

**STURGIS
&
MEADE
COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

Newsletter, November 2017, Vol. 2, Issue 5



Photo Courtesy of Bob Davis

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W. F. L. Souter, Early Lawman

Mark Rambow

(In place of my usual President's letter, I am choosing this month to use extra newsletter space to provide this narrative about an important historical figure in Sturgis and Meade County.)



Most legendary western communities had a legendary lawman. Names like Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, and even Seth Bullock come to mind; figures who, while not perfect, were the strong hand needed to tame a town. Sturgis was no exception. However, most people today do not know the name of William F. L. (Bill) Souter, who was the first Marshal of Sturgis, the first Sheriff of Meade County, and who ultimately gave his life in the name of justice.

As we have previously determined, early Sturgis City was a wild place, filled with saloons, dance houses and gambling halls. Murders, beatings and careless behavior were far too common; often committed by drunken soldiers or disorderly cowboys. From the founding of Sturgis City in 1878, until after the town incorporated in 1886, lawlessness and disorder were the rule of the day in "Scooptown."

It is into this scene that we introduce William F. L. Souter. Bill Souter came to the Black Hills with his father in 1876 to try his hand at mining. He quickly found work as a Deputy Sheriff for Lawrence County. (Keep in mind, Meade County did not exist until 1889, being the eastern half of Lawrence County until that time.) Souter was assigned to the community of Central City, and gained a reputation as a fair but firm hand in law enforcement into the early 1880's.

(continued on page 4)

Read on page 2 about these fun upcoming Society events

and then make your plans to join us!

Our Society

MEMBERSHIPS

- 42 individual
- 34 family
- 1 lifetime member
- (111 total members)

SPONSORSHIPS

- 3 paid sponsors
- 13 in-kind sponsors
- (16 total sponsors)

Your interest and monetary contributions help us move forward in preserving the history of Sturgis & Meade County. If you are not already a member, please consider joining us! You will find a membership form on page 7 of this newsletter.

*(Information provided by
Joan Bachmeier.)*

WINTER SCOOP OF HISTORY

Gettin' Rubber in all Four Gears
Memory sharing of the 1960s drag racing
near Sturgis Airport
Saturday, December 2, 2:00 p.m.

3rd ANNUAL 'TASTE OF STURGIS'

Sturgis area restaurants showcasing their
favorite food
Friday, January 26, 2018, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Scoop of History: “Gettin’ Rubber In All Four Gears”... *David Super*

The clock will roll back about 50 years on Saturday afternoon, December 2, when the audience pulls up a chair at the Knuckle Brewery to hear “Gettin’ Rubber In All Four Gears.”

Sturgis journalists Jim Holland and David Super will take the stage at 2:00 p.m. to open the Scoop of History program that will focus on recollections of informal drag racing that was conducted on the Alkali Road, starting in the mid - 1960s. During and after their presentation, audience members will be invited to offer their own stories from the era when young men, mostly just out of high school,

would gather on the straight and newly paved stretch of county highway for side-by-side racing.

The journalists, Holland (a business reporter for the Rapid City Journal) and Super (now mostly retired), have been talking with former racers, retired highway patrol officers, and others to gather information and photos for the presentation.

“The statute of limitations on motor vehicle violations has long expired,” Super teases, “so we encourage everyone to come to the Knuckle for the fun. We’re also at the age where we don’t have to ask our parents permission to borrow the car.”

Skip McBayer: 421 GTO, 442 OLDS



Scoop of History programs are sponsored by the Sturgis/Meade County Historical Society and are held quarterly. Topics are unrestricted so long as they pertain to the rich social and physical history of the community and surrounding area.

Taste of Sturgis ... *Kris Hubbard*

Mark your calendar for Friday, January 26, 2018, for the third annual Taste of Sturgis – a fundraiser to benefit the Sturgis and Meade County Historical Society.

This event features area restaurants showcasing their favorite food in the categories of appetizer, main dish or dessert. A people's choice award in each of those divisions will be presented to the restaurant with the most popular item based on votes

cast by those in attendance. Participating restaurants will be announced later.

Historical Society President Mark Rambow said that the proceeds from the fundraiser enable the organization to carry out its mission of preserving, protecting and promoting Sturgis and Meade County history. “Money raised

will also help us to acquire and catalogue artifacts and to continue planning for this summer’s celebration of the 140th birthday of Sturgis,” he said.

The Jan. 26 Taste of Sturgis will be held from 5:30-8 p.m. at Boulder Canyon Station Convention Center, Holiday Inn Express. Admission is \$5 for those 8 years and under, and \$10 for all others.



The Charles Nolin Monument Update ... *Ross Lamphere*

The Nolin monument is nearly complete. All of the stone work is complete and landscaping is finished. The sidewalk is scheduled to be completed in the



immediate future, at which time the five plaques will be installed.

The dedication is tentatively scheduled for Friday, June 15th, 2018, at 3:00 p.m. This will be in conjunction with our annual History Day and the community-wide 140th Sturgis anniversary celebration. The dedication will take place at the Nolin Monument site on south Junction Avenue next to the new hospital emergency room and clinic. Immediately following the dedication, you are invited to a community

mixer at the city auditorium at the corner of Main Street and Junction Avenue.

A Big 'Thank You' to all the supporters and contributors to this project, especially the committee members who have given of their time and talents.



Happy Birthday, Sturgis and Ft. Meade!

2018 will mark the 140th birthday of Sturgis and Ft. Meade. To plan the "party," a group of representatives from the City, Historical Society, Ft. Meade Museum, Art's Council, Chamber of Commerce, and others have been meeting to coordinate efforts.

The major event in the planning stage so far is the 4th Annual History Day which will coordinate with other groups this year to provide an extra special event. The tentative schedule so far is ...

Friday, June 15

3:00-4:00: Dedication of the renovated Nolin Monument

4:30-???: Reception/mixer at the armory/auditorium with historical booths

Saturday, June 16

8:00-1:00: Booths, tours, speakers, etc. at the armory/auditorium and/or the Community Center

10:00-???: Parade on Main Street

11:30-1:00: Lunch at the armory/auditorium

1:30-???: Games, ranch rodeo, tours, etc. at Ft. Meade

*Happy
Birthday!*

W. F. L. Souter, Early Lawman *(continued)* ... *Mark Rambow*

In June 1883, Deputy Sheriff Souter moved to Sturgis as the deputy for the eastern half of Lawrence County. At that time, the wild town of Sturgis City was experiencing a boom and needed a firm hand. The Deadwood paper reported that Souter is the “best Deputy Sheriff the County has ever had.”

The move was a good situation for Souter, as his brother-in-law was Judge O. W. Jewett, Justice of the Peace. Within the year, Souter also married a Sturgis girl, Ida Page, with the ceremony being performed by Judge Jewett. Souter was also named, within a few months, as the Sturgis Constable, and the town’s first Fire Marshal.

Souter quickly set to work establishing a sense of law and order. It was needed. Newspaper reports indicate that Scooptown was crawling with unsavory characters. Stories began to appear immediately about the work Souter was doing, butting heads with the notorious “Baldy” Ford, and “Broncho” Jim, who was clubbed right off his horse by Souter while causing trouble.

Despite these efforts, Sturgis was still a tough place to be. In the fall of 1883, while frustration with the situation was reaching a peak, the Sturgis business community formulated a “Law and Order Committee.” It is one of the only examples of an organized vigilante movement in the region. William Souter’s role in organizing the committee is impossible to say, as no names were ever recorded, but it is quite apparent that he was involved.

In early November, 1883, the “Law and Order Committee” posted placards around the town, bearing the ominous warning of “3-7-77,” which was the hallmark of vigilance committees in Montana. Four individuals were informed through these signs that they needed to “get up and git, or take the consequences!” The paper only referred to the men notified as “Bill,” “Six-Toed Pete,” Charley Cook, and Alex Fiddler, the last being a desperate character, previously sent to prison and only recently slipping out of a murder charge in Pierre.

The Deadwood Papers, as they were prone to do, ridiculed Sturgis City for these efforts. Bill Souter’s involvement in the Committee becomes apparent with a letter to the Editor he wrote them in response:

Sturgis, Nov. 11, 1883.

To the Editor of the Times:

In your issue of Sunday I notice an article headed “Vigilantes.” Such, was the case for I ought to know. It is very true that placards of the description you give were placed in certain parts of the town, ordering four parties to leave. All four of them are strangers to us, and the good people of Sturgis are desirous of keeping them such. For we are no ways in need of the people that Pierre and Deadwood kick out. You speak of the “transient lawlessness” of this place. I can assure you that you have a wrong impression of our town. I have had experience as an officer in Central and your place, as well as Sturgis, and I can truthfully assert that there is not a more quiet place in the Hills than this. As to the parties ordered out, they have committed no crime here to my knowledge, but were requested to leave on account of their past reputation. However three of the four still remain and the vigilantes have so far failed to hang them. One of them made the remark that he intended to remove to Deadwood, where he could realize full freedom.

Yours Truly,

W.F.L. Souter

While Souter and the committee continued to clean up the town trouble continued to happen with various shootings, fights and even murders, mucking up their efforts over the coming months. At this time, Souter decided that the town needed its own “Calaboose,” a small building used to house prisoners. He took up a collection and gathered \$250 toward building it through the spring of 1884. Newspaper reports were many through the winter and spring of 1883-1884, of the pursuit, arrest and apprehension of various characters. Souter was also reportedly diligent in handing out fire-safety violations in his role as Fire Marshal, to residents and businesses whose chimneys and stove pipes were a threat to the town safety. He found the time, however, to get married on April 23rd, and begin building a home. *(continued on page 5)*

In early June 1884, two events occurred which effected the future trajectory of law-enforcement in Sturgis. The first was the discovery of a horse-theft racket. Souter, upon arresting one of the men, determined that the gang leader, one James “Red” Lindsay, was returning to their camp that night. With two deputized men, Dick France and William Roy, Souter staked out the camp, said to be on the steep hillside to the north of town. When Lindsay arrived at 2 a.m., he was ordered to throw up his hands, but went for his gun instead. Souter and the deputies opened fire, and cut the man down. The autopsy report stated that he had “no fewer than 11 wounds in an area less than 18 inches in diameter.” Several of the shots pierced the heart.

While the general consensus was one of jubilation, several people in Deadwood complained that the man should have been brought in peacefully. Ultimately, William Roy, who had been deputized by Souter, was tried and convicted of manslaughter. He was only fined \$500 plus expenses by a sympathetic judge, and that fine was partially waived while the rest was paid by a collection of the citizens of Sturgis.

It was only a few days after this shooting that another event occurred involving Souter. On Wednesday, June 11th, three men severely beat and robbed an immigrant named Theodore Schramm, who was camping in the canyon between Fort Meade and Sturgis City. Souter was on the case, and quickly arrested the three culprits. Two were soldiers from the 7th cavalry, and the third was Alex Fiddler, who had previously been ordered out of town by the vigilance committee.

Souter placed Fiddler under the watch of a deputy and attended to other business. The night of Friday, June 13th, approximately 15 masked men strong armed Deputy McMillan, and took control of Fiddler. He was taken to a strong tree in the canyon behind the Catholic Church, on the road to Deadwood, and lynched. Souter, finding out from McMillan of the abduction, got there too late, and only found the body of Fiddler hanging above the ground. It would seem the “Law and Order Committee” had finally made a statement to Fiddler and the riffraff in town.

The site became known as “Fiddler’s Tree” and was a landmark in the town for decades. It was also the site of more trouble about a year later.

In August of 1885, after the murder of Dr. H. W. Lynch in his office on Main Street, Souter arrested a soldier for the crime. Corporal Ross Hallon was a member of the all-black 25th Infantry, stationed at Fort Meade. In a moment replicating that of Fiddler, Souter placed Hallon in the calaboose under the watch of two deputized assistants. Late the night of August 24th, about 15 members of the “Law and Order Committee” forcibly relieved the deputies of their prisoner. He was taken to “Fiddler’s Tree” and lynched in the same location and fashion as Fiddler had been 14 months before.

In the aftermath, an armed group of the 25th Infantry was stopped as they were heading into Sturgis to wreak revenge on the town. They were stopped, but a month later, came in force, and, in military fashion, shot up several businesses on Main Street, killing one man. During their shooting spree, they were heard calling out to Deputy Sheriff Souter to “meet them at Fiddler’s Tree!”

While the public sentiment was greatly in favor of Souter and the actions of the Law and Order Committee, some people in Deadwood questioned his role in the hanging of Hallon and Fiddler. A grand jury investigated the matter and made an over-whelming ruling in favor of clearing Souter of any wrong doing.

In the aftermath, and to gain better control over their destiny, Sturgis City incorporated as the town of Sturgis in the Spring of 1886. In the first election for city officers in March, William Souter was elected as Sturgis’s first “City Marshal” by a vote of 71 to 1. He immediately went about planning for fire safety, and law and order in the town. He also worked with the town council to begin to regulate out many of the worst business establishments.

When Meade County was finally formed from the eastern half of Lawrence County in 1889, the first election saw W. F. L. Souter elected as the first County Sheriff, with almost no opposition. Everyone proclaimed his qualifications and that “he has no superior in the whole country.”

(continued on page 6)

Former location of Fiddler’s Tree on West Sherman near Viaduct.



W. F. L. Souter, Early Lawman *(continued)* ... *Mark Rambow*

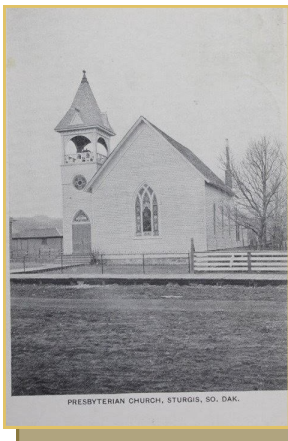
Souter did his work diligently until early 1891 when he abruptly quit his position as Sheriff and left the area for mining work in Washington State. His wife and four children stayed behind in Sturgis. Little was said of him until November of 1891, when word was received by his wife that he had been killed in a mining accident. She and the children immediately went to Washington State to retrieve his body.

While the details of his death indicated a horrible, but straight-forward accident, the local press began to dig deeper, and eventually printed a more amazing story. They indicated that Souter had resigned his position as Sheriff to pursue a murderer. He had been working in the mine as a cover, working side-by-side with the man, to gather enough information to bring him in. It was while doing this “undercover” work that the accident occurred, killing W. F. L. Souter.

Ida Souter returned to Sturgis with her husband’s body, and he was buried in a large ceremony at Bear Butte Cemetery. Today his grave is largely overgrown and forgotten, much like the memory of W. F. L. Souter. It is fitting for us to revive the memory of such a man. He served as the first Sturgis Fire Marshal, first Sturgis City Marshal, and first Meade County Sheriff., and such a story deserves to be told!



Spring Scoop of History ... *Leona Schroeder*



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, STURGIS, SO. DAK.

For our spring scoop, we are again visiting one of our local churches that has history dating back to the early days of Sturgis. On Sunday, April 8, 2018, we will be hosted by the First Presbyterian Church, where we will enjoy hearing about the history of the church in Sturgis, the stain glass windows, and Reverend Erskine. Mark your calendar and plan to join us for this interesting presentation.



Calendar of Upcoming Events ... *Leona Schroeder*

Tuesday, November 28, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Saturday, December 2, 2:00 p.m.: WINTER SCOOP OF HISTORY ... Gettin' Rubber in All Four Gears
The Knuckle Brewery

Tuesday, December 19, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Tuesday, January 16, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Friday, January 26, 5:30-8:00 p.m.: TASTE OF STURGIS, Boulder Canyon Convention Center

Tuesday, February 20, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Sunday, April 8, 2:00 p.m.: SPRING SCOOP OF HISTORY, Presbyterian Church

Friday, June 15 and Saturday June 16, 2018
4th ANNUAL HISTORY DAY and
140TH STURGIS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Our goal is to preserve, protect and promote the history of Sturgis and Meade County. We cannot do this alone ... this is done through memberships, sponsorships and donations. The Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society is a 501©3 nonprofit organization. Therefore, sponsorships and donations are tax-deductible; membership dues are not tax deductible.

Registration Information

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Level Desired

_____ Individual: \$25.00/year _____ Family: \$35.00/year _____ Student: \$15.00/year
_____ Business Sponsorship: \$250.00/year _____ Life Membership: \$5,000.00

Please send this form, accompanied by a check for your membership, to:

Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society
P.O. Box 221
Sturgis, SD 57785

You may also register, pay dues, and donate online with a credit card or PayPal at: www.SturgisHistory.org

STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



P. O. Box 221, Sturgis, SD 57785

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'The lessons of the past provide the path to the future.'
(Anonymous)