

Written by Sharlene Minshall  
Tuesday, 01 March 2011 00:00

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From U.S. Highway 20, the Old Trail Town & Museum of the Old West at Cody, Wyoming, looked like random shacks strung along a weathered boardwalk...and it was, sort of. The talkative (and also weathered) gentleman docent gave us his enthusiastic version of its history. Twenty-six historic buildings dating from 1879 to 1901 were reassembled onto Cody's original town site along with artifacts and furnishings gathered from the Wyoming frontier. These structures belonged to or were frequented by the names we associate with rebels and outlaws and exist as a memorial to the "The Old Frontier West."

To give a little personal excitement to the mix, I may have found a long-lost relative. Simpson E. Stilwell, aka Jack Stilwell, aka Comanche Jack, was born in Kansas in 1850. He was six-foot-three with dark curly hair, a lot like my fraternal grandfather, and my maiden name is Stilwell so I at least temporarily claimed him as kin. At 13 he left home for Texas and adventure. By age 18, he was already referred to as a "first-class hardy frontiersmen" and recruited into Maj. George A. Forsyth's company as a scout.

At the fierce 1868 Indian Wars and the Battle of Beecher's Island, Jack and another scout surreptitiously escaped to Ft. Wallace, roughly 110 miles away. The 10th Cavalry rescued Forsyth's men on the ninth day of battle and sealed Jack's claim to fame. He became an Indian Territory scout and guide, eventually studied law and became an Indian Territory judge. Judge Jack died near Cody, Wyoming, in 1903.

His brother, Frank, didn't fare so well. His claim to fame was being murdered by Wyatt Earp in Tucson, Arizona.

### **Tough Times**

Several bodies originally interred elsewhere, were reburied at Old Trail Town. Jack, reburied there in 1984, shares this space with a collection of his countrymen. Only in their 30s, Blind Bill and W. A. Gallagher had a history of horse stealing, forgery, kidnapping and temper. Both were murdered in 1894. Gallagher was killed by Bill Wheaton over a woman called Belle Drewry and when Blind (in one eye only) Bill heard about it, he went after Wheaton. Blind Bill was shot in the back. Wheaton was imprisoned for Gallagher's death. Belle was killed by someone else, somewhere else, in 1897. She's buried there, too. She was 30. They lived hard and they died hard.

The museum includes the log cabin of "Curley," a Crow Indian army scout who helped guide Lt. Col. George A. Custer and the U. S. Seventh Cavalry to the battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. The Rivers Saloon, built in 1888 near Meeteetse, was a favorite watering hole for various colorful cowboys, gold miners, and outlaws whose bullet holes can still be seen in the door. A two-room 1883 log cabin brought in from Buffalo Creek was used as a gathering place by the famous "Hole in The Wall" gang that included Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid and Kid Curry.

### **Jeremiah's Journey**

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[drivethetop10.com](http://drivethetop10.com) [museum-oftheoldwest.org](http://museum-oftheoldwest.org)