

FRONTIER DIARY

The gallows comes to Glenwood

Though it was never used here

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Justice in the American West was swift and final. A person convicted of a serious crime often went to prison. Some, however, paid the ultimate price to society — with their lives. The decisive method of payment was usually carried out in the form of hanging.

Hanging was a precise science, which took into consideration the height and weight of the convicted. Rope stretch and rope length also figured into the calculation.

These factors created a custom noose for each sentenced prisoner. To create a quick death, the prisoner was strapped to a backboard before being dropped through

the gallows' trapdoor. Hanging contrasted lynching. Lynching did not break a person's neck, but instead created death by slow strangulation.

Assistant District Attorney Edward T. Taylor, of Leadville, traveled to Denver in February 1886 to ensure that convicted murderer Si Minnich hung for his crime. Gov. Eaton had received a petition to commute the murderer's sentence to life in prison. Taylor knew a Leadville lynch mob would enact its own justice if the sentenced was reprieved.

Taylor pleaded the case before the governor. After deliberation the afternoon of Feb. 18, Minnich's hanging was upheld. A telegraph to Leadville announced the decision. Minnich swung from the gallows before Taylor returned to town.

Two years later as district attorney, Taylor successfully prosecuted Herman Babcock

in Glenwood Springs for the murder of James M. Riland. The gallows arrived in Glenwood Springs in time for Babcock's Nov. 9, 1888, hanging; however, on Nov. 7, Babcock received a stay of execution and eventually served a prison sentence.

Afterward, the gallows remained idle in Glenwood Springs with no person ever being hung here for their crimes.

Frontier Footnote: The Pinal County Historical Society in Florence, Ariz., contains an extensive display of nooses used to carry out the sentences of Arizona's convicted murderers. We thank the docent who supplied the information on the science of hanging used in this article.

"Frontier Diary" is provided to the Post Independent by the Frontier Historical Society and Museum, 1001 Colorado Ave., Glenwood Springs. Winter hours are 1-4 p.m. Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays.



Photo Courtesy Frontier Historical Society

Edward T. Taylor called the Minnich case an epoch in his life. His successful plea before the governor elevated his legal career and won him confidence with people across Colorado. Later, Taylor dedicated his life to politics, serving 33 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.