

Way We Were  
Wednesday, April 2, 2014  
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Fool Me Twice

In the earliest of days, Park City was very much a part of the Wild West. It was a community based in mining, but it still had its fair share of gunfights, cattle rustling, saloon brawls and horse thievery.

Stealing horses was considered a serious offense. Depending on where the horses were stolen, one may have gotten off relatively easy serving a short jail sentence, or in many cases, repeat offenders found their fate at the end of a hang mans noose. Park City had its share of horse thieves like Harry Taylor and his accomplice in 1922<sup>1</sup>, Thomas Reed in 1883 who was nearly shot for his trouble (and was only missed because the shooters were trying to not hit the horses)<sup>2</sup>, and John Riley who stole horses on two separate occasions in 1884, among others.

John Riley was an Irish immigrant who worked as a foreman for one of Park City's mines. In January of 1884, he was arrested for stealing a horse. He was arrested by Sheriff Allison, the county Sheriff in Coalville at the time, tried, and convicted. Instead of what would normally have been a harsh sentence, he was let go and the charges were waived. The Park Record reported that Mr. Riley was "permitted to go at large on his promise of good behavior"<sup>3</sup>.

This is not where Riley's story ends. On a Friday night six months after the first offense, Riley was arrested for stealing another horse and was, once again, transported by Sheriff Allison to the Coalville jail. Instead of remaining in jail, the Park Record reported that Riley "broke Jail on Monday and is now among the missing"<sup>4</sup>. At the time of print he had still not been found, but was still being hunted for in the area. This time it was assured that his sentence would not be reduced as it was noted, "If he is caught he will have a chance to repent of his evil doings in the Pen at Salt Lake."<sup>5</sup> Riley was not mentioned again beyond this, so it is unknown whether he was found and punished for his criminal behavior.

What can be considered a dangerous occupation, horse thievery has become an important part in the history of the West. Shockingly enough, it still happens today, on a much smaller level, with horses being stolen and taken across U.S. borders to turn a profit. What was thought to be lost to the history of the west, horse thievery is still very much alive today.

The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> Park Record 1922-09-15 Alleged Horse Thief

<sup>2</sup> Park Record 1883 A Scared Horse Thief: An Attempt to Steal one of Drew's Horses Frustrated—Some Excellent shoeing by Officers and citizens

<sup>3</sup> Park Record 1884-07-05 Horse Thief Caught and Lost

<sup>4</sup> Park Record 1884-07-05 Horse Thief Caught and Lost

<sup>5</sup> Park Record 1884-07-05 Horse Thief Caught and Lost



Image# 2000.17.234

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum, Kendall Webb Collection