

Fred Lambert, a link with frontier days, dies

By HOWARD BRYAN
Tribune Staff Writer

New Mexico has lost one of its last links with the old frontier.

Fred Lambert, early day town marshal of Cimarron and last surviving member of the New Mexico Territorial Mounted Police, died unexpectedly last night in a Raton hospital.

The pioneer lawman, rancher, author, poet and artist had observed his 84th birthday Jan. 23 with a party at his Cimarron home.

Museum

Mr. Lambert, who in recent years had been operating the century-old Maxwell Grist Mill in Cimarron as a museum and tourist attraction, was stricken

ill yesterday at his small and attractive home next to the old mill.

"Fred started complaining of stomach pains," Charles Hornung, Lambert's close friend and biographer, said today in Raton.

"George and Mary Stump drove him to the Northern Colfax County Hospital in Raton late yesterday afternoon, and he died there a few hours later."

Biography

An autopsy was to be performed today to determine the cause of death.

Mr. Hornung, a Boy Scout official who has just completed the manuscript of Lambert's biography, said he visited the pioneer Monday in Cimarron and that he was feeling hale and hearty.

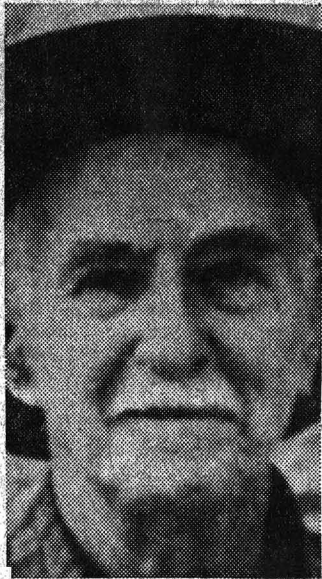
"In fact, he was getting ready to paint the floors of the old mill," he said.

Burial

Hornung said that funeral arrangements have not yet been made, but that Lambert probably will be buried next to his late wife, Katy, in the old hilltop "boot hill" cemetery at the south edge of Cimarron.

"This is the way he wanted it," Hornung said.

Fred Lambert was born on the night of Jan. 23, 1887, in the St. James Hotel in Cimarron, an old Santa Fe Trail landmark which still stands in Cimarron and which is still being operated as a hotel.



Fred Lambert

Stormy

William (Buffalo Bill) Cody, a close family friend who was visiting in the hotel that night, noted the stormy weather outside and christened the newcomer "Cyclone Dick."

The historic St. James Hotel, scene of at least 26 fatal shootings during the frontier period, was founded, owned and operated by Lambert's father, Henry Lambert.

Henry Lambert, a native of Bordeaux, France, came to the United States in 1858. He served as a cook in the field for Gen. Ulysses S. Grant during the early days of the Civil War before being summoned to the White House to be chef for President Abraham Lincoln.

Gold Fever

Henry Lambert got the "gold fever" in 1863, however, and headed down the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico. He lived in Elizabethtown before settling in Cimarron in 1872 and opening the hotel.

Notorious gunfighters and outlaws were frequent customers at the hotel and its saloon, including Clay Allison, Davey Crockett and Black Jack Ketchum.

Buffalo Bill was a frequent visitor to the St. James Hotel, where Fred Lambert was born and reared.

Brings Tricycles

"Bill was very fond of kids," the pioneer once recalled. "One time he bought a bunch of us tricycles, then leaned back in his chair and smiled as we all paraded around him on our trikes."

When Lambert grew older, Buffalo Bill taught him how to shoot. This is probably one of the reasons Fred was a deputy sheriff in Cimarron at the age of 16.

This came about when Colfax County Sheriff Marion Litterell contacted 16-year-old Fred Lambert and asked him to locate a deputy and tell him to arrest some outlaws who were headed that way.

Captures Outlaws

Instead of looking for the deputy sheriff, Fred strapped on his gun, went out after the outlaws himself, and brought them in.

Lambert was town marshal of Cimarron for six years, and at the same time was also a deputy sheriff and special New Mexico Mounted Policeman.

In 1911, Gov. William Mills appointed Lambert a full-time member of the New Mexico Mounted Police, a colorful group of lawmen on horseback — similar to the Texas Rangers — who helped bring law and order to New Mexico during the territorial days.

Youngest Member

Fred Lambert was the youngest member of the Territorial Mounties, and the last survivor.

From 1913 to 1915, Lambert was deputy special officer for the U.S. Indian Service in Santa Fe, in which position he led a number of deputies for the suppression of liquor traffic among the pueblos of northern New Mexico.

Lambert left the Indian Service to help Charles Catron of Santa Fe in the development of Catron's huge Espiritu Santo Land Grant near San Ysidro. Later, he worked five years as an inspector for the New Mexico Cattle Sanitary Board.

Ranch Manager

He managed the TV Ranch at Ute Creek in Colfax County for a while, and went to Kansas City during World War II to perform police work at defense plants.

Returning to New Mexico after the war, Lambert lived in Raton and Albuquerque before returning to his old home in Cimarron.

For a while, he lived in a house trailer just across the street from the old St. James Hotel where he was born.

Stone Mill

Les Davis, prominent Cimarron rancher, later invited Lambert to open and maintain a museum in the old grist mill which Davis owns. The big stone mill was built in the 1860's by Lucien B. Maxwell, owner of the huge Maxwell Land Grant.

Lambert, a wiry little man with gentle eyes and a keen sense of humor, spent the last years of his life managing the mill museum and telling visitors of the history of the old Wild West town.

In his spare time, he wrote manuscripts and painted pictures, all dealing with the Old West, in his home next to the mill.

In Book

Part of his life story is told in the book "Satan's Paradise," a saga of Cimarron written by the late Agnes Morley Cleaveland, and in the book "Haunted Highways," by Ralph Looney, Assistant Managing Editor of The Albuquerque Tribune.

In 1948 he published a limited edition of a book called "Bygone Days of the Old West," consisting of his poems and more than 1,300 of his pen and ink illustrations.

Historical Markers

The leading authority on the history of Cimarron, having been a part of it himself, he had placed historical markers about the old town in recent years which point out landmarks and tell their history.

Cimarron just won't be the same without Fred Lambert.

Survivors include a younger brother, Gene, of Huntington Park, Calif., and an adopted son, Manuel Cruz, of Kansas City.

FRED LAMBERT (1887 - 1971)

Fred Lambert is dead!

It is hard to accept this fact for Fred belonged to the ages. It just seemed that he should go on living forever.

Fred was truly a great little man - with a heart as big as the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that he loved so deeply. He lived a full measure of life....much greater than than the average man. His life spanned the colorful and dramatic history of our great Southwest. It began during that era of the "wild and woolly West". He came in touch with the great and near great of young America. He saw the "territory" merge into the full-fledged state of New Mexico.

Hostile and friendly Indians, cowboys, famous and infamous outlaws, horse thieves, cattle rustlers touched his life as well as good, righteous, and courageous citizens. All these became an amalgam of the Fred Lambert that we had known in recent years.

Fred devoted his final years and his boundless energies to the Mill Museum in Cimarron. What a stroke of genius it was for Les and Linda Davis to have Fred Lambert move to that lovely little house along the banks of the Cimarron, adjacent to the old mill that was built in 1864 - only twenty-three years before Fred Lambert entered this world. The Mill Museum is a monument to Fred Lambert. It was the fulfillment of his life.

Oh, yes, Fred was an artist, a writer, a humanist. His paintings may not hang in the famous galleries of Taos or Santa Fe. His books of poetry and stories of the Southwest may not bring fame to his memory. They will be treasured most by those who really knew Fred Lambert - and they are legions.

The essence of Fred Lambert's final years can be summed up briefly:

- he loved life and lived it fully. He was very much "alive" until the day he was stricken.
- his enthusiasm was boundless - even at the advanced age of seventy and eighty years
- he never thought of himself as being old. He tackled the museum project at the age of 76 with all the vigor, enthusiasm and energies of youth. It was truly a labor of love.
- he kept his mind everlastingly active. He was alert, creative, imaginative until the very end.
- Fred was a friendly man - he loved to have friends and strangers alike drop in on him, and he was never too busy to "show them around".
- he had pride tempered with humility. How he enjoyed "his museum". The exclamations of joy and wonderment by the hundreds who visited the museum were music to his ears. The many accolades nurtured his spirit - but never affected his head.

These are great lessons for living that all of us would do well to emulate.

Yes, Fred Lambert is dead. He died on Wednesday, February 3, 1971. It was the passing of an era. Fred's beautiful spirit will live on forever - in the hearts of those who were privileged to know him.

Farewell, Fred Lambert!

Joe Davis, Director
Philmont Scout Ranch & Explorer Base

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