



## **South Park, Colorado**

### **Gold Prospecting & The Reynolds Gang**

*By Johnny Walker (Colorado Adventure Guide, Heritage and History)*

Many Confederate soldiers formed into militia groups during the War for Southern Independence in Colorado. They included the Fairplay Unit, Leadville Unit, Denver Unit, and Maces Hole. Col John Heffner was the highest ranking Confederate to operate in the state. He and his officers were forming a regiment at Maces Hole in 1862. They were attacked and driven out of the territory by Union forces from Ft. Garland.

Southern sympathizers, the Reynolds Gang operated in South Park in 1864. In July of that year, Jim Reynolds and eight Confederate "soldiers" launched an attack of the South Park area in what would become the only "invasion" the Colorado Territory during the Civil War. Their plan was to rob the gold mines of South Park to help finance the Confederate Government.

The Reynolds gang started by attacking the ranch of Adolph Guirand on July 24, 1864 and taking horses and cash. They then headed north to raid Dan McLaughlin's stage station, about eight miles out of Fairplay, where the nearby town of Como is located today. They took cash, a gold watch, and horses. It was reported that they made off with about \$3,000. Heading over Kenosha pass toward Denver, the gang robbed the Michigan House stage stop, taking more horses.

A local man, Mr. Berry, began to warn everyone about the Reynolds gang and their Confederate invasion, and tried to raise a posse without success. Mr. Berry followed the gang as far as the Omaha House stage station near the present day town of Conifer. From the Omaha House, the gang headed towards Shaffer's Crossing.

A posse was eventually formed and on July 30, 1864 the Reynolds gang was spotted camping in a small clearing in the forest. A gunfight ensued, in which one of the gang, Owen Singleterry was killed. One of the posse members, a Dr. Cooper, cut off Singleterry's head, took it back to Fairplay and preserved it in alcohol, where it remained on display for many years.

The gang hid their loot and attempted to escape, heading in different directions. It was estimated at the time, that the gang had taken somewhere between \$5,000 and \$100,000 and area locals blamed them for every robbery in the area.

An even bigger posse was raised to capture the fleeing gang. About 75 men joined the posse to find the southern raiders and just four days later, four of them were captured. Tom Holliman was caught 4 or 5 days later as he made his way to Canon City, Colorado. However, Jim Reynolds, his brother John, and another gang member escaped to New Mexico.

As the five captured southern sympathizers were being taken to Fort Lyon, the first stop on their way to Denver for a military trial, they attempted their escape. A fight started in which three of the prisoners were killed, however two managed to take horses in the confusion and escaped.

Years later, John Reynolds lay dying of gunshot wounds suffered in Taos, New Mexico. Before he died, he told the story of how the gang had buried their treasure, to fellow outlaw Albert Brown. He also drew a map, which showed the site of the ambush and the vague location of the treasure. After Reynolds died from his wounds, Brown and his partners traveled to the South Park area, trying to find the treasure. When they arrived at the site, they were disappointed to find that a forest fire had destroyed many landmarks. They reportedly found an old

white hat that once supposedly belonged to the decapitated Singleterry, a headless skeleton, and horse bones in a swamp. They were unable to find the rocked-in prospect hole. Apparently Brown and his partners made three more attempts to find the treasure, but had no luck and finally gave up and returned home. Albert Brown later died in a drunken brawl in Laramie City, Wyoming Territory.

However, before he died, he either gave or showed the map to a Detective David J. Cook, a Colorado Lawman. In an auto-biography by Detective Cook, published in 1897, Cook quotes Reynolds' conversation with Alfred Brown as follows:

"Jim and me buried the treasure the morning before the posse attack on Geneva Gulch. You go up above there a little ways and find where one of our horses mired down in a swamp. On up at the head of the gulch we turned to the right and followed the mountain around a little farther, and just above the head of Deer Creek, we found an old prospect hole at about timberline. There, we placed \$40,000 in greenbacks, wrapped in silk oil cloth, and three cans of gold dust. We filled the mouth of the hole up with stones, and ten steps below, struck a butcher knife into a tree about four feet from the ground and broke the handle off, and left it pointing toward the mouth of the hole."



**A member of the Reynolds Gang  
From "Moonshiners, Robbers, and Frontier Law"  
Lee Hiedeman**

Treasure Hunters come to Fairplay and try your luck. By all accounts, the treasure remains to be found, buried somewhere in the north end of the South Park area.

