of his family to not travel alone in light of recent murders, he was persuaded to travel south from the Gray ranch house and join up with a cattle drive from the Lang ranch that was also headed west toward Tombstone. This “safety in numbers” strategy turned out to be fateful, in light of the proximity of

Guadalupe Canyon to the dangerous Mexican border. This diversion to the south actually took Dixie Lee away from the normal route that the Grays would travel to Tombstone. Their standard northerly route, coincidentally, was taken by John Gray a couple months later when he stopped for lunch at the ranch of the McLaury brothers a short time before they were killed at the OK Corral along with one of Old Man Clanton’s sons, Billy Clanton.

I often re-read John's graphic account of finding Dixie Lee's body, in part wondering what personal agony he must have endured with the discovery of his murdered younger brother and what anguish Mike suffered as he buried a son still in his teens. After a number of readings, I realized that while John had left no explicit explanation as to where Dixie Lee was buried, he had left a clue, and I became determined to pursue it. In John's words, he explained "...we buried the four bodies in a little square plot on the top of a nearby knoll..."<sup>4</sup> The coffins were made from flooring ripped from the Gray ranch house. So I concluded that the graves must be on a knoll somewhere near the old ranch house site. The four bodies buried on the knoll to which John referred to in his memoirs were those of Dixie Lee, Crane, Lang, and Old Man Clanton; John's memoirs clearly state that they buried the fifth victim, Charley Snow, where he was found in Guadalupe Canyon because the body was in such poor condition, having been repeatedly shot by the attackers.<sup>5</sup>

In 2009 the search for Dixie Lee's grave began in earnest. Public access to the Gray Ranch is not available. It was purchased in 1990 by the Nature Conservancy and then subsequently conveyed to a private foundation which has sought to restore the depleted grasslands of the original ranch. The Nature Conservancy purchase price of \$18 million stands in stark contrast to the \$300 paid by Mike Gray to Curly Bill in 1881, or the \$12,000 paid to Mike Gray in 1883 when he sold the ranch to a group of investors organized by the Hearst family, with whom Mike was acquainted from his days in northern California before coming to Tombstone. Despite the restrictive access appropriately in place by the current owners of the Gray Ranch as they seek to re-establish native grasslands, my request to visit the ranch with my brother Eric was granted because of our relationship to Mike Gray. I am most grateful to the current owners for granting access on that initial visit and three subsequent ones.

On that initial visit to the Gray Ranch, my brother and I were not allowed to roam alone across the thousands of acres on the ranch with its vast valleys and the picturesque mountain ranges that frame those valleys. Even today, with its rich grasslands and springs large-

ly gone, one can appreciate what Mike Gray and his sons discovered in 1881. For our initial visit, we were fortuitously escorted by the ranch's head of security. Not your typical security chief, she was a woman whose father had been ranch foreman at the Gray Ranch for many years, and her two sons still drove cattle on the ranch in recent years. Her seriousness of purpose and toughness were tempered by a genuine friendliness and deep reverence for the Gray Ranch. Among other security duties she served as an unofficial extension of the Border Patrol agents who routinely travel the Gray Ranch and the other properties to the south where frequent illegal border crossings occur. It quickly became apparent to me and my brother that our escort for the day was not only intimately familiar with the Gray Ranch but an entertaining and willing source of both fact and lore—but mostly fact.

As we drove for hours around the ranch soaking in its vastness, I clearly had in mind John's description of burying Dixie Lee on a knoll near the old ranch house. A few hours into our journey around the ranch, with the three of us squeezed into the front seat of her pickup with a rifle at her feet, I casually inquired if she knew the exact location of the original ranch house. She said nothing of that structure still existed but a portion of what she understood was an adjacent outbuilding did still stand. We asked to go there, and upon arrival and inspection of the remnants, my brother and I scanned the surrounding area and observed a number of knolls since the immediate area is particularly hilly. Since our escort had literally grown up on the ranch, it seemed worth asking, albeit a long shot, whether she knew of any graves in that area on a knoll. Remarkably, she said that she did! She commented that, while growing up on the ranch as a young girl, she had seen some graves but had no idea who was buried there. I told her of John's description of the burial site on a knoll, and we began traversing the nearby knolls one by one; she remembered that the graves were nearby but not certain of the particular knoll. Our anxiety grew as we covered one knoll after another. While I had not totally despaired, I was becoming skeptical that any grave markers would still be visible. Undeterred, we trudged over knoll after knoll and, finally, there they were. One obviously larger

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grave marker was made of a mortar type material, with a hollowed out core for what served as an apparent holder of a wooden cross—only the weathered remnants of which remained. Nearby were two small crosses in the ground made of the same mortar-like material. This had to be the grave of Dixie Lee, and those of Jim Crane and Billy Lang. (John Gray's memoirs reported that, while Old Man Clanton was originally buried on the same knoll, the Clanton family removed it shortly thereafter and he was buried again in the Boot Hill Cemetery at Tombstone where his marker still exists.)

Only on a later trip back to the grave site, I placed a granite stone marker that designates the location of Dixie Lee's grave and those of Crane and Lang. We also observed one other circumstance of note. Unfortunately, my brother had passed away after our first trip when the graves were discovered, but on the subsequent trip I was accompanied by my good friend, Art Hobbs, who assisted me in taking the granite marker to the site. At the grave site, Art noticed an obvious depression in the otherwise smooth ground near the original mortar grave markers, and that depression was about the width and length of a coffin. The site of Old Man Clanton's original burial? A very good chance.



The author at the Gray Ranch graves



One of the two original markers



The new marker placed by the author



### **Charley Snow's Grave in the Guadalupe Canyon**

While the family mystery of where Dixie Lee was buried was solved, and evidence of the graves of Crane and Lang established, I began to wonder about the grave of Charley Snow, the fifth murder victim of the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre whose body was so badly riddled with bullets that John Gray decided to bury Charley where they found him in the Canyon.

Over the years there had been differing speculations as to the exact site of the massacre, with only two written contemporaneous accounts about the event—those of John Gray and Billy Byers—and neither identified a precise location. Guadalupe Canyon is now home to a single ranch; several others have been subsumed over the years into ownership by a single family, and like the Gray Ranch, it is not open to the public. During my communications in recent years with the current owners, it was clear to me that they had developed an understanding as to the location of the massacre site, in large part based on the accounts passed down by the McDonald family whose members had lived in the area well back into the late 1800s and early 1900s. The McDonald family information was apparently derived from a family member discussion with the driver of the wagon that went to Guadalupe Canyon to pick up the bodies after the massacre. In fact, John's memoirs specifically refer to a wagon being driven from the Gray Ranch to the ambush site. That information from the wagon driver to the McDonalds identified the massacre site at a place in the Canyon subsequently marked by an old schoolhouse and near an old gate and corral that still partially stand. It is also near a stream that would have been a natural overnight camp for a cattle drive.

Armed with this information, and Billy Byers' reference to three nearby low hills, I requested access to the ranch in Guadalupe Canyon, primarily thinking that I might be able to identify where Dixie Lee had been shot. The likelihood of locating Charley Snow's grave some 132 years later seemed remote until a remark was made by the ranch owner a few months before he granted us permission to enter

the ranch. He somewhat matter-of-factly mentioned that there had been a brush fire a couple years earlier, near what they had believed was the massacre site; the fire had uncovered what appeared to be a grave. While the current ranch owner was aware of the general history of the massacre, he was not familiar with John Gray's account describing that Charley Snow was buried where his body was found. Therefore, the potential significance of the grave he had discovered had not been apparent until I mentioned John's account. Now arrangements for the trip to Guadalupe Canyon took on even greater importance; I might not only be able to stand where Dixie Lee and the others were ambushed, but the discovery of the exact location of Charley Snow's grave could become more than a remote possibility.

In 1881 and for decades thereafter Guadalupe Canyon had open range areas, like the Gray Ranch just to the north. But unlike the Gray Ranch—which still has vast areas of open grassland areas—many of the Guadalupe Canyon grazing areas have become overgrown with an assortment of trees and brush. Our entry into Guadalupe Canyon, over what must have been the original path of any cattle drive in or out of the Canyon, was over rugged terrain, marked on each side



Site of what is believed to be the grave of Charley Snow



The author and Art Hobbs at the Snow grave



The area surrounding the Snow grave

with interesting rock formations and along an old creek bed. Our escorts took us to the fence and corral that earmarked the massacre location passed down in the McDonald family accounts, and it was easy to see the higher vantage points in the sloping hills near that site where the Mexicans likely waited in ambush. These appeared to be the hills described by Byers. Not far away was a pile of rocks that had been carefully arranged in a configuration that would certainly match that of a grave. Some rusted metal materials (perhaps an old enclosure) lie under a portion of the rocks. This seemed to be the likely site of Charley Snow's burial.

### **The Gray Family Relationship with Jim Crane and other Cowboys**

While some might simply attribute to coincidence or circumstance the fact that Dixie Lee was ambushed along with the outlaw and murderer Jim Crane, and that the Grays buried Crane next to Dixie Lee as a matter of convenience, I think more can be read into these events in terms of the relationship of the Gray family with Jim Crane, and other criminals of the time, like Curly Bill Brocius and Billy Leonard. Furthermore, the Gray's relationship with the Clantons, who like Crane had a nearby "hideout" ranch in New Mexico, as well as the relationship with the McLaury brothers, underscores what John Gray said in his memoirs when he noted that on the "frontier in those pioneer times, if you hoped to survive you had to be a good neighbor to all." He emphasizes in his memoirs that the Grays knew and befriended a large number of rustlers, observing "[t]he rustlers were not wholly a bad set" and that, "[t]hey were young men and boys hardly out of their teens who fell into this life in search of adventure." But he also clearly acknowledged that the Grays knew that there were certain men among these rustlers who "knew crime as a business."<sup>6</sup> These men were not just adventuresome, and Jim Crane was one such man whose violence was well documented and known to the Grays.

As a justice of the peace in Tombstone, Mike Gray definitely knew which men had adopted violent crime as a business. Besides

Crane, whose path crossed frequently with the Grays prior to Dixie Lee's murder, Mike Gray had known Curly Bill Brocius prior to Gray's acquisition of Brocius' squatter rights for \$300 for what would become the Gray Ranch. In early November 1880, Curly Bill had in fact appeared before Mike Gray in his justice of the peace capacity following Curly Bill's arrest for the fatal shooting of Marshal Fred White, although Curly Bill was never charged with a crime.<sup>7</sup> Although Mike Gray apparently had nothing to do with the decision not to charge Brocius, the Gray acquisition of Curly Bill's squatter's rights to the land in nearby New Mexico occurred very soon after that case.

Perhaps most revealing in terms of the Gray's familiarity with outlaws and rustlers are some of the events involving Crane and Billy Leonard. Consider the following, as reported in John's memoirs:

- After acquiring Curly Bill's rights to what would become the Gray Ranch (with Curly Bill's guarantee that his rights were valid), the Grays were confronted one day at the ranch by a mysterious character named George Washington Jones. Jones gave the Grays a letter challenging the Gray's rights to the ranch and demanded that they abandon the ranch. A short while later the Grays mentioned this threat to Jim Crane who knew that Curly Bill had sold his "squatter's right" to the Grays and effectively guaranteed whatever his rights were. In response to the Grays, Crane stated that he knew who Jones was, although that was not his true name (no surprise there!). Whether it was in deference to protecting the integrity of Curly Bill's transaction or out of respect to Mike Gray (or possibly both), Crane subsequently reported to the Grays that they would have no further problems with Jones and that Crane had "fixed him good and plenty." The Grays never saw Jones again and believed Crane had enforced Curly Bill's guarantee which was recognized as "the law."<sup>8</sup> Was Jones murdered by Crane under his brand of the law? Quite possibly he was.

- Jim Crane, Billy Leonard, and Harry Head are generally regarded as the three men who attempted to rob the Tombstone-to-Benson stage on March 15, 1881. Two men were killed—although

nothing was taken due to the evasive actions taken by stage coach driver, Bob Paul. A \$3,600 reward was offered for the killers "dead or alive." The brothers Ike and Bill Heslett shot Leonard and Head in early June 1881, apparently in an effort to claim the reward. A few days later, having learned of the killing of his two partners, Crane (and possibly others at his behest) reportedly shot and killed the Heslett brothers in a saloon in Eureka, New Mexico (later renamed Hachita). Mike Gray's name is sometimes injected into this series of events, and particularly for being responsible for the Heslett brother killings, because, at the time of their murders, Gray had apparently negotiated the purchase of the 320 acre Heslett ranch which was close to the Gray ranch. With the killings the sale was never finalized and the Heslett brothers left the property to their family back in Kansas. With such a clear motive of his own, Crane seemingly needed no encouragement from Mike Gray. It is odd though that the reported amount of Gray's planned purchase from the Hesletts was \$4,000, a relatively substantial sum compared to the \$300 paid to Curly Bill's rights to a much larger tract of land. Was there a better opportunity for Mike Gray with the Hesletts dead? That certainly did not turn out to be the case since he did not ever acquire their 320 acres.<sup>9</sup>

- While the exact destination of the men who fled the scene of the Benson stage coach killings is not known, John recounts that one day thereafter he came upon Crane, Leonard, and Head near the Gray ranch "well armed, but their clothing was almost in tatters and they looked wild, wooly and hungry." John concluded that they must have been the three involved in the Benson stage coach robbery, but invited them to the ranch nonetheless to be fed and outfitted with "what clothing we could spare."<sup>10</sup>

- According to John Gray's memoirs, Crane confessed, to the Grays, his involvement in the March 1881 attempted Benson stage coach robbery and killings. Such a confession certainly suggests a level of confidence among these men. Crane further claimed that the Earps were behind the planned holdup which had gone awry, and John indicates in his memoirs that the Grays urged Crane to turn himself in (presumably to someone other than the Earps, like Tombstone Cochise County Sheriff John Behan) in hopes that he might

receive "a light sentence." There is no proof that Crane ever took this advice to heart, but John Gray theorizes that, when Crane joined the cattle drive in the Guadalupe Canyon in August 1881 headed to Tombstone, he did so with the intent to turn himself in. That seems unlikely unless Crane truly feared that the Earps might otherwise find him first and kill him. If, however, that was Crane's intent, it demonstrates some degree of respect by Crane for the urgings of the Grays.<sup>11</sup>

- John's memoirs contain a number of references to occasions when known rustlers would show up to be fed at the Gray Ranch; on one occasion he says 60 of them were there at one time. That the Grays regularly hosted rustlers was apparently not a secret since a bystander in Lordsburg once commented to others, when he saw John in town, that there is "the fellow who feeds all the rustlers." In John's memoirs, Crane is specifically mentioned as a regular lunch time visitor.<sup>12</sup>

- John also refers to an incident when rustlers showed up for lunch one day but also began to steal ammunition at the ranch. Billy Leonard appeared on the scene, admonished the rustlers to return the stolen ammunition, and told them to never again steal from the Grays. This occurred shortly before Leonard was killed by the Hesses, and certainly the Grays could not have been happy with the loss of their protector, Billy Leonard.

- John's memoirs also contain references to the other characters of notoriety. For example, he discusses the Ringo and Clanton ranches near the Gray ranch, and Mike's acquisition of them through the same type of squatter's claim he exercised following his transaction with Curly Bill. Another person mentioned in the memoirs, and a man of questionable character, was the murderer Frank Leslie. Leslie was also a lunch guest of the Grays on one occasion, coincidentally the same day when Jim Crane had also shown up for lunch, and while Leslie held a warrant for Crane in his pocket, he decided not to arrest Crane. Whether this was out of fear of Crane or in deference to the Grays, it is hard to know, but Leslie said in a low voice (outside of Crane's earshot) as he rode off, "Tell Jim if they want him someone else will have to serve the warrant."<sup>13</sup>

- Finally, the Gray family views of the Earps are clearly stated

by John when he characterizes the killing of Ike Clanton and the McLaury brothers as “engineered” by the Earps. He also held a personal conclusion that Wyatt Earp was a “gunman” hired to be a lawyer.<sup>14</sup>

So when John Gray discovered Jim Crane’s body lying near Dixie Lee’s in the Guadalupe Canyon, was he just being decent in returning the body to the Gray ranch for burial? The same question can likely be asked as to Old Man Clanton given his somewhat questionable (but probably not violent) reputation. The place selected by Mike and John Gray for Dixie Lee’s grave overlooks a special place. It is quite close, I believe, to the spot where the Grays first arrived in the Animas Valley in early 1881, and John describes it as a “big green meadow...covered with red-top clover and watered with numerous springs.”<sup>15</sup> Fittingly, of all the springs that once dotted the ranch, only one is still obvious near the old ranch house site, and it is visible from the top of the knoll where Dixie Lee and the others are buried. I think Jim Crane in particular was buried in such a place of family relevance because, despite all his flaws, Crane had a mutual friendship with the Grays. They took meals together frequently, and Crane had performed an enormous service to the Grays by ensuring their future when Jones threatened the Grays. One can almost conclude that but for Crane’s intervention with Jones, the Gray Ranch may have never become reality.

In his memoirs John explains that the burial on the knoll “...render[ed] an equal and honorable reverence to all.” The Grays were not fooled by who Crane really was, but as John said, “Jim Crane, the outlaw, had gone before a Higher Court, and we were no more his judges.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Were the Mexicans Alone in Guadalupe Canyon for the Massacre?**

Assume for the sake of discussion that John Plesent Gray had no motive to fabricate Jim Crane’s confession in the Benson stagecoach robbery, or Crane’s assertion that the Earps were the planners



behind that robbery. Once the robbery failed, and after Crane's two cohorts in the robbery (Bill Leonard and Harry Head) were dead at the hands of the Heslett brothers, who needed Crane's silence the most? Also assume for discussion that Jim Crane, as John Gray reports in his memoirs, had been persuaded by the Grays to turn himself in and to join Lang's cattle drive to Tombstone in order to do so.

In his book, *Wyatt Earp Angel of Death*, Ben Traywick marshals a number of circumstances that are intended to support his theory that the Earps and a posse that included Doc Holliday were present with Mexican Rurales at the time of the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre. Traywick relies heavily on his personal interview in the 1970s of Veedol Samaniego, a resident of Sonora, Mexico. A photo of Veedol appears in Traywick's book.<sup>17</sup> According to Veedol, his grandfather was part of a Rurales company formed by Captain Carillo, and in August of 1881 the company rode toward the border where, just south of the border, they met a group of Americans who combined forces and were subsequently involved in the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre.<sup>18</sup> Traywick believes that these Americans were the Earp-lead posse which included his brother Warren, Doc Holliday and scout Sherman McMasters. Traywick cites a communication from U.S. Marshal Crawley Dake sent to the U.S. Attorney General indicating that a posse, led by Wyatt Earp, had been sent out on August 5, 1881 to search for outlaws involved in the rustling activities that were heavily concentrated in the area of the boot heel of New Mexico.<sup>19</sup> Traywick further attributes to Sherman McMasters, the scout for Earp's posse, the sighting of the Lang cattle herd on August 12, 1881—the day before the massacre. On the morning of the 13th, McMasters identified Old Man Clanton and Jim Crane as being present with others tending the herd. Traywick cites no source for the McMaster account, although it is quite detailed in his book.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Traywick theorized that the Earps wanted Jim Crane to be captured alive, but the Mexicans killed Crane and the others without giving them an opportunity to surrender. Traywick

believes that the Earps wanted Crane alive so he could “tell the story of the attempted robbery at Drew’s station.” If in fact, as John Gray reports, Crane was headed to Tombstone with Lang in order to turn himself in—and presumably to implicate the Earps in the robbery—then Traywick would be wrong in assuming Crane was more valuable alive than dead. Ben Traywick’s theory is interesting, but there is no clear evidence as to whether Earp’s posse was present and involved in the Guadalupe Canyon Massacre. Billy Byer’s published newspaper account includes no references to Americans, although Traywick discounts this absence given the chaos surrounding the event and the inability of Byers to see all who were present.

Billy Byers lived until he was 90 years old. His “favorite” great granddaughter still resides in Portal, Arizona. She was six years old when Billy Byers died. The great granddaughter’s father-in-law was Alden Hayes, author of the book *Portal to Paradise*. In that book, Hayes also gives an account of the Guadalupe Canyon massacre.<sup>21</sup> While it is generally reflective of the published newspaper accounts in 1881, and John Plesent Gray’s account in his memoirs, it does contain some details previously not published.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that Alden Hayes had access to some Byers family members whose information regarding the event contained other recollections of Byers. Byers’ son and grandson were known to have often spoken of the massacre with him. Both are now deceased, but a number of years ago they made a failed attempt to enter the Guadalupe Canyon Ranch in an effort to visit the site of the massacre. They were in part also motivated to search for the ring that Byers had buried where he had fallen after being shot, when he had played dead as the Mexicans ransacked the camp and robbed the murdered. In any event, Alden Hayes’ account also does not include any reference to anyone other than Mexicans being responsible. Regardless of who were the murderers at the Guadalupe Canyon massacre, there is a fateful irony that Jim Crane and a member of the Gray family, who had befriended him, died together.

### Conclusion

The anguish of Dixie Lee's murder, and the constant reminder of the grave on the knoll near the ranch house, proved too much for Mike Gray, and he sold the Gray Ranch in 1883. It is remarkable that, despite his short ownership and the fact that several successor owners have operated the ranch under different names, it remains to this day commonly referred to as the Gray Ranch. That in itself says something about Mike Gray, and I am grateful that John's words enabled the discovery and marking of Dixie Lee's grave some 132 years later.

I do not believe Mike Gray was the "silent leader of the Cowboys" as one author has postulated.<sup>23</sup> Certainly, evidence of Mike Gray's complicity in the crimes of Crane, Curly Bill, and others does not exist. The circumstantial evidence supports the view that he was a clever pragmatist and opportunist living in a dangerous place and time. Perhaps out of necessity, as well as his respect for loyalty and friendship, he developed his views of men regardless of their lawlessness. In the end, as much as any person in the Tombstone era, he found a reason to value many different sorts of men, including any who contributed to his survival or who enabled his ranching dream in the Animas Valley.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The best biographical sketches for Mike Gray are found in Lynn R. Bailey and Don Chaput, *Cochise County Stalwarts, A Who's Who of the Territorial Years*, (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 2000), pp. 154-156, and in the memoirs of his son John Plesent Gray, as edited and annotated by W. Lane Rogers, *When All Roads Led to Tombstone*, (Boise: Tamarack Books, 1998). John Plesent Gray provides a colorful summary of various aspects of Mike Gray's life in Rogers' book, pp. 136-146.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. While John Plesent Gray's memoirs, written many years after some of the events that he reports, contain some factual mistakes as noted by W. Lane Rogers, the general content and detail has, in the words of historian John Duncklee, provided "enrichment to the history of Southern Arizona and the Southwest ('Foreword,' p. x)." Furthermore, John Plesent Gray was an educated man, having graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1880, and his memoirs are not only a serious attempt to capture key facts and events, but also are in a literary style that reflects his education. Rogers' ability to annotate the memoirs

adds critical context to Gray's work.

<sup>3</sup> Besides the three published newspaper accounts in this article, two others appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Record Union*, August 18, 1881, and in *The Arizona Weekly Star*, August 25, 1881, "Border Warfare."

<sup>4</sup> Gray and Rogers, *When All Roads Led to Tombstone*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85. Gray characterizes rustlers of the 1880s as men with a "strain of honor in their heart, which placed them several notches ahead of our present day [1940] criminals." Throughout Gray's memoirs, his characterizations of those commonly referred to as "cowboys" are tempered with a practical recognition that most were just men trying to survive, and only a handful "hunted trouble."

<sup>7</sup> Lynn R. Bailey, *The "Unwashed Crowd:" Stockmen and Ranches of the San Simon and Sulphur Spring Valleys, Arizona Territory, 1878-1900*, (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 2014), p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Gray and Rogers, *When All Roads Led to Tombstone*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Roy B. Young, "The Heslet Brothers in Grant County, New Mexico," *Western Outlaw*, December 23, 2009. In an excellent piece of research, Young chronicles the events leading up to the killings of the Heslets, including the various accounts of who killed them and where the murders occurred. While the versions vary to some extent, the complicity of Jim Crane seems certain.

<sup>10</sup> Gray and Rogers, *When All Roads Led to Tombstone*, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Traywick, *Wyatt Earp Angel of Death*, (Honolulu: Talei Publishers, 2007), p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> Alden Hayes, *A Portal to Paradise*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), pp. 125-132.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. Hayes describes Dixie Lee Gray's travel first to the Lang Ranch and then his subsequent joining with others in Guadalupe Canyon the night before the murders. These details, appearing nowhere else, seem likely derived from conversations with Byers' family members many years after the events. Unfortunately, a review of Hayes' research papers at the Arizona Historical Society Archives, Tucson, provides no further detail as to his sources.

<sup>23</sup> Roy B. Young, *Cochise County Cowboy War*, (Apache, Oklahoma: Young and Sons Enterprise, 1999), p. 44; Karen Holliday Tanner, *Doc Holliday: A Family Portrait*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 153-154. She notes "...Mike Gray...had strong connections with the lawless cowboy faction..." and further comments on the proximity of the Ringo and Clanton ranches to the Gray

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Ranch. Regarding Mike Gray's attempt to acquire the Heslet ranch, she states, "With Gray controlling the three adjoining ranches, the cowboys would have plenty of room to hide either themselves or their 'hot stock.'" Notwithstanding this speculation, there is no evidence of Mike Gray's complicity in any rustling activity.