DID BUTCH CASSIDY RETURN?

by Daniel Buck & Anne Meadows

Memory is the diary that chronicles things that never happened or couldn’t possibly have happened.

-- Oscar Wilde

The stories about Butch Cassidy’s fate are both legend and legion. A dozen or so tell of his death in South America, although only one account -- that of his dying with the Sundance Kid in Bolivia in 1908 -- is supported by any credible evidence.¹ Scores of other tales, mainly from the 1920s and 1930s, report his presence in the United States after his alleged return from South America.² Most of these posthumous sightings of Butch can be traced to William T. Phillips, a failed businessman from Spokane, Washington, who visited some of Butch’s old haunts in Wyoming, pretending to be the famous outlaw returned to look for buried loot.

Normally, the first source to consult about a man’s fate would be his immediate family. But in the case of Butch Cassidy, born Robert LeRoy Parker, the family is of little help: Its members hold maddeningly divergent opinions on the subject.³ Only one relative who lived during Butch’s day, his sister Lula Parker Betenson, went on record to state unequivocally that her brother had returned, and her story is subject to many a question.

A careful review of what Lula claimed to know and when she claimed to know it strongly suggests that her account of Butch’s having died in the northwestern United States in 1937 was inspired by rumors of her brother’s return reported in newspaper articles in the late 1930s and by outlaw researchers in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, when Lula set out to write a book about her brother, she had little to go on regarding his fate: Both the reports of his death in South America and the tales of his return were purely anecdotal. The first solid evidence of what became of him did not surface until the San Vicente shootout was documented in the late 1980s, several years after Lula’s death.

The Old Folks At Home

Although Butch left home when he was eighteen, he remained fond of his family. In a letter to his brother Dan in 1890, he wrote:

I do wish I could come and see you all and I intend to if nothing happens to prevent this Summer coming for I almost feel homesick when thinking how long it is since I saw my Mother. [I]t seems almost an age since I saw any of you. When you get this letter you must write me and tell me all the news and what the prospects are for a safe reunion.⁴

If Butch had returned to North America after the Bolivian shootout, he surely would have visited his family. He would have arrived too late to see his mother, Annie Gillies Parker, who died in 1905 (at about the time that Butch, Sundance, and Ethel Place were selling their holdings in the Cholila Valley and fleeing Argentina for Chile), but his father, Maximillian Parker, lived another three decades and would undoubtedly have welcomed a visit from his eldest son.

The first clue as to whether such a visit occurred came from Wyoming rancher Jim Regan, who told a newspaper reporter in 1942:

Before Cassidy’s father died he said if Butch had gotten back from South America, he would have been to see him and look up his own people.⁵

This may have been hearsay, but it was the only statement about Butch’s fate ever attributed directly to his father. In fact, it was the first published comment from any Parker family member. Incidentally, Regan also said that Butch Cassidy and William T. Phillips were separate individuals:

Mr. Regan is confident the man Phillips who came back here a few years ago posing as Butch Cassidy was Phillips, not Cassidy. He knew Phillips well at Lost Cabin where he ran a poker game during shearing time. He was a tall man 5 feet 11, weighing 210 to 215, much larger than Butch who scaled about 150 to 160.⁶

Western historian Charles Kelly closed the chapter “Is Butch Cassidy Dead?” in his 1938 book, Outlaw Trail, by observing that if Cassidy

is still alive, as these rumors claim, it seems exceedingly strange that he has not returned to Circleville, Utah, to visit his old father, Maximillian Parker, who died on July 28, 1938, at the age of 94 years.⁷

Kelly is thought to have interviewed Butch’s father before his death, but no transcript has come to light.

The Revisionists

Until the 1970s, outlaw historians generally (though not universally) believed that Butch had died in South America. Kelly and James Horan,⁸ another early Wild Bunch historian, held fast to that view. The appearance of Lula Parker Betenson’s Butch Cassidy, My Brother in 1975 and Larry Pointer’s In Search of Butch Cassidy in 1977 shifted the ground. Pointer argued that William T. Phillips was Cassidy, while Lula averred that Cassidy returned but was not Phillips.

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We know that Pointer was aware of the article about the Regan interview, which was reported under the headline "Regan Says, Phillips not Butch Cassidy," because he quoted a paragraph in which Regan said he had known Cassidy. Pointer did not, however, cite those portions of the article that refuted his hypothesis, a curious omission inasmuch as his preface painted the book as the scholarly work of an indefatigable researcher:

The grains of truth have been carefully winnowed from the chaff.... I hope that with this book I have done my small part to help the reader distinguish fact from fiction, legend from history, in Western Americana.

Lula, Butch's last-surviving sibling (she died in 1980), was the only member of his immediate family to go on record with a first-person account of having seen him alive after the Bolivian shootout. In the fall of 1925, she said, Butch paid a visit to the Parker family home in Circleville, Utah, driving up in a "new black Ford." According to Lula, in addition to herself and Butch, those present included her father, their brother Mark, and Lula's husband, Joseph "Jose" Betenson. She said that Butch talked into the night, and the next morning he and his brother Mark rode up to a family cabin, where they met their brother Eb and Lula's son Mark, who was eleven years old at the time. After a week at the cabin, said Lula, Butch returned to visit his dad for a "day or two," and then "left and never returned."

Several outlaw researchers who spoke with Lula during the 1970s doubt her knowledge of Butch's fate in general and that tale in particular. Sundance Kid historian Ed Kirby says she gave him the impression that "she was just having fun with these stories." Another outlaw researcher, Roger McCord, had a similar recollection: "I was sitting with Lula, and she grabbed my leg and said, 'Roger, let's make some money. Six movies have been made about Butch, and the family's never got anything.'" McCord says that he returned to Circleville shortly after Lula's death and that Mark Betenson, her son, told him that the account of Butch's return in 1925 was "Lula's story, what Lula told people, but that his grandfather [Maximillian Parker] said that Butch had never come back. What's more, he said that no black car ever came up to the family home."

Lula insisted that her son met Butch, but that at the time "nobody told Mark who the stranger was." She said that after meeting Butch, Mark was sent away, but later his Uncle "Eb told him who it was. Mark kept the secret faithfully until one day when he and I were chatting, and he asked me very confidentially if I knew that 'Uncle Butch' had come home a long time ago. When he was sure that I, too, shared the secret, we discussed it often."

According to Lula's great-grandson Bill Betenson, Mark did indeed meet Butch Cassidy. In a recent interview with Irish writer Eamonn O'Neill, Bill Betenson said:

"He stayed for a while in the town, met some more relatives, took off into the hills to meet some brothers, and then disappeared.... He stayed in touch with his father via mail for a while but the letters were always carefully destroyed after they'd been read. According to Lula, he died in the fall of 1937 somewhere in the northwest. Someone called 'Jeff' wrote a letter to the family saying he'd been 'laid away very nicely.' No one ever divulged where the grave was, although Lula definitely knew."

Bill told O'Neill that Mark's widow and brother Scott both confirmed that Butch had visited Circleville in 1925. Mark, of course, didn't know Butch -- it was his uncle Eb who reportedly told him "who the stranger was" -- and neither Mark's widow nor Scott had been present.

In newspaper interviews in the early 1970s, prior to the publication of her book, Lula almost always declared that her brother had died in "the northwest" or in Spokane in 1937. According to her book, their father received a letter from one of Bob's friends, reporting that Bob had died of pneumonia. . . . It was signed simply 'Jeff.'"

Apparently, however, she was simultaneously investigating rumors that he had died in Nevada. Kirby says that Barbara Ekker, a Hanksville, Utah, journalist and local historian, told him that "Lula went to Johnnie, Nevada, and asked questions about Butch being buried there, while at the same time [she was] telling reporters that he had died in the state of Washington." Outlaw historian Jim Dullenty, who has been researching and writing about Butch Cassidy for nearly thirty years, has a similar recollection:

At least one researcher found in interviewing the people still living around Johnny [sic], an old mining camp, that Lula had visited there early in the 1970s trying to confirm that Butch was buried there.

Dullenty believes that Lula didn't know what happened to her brother and, in writing about his fate, had to depend on stories she heard from others, not all of whom were reliable. According to Dullenty, she also had trouble sticking to one version:

During the 1970s, Lula's story kept changing. I was fascinated and clipped article after article of interviews. But when reminded of a former statement that proved questionable, Lula always said she was misquoted.

All of this raises questions. I personally do not believe Lula's claims that she returned in 1925 or that she knew where Butch was buried. However, if someone can document her claims, I would gladly like to be proven wrong.

Lula's Collaborators

Wild Bunch historian Pearl Baker, who came from an old ranching family in Robbers Roost and was an early collaborator with Lula on her book, told Dullenty that Lula was "hurt that Butch never returned to see any of the family." According to Dullenty, Baker said that she was dismissed as Lula's collaborator because she objected to the story of Butch's 1925 visit to the Circleville family home on the grounds that it was untrue.
1988, Baker told another writer that Lula "really didn't know anything" and that she was "probably embarrassed to say she didn't know where Butch Cassidy died, so she talked about the northwest, Washington, and Spokane." Baker's critical remarks, of course, might have stemmed from her falling out with Lula.

In the first edition of *The Wild Bunch at Robbers Roost*, published in 1965, ten years before Lula's book, Baker related two slightly different accounts of Butch's fate. In one, she had Butch "becoming established as a reputable rancher in Chubut, Argentina," where he met up with the Sundance Kid and Kid Curry. Sundance and Curry "took off on a train-robbing, bank-heisting spree," while Butch sold his ranch and went back to the United States. Sundance and Curry were later killed in a gunfight in Bolivia, but, "through an error in identification, it was reported to the Pinkertons that it was Butch Cassidy and Longbaugh" who were killed.24

In second version of Butch's fate, Baker had all three outlaws settling in Argentina together, where they later bumped into Percy Seibert and, fearing that he would "turn them in for the considerable reward," they "panicked, sold out, and drifted up the coast." (Seibert was the American mine manager who befriended Butch and Sundance in Bolivia in 1906.25 There is no evidence that he knew them during their ranching stint in Argentina, which ended in 1905. Nor is there any proof that Kid Curry ever went to South America.) Baker wrote that Butch and Sundance and "possibly Curry" went on a "campaign of robbery" in western South America and that after the shootout in Bolivia, Butch returned to the United States, "showed up in Lander," then "tried to live in Seattle," and "drifted around and finally settled in Spokane, where he took the name of Roy or LeRoy Phillips. He died in the late 1930s, unknown and alone -- of pneumonia, Carl Hanks tells me."27

Baker said that she "became good friends with Lula" and that Lula had told her that

the reason the Parkers have always had nothing to say about Butch was not because they were ashamed of him, or because they didn't know anything -- they

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In a revised edition of her book, published in 1971, Baker presented the tale of the visit to Circleville as fact, although she changed the year. She acknowledged that there were several conflicting stories of what happened to Butch, but wrote:

Whatever happened, it is certain that Butch Cassidy did return to the United States. In 1929, he visited his family in Circleville, and spent several days with them. He didn't want them to tell anyone about his being there, and they never did; even members of his own family didn't know.29

In her "Time Table for the Wild Bunch" at the front of the book Baker listed the Circleville visit as having taken place in 1925.30

In the text, Baker wrote that Butch had visited both in New Mexico and in Lander [Wyoming], and many, many old friends saw him. He is supposed to have died in either 1936 or 1937, and there is one

story he is buried in Johnny [sic], Nevada.31

By contrast, her timetable said that Butch died "probably in California or Washington" in 1943 or 1944.32

Although her 1965 edition had Butch settling in Spokane as Roy or LeRoy Phillips, Baker apparently now believed that Cassidy had come back under the alias William Phillips, but wasn't the Spokane William Phillips. In a 1970 letter commenting on the fact that the Spokane Phillips's widow had told Charles Kelly that her husband was not Butch Cassidy, Baker wrote that "of course she was right as rain." At the time, Baker was hunting the death certificate of yet another returned-Butch, a man named William Phillips who had died in California in 1943 or 1944.33 Then in a 1974 interview, Baker changed course again: "The Seibert and Dullenty papers prove that William Phillips was Butch Cassidy."34 Her reference to Seibert makes no sense because he believed that Butch had died in Bolivia, but Dullenty, at the time, was one of the chief proponents for the case that the William Phillips who died in Spokane was Butch.35

In short, Pearl Baker, who is considered one of the leading Wild Bunch historians of her day, had Butch dying in 1936, 1937, 1943, or 1944, in California, Nevada, or Washington. Clearly Baker had no idea what he really happened to Butch. She was merely reporting rumors.

Lula Parker Betenson, however, wove the rumors into what she presented as the inside story of Butch's return. Dullenty has concluded that in her zeal to publish a book, Lula may have been swayed by tales she heard from a drifter calling himself Robert Longbaugh or Harry Longbaugh, Jr., who visited her about 1971.36 Sundance, Jr., as the newspapers nicknamed him (his real name is unknown), was a refugee from a Fresno, California, detox center who wandered the Rockies in the early 1970s, claiming to be the son of the Sundance Kid and Etta Place (or her half-sister -- he had as much trouble remembering who his mother was as he did recalling his own name). Sundance, Jr., bragged that, among other accomplishments, he had "put a bunch of kids through college" with the money
from his outlaw career as the Cimarron Kid and that he was acquainted with "seventeen different members of the Wild Bunch." William T. Phillips was Butch Cassidy, according to Sundance, Jr., who claimed to have been a pallbearer at Phillips's funeral.37

Evidence that Sundance, Jr., influenced Lula can be seen in the fact that she repeated the details of one of several claims he had made about the circumstances of the real Sundance's death. In a 1970 interview, Lula said that "Sundance died in 1957 and is buried in Casper, Wyoming, under the name of Harry Long," a statement previously made, as far as we know, only by Sundance, Jr.39

Lula also relied on information from Jerry Ross Boren,40 who asserted that Butch Cassidy returned from South America but wasn't William T. Phillips.41 Like the make-believe son of the Sundance Kid, Boren has issued his share of outlandish declarations. According to Boren, after escaping from South America the Sundance Kid played "an instrumental part" in the Mexican Revolution, training Pancho Villa's men how to "stop and hold up trains"; was a guest of the Duke of Marlborough during World War I; and became acquainted with the Duke's son, young Winston Churchill; and later was employed by none other than T.E. Lawrence -- better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia' -- as a soldier of fortune in the Gulf of Aqaba." Boren apparently thought that this was not enough excitement in one outlaw's life, so he added that Sundance had gone on to become a "devotee of Omar Khayyam, practiced yoga, and spouted oriental philosophy like a scholar."42 Boren is another source for the rumor that Butch Cassidy is buried in Johnnie, Nevada. According to his version, Butch died there in 1944 in a mining accident and was buried as Frank Ervin.43

In her book, Lula related an account of Butch's death that sounds as if she had simply split the differences among what she had picked up from Baker, Sundance, Jr., Boren, and others:

Robert LeRoy Parker died in the Northwest in the fall of 1937, a year before Dad died. He was not the man who was known as William Phillips, reported to be Butch Cassidy... Where he is buried and under what name is still our secret.44

But there is another possible, perhaps likely, source for Lula's account. In the summer of 1936, Mart T. Christensen, the director of the WPA writers project in Wyoming, launched an investigation "to gather facts that will set down the true life history of Albert [sic] Parker, alias 'Butch' Cassidy." Christensen disclosed in a newspaper interview that "reports that Cassidy is still alive and living on the Pacific coast under an assumed name will be checked out as far as possible."45 By early 1937, Christensen went a step further. He disclosed that Butch's life was "drawing to a close in Seattle where the famed outlaw, now 72, is dying from cancer of the stomach." The famed outlaw's alias, Christensen revealed, was "William Phillips."46 (Phillips, in fact, was dying of colon cancer in Spokane.) Later that year, Wyoming and Colorado newspapers reported the death of Butch Cassidy, under the name William Phillips, in Spokane.47 One of the stories was subsequently reprinted in the Spokane Spokesman-Review.48 It is possible someone did write the Parker family saying that Butch died in 1937 in Spokane, but it was William Phillips who died, not the famous outlaw.

If Lula's first collaborator had doubts about how much Lula knew, her second did not. Dora Flack, the Utah writer who actually wrote Lula's book (the by-line reads: "Lula Parker Betenson as told to Dora Flack"), believes that Lula told the truth. "Never would I have attempted the task," Flack recently wrote, "if I hadn't believed Lula's story."49 She continued:

I assure you that Lula was not influenced by Jerry Ross Boren (whom we both knew) or Harry Longabaugh Jr., or any others... [Barbara Carlson, Lula's daughter] knows her brother Mark [Betenson] saw him, as stated in the book. Mark has been dead for 14 years. Barbara is convinced that her other brothers never stated to anyone that Butch did not come back. They supported their mother's statement... .

The purpose of my writing the book for Lula was to put Butch to rest. Never would I have gone to so much work and research if I had not believed her. The statements in [pages 192-196 of the book] are true and I rely on her veracity.50

Flack, however, has her own theory about who Butch was. "I honestly believe," she says, "that he died as William Phillips. I have no proof. It just seemed logical from everything Lula told me." Flack also says that Lula did not want to disclose the name Butch died under because "she didn't want anyone to make a hero out of him, to memorialize him or build a shrine."51 (Building a shrine to Phillips would have been difficult, because there is no grave. His widow, Gertrude Phillips, had him cremated, and his ashes were scattered in the Spokane River.52) As for Lula's pursuing rumors of Butch's death in Johnnie, Flack says, "It rings a bell, but not a clear one.

An interview Pointer conducted with Lula two years before her book was published supports Flack's hunch that Lula believed Phillips to have been Butch Cassidy. According to Pointer, "Lula admitted Cassidy did, at times, use the alias Phillips," but she insisted he wasn't Phillips.54 In short, Lula was saying that her brother had used the alias Phillips and died in the same year and same city as Phillips, but was somebody else.55

Dissension In The Ranks

If the stories of Butch's return are to be believed, he lived in the United States for perhaps the better part of three decades, was a faithful correspondent, and announced his real identity to all manner of friends, acquaintances, and even strangers,56 yet he returned to his family home but once. Odd. Odder still, no one has turned up any credible documentary evidence, such as a photograph or a letter (although spurious photographs and letters surface from time to time).57 Lula claimed that Butch corresponded frequently with his friends and family, but that all the letters were destroyed, stolen, or lost. Of the family letters, she said, "I have never been able to find a single one."58

In newspaper interviews during the 1970s, before and after the publication of
her book, Lula stuck to her version of his death, though the details occasionally varied. In 1970, for example, she told a Spokane reporter that Butch had "lived to be 69 and died a natural death in 1936 in this country."59 (Butch would have been 71 if he had died in the fall of 1937, as she wrote in her book.)

Contradicting Lula's story is an undated Church of the Latter Day Saints genealogy form filled out by her husband declaring that Butch died on July 9, 1909, which is consistent with the period in which he was thought to have died in Bolivia.60 The document stated that the information was based on "Family Record." Sometime after 1972, another form was filed, this time stating that Butch had died in 1937.61 Lula later explained that the 1909 death date had been purposely entered because "we never intended that the truth be known."62

Another version of Butch's return was offered by Ellnor Parker, the wife of Max Parker (son of Butch's brother Daniel Sinclair Parker). In a 1975 interview with Jim Dullenty, she said that she had "met Butch in early 1930; met him in Milford, Utah. Max's father was there, and two brothers. And grandfather Max [Butch's father] was there." Ellnor also said that Butch's "name was Bill Phillips in Spokane," and that the year of his death was "possibly 1937."63 Could William T. Phillips have visited the Parker family and snookered them? The general consensus today is that Phillips was a fraud,64 but in the 1920s and 1930s some people accepted him as the genuine article. Was Ellnor taken in by Phillips? Were the Parker brothers playing a joke on her? Or did she make the whole thing up?

In a letter to another researcher, two years before she spoke with Dullenty, Ellnor didn't mention the 1930 visit. She wrote that she didn't know what the returned-Butch's name was, and she reinforced the notion that stories from Sundance, Jr., had influenced the Parker family:

I do know [Lula] has some dates wrong, but she told my husband she would tell what name they used when they buried him, which I don't know, because I was not in Washington when he died, but the WOLA Journal -- page 28.

Clifford R. McMullin, Butch's nephew, claims he saw his famous uncle on the Colorado River in the 1920s. McMullin did not recognize Butch on sight, but said he "knew [it] was Butch by the questions he asked me."

Sundance Kid's son was right. He is buried in Spokane, Washington.65

Lula, for her part, vigorously disputes Ellnor's story of Butch's visit to Milford: There's no truth to any part of it. I can't imagine why she'd tell something like that unless Mr. Dullenty hooded her for a story until she decided to give him a good one. That's the only excuse I can find for it and I'm sorry she died before I had a chance to talk to her. This is absolutely untrue.66

All in all, the number of supposed Butches being pursued in the 1960s and 1970s was considerable: two men named William Phillips, one in Washington (Larry Pointer's and Ellnor Parker's Butch) and one in California (Pearl Baker's second Butch); a man in Washington named Roy or LeRoy Phillips (Pear Baker's first Butch); a man in Washington not named Phillips (Lula's main Butch), and a man in Nevada named Frank Ervin (Kerry Ross Boren's Butch and Lula's occasional Butch).

In spite of the attention that Lula's story of Butch's return received,69 hers was by no means the prevailing view in the family. Other Parkers not only said that Butch's fate was a mystery, they disputed Lula's declaration that he had returned from South America. One of Butch's nieces (the daughter of another of his sisters), who does not wish to be identified by name, said in 1992 that "the family was quite unhappy with Aunt Lula's book." She added that Butch's siblings "never stopped looking for him--they looked everywhere."68 Almost a year later, after reading an article stating that "a niece recently said that she does not believe her Uncle Butch came back alive,"69 the niece informed the authors that she was concerned about their interpretation of what she had said. She provided this cryptic correction: I remember being asked if the family believed he died in So. America. As I could not speak for the family, I tried to answer by asking this question, "If you had a brother that you believed died in Bolivia in 1908 would you continue to search for him? They did into the late 1930s." I believe they hoped that Uncle Bob was still alive.70

In other words: Butch's siblings continued to look for him, but they never found him. Period. That is why she had told the authors previously that she had no truck with the tales of Butch's return.

The Man On The Colorado River

There are several versions of a story from one of Butch's cousins about his encounter on the Colorado River with a mysterious stranger whom he concluded was Butch Cassidy. The first version appeared in an article by Gale R. Rhoades, "Butch Cassidy Didn't Die in An Ambush in South America," published in The West in January 1974. Rhoades related a story allegedly told by one Clifford L. McMullin, who said that his father, whom he didn't name, "was working as a cook for a diamond drilling gang in Black Canyon on the Colorado River. Late one afternoon two men in a high-powered, twelve-cylinder inboard came up the Colorado River and stopped to buy some gasoline. Dad recognized Butch immediately, but dad said nothing to give him away. When Butch stepped from the boat, he turned to dad and asked, 'How's uncle Brig and aunt Ada?' He was referring, of course, to dad's parents...." When asked if his father could have been mistaken about the identity of Cassidy, Mr. McMullin...

*Clifford H. McMullin
There was no doubt that it was Butch. He'd seen Butch twice before in the early days when Butch came down to hide out from the law at grandfather McMullin's place in Lees, Utah.\textsuperscript{61} Another version appeared in Lula's 1975 book, in a letter signed simply "Cliff":

"In 1923 I was with the government. We were blasting in the bottom of the canyon where the Boulder Dam now is. A very powerful boat with three men in it came chugging up stream. They said they were prospectors. They wanted food, gasoline, and oil. I had charge of all the supplies. So it was left to me to get what they wanted. I knew one of them was Butch by the questions he asked me. He was familiar with the terrain and many of the people in southern Utah. He asked how 'Uncle Brig and Aunt Ada' was. . . . A few days after they were gone, a friend asked me what relation one of them was to me. He said one of them looked enough like me to bear his brother. I have been told before I looked like him. . . ."\textsuperscript{72}

Writer John Byrne Cooke interviewed Clifford R. McMullin in a Salt Lake City nursing home in 1989 and McMullin told him essentially the same version as the one that appeared in Betenson's book.\textsuperscript{73}

And Dustin McMullin, one of Clifford's sons, recalls his father's story of the river-bank encounter:

He told me about it, about how Butch came to Lee's Ferry to get supplies. He got him off to one side and said to say hello to Aunt Ada. He just sidled over and asked about Aunt Ada. He recognized him. Dad knew him.\textsuperscript{74}

His father, Dustin McMullin adds, "never did see [Butch] or hear of him again."\textsuperscript{75} Dustin McMullin recalls that his father died in 1991 or 1992 at age 97, meaning that he was born about 1894, ten years after Butch had left his Utah home for a life on the road. When Butch fled the United States for Argentina in early 1901, Clifford R. McMullin would have been no more than six or seven years old. How he could have recognized Butch on sight (or Butch him) more than two decades later is unclear. Indeed, in his letter to his cousin Lula, Cliff indicated that he had merely concluded the man was Butch "by the questions he asked me."

In all but the first version, the storyteller was Clifford R. McMullin, who was the son of Brigham Young McMullin and Ada Parker (Butch's father's sister). Rhoades's version is a mystery because Clifford R. McMullin did not have a son named Clifford L., nor do people familiar with the McMullin family recognize that name. More than likely, Rhoades had heard McMullin's story but, by the time he got around to writing his article for The West, had forgotten some key details (that it was McMullin, not his father, who had met the mysterious stranger) and exaggerated others (changing the fact that McMullin had intuited the stranger's identity to the statement that the stranger had told McMullin he was Butch Cassidy).

This is the most salient feature of McMullin's story: The mysterious man did not identify himself as Butch Cassidy. It is highly unlikely that Butch or McMullin had ever laid eyes on one other before this alleged encounter and even more doubtful that they would have recognized each other after so much time had elapsed.\textsuperscript{66} If anyone knew McMullin well enough to ask him about his parents, it would have more likely have been a Parker who knew the now-grown McMullin on sight.

A possible explanation is that one of the other Parker offspring came chugging up the Colorado River. Five of Butch's brothers -- Dan, Joseph, Mark, Max, and William -- were alive in the 1920s and might naturally have asked about Uncle Brig or Aunt Ada. The McMullin and Parker clans had intermarried. They undoubtedly socialized, if only to attend the weddings. In any event, there is nothing in McMullin's story to support his notion that the man he met was Butch.

Another explanation is that Clifford McMullin was just spinning a tale. He had a "Walter Mitty personality," recalls Bill Buchanan, a Utah friend who has known the family for decades. "He fantasized about a lot of things and told stories. His siblings kidded him about it."\textsuperscript{77} On another occasion, "McMullin told his family that he met Butch and lent him money, but no one believed him because he never had any money."\textsuperscript{68}

Nonetheless, Buchanan agrees that "It's always been a family tradition that Butch came back."\textsuperscript{79}

Kelly's Correspondents

Charles Kelly's book, first published in 1938 as Outlaw Trail and reissued in a revised edition in 1959 as The Outlaw Trail, solicited letters from the readers. A number of people who had information about Butch's fate wrote to Kelly. In 1963, for example, Clifford McMullin's cousin Etta McMullin Mariger wrote Kelly's publisher stating that although she could not "affirm or deny" the story of Butch's return from South America, Elzy Lay "at one time . . . came from California to a spot in Arizona to tell Anne [sic] Bassett of Butch's death in South America."\textsuperscript{69} Lay was Butch's best friend within the Wild Bunch fraternity, so his opinion should carry some weight. I.B. Allen, who said he had been a friend of Elzy Lay, wrote Kelly in 1949 to say, "I, like you, think Cassidy was killed in South America. Lay told me he was."\textsuperscript{81}

Elzy Lay was not the only Wild Bunch veteran to offer an opinion. In December 1937, Matt Warner, whose association with Butch Cassidy went back to the Telluride bank robbery in 1889, sent Kelly an unequivocal note:

Forget all the reports on Butch Cassidy, they are fake. There is no such man living as Butch Cassidy. . . . [He was] killed in South America, he and a man named Longbow [sic] were killed in a soldier post their [sic] in a gun fight. This is straight.\textsuperscript{82}

In Warner's memoir, Last of the Bandit Riders, published three years later, he reiterated his belief, though he has Butch dying in the wrong country:

There is [sic] a lot of false legends about what become [sic] of Butch. Some believe today that he is still alive. Some men claim they have seen Butch recently. Once in a while some hombre claims he is Butch. It's all poppycock. Butch was killed in Argentina.\textsuperscript{35}

Of related interest is a letter, published in the November 1928 Frontier Times, from Charles Siringo, the indefatigable WOLA Journal -- page 29
Pinkerton detective who had tracked Butch up and down the Rockies. Siringo, who was about as close to the Wild Bunch as one could get without joining the gang, wrote:

According to what I consider reliable information Butch Cassidy committed suicide in South America. When trapped by the native police and Harry Longabaugh alias the "Sundance Kid" lay dead, "Butch" fired his last bullet into his own brain.\(^{84}\)

Siringo's account roughly parallels the events of the shootout that occurred November 6, 1908, in San Vicente, Bolivia.\(^{85}\)

Wyoming attorney William L. Simpson, whose family had remained close to Butch even though Simpson had prosecuted Butch for horse theft, relayed similar sentiments to Kelly: "I am confident that Butch Cassidy died in South America by a bullet from his own hand."\(^{86}\)

Still another reader of Kelly's Outlaw Trail brought news of Butch's fate from unnamed members of the Parker family. Harry M. Fleenor, the editor the Penrose Press in Penrose, Colorado, wrote Kelly in 1940 that a noted Wyoming rancher, Dr. B.V. McDermott, had recently told him that he knew close relatives of Butch -- whose name he said was Parker, I believe -- and he swore they believed Butch was dead -- and that he and the "Sun Dance Kid" had been killed together in South America.\(^{87}\)

**Conclusion**

The Parkers who believed that Butch Cassidy died in South America had one thing in common with those who believed that he came back alive. None of them had any hard information. For decades, those who thought Butch had died in Bolivia had to rely on little more than scraps of information from magazine articles and veterans of the Andean mining trade. Many of the accounts of his death were as garbled in the telling and retelling as were the accounts of his return. The shootout in which Butch and Sundance are thought to have died was not documented for certain until the late 1980s, eight decades after the fact.\(^{88}\)

Whatever the Parkers wanted to believe, they had little to go on. Over the years, four distinctly different views developed within the family: Butch came back and was Phillips; Butch came back but wasn't Phillips; Butch didn't come back; and Butch's fate is unknown. Even Lula, who appointed herself family historian, had trouble settling on one version. She papered over the inconsistencies and doubts with an evasive explanation: I know, but I'm not going to tell. She gave this the explanation to everyone, including her family. Her daughter-in-law Vivian Betenson reported that "Lula took the secret to her grave. 'She never told anyone, not even her children.'"\(^{89}\) And Lula didn't appreciate other members of the family expressing their own opinions on the topic. Ellnor informed Jim Dullenty that Lula told her not to say anything about the alleged Milford visit in 1930 -- and that when she, Lula, would do the talking for the family.\(^{90}\)

Lula and Bill Betenson have asserted that the family agreed to plead ignorance about Butch's fate in order to protect him. But this does not explain the myriad discrepancies and contradictions in the stories that the family -- as a group and as individuals -- could never get straight. If the dozens of Butch sightings reported during the 1920s and 1930s were accurate, he was wandering the western United States broadcasting his presence to bartenders, highway patrolmen, store clerks, and gas station attendants. Why, then, should the family be so concerned about protecting his privacy as to have conducted an orchestrated silence about him?

Moreover, if Lula was truly worried that souvenir hunters or excavation-minded historians would find Butch's grave, she would not have announced to the world that he had died of pneumonia, single, age 71, in the fall of 1937 in Spokane. A diligent researcher would need little time scouring the Washington death records to figure out under which name Butch had been buried.

In any case, the family's inability to agree about what happened to Butch continued long after his death and even after Lula published her book. Indeed, the disagreements continue to this day. A new account of Butch's fate comes from his great-great-nephew Cory Young in Utah. Young said that it was "always the story in my family that Butch ended up in California, where he was a successful businessman, and that he died there in the 1930s."\(^{91}\)

Perhaps the most one can surmise is that because Butch disappeared, his family was unable to figure out what had happened to him. Thus, it should not be surprising that some members of the family would grasp at anything, even the yarns of a hoaxter like William T. Phillips or a wandering raconteur like Sundance, Jr., to explain what had become of their long-lost black sheep.

**END NOTES**


Even while Butch Cassidy was in South America, conflicting stories about his being present—alive or dead—in the United States appeared in the newspapers. See, for example, The Vernal (UT) Express, November 30, 1901: "Butch Cassidy is receiving as much unsolicited notoriety as a New York Tammany leader. He has been reported killed a dozen times in the last five years, and yet every time a notorious train robbery occurs, Butch comes to life and is credited with being the leader of the gang. He certainly must have more lives than a whole family of cats.” The Vernal Express, August 1, 1903: "The people of Carter, Wyoming, and Union Pacific officials, were much worked up last week over the presence of Butch Cassidy in town, and took it for granted there was going to be a hold-up p.d.q. It is stated that Butch and a companion got their horses shod in Carter and then went into camp about three miles below town, where they were joined by several others.” The Vernal Express, October 6, 1906: "'Butch' Cassidy is alive and at his old practices. The New York Herald of Sunday, September 23, says 'Butch,' with three others of his kind, is holed up in the
Argentine republic. . . ‘Butch’ Cassidy was born in southern Utah. He has relatives living in the region today. It is generally believed that he died near the Hole-in-the-Wall country a few years ago and is buried there.”

3. The family of the Sundance Kid, who was born Harry Alonzo Longbaugh, knew as little about his fate as the Parker family knew about Butch’s, but tales of Sundance’s return did not become part of Longbaugh family lore. Indeed, just the reverse: The 1918 will of Sundance’s sister Emma indicated that he had not been heard from in years, and his brother Harvey told his son of having had an uncle who died in South America. See Donna Ernst, Sundance, My Uncle (The Early West: College Station, TX, 1992), p. 187.


5. “Regan Says, Phillips Not Cassidy,” The Lander Wyoming State Journal, May 7, 1942. For a critical analysis of the Regan interview, see Jim Dullenty, “Did Regan Know Phillips and Cassidy?” Western Outlaw-Lawman History Association, Spring 1993, vol. 1, no. 3. Dullenty observes that although Regan’s credibility is weakened because he is mistaken on much of what he said on other topics in the article, perhaps his “confusion of dates and other information can be blamed on old age.”

6. Ibid.

7. Charles Kelly, Outlaw Trail (Salt Lake City, UT, 1938), p. 337.


14. Bill Betenson, “Lula Parker Betenson,” The Outlaw Trail Journal, Winter 1995. Betenson said that Mark’s widow, Vivian Betenson, and Mark’s brother Scott both told him that Mark had met Butch. Bill Betenson explained that “a family pact was made between Maximilian and the children about Butch’s death. Although discussions about Butch would open up, Butch was not discussed openly up until the 1950s.”


16. Ibid., p. 246.


18. The rumor may have started with Brown’s Park pioneer Josie Bassett, who said “Butch Cassidy died in Johnny [sic], Nevada, . . . I don’t know the date, but he was an old man.” John Rolfe Burroughs, Where the Old West Stayed Young (Bonanza Books: NY, 1962), p. 135.


21. Ibid.

22. Jim Dullenty, conversations with Daniel Buck, September 5, 1997, and January 6, 1998. In a letter to Dullenty, Lula confirmed that he had met with Longbaugh, Jr., although she didn’t seem to think much of his stories: “Mr. Longbaugh visited with me some time ago and this article is so different from what he told me. He had some wild stories but didn’t mention being a pallbearer, or that my brother was buried under the name of Phillips. He knew better than to tell me those things. But Longbaugh wasn’t so different from so many other people who tell so much and know so little. I have so much proof that my brother came back to the United States and lived for so many years.” Lula Parker Betenson, letter to Jim Dullenty, May 21, 1973. Courtesy Jim Dullenty.


25. Ibid., p. 229.


28. New Mexico writer Fern Lyon had another version of Hanks’s story. Lyon wrote that Baker “has collected a pile of death certificates from half a dozen states trying to find the truth. There was one for a man named Ed Roberts, who was shilling in a Las Vegas gambling joint when he died in 1944. Charl Hanks, who rode for while with the Wild Bunch, told Pearl years ago that he could prove Butch died of pneumonia in Oregon in 1937, but that he’d lost the letter that told him about it. Members of Butch’s family think he may have died in Seattle in 1936.” Fern Lyon, “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,” New Mexico, November/December 1972.

29. Baker, The Wild Bunch (1965), pp. 230-31. Baker added that “Lula (past eighty, but plenty sharp) is now compiling a history of her interesting family, and plans to tell the true story of what happened to Butch in South America. That the exact truth is not known, I am convinced—and who can tell it better than the sister . . . ?” This indicates that Baker and Lula were in communication and that Lula had been at work on her book years before the 1969 movie, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, was released.


31. Ibid., p. 11.

32. Ibid., p. 200.


38. Edward Kirby, The Rise & Fall of the Sundance Kid, (Western Publications: Iola, WI, pp. 144-146; and “Meadows, Digging Up, pp. 121-122.


41. See references to Boren in Betenson, Butch Cassidy, My Brother, pp. 153, 157, 172, 173, and 199; and Lula Parker Betenson and Bill Kelly, “Butch Cassidy...And When He Came Home,”


44. Betenson, Butler Cassidy, My Brother, p. 195. Lula’s story is almost word-for-word the same as what Charles Hanks is said to have told Pearl Baker some years earlier, that Butch died of pneumonia in 1937 in Oregon—right down to having learned it in a letter, now conveniently lost. See Lyon, “Butch Cassidy.”


That same year, in Stories of Early Days in Wyoming: Big Horn Basin (Prairie Publishing: Casper, WY, 1936), pp. 162-63, Wyoming historian Tacetta B. Walker reported that in 1934, “Cassidy, older in years but with the same unmistakable face, showed up in Wyoming among friends he had known in the old days. It did not seem possible, but he had escaped from that terrible siege [in Bolivia] and is today living in Seattle under an assumed name. He is holding a responsible position and no one in the city knows him as the renowned Butch Cassidy.”


50. Ibid.

51. Dora Flack, conversation with Daniel Buck, January 17, 1998. Flack’s recollection of why Pearl Baker left the book project differs from Dullentay’s. Flack said that early in the collaboration Baker had “submitted the manuscript to a publisher, and it was rejected. Afterwards Baker was more interested in getting information from Lula for her own book and having it published than she was in pursuing Lula’s book.”


54. Pointer, In Search of, p. 17.

55. Mrs. Henry Sigg, the daughter of Gertrude (Glasgow) Lundstrom, one of Phillips’s closest friends in Spokane, told Charles Kelly that she had written to Lula about Phillips, without mentioning his name, and that Lula replied saying “he could be her brother. I didn’t say [to Lula] his name was Phillips. I hoped she would say something about it but she didn’t give me much satisfaction. She doesn’t know much about her brother except that he died in the later 30’s.” Mrs. Henry Sigg, letter to Charles Kelly, undated, c. 1970. Charles Kelly papers, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

In what appears to be Lula’s actual reply, she informed Mrs. Sigg that “The man you speak of may be my brother. I really don’t know how he got the name George, but his real name was Robert LeRoy Parker.” Lula Parker Betenson, letter to Mrs. Henry Sigg, June 2, 1970. Courtesy Jim Dullentay.

The reference to George in Lula’s letter was apparently in response to Mrs. Sigg’s having told her that the unnamed man in Spokane had said his name real name was George Parker, as Cassidy was known in the press. Few people outside the family knew that his real name was Robert LeRoy Parker. Without realizing it, Lula had poked a hole in Phillips’s charade. At the same time, she demonstrated that she really wasn’t sure who her brother was. Later that same summer, Lulatold Mrs. Sigg: “I have heard of this Phillips before, but I am sure he was not my brother.” Lula Parker Betenson, letter to Mrs. Henry Sigg, July 16, 1970. Courtesy Jim Dullentay.

Mrs. Sigg wrote again to Kelly, saying she had corresponded further with Lula, trying to convince her that Phillips was her brother. Lula “didn’t say anything. I asked her if she knew he died of cancer and she didn’t even say anything except that he died in the northwest in later 36 or 37. She says it’s her secret where he is buried but I don’t think she even knows so that’s why it’s her secret.” Mrs. Henry Sigg, letter to Charles Kelly, August 30, 1970. Charles Kelly papers, Utah State Historical Society.

Later that fall, Mrs. Sigg got in touch with Kelly again, but this time she herself raised doubts about whether Phillips was actually Butch: “As Bill [Phillips] said in the first part of the story that he was on the Parker Ranch, and took on the name of Parker there maybe they just called him that, or maybe one of their kids died. Did you ever look up birth records yourself and find that there was a Robert LeRoy Parker? Bill never did claim to have been born a Parker, but just took the name. . . . Say, hold it right here. I just reread the story from the start and it says at age of 14 he was living on the ranch of George Parker. Now he didn’t stay there too long, but he could have been a friend of Robert LeRoy Parker. Now I am just speculating [sic] here. They were just practically the same age, and Robert Parker left home so young too, to enter a life of crime more or less, couldn’t he have been killed and Bill Phillips have gone right along with his name. . . . All I can say Mr. Kelley [sic] is that he was either over there, or he was a mighty good story teller.” Mrs. Henry Sigg, letter to Charles Kelly, October 30, 1970. Charles Kelly Papers, Utah State Historical Society.

Mrs. Sigg’s reference is to Phillips’s manuscript, The Bandit Invincible, which some say is Phillips’s account of his own life as Butch Cassidy, but which is actually nothing more than Phillips’s attempt to write a narrative of Cassidy’s life. Regardless, Phillips assertion in The Bandit Invincible that Cassidy’s real name was not Parker, but that “he adopted the name of Parker” while working on the George Parker ranch is just plain wrong. See William T. Phillips, The Bandit Invincible (Rocky Mountain House Press: Hamilton, MT, 1986), p. 7.

56. See, for example, Betenson, Butch Cassidy, My Brother, pp. 197-212.

57. During a panel discussion on Butch Cassidy at the 1996 WOLA convention in Craig, Colorado, Wild Bunch researcher
Steve Lacy passed around photocopies of several letters purportedly mailed to Matt Warner’s widow in the late 1930s and early 1940s by Frank Ervin, a man claiming to be Butch Cassidy. The authors looked at them and concluded that the handwriting bore absolutely no resemblance to handwriting on Butch’s letters from South America, which constitute the best collection of authentic examples of his handwriting.


60. Parker Family Archive Record, Church of the Latter Day Saints, undated. The copy is stamped “Wyoming State Archives.” Courtesy Larry Pointer.
61. Parker Family Group Record, Church of the Latter Day Saints. The record is undated, but the form bears a 1972 copyright date. Courtesy Barbara Carlson.
63. Ellnor Parker, interview with Jim Dullent, June 30, 1975. There is some confusion about exactly who was present at gathering in Milford and when it occurred. According to Dullent’s handwritten notes of his June 30 interview with Ellnor Parker, the meeting took place in the “latter part 1930, or first part 1931,” and Dan Parker was there, along with two of his brothers and Ellnor. In Dullent’s typewritten version, “grandfather Max” (Butch’s father) was also at the gathering.

In Larry Pointer’s version of the gathering, Butch, his father, his brother Dan, Ellnor, and “two unidentified men” were present. Pointer, In Search of, p. 19. Pointer cited two conversations Dullent had with Ellnor Parker in 1975, the first on June 30 and the second on July 12, as the basis for his list of attendees. Pointer, ibid., p. 19, n. 18, p. 260. Dullent’s notes of the July 12 interview are lost. Jim Dullent, conversation with Daniel Buck, January 12, 1998.


A computer-generated comparison between a photographs of Phillips and of Cassidy conducted in 1991 determined that they are two different people. Among the several differences between them, Phillips’s head was “much smaller” than Cassidy’s. See Thomas G. Kyle, “Phillips Photo Fails,” Old West, Fall 1991.

65. Ellnor Parker, letter to Sylvia Beecher, February 14, 1973. Courtesy Museum of Northwest Colorado. Years later, Beecher recalled an interview with Sundance, Jr., on September 1, 1970. She said that he told her “that he had recently talked to Lula Parker Betenson…about her brother, Butch Cassidy. She said that she was born after he left home and that she didn’t know as much about Butch as Young Longbaugh does.” Sylvia Beecher, “The Sundance Kid’s ‘Son’ Tells His Story,” The Daily Press, Craig, CO, September 7, 1989.

During the 1970 interview, Sundance, Jr., told Beecher that after Butch and Sundance came back from South America, they went gold prospecting in Alaska. Lula told a similar story in her book, p. 192, but she has Butch going to Alaska solo, “where he trapped and prospected [and] lived with the Eskimos….” Did Lula get the Alaska story from Sundance, Jr., or vice versa?


68. Butch’s niece, conversation with Daniel Buck, April 1, 1992. Jim Dullent said that this same niece told him that her uncles “spent a lot of money and traveled around a lot looking for Butch, asking questions,” without success. Jim Dullent, conversation with Daniel Buck, October 15, 1992.

69. Meadows and Buck, “Showdown at San Vicente.”
70. Parker niece, letter to Anne Meadows and Daniel Buck, January 15, 1993.
72. Betenson, Butch Cassidy, My Brother, pp. 204-205.
75. Ibid.
76. Max Parker (Daniel Sinclair Parker’s son) expressed doubts about McMullin’s story: “Well, I don’t know. Cliff’s a lot younger man than Butch was, I’m sure of that.” Max Parker, interview with James Dullent, tape recording, January 3, 1976, Kent, Washington.
77. William Buchanan, conversation with Daniel Buck, November 11, 1997.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Etta McMullin Mariger, letter to Devon-Adair Co. (Kelly’s publisher), June 10, 1963. Charles Kelly Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
81. L.B. Allen, letter to Charles Kelly, November 18, 1949. Charles Kelly Papers, Marriott Library. Allen’s four-page, chatty letter, written from Caracas, Venezuela, raises the question of whether he was regurgitating stories he had read in Western magazines. He told Kelly that his book “recalled to me many memories of the Wild Bunch, facts that I have never told and I don’t think never have been [printed and…] which may give you some of my memories of mine.”

He rattled on about Elzy Lay’s life, the Castle Gate robbery, and Tom McCarty, among other topics. Allen related a convoluted story of the October 1900 Winnemucca bank robbery, saying that $600 from the proceeds went to Wild Bunch lawyer Douglas Preston, who used the money to get Elzy Lay’s New Mexico prison term commuted. In fact, Lay’s sentence was commuted, but not until 1905, and the chief reason for the commutation was that he had been helpful to prison authorities during an uprising by prisoners.

Nonetheless, there had been rumors of a payoff. Former New Mexico Governor Miguel A. Otero, who had signed the commutation papers, learned that Kelly had mentioned such a payoff in a draft of his Outlaw Trail manuscript. Otero wrote to Kelly in late 1935 lambasting the
“scurilous attack.” He threatened to sue if Kelly printed the allegation. (Kelly didn’t.) Otero implied that the payoff allega- tions originated with Matt Warner, whom he called “a profound liar,” and New Mexico rancher Captain William French, a friend of the outlaws. See Miguel A. Otero, letters to Charles Kelly, August 27, September 6, 14, October 9, 16, November 7, and December 3, 1935. Charles Kelly Papers, Utah State Historical Society.

Elzy Lay’s daughter, Mrs. Marvel Lay Murdock, said that “she is satisfied that no contact was ever made by Butch to her after 1906.” Mrs. Murdock did not elaborate on the reference to the 1906 contact. See E. Dixon Larson, “Legends and Facts...Butch Cassidy,” Guns, March 1974.

Helen Bengston, who was related to Lay by marriage, told Larry Pointer that in the late 1920s Lay’s sister-in-law, Ada Calverpiper, once said that Butch Cassidy was in Shoshoni and that Lay’s wife, Mary, exclaimed, “That’s ridiculous! Mac [Lay] hired a detective and found that Butch was dead.” Bengston also told Pointer, however, that “Mac and Butch Cassidy may have taken trips into the mountains together in 1932.” Helen Bengston, interview with Larry Pointer, March 12, 1973. Courtesy Larry Pointer.

Zane Grey figures in another Lay story: “There has been considerable speculation about whether Butch Cassidy ever visited Lay after his return from South America (many historians now doubt the story of his and the Sundance’s death in Bolivia in 1909) and several persons in Baggs, Wyo. insisted they saw Cassidy and Lay together on many occasions in 1929-30. Lay refused to admit anything, even under the coaxing of Western novelist Zane Grey. Just before he died on November 10, 1934, he told his wife, ‘Mary, get ahold of Zane because I’m not going to live much longer.’ He died before Grey reached him.” Carl Sifakis, The Encyclopedia of American Crime (Facts on File: NY, 1982), p. 416.


84. Charles Siringo, letter to Frontier Times, November 1928, vol. 6, no. 2. This was apparently the third publication of an English-language account of Butch and Sundance’s death in Bolivia. The first account appeared in a May 1913 article by A.G. Francis, “The End of an Outlaw,” published in The Wide World Magazine, a popular British adventure magazine of the era. (Francis erroneously named the outlaw killed with Butch in Bolivia as Kid Curry, not the Sundance Kid.) Wide World had an American edition, and a Pinkerton agent in Spokane, Washington, saw the issue and alerted his superiors. William Pinkerton, however, dismissed the article as a “fake,” published just to sell newspapers. See P.F. Kemble, letter to P.K. Ahern, April 22, 1913; and William A. Pinkerton, letter to George D. Bangs, April 27, 1913. Pinkerton Papers, CPP/ Pinkerton, Van Nuys, California.

The second published account, in Frederick R. Bechdolt’s Tales of the Old-Timers (Century: NY, 1924), pp. 336-37, has Butch and Sundance dying in 1906 in Argentina in a shootout with “more than one hundred soldiers.” In Bechdolt’s version, Sundance was killed by the soldiers and Butch committed suicide.

In any event, these writings apparently did not attract a great deal of attention although perhaps they were seen by some of Butch and Sundance’s relatives or former confederates, such as Matt Warner or Elzy Lay.

85. Meadows, Digging Up, pp. 266-269.

86. William L. Simpson, letter to Charles Kelly, May 5, 1939. Charles Kelly Papers, Marriott Library. Simpson said he knew of two people, one named “Billie Sattell,” who went “to the place where [Butch] died and authenticated the story of his death.” This is doubtful. No record of any such trip has ever come to light.

Simpson indicated that he knew something of William Phillips, saying that “at one time Phillips went under the name of Al McCrea, but I may be mistaken in this.”

Simpson wrote to Kelly later that year intimating that the people promoting the Phillips story didn’t know what they were talking about. He added that Bert Charter, a second-tier member of the Wild Bunch, was responsible for having sent “Billie Sattell” to South America to investigate Butch’s death, but this seems doubtful because Charter was apparently among those who believed Phillips was Cassidy. See Pointer, In Search of, pp. 240-41.

Simpson also said “I offered [Hank] Bodecker [sic] one hundred dollars to advise me when Phillips came back to Lander again and he did come and Bodecker never took me up on the hundred.” Simpson, letter to Charles Kelly, September 6, 1939. Charles Kelly Papers, Marriott Library.

Yet another version of the man-sent-to-South-America story is that “Billy Sattelle, who in 1911 shot and killed a man on the main street of Shoshoni, pulled out and left for Buenos Aires. Some time later, when he returned, he brought word that Butch Cassidy had assuredly been killed there in a skirmish with the police.” However, before Sattelle made it back north with his story, Cassidy who had “shot and killed Lonabaugh [sic]” at their ranch in Chile during “a heated quarrel,” and himself been “riddled with bullets, then left . . . for dead” by the “rurales,” returned to the United States, finally settling “in Spokane, Washington, where he operated a restaurant and became a highly respected citizen under the name of Bill Phillips.” Edmund Crabbe, interview with Ludwig Stanley Landmichl, c. 1939. WPA Manuscripts Collection, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Courtesy Richard Johnston.

If Billy Sattell/Sawtell/Sawtelle went to Argentina after a 1911 shooting in Wyoming, he very likely would have heard about the deaths of Robert Evans and William Wilson, a pair of notorious gringo bandits killed in December of that year by the Frontier Police in a shootout in Patagonia, near where Butch and Sundance had ranched. See “American Outlaws, Shot by the Frontier Police,” December 12, 1911, and “Deaths of the Bandits Evans and Wilson,” December 16, 1911, Buenos Aires (Argentina) Herald. Perhaps Sattell assumed Butch and Sundance were killed in that shootout.

Matt Warner told a somewhat different version in his memoir: “Cassidy’s friends sent a man named Walker down [to Argentina] to make sure of [his death] and to find Butch’s grave, if possible. Walker reported he found the grave and told the same story of Cassidy’s death that I’m telling here.” Warner and King, The Last of, p. 323.

Charles Kelly harvested several stories, all highly doubtful. For example, one story had Elzy Lay and Matt Warner raising money, at $125 a head, from leading citizens, “among them Charley Gibbon, the Hanksville storekeeper, and Dr. I.W.K. Bracken, a retired capitalist who had once owned cattle in the Henry mountains. The emissary made a trip to the reported scene of Cassidy’s last stand, interviewed surviving soldiers who had participated in the battle at San Vincente, obtained photographs taken at the time showing the two dead outlaws, and returned to Utah with his evidence.” Kelly said that Queen Ann Basset recalled that “Elzy Lay told her he sent a man named Burton. Warner says that when the hat was passed Walker was sent. William L. Simpson says he knows two men who investigated Cassidy’s death, one being Billy Sattell.”


Dr. Bracken, according to Kelly, looked at one of the photographs of the dead men and “declared that the one thought to be Cassidy was actually Tom Dilley, a minor outlaw from Robbers’ Roost who had gone to South America . . . .” Kelly, ibid., p. 316.

In a 1974 article, E. Dixon Larson

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related the tale of the photographs with yet one more variation: “A certified statement of the post office detective, Robert Hildebrand, who knew Butch and chased him for years[,] was examined in which he states that the photo was in no way LeRoy Parker.” E. Dixon Larson, “Legends and Facts . . . Butch Cassidy,” Guns, March 1974.

There is no hard evidence in the United States, Bolivia, or Argentina, however, that anyone went to South America looking for Butch and Sundance in the aftermath of the November 1908 shootout. Indeed, it was months, if not years, before word of their deaths filtered back up to the Butch’s friends in the Rockies. Moreover, the meticulously detailed report of the investigation of the shootout in Bolivia, which was conducted by judicial authorities shortly after the event, contains no reference to photographs. Finally, none of the photographs allegedly seen by individuals here in the United States has ever been found.

88. Anne Meadows and Daniel Buck, “Showdown.”