

Western Outlaw

December 23, 2009

The Other Ike & Billy: The Heslet Brothers

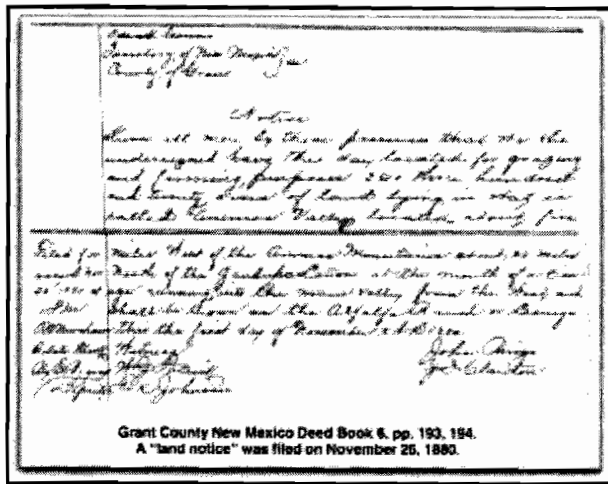
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The Heslet Brothers in Grant County, New Mexico

By: Roy B. Young

Mention the names “**Ike and Billy**” and most students of the old west will automatically think of the two **Clanton brothers** who were involved in the infamous “**Gunfight at the OK Corral**” on October 26, 1881 in Tombstone, Arizona Territory. But, there were two other similarly named men involved in the outlaw saga that developed in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico during that same period of time. They were known as the **Heslet brothers** 1, Isaac and William, and their story is perhaps equally interesting to that of the more famous Clantons.

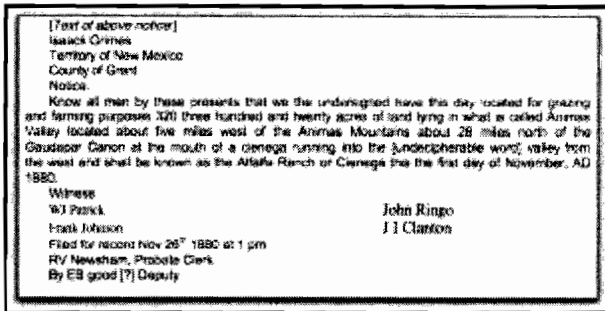
Who were the Heslet brothers? Honest ranchmen?



Heslet Ranch

Cattle rustlers? Assassins? “Cow Boys” gone bad?2 Let’s trace their meagerly recorded movements from childhood through manhood and to the tragedy that would eventually end the lives of these young men from a good Kansas family who, like so many others, sought their fortune in the old west.

John Heslet and Elizabeth Andrews



Heslet ranch title deed details

, both Pennsylvania natives, were married about 1850 in either Pennsylvania or Ohio.3 Their first child, Isaac R., was born in 1851 and their second child, William A., in 1855, both in Clermont County, Ohio.4 The boys would eventually have five siblings: Joseph (born 1858)5, James (born 1862), Anna (born 1869), Samuel (born 1872), and Mary (born 1874).6

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About 1869, the John Heslet family joined with John's brother Jacob Heslet and his family and immigrated to Shawnee County, Kansas where they settled first in the Tecumseh community and later in the Silver Lake community. Here, Isaac and William grew up and attended the public schools.⁷ John Heslet was active in community affairs and was one of the first directors of the Silver Lake Cemetery Association.⁸ The boy's mother died on January 23, 1876 in Silver Lake. Shortly, their father married Mrs. Annie M. Ward.⁹ No further information on the early lives of the two young men in Kansas has been found.

A letter from the Heslet boys father, on file in the Arizona State Library¹⁰ indicates that the two brothers were in New Mexico by 1877 or early 1878. With their mother dead and their father having married a widow with other children, much speculation could arise as to how these circumstances may have precipitated the desire of Ike and Billy to go west.¹¹

In 1880, William is shown on the federal census of Grant County, New Mexico as a 25 year old "Batchelor" miner.¹² Isaac does not appear with his younger brother on this enumeration and his whereabouts are unknown. However, within a year the two would become well-known as southwestern Grant County ranchers and cowmen.

The brothers purchased and settled on some ranch land in the Animas Valley, south of the community of Eureka (later to be known as Hachita or Old Hachita), which was said to be in an especially fine valley for grazing cattle. Cochise County, Arizona justice of the peace and Tombstone city councilman Michael Gray¹³ badly wanted that land to complement his own ranching concern in Grant County. Rumors spread that Gray, through his cowboy associates, would do whatever was necessary to acquire that land.¹⁴ He had already acquired an adjoining 320 acre ranch that had previously been claimed by John Ringo and J. Ike Clanton.¹⁵ It is believed that this is the property upon which Newman Haynes Clanton, the patriarch of the Clanton family, was residing when he was killed by Mexicans in August of 1881.²⁴

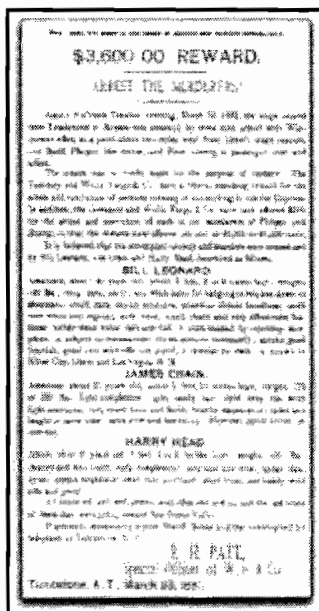
John Pleasant Gray¹⁶, son of Mike Gray, described the area in these terms:

Going eastward from Tombstone you cross the Dragoon Mountains into the Sulphur Springs Valley, thence through the

Chiricahua Mountains into the San Simon Valley of New Mexico and right there under the shadow of Animas Peak was a big green meadow of about a thousand acres which was at the time covered with red top clover and watered by numerous springs...

This was the The Ringo/Clanton land described in the Grant County location notice as being “five miles west of the Animas Mountains about 28 miles north of the Gaudupar Canon.” Ringo and Clanton never actually “owned” the land as it remained in the hands of the federal government until patented to the Gray family on March 16, 1884. The two cowboys held what was called a “squatter’s claim,” which was a quasi-legal claim to which the occupants had no actual deed or patent. A “preemption law” was then in force which gave preference to the persons “squattin” in some form of structure designed as a residence. To what extent Ringo and Clanton “resided” there is open to speculation. It is commonly believed that this land was used by them as a place to secure cattle acquired by nefarious means from across the border.

Grant County New Mexico Deed Book 6, pp. 193, 194. A “land notice” was filed on November 26, 1880.



Newspaper clipping

spot we had picked for a cattle ranch and it seemed just right for the purpose.¹⁷

25

[Text of above notice:] Isaack Grimes Territory of New Mexico County of Grant

Notice:

Know all men by these presents that we the undersigned have this day located for grazing and farming purposes 320 three hundred and twenty acres of land lying in what is called Animas Valley located about five miles west of the Animas Mountains about 28 miles north of the Gaudapar Canon at the mouth of a cienega running into the [undecipherable word] valley from the west and shall be known as the Alfalfa Ranch or Cienega this the first day of November, AD 1880.

Witness

WJ Patrick Frank Johnson

Filed for record Nov 26th 1880 at 1 pm RV Newsham, Probate Clerk By EB good [?] Deputy

John Ringo J I Clanton

Another parcel of land that came into Gray's hands was "sold" to them by **Curly Bill Brocius**.

John Pleasant Gray related that event:

We paid Curly Bill, the rustler, three hundred dollars for his squatter claim on the land and also had a written contract or guarantee from Bill that he would uphold our rights against all claimants. It being unsurveyed land, possession of course was the only title possible but we paid this sum to Curly Bill for the sake of peaceful possession of land in a country where law officers seldom, if ever, ventured, and self-preservation was really the only law to follow.¹⁸

The "ownership" situation of the land claimed by the Heslet brothers would have fallen under the same rules. Today, no documentary evidence of the Heslet brothers having filed a location notice is extant in Grant County records. While no record of the precise location of their ranch can be found, it would have been in the immediate vicinity of the Ringo/Clanton and Gray ranches. Nonetheless, the letter from John Heslet indicates that a sale of the

land to Mike Gray was pending in the amount of \$4,000. Additionally, an article in the Topeka (Kansas) Capitol indicated the sale of the boys stock and an imminent trip home to Kansas.¹⁹

The genesis of the Heslet brother's introduction into brief notoriety and outlaw-lawman history goes back to the March 1881 attempted holdup of the Kinnear Stage near Drew's Station in newly formed Cochise County, Arizona. Among the suspected highway robbers were William "Billy" Leonard,²⁰ Harry "The Kid" Head,²¹ James "Jim" Crane,²² and Luther King,²³ with the highly rumored complicity of John Henry "Doc" Holliday.

Some of the suspects were believed to claim a ranch in southern Animas Valley. It was to that area that three of them headed in an effort to avoid a Virgil Earp – Bob Paul led posse²⁴ that had tracked the men from Cochise County to Cloverdale in the southern-most part of the New Mexico boot heel.²⁵ Another posse, led by Sheriff John Behan of Cochise County, set out to locate the outlaw's hideout.²⁶ At night the two posses would sometimes meet, but during the day each pursued its own purpose.

In the interim Bob Paul, working as a special officer of Wells, Fargo & Company, had issued a reward notice to "discreet and reliable persons only" detailing the attempted holdup of the Kinnear stage and the killing of driver Budd Philpot and passenger Peter Roerig. It headlined a reward in the amount of \$3,600 for the arrest of "the murderers." As a reward of this size could²⁶ hardly be kept secret, word of it soon reached the hinterlands, including southwestern New Mexico, where the presence of Leonard, Head, and Crane had become known.

Returning to the memoirs of **John Pleasant Gray**, we learn that the three suspects who had moved into Grant County were Billy Leonard, Harry Head, and Jim Crane. Gray wrote:

I think it was the next morning when I was out early with wagon and team to pick up a load of dry wood for camp use. About two miles west of the ranch, I met three horsemen. As soon as they came in sight I knew they must be the three hunted stage robbers who had tried to hold up the Tombstone stage a few months before – Billy Leonard, Harry Head, and Jim Crane. They were well

armed, but their clothing was almost in tatters and they looked wild, wooly, and hungry.²⁷

After giving them a good dinner, Gray related to them why his family was in the Animas Valley and told them of a problem they were having with a man named Jones who wanted their property. Jones had written the family a threatening letter.²⁸ This led to a promise by Crane that they would take care of the matter. Gray thought the three men knew the actual identity of the writer and based on their friendship with Curly Bill, they would see that Bill's agreement with Mike Gray was upheld.²⁷

A few days later, John Gray was on a visit to Richard and Nellie Powers at the nearby Double Dobs ranch²⁹ when he found it literally "alive with men." Jim Crane stepped out from the house "in the midst of this small army" and told Gray that he would have no more problems with Jones as "he had fixed him good and plenty."³⁰

Gray relates in another story that Frank Leslie came to their Animas Valley ranch on a mission to arrest Jim Crane. This appears to be a different occasion than Leslie's participation in the Behan posse that was looking for the outlaw's hideout.³¹ After their return to Tombstone, Leslie had been appointed as a deputy sheriff of Cochise County and among his first assignments, Sheriff John Behan sent him on "a trip of several weeks duration to the country eastward of us."³² Gray relates that during Leslie's sojourn, Crane joined them for a peaceful lunch during which Leslie changed his mind about capturing Crane and left the ranch saying to Gray, "Tell Jim if they want him, someone else will have to serve the warrant."³³

Now, into the scene come the Heslet brothers. Whether intent on getting the reward (perhaps thinking it would be a tidy sum with which to purchase additional cattle or expand their ranch holdings) or defending themselves from a rumored murder plot, subsequent events would send five men "head long into eternity."

Other than the John Heslet letter, most of what transpired has come down to us via newspaper accounts. The first such account appeared in the form of an anonymous letter from Owl City, New Mexico published in the Tombstone Epitaph on June 18, 1881 and again in the Arizona Weekly Star on June 23, 1881 (all spelling and punctuation as in original articles):

Sent to Meet His God. How Bill Leonard Climbed the Golden Stair Open Picture of a Desperate Affray.

THE NARRATIVE Well about the shooting scrape. This place is their [the cowboys] headquarters. Ike Haslett and his brother Bill have a ranch in Animas Valley, the best one in it, and old man Gray, of Tombstone fame, has one on each side of it that he bought from Curly Bill and his gang, and he wanted the one belonging to the Haslett boys, so some of the cowboys were going to run the H. boys out of the country or kill them. On Friday last [June 10], Bill Leonard and three more Cowboys, or “rustlers,” as they call them, came to camp, to a store about a quarter of a mile from the mine, that is owned by Parker;³⁴ Joyce’s partner in the Oriental, and a man known as Baldwin.³⁵ Well the rustlers went in there and got drunk, and told they were coming up to the mine to kill the Haslett boys, so some fellow came up and told Ike, which put him on his guard.

Revolvers and Rifles for Dinner Yesterday I went down to the store, getting there about noon, so I went in and ate my dinner: Leonard and the others were at the table with their six-shooters along side their plates and their rifles lying in their laps [“and a fellow outside guarding,” per Epitaph]. I tell you it looked tough. Well, Bill [Leonard] said he was going to shoot the Haslett boys on sight, and we looked for them last night but they did not come, so Ike thought the best thing he could do was to catch them himself, so this morning at daybreak he went to the store and laid in wait for them.

The Fight Back of the store is a corral, and Ike and his brother got in there. The fence is three feet high [“about three and a-half feet high,” per Epitaph]. Bill Leonard and the one they call Harry the “kid” had come down the road past the corral, so when they got to within thirty [“fifty,” per Epitaph] yards Ike and his brother Bill jumped up and opened fire on them. The “kid” was on foot and Leonard was on horseback. Ike let drive and got Leonard just below the heart, when he dropped to one side of his horse, Bill thought he would get away so he plugged the horse and he fell. The “kid” pulled his gun, when Ike pulled on him and told him to stop, but he was going to pull when Bill Haslett gave it to him in

the abdomen, and he started to run when both Bill and Ike commenced to pop it to him. ["They put six balls in him," per Epitaph]. When they picked Leonard up he breathed his last breath, "kid" is still alive, but they think he will die soon. Bill Leonard said last night that he wished²⁸ someone would shoot him in the heart and put him out of his misery, as he had two big holes in his belly that he got when he tried to rob the stage at Tombstone. They were put out of sight at sundown this evening.³⁶

Whether the Heslet brothers were being proactive in defending their own lives or intent on collecting the reward on Leonard and Head cannot be completely determined. But, their time was growing short and before any potential reward could be claimed they would be dead themselves.

The Arizona Gazette on July 18, 1881 carried the following notice of the death of Billy Leonard:

Sheriff Paul yesterday received intelligence from Deming that Billy Leonard, the notorious cowboy, was killed in a fight at Eureka, New Mexico, a short time since. Mr. Paul says his information is entirely reliable, and he regards the statement as correct. Leonard it will be remembered was one of the party that jumped the Tombstone stage some time since and killed Budd Philpot the driver, and a passenger named Roerig. If Billy has really been killed, his death will be a relief to any community where he might otherwise have taken residence, as he was a very "hard citizen." – Journal.³⁷

Another anonymous letter carried in the Tombstone Epitaph on June 22, 1881 gave the following account of the murder of Ike and Billy Heslet:

END OF THE COWBOY TRAGEDY A Circumstantial
Account of the Murder of the Hasletts. HOW IT OCCURRED

It was evening and the boys were playing cards for pastime in West McFadden's saloon, when about fifteen or twenty men came down on them by surprise, and they did not have a chance to protect themselves.... I counted eight [shots], but they say there were more... never saw such a dreadful sight. The place was

running in blood. Bill Haslett was shot six times in the bowels, and Ike twice through his body and his left hand all shot to pieces. [A] boy, Joe [Sigman Biertzhoff] was shot six times through the stomach and once through the ankle. The Haslett's left a will leaving everything to their father and sister in Kansas.³⁸

Nellie Powers, wife of Richard Powers, of the Double Dobes ranch was present when a group of cow boys rushed West McFadden's saloon in Eureka. She said, in part:

I counted eight, but they say there were more. My husband started to run, but I caught hold of him and held him back until I heard them mount their horses and ride away like the wind. I ran and put out the light, and then we started down.... When my husband got to the saloon he said he never saw such a dreadful sight. The place was just running with blood. Bill Haslett was shot six times in his bowels, and Ike was shot through his head and his left hand was shot to pieces. The boy Joe was shot six times through his stomach and once through his ankle. He suffered the worst of any of them. They were all conscious to the last. The Haslett boys made out a will leaving everything to their father and sister in Kansas. The German boy's people live in California – he had nothing, not even enough to pay his debts in camp, but the company gave them all as good a funeral as could be had in this country. It was a sorrowful sight to see those three coffins followed by all the men moving slowly through the camp.³⁹

Wire reports of the incidents spanned the western newspapers. In Utah, the Ogden Standard Examiner reported to its readers:

A dispatch received this morning, from Tombstone, Arizona, says: Particulars have come in of the killing of the Hazlitt brothers, who killed Leonard and Harry Head, the stage robbers, last week, and a German, at Eureka, N.M., by the cowboys, last week. They were surprised by a party of twenty cowboys while playing cards in a saloon at Eureka. As they has [sic] no chance to defend themseves [sic], Bill Hazlitt was shot six times through the bowels, Ike twice through the stomach, and the German six times through his body.

As soon as the firing ceased, the murderers mounted and rode away. There is no trace who they were.⁴⁰

The Arizona Weekly Star, on June 23, 1881 commented: 29

The killing of Bill Leonard and 'Harry the Kid' at Eureka, N.M. by the Haslett brothers, a full account of which appeared in the STAR of Sunday morning, has been summarily avenged. It appears that a cowboy named Crane organized and got a band of congenial spirits in the work of vengeance. They followed the Haslett boys for some twenty-five miles from Eureka before they overtook them, and as soon as they came up with them the fight to the death commenced. The Haslett boys were game and made a brave fight killing two and wounding three of the Crane party but being overpowered, were finally killed.⁴¹

However, the **Tombstone Nugget**, the day earlier carried a slightly different story of the incident:

The boys [Heslet] were playing cards for pastime in West McFadden's saloon, when about fifteen or twenty men came down on them by surprise, and they did not have a chance to protect themselves.

Gray's memoirs gave the following version of the death of the Heslet boys in which a vengeful Jim Crane exacts revenge:

Jim Crane soon heard of the killing [of Leonard and Head]. He got together a bunch of rustlers, and leaving them hiding close by, rode into Hachita alone. He found the Hesletts in the saloon getting pretty drunk. Jim played friendly and the three were soon seated at a game of cards. Suddenly rising from his chair opposite the two brothers, Crane shot them both before they could make a move, and thus avenged his comrades, Leonard and Head."⁴²

The Epitaph followed up with this account on June 21st in which the Heslets were killed, not in a saloon, or in the open 25 miles away, but in their own home:

More Murders in San Simon

As we go to press the report is current, said to be reliable, that friends of Leonard and Harry the “Kid” have killed both the Haslett boys. They were attacked and slaughtered at their own home. The circumstances of the first killing appeared in the Epitaph on Saturday morning last. These events all transpired on the Sam Simon, that seat of the cowboy troubles. It is asserted that the Hasletts killed Leonard and Harry Head (that being the “Kid’s” real name) for the sake of the reward offered for the capture of Leonard for his participation in the Contention [sic] stage robbery. Two or three of the cowboys are reported wounded in the fight. At this rate the gang will soon be exterminated much to the joy of all law-abiding citizens.

Jim Crane (who would soon receive his just desserts) and a contingent of cowboy associates were the real culprits in the murder of the Heslet brothers and the boy, Joe. However, **Wyatt Earp** gave a somewhat garbled account of events in his biography by Stuart Lake, in which he identifies Ringo and Brocius as the killers of the Heslets in a fourth location – their store. Lake wrote:

Wyatt urged [Joe] Hill to keep after Leonard and Head, and after another talk with Ike Clanton and Frank McLowery [sic], Hill started for the New Mexico hideout. Joe Hill found Bill Leonard and Harry Head, but in their coffins; he reached Huachita [sic] New Mexico, a few hours after the two bandits were killed by Ike and Bill Haslett, brothers who ran a small store which the outlaws attempted to rob. Wyatt sent Morgan to Huachita to verify Hill’s story.

Morgan learned that Leonard lived for some hours after the Hasletts shot him, and that his groin showed a festering flesh wound which Leonard admitted had been inflicted by Bob Paul’s shotgun in the attack on the Benson stage. Leonard’s dying statement identified Luther King, Jim Crane, and Harry Head as his only associates in the holdup. Crane, he declared, had fired the shot which killed Bud Philpot. Who had killed Roerig, he could not say, as Crane, Head, and he had stood in the road and shot at the back of the stage. Morgan had barely returned to Tombstone when Curly Bill and John

Ringo rode up to the Haslett store, shot and killed the Hasletts without warning, in revenge for the deaths of Head and Leonard.⁴³ 30

Ringo was probably not in the area at the time of the killing of the Heslet brothers as he was known to be in Texas by May 2nd, returning to Arizona from Missouri during July 1881. Brocius was likely still in Galeyville recovering from his near death shooting through the jaw. Neither man was directly involved in these murders.⁴⁴ Why would Wyatt Earp insinuate their names into this murder scene? Perhaps, through his biography, to further indemnify his own alleged killings of the two outlaws? What might have passed then, without serious questioning, will not pass among today's more critical researchers. The brief mention that Head, Crane and King were Leonard's "only associates" in the attempted Benson stage holdup appears to be one more attempt to eliminate Doc Holliday from collusion.⁴⁵ It is interesting that Wyatt Earp did not trust Joe Hill's report enough to simply check his story through a telegram to the Grant County sheriff or another southwestern New Mexico law enforcement official. As well, Earp ignored the widespread newspaper accounts of their deaths. Why did he feel it necessary to send his brother over that rough and rugged country to verify the deaths of Leonard and Head? Was he afraid of what they might have revealed to others in New Mexico about the participants in the holdup, as Ike Clanton intimated in his testimony in the Spicer hearing?⁴⁶

An even more garbled story⁴⁷ was recorded by **Forrestine Cooper Hooker** in her brief account of Wyatt Earp, **An Arizona Vendetta**:

Two brothers names Haslett ["Hessler" in her original manuscript] had established a small store in Skeleton Canyon, located in the Whetstone range. A little mining camp had opened up there, and Leonard and Head dropped in at intervals. Difficulty arose between Leonard and Head and the Hasletts, and threats made by the outlaws reached the brothers. The Hasletts started out and found the rustlers at Iron Springs, and in the fight that ensued both Leonard and Head were killed....But a week after the killing of the two rustlers, Curly Bill and John Ringo crept up to the Haslett place and fired through the window, killing both brothers, and then escaped in the darkness.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note that Ike Clanton was in Grant County at the time these events were unfolding. **Virgil Earp**, in his testimony in document 94 of the so-called **OK Corral Inquest** stated:

He [Ike Clanton] said that Leonard had a fine ranch over in the Cloverdale County. He said, 'As soon as I heard of him robbing the stage, I rounded up my cattle on the San Pedro here,⁴⁹ and run them over and jumped his ranch.' And he said, 'Shortly after you boys gave up the chase who should come riding up but Leonard, Head and Crane.' And he said, 'By God, they have been stopping around there ever since, and it looks as though they are going to stay.' He said, 'They have already told me that I would either have to buy the ranch or get off of it. I told them that I supposed after what they had done, they would not dare to stay in the country and I supposed you would rather your friends would get your ranch than anybody else.' He said, 'But if they were going to stay in the country he would either get off or buy the ranch. Now you can see why I want these men either captured or killed, and I would rather have them killed.'

This may well have been part and parcel of a convoluted attempt by Wyatt Earp to enlist the aid of Ike Clanton, the McLaury brothers, and Joe Hill in rounding up Leonard, Head, and Crane and, in a "better dead" than "alive" scenario, put the outlaws away where they could not cast any further aspersions on **Doc Holliday** (or the Earps)⁵⁰ as being involved in the foiled robbery of the Benson stage. Ostensibly, Wyatt would use their capture as a vehicle to get elected as Cochise County sheriff in 1882. What a ruse! The elections were a year and a half away, and by then who would care about the attempted Benson stage robbery? Of course, whatever the truth behind Wyatt's plan, it all came to naught when the stage-robbing trio came to their tragic ends.³¹

Back in Kansas, when word of the brothers having been killed reached the Heslet family their father was ready to make an immediate trip to New Mexico to learn the particulars of his son's deaths. The Topeka Capitol carried this mention:

Mr. Hazlett had received a letter from the boys a short time since saying that they had sold their stock and were coming home, and

the next news that came was a telegram yesterday informing him of their death.⁵¹

It is unknown whether or not he actually made the trip, but a couple of months later a perplexed John Heslet wrote, through his attorney in Topeka, to the Governor of the Territory of Arizona under date of August 15, 1881:



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D. Sir Mr. John Heslet of Silver Lake Shawnee County Kansas, (who requests me to write you this letter) is informed that you in behalf of the Territory of Arizona offer a reward for the capture of William Leonard and Harry Head also for Jas. Crain [sic] who on March 15th last robbed the stage between Tombstone & Benson. Mr. Heslet is an old resident of this county and had two sons William A & Isaac R Heslet who left here about 4 years ago and settled in New Mexico,, the two boys purchased a Ranch near Eureka I believe and settled on it. In the spring of this year they made arrangements to sell their Ranch to one Gray for \$4000, and the money was to have been paid them on the second week in June last, but instead of paying the money over Mr Heslet is informed that Gray hired Leonard & Head to kill his two sons & that they proceeded to the Heslet Ranch for that purpose, but were met by the Heslet boys & both Leonard & Head shot & mortally wounded. Leonard dying at once & Head about one week after. An inquest was held on the bodies & they were both identified. The band of outlaws of whom Leonard and Head were a part after this occurrence, determined to avenge the death of their comrades and on June 16, 1881 at ten at night the two sons of Mr Heslet were killed on their Ranch. Mr. Heslet feels that if a reward is offered for the capture of these men he is entitled to it. Will you please at

your early convenience write either Mr Heslet or myself, stating if a reward is offered for the capture of these parties, the amount of same, and what proof you require.

Very respectfully Yours, Henry J. Page⁵²

A handwritten note on the bottom of the letter was added by the acting secretary of the territory:

Ansd. Giving copy of Proclamation explaining that the reward was for capture and conviction not for the killing of the parties he named.⁵³

Mr. Heslet had received a telegram informing him of his sons' deaths, but how and from whom he received the additional information revealed in his letter is unknown. It does confirm the pending sale of the Heslet ranch to Mike Gray, and Gray's possible collusion in the eventual murder of the boys. What Mr. Heslet did not realize, or this letter does not mention, was that **Wells, Fargo & Company** had put up the \$3,600.00 reward his sons may have been seeking. According to a June 7, 1881 wire from L. F. Rowell, Wells, Fargo & Company divisional superintendent in San Francisco, to Marshall Williams, Wells, Fargo agent in Tombstone, the reward was payable "dead or alive."

It would have been interesting to be privy to the discussions and plan-making that was involved in the various scenarios of this story. What was the true motivation behind the Heslet brothers plan to kill Leonard and Head? Were they prepared to set a trap for Jim Crane? Was Crane exacting revenge on the Heslets for the murder of his friends? Or, was he a hired killer working on behalf of Michael Gray? As with most stories of this era and area, there are so many complicated involvements, that final conclusions must await further evidence.³²

Endnotes:

1 Most contemporary accounts of the incidents recorded in this article, as well as most modern writers, refer to the brothers using the surname "Hazlitt;" the spelling "Heslet" is correct as is shown in a letter from attorney Henry Page to the Governor of the Territory of Arizona included in this article as well as various census and genealogical records. John Plesant

Gray, in his memoirs, comes closest to the spelling, using “Heslett.” See reference to the Gray memoirs in note below.

2 Author, Lynn Bailey calls the Heslet brothers, “miners and stockmen of... dubious reputation;” see: *Tombstone Arizona: Too Tough To Die*, (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 2004) p. 132; author, Timothy W. Fattig refers to them as “outlaws;” see: *Wyatt Earp, The Biography*, (Honolulu: Talei Publishers, 2002) p. 296; while author William Shillingberg in his book, *Tombstone, A.T., A History of Early Mining, Milling, and Mayhem* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1999), p. 211, characterizes them as “one-time Cowboys trying to reform.”

3 An extensive search of marriage records has produced no date or location. John was still single on the 1850 federal census of Clermont County Ohio (p. 64, household 510, living in hotel). No birth or death records have been located for John; Elizabeth is buried in the Silver Lake, Kansas cemetery which records her birth as March 19, 1829 and death as January 23, 1876.

4 Information from 1860 federal census of Clinton County Ohio (p. 68, household 424). John was a well-to-do farmer with a real estate value of \$5,500.00. The space to show the birthplace of William was left blank; the 1870 federal census shows him as having been born in Illinois, while the 1880 federal census of Grant County New Mexico lists his birthplace as Delaware. Often the information shown on a census record was not supplied by the enumerated persons themselves, but by just anyone the census taker might locate in the area, on the same road, or in the same hotel, who might offer information.

5 Joseph Heslet was active in community affairs in both Silver Lake and Topeka, Kansas where he later settled.

6 Per later federal census and genealogical records (via Ancestry.com).

7 Schooling information from 1870 federal census.

8 John and Annie Heslet sold the land for the Silver Lake Cemetery on June 19, 1880 (Shawnee County Register of Deeds, book 63, page 602).

9 John Heslet married Mrs. Annie M. Ward on July 22, 1879 (Shawnee County Marriage Record Book 2, page 654).

10 Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, History and Archives Division, Record group 6, Secretary of the Territory, August 15, 1881.

11 Anna M. Ward Heslet was born October 8, 1829 and died January 10, 1883 per gravestone in Silver Lake Cemetery.

12 1880 federal census Grant County, New Mexico (p. 362, household 7)

13 Michael "Mike" Gray was born in Tennessee in 1827. He had been a Texas Ranger and later an acting sheriff of Yuba County, California. He was active in mining in the region of Sonora, Mexico where his son Dixie Lee Gray was born. In 1879, he located and filed on the 320 acre townsite which became Tombstone, Arizona. He was one of the five original owners of the Tombstone Townsite Company; was a partner in the real estate firm of Clark, Gray & Company. He owned another ranch that included old Camp Rucker and stocked it with a herd he purchased from John Chisum. Gray was said by many to have been a silent leader of "Cow Boys." See author's Cochise County Cowboy War (Apache, Oklahoma: Young & Sons Enterprises, 1999) p. 55.

14 Author Karen Holliday Tanner writes that, "...Mike Gray... had strong connections with the lawless cowboy faction.... With Gray controlling the three adjoining ranches, the cow boys would have plenty of room to hide either themselves or their 'hot stock.'" See: Doc Holliday: A Family Portrait, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 153, 154.

15 The Ringo/Clanton claim is in Grant County Deed Book 6, pp. 193, 194. A "land notice" was filed on November 26, 1880. Gray in his "memoirs" and George Hilliard in his book, A Hundred Years of Horse Tracks: The Story of the Gray Ranch (Silver City, New Mexico: High-Lonesome Press, 1996) pp. 11,

16, refer to the Ringo/Clanton property as a "squatter's claim."

17 John Pleasant Gray wrote his memoirs entitled “When All Roads Led to Tombstone” in 1940; the original manuscript is owned by the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. It has been transcribed, edited, annotated and published under the same title by two authors, W. Lane Rogers, (Boise, Idaho: Tamarack Books, 1998) and Neil Carmony, Tombstone’s Violent Years, 1880-1882, As Remembered by John Pleasant Gray, (Tucson: Trail to Yesterday Books, 1999). Page numbers in this article refer to the Rogers version. John Pleasant was born on February 29, 1860 in Sacramento, California. He was an 1880 graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. This writer agrees with author Don Chaput who has written, “As a raconteur, Gray is considerably more reliable than Charles Mauk or Billy King, so we can assume most of the above report is correct.” See: Don Chaput, “Buckskin” Frank Leslie, (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1999) p. 44. For further information on the Gray family, see author’s CCCW, p. 55. 17 Hilliard, loc.cit. p. 10; Rogers, p. 47.

18 Rogers, p. 48.

19 See: Ed Bartholomew, Wyatt Earp, 1879 to 1882, The Man and the Myth (Toyahvale, Texas: Frontier Book Co., 1963) p. 165.

20 For further information on Leonard, see author’s CCCW, p. 79.

21 For further information on Head, see author’s CCCW, p. 61.

22 For further information on Crane, see author’s CCCW, p. 31. 23 For further information on King, see author’s CCCW, p. 75.

23 WOLA Journal

24 Other members of this posse included Wyatt Earp, Morgan Earp, and Bat Masterson.

25 Luther King had been captured and taken to Tombstone where he subsequently escaped. See: The Evening Gossip, Tombstone, Arizona, March 29, 1881, p. 3, column 1.

26 Among the posse members were Deputy William Breakenridge and former government scout Frank Leslie.

27 Rogers, p. 48.

28 John Gray intimates that Jones was actually one of the Heslet brothers; see: Rogers, p. 51.

29 The Double Dobes was also known as the “Flying Cloud;” see: Rogers, p. 51.

30 Rogers, p. 50.

31 For an account of Leslie’s involvement in the Behan-Breakenridge posse, see: William Breakenridge, *Helldorado, Bringing the Law to the Mesquite*, (Glorietta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 1970) pp. 122, 123.

32 Tombstone Daily Nugget, July 3, 1881. See also: Chaput, *ibid*, p. 43, 44.

33 Rogers, p. 36.

34 William Crownover Parker, Jr. See: author’s CCCW, p. 99.

35 Possibly Charles Baldwin, another Tombstone saloon owner. See: author’s CCCW, p. 8.

36 The Epitaph article appeared in the San Francisco Examiner June 22, 1881, per Casey Tefertiller, *Wyatt Earp, the Life Behind the Legend* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997) pp. 84, 85.

37 Article located by Troy Kelley and reproduced in his book, *From Tombstone to Their Tombstones, Volume I, The Palmy Days 1879-1900* (Phoenix: Troy Kelley, 2002) p. 16. The “Miner” is the Arizona Miner of Prescott, the territorial capitol.

38 The “will” was apparently never filed as a legal document; nothing is on file in either Grant County or Hidalgo County (of which Eureka – now Hachita – is a part).

39 Tombstone Epitaph, June 22, 1881. The author scoured the area in 2004 for the possibility of marked graves; nothing was located. On the possibility that the father had the bodies shipped back to Kansas, the author checked all

available cemetery records of Shawnee County and found that there are no marked graves for Isaac or William Heslet.

40 Ogden Standard Examiner, June 22, 1881.

41 No information has been located on the identities of the two members of the Crane contingent who were allegedly killed.

42 Rogers, p. 50.

43 Stuart N. Lake, Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshal, (New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1994), pp. 275, 276.

44 Ringo was arrested in Austin, Texas on May 2, 1881 by Ben Thompson, per Austin Daily Statesman, May 3, 1881. See: Steve Gatto, Curly Bill, Tombstone's Most Famous Outlaw, (Lansing, Michigan: Protar House, 2003) pp. 80, 155. Ringo biographer Jack Burrows believes that Ringo was "likely involved in the killing of the Haslett brothers in June, in retaliation for their killing of outlaws Bill Leonard and Harry Head...." See: Jack Burrows, John Ringo, the Gunfighter Who Never Was, (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1987) pp. 145, 199.

45 **Wyatt Earp continually tried to keep Doc Holliday from "Harm's Way,"** and often defended his innocence in the Benson stage holdup. For example, see: Document 94, Testimony of Wyatt S. Earp, Alford E. Turner, editor, The O.K. Corral Inquest, (College Station, Texas: The Early West, 1981), p. 167.

46 Turner, p. 107.

47 It would be impossible to recount all of the garbled accounts of the killings of Leonard, Head, and the Heslets. The Earp/Lake and Earp/Hooker versions are but two. A recent work by R. Michael Wilson, Encyclopedia of Stagecoach Robbery in Arizona (Las Vegas, Nevada: Stagecoach Books, 2003) pp. 36-38, may have the most absurd account when he says that "Curly Bill Brocius... gathered a small army of gang members which may have included Frank Stillwell [sic], Pony Deal, Pete Spence, Jim Crane and at least five other men, to assist in killing the storekeeper-brothers."

48 Forrestine Cooper Hooker, *An Arizona Vendetta, The Truth About Wyatt Earp* (Riverside, California: Earl Chafin, 1998) p. 30. One would think that Hooker surely was the “garbler” of this account; it is hard to imagine that Wyatt Earp would have told such a mishmash of a story.

49 Ike’s ranch, at that time, was fourteen miles south of Tombstone and four miles from Charleston, on the San Pedro River.

50 Numerous Earp/Tombstone writers have tried to place the Earps into the stage robbing business. While the evidence is circumstantial, it is this writer’s opinion that it should not be completely discounted.

51 Via, Paula Mitchell Marks, *And Die in the West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1989), p. 153.

52 Henry J. Page, who later became a respected attorney in Topeka, is listed in the 1879 Radages Topeka City Directory, page 144, as a clerk in the United States Circuit Court. 53 Letter, loc.cit, Secretary of the Territory, record group 6, August 1881.

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