



The DENVER WESTERNERS
ROUNDUP

September - October 2018



History Colorado

A 1937 view of 16th Street from Champa. The May Company is at right, and the Daniels and Fisher Tower is visible in the distance.

Denver's Lost Department Stores
by Mark Barnhouse
(Presented February 28, 2018)

Season Of Terror: The Espinosas in Central Colorado March – October 1863, by Charles F. Price. University Press of Colorado, 2013. 331 pp. Maps, photos, bibliography, index, paperback. \$26.95.

This is an intriguing book about a murderous trio of Colorado Territory residents who in less than a year killed an estimated thirty-two persons. For reasons not completely known, their violence is explained in detail as perhaps insanity, religious belief, or in response to actions against their family by Territorial Government and other residents. Each of these is explained by the author through his detailed writing and use of copious notes. The reader is left with the possibility that each of these had some part in the Espinosas' killing spree. The sparse population in and around the Canon City, Colorado City, Fairplay, and Leadville areas was terrorized.

Vigilante groups went hunting for the murderers, and without having information engaged unknown people, or if someone was expected of minor crimes, were "choked" or "stretched" to get to the truth. This led to several people being lynched and innocent people implicated in these crimes. Law officials went searching for the murderers but without success. Finally, there was real evidence about who were the murderers. The Colorado Military was given primary responsibility for finding and stopping the criminals.

The middle section of the book gets away from the Espinosas and murders, and includes a detailed story of the Colorado Military, their relationship with the New Mexico Military, and Federal Government control of the military. There is a great deal of personal drama between the officers in these military units. The outcome of all this drama results in unit commanders and military actions with which the reader is familiar.

Ultimately it took the hiring of Tom Tobin, a military scout, to find and kill the Espinosas. He accomplished his job and the heads of the two murderers were carried back to Fort Garland. The last of the book includes two possible locations for the end of the Espinosas; both have good arguments presented. Pictures taken within a few years, and thirty years later, show Tobin still wearing his frontier buckskin clothing, and he was still trying to obtain the government-offered reward for his ending of the reign of terror.

--Chuck Mattson

