

Robert Leroy Parker of Beaver and Circleville

Butch Cassidy, Famous Outlaw, Was Both Legendary and Real

By THERON H. LUKE

Did Butch Cassidy or didn't he?

If you're a Butch Cassidy buff, you'll know what we mean — but in case you aren't we'd better explain.

Did Butch Cassidy come back to the United States after the famous battle with the federal troops in Bolivia in 1909, and die a natural death at a ripe old age here in America? Or did he die in the 1909 fight, as was the fate of his partner, the Sundance Kid?

Sister Disputes Legend

For a long time, and by many writers, Butch died in Bolivia. His sis'er, Mrs. Lula Parker Betenson of Circleville, who at 85 is the only living member of a family of 13, says he returned to America and died here. She says she has proof, and we have no reason to doubt her, but she's saving it for her own book which she intends to write and which, she says, will contain the only true story about her famous brother.

Why this interest in Butch Cassidy?

Two reasons: First, the movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" will begin showing in Provo Oct. 1 at the Academy and Pioneer Motor-Vu Theatres. Attempts are being made to get the world premier here, but at this stage no one can guarantee it. And the Sundance Kid who was a real character and perhaps Butch's closest friend, is played by Robert Redford, rising star who by now is practically a Provoan. Redford married the former Lola Van Wagenen of Provo, has built a beautiful summer home on the east base of Timpanogos, and has purchased, along with other partners, the former Timp Haven Ski Resort — renaming it Sundance after the movie, and the real life character.

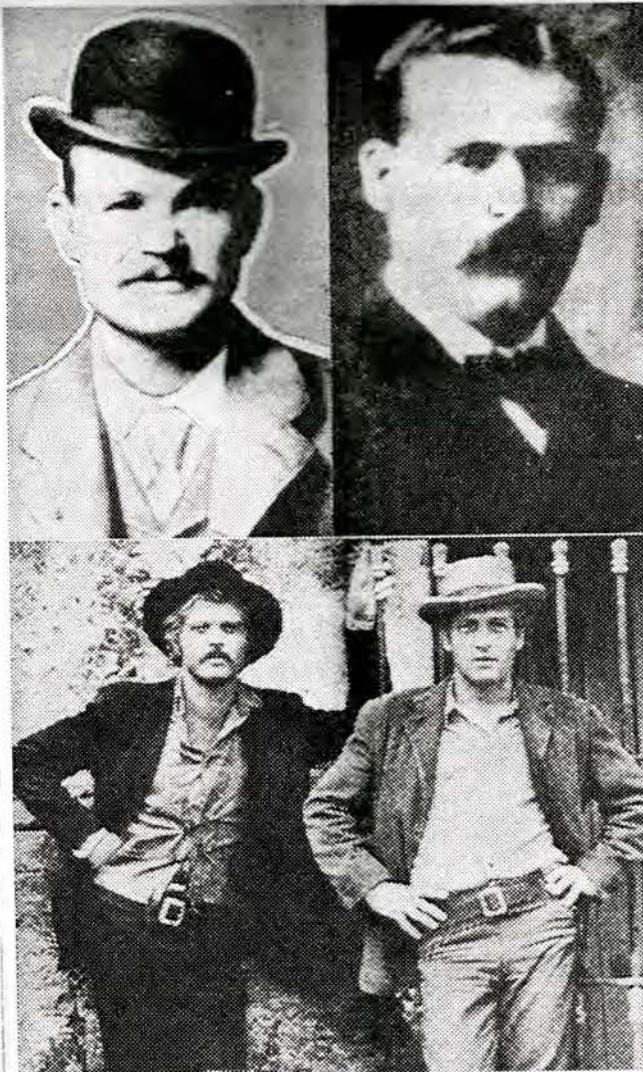
Butch Was a Mormon

Reason number two, is the fact that the movie and character of Butch Cassidy has a special interest for Utahns because he was really the only Mormon outlaw who ever amounted to anything — as an outlaw, that is.

We confirmed the fact that he was a Mormon from his sister, who said he was baptized into the church probably in Beaver where he was born, not Circleville where he later lived. Butch, if he followed the usual pattern, probably was made a deacon at the usual age of 12 or thereabouts. He hit the outlaw trail before he was 18, so it's reasonable to assume he didn't go much further up the priesthood ladder. And this brings us to a title we've long been toying with for an article on Butch: "Butch Cassidy — the first Senior Aaronic."

True Name

He was born Robert Leroy



BUTCH CASSIDY was a real person, a famous Utah and Western outlaw in the late part of the 19th century, and so was his pal, the Sundance Kid. Cassidy's real name was Robert Leroy Parker, a Mormon boy born in Beaver who later lived in Circleville. The Sundance Kid was actually Harry Longabaugh who got his nickname, according to an old Pinkerton poster, because he "served 18 months in jail at Sundance, Cook County, Wyoming, when a boy, for horse stealing." Top left is the real Butch Cassidy in a famous picture taken about 1900 when Butch was just over 30. Top right is the real Sundance Kid. Lower, Robert Redford, left, known to many Provoans, who plays the Sundance Kid in the movie, and Paul Newman who has the role of Butch Cassidy.

Price gained a niche in history by being the scene of one of Utah's more famous holdups when Butch and a buddy robbed the D. and R. G. Railroad of a mine payroll. Many people throughout Southern Utah knew him, including a few who are alive today.

Claims Meeting

Clifford McMullin, who lives today in St. George, claims he saw Butch in 1923 in the Colorado River while working on a crew preparing to build Boulder Dam. Clifford was Butch's full cousin, and he claims the latter recognized him and sidled up to say "Give my love to Aunt Ada." Aunt Ada was Clifford's mother and Butch's aunt, the sister of his mother.

There are other accounts, some undoubtedly legend, some carrying weighty evidence, that Butch was seen in America

he never killed a man will stand a little scrutiny in view of the fact that the last fight in Bolivia was an all-out, no-holds-barred battle for survival against a troop of Bolivian cavalry. Even his sister admits he may have killed someone in Bolivia, but stoutly insists he didn't prior to that.

Redford is Great

Paul Newman plays Butch in the movie and does his usual fine job. But for our money Robert Redford is great — absolutely great — and that's not just because I might run into his in-laws sometime. The movie is set up for Butch as the comedian and Redford as the straight man. Redford is so good that at times he's the comedian. He chews tobacco constantly in the film. I asked him if it were the real thing. "I tried it, but it made me

dizzy," he said candidly. "I ended up with was of Blackjack gum."

As for the movie, you'll love it. It's so funny — a spoof of but done better than yet tried. It is not film, until the Boliv. It is not really a r although it has an "r". The sex scenes are as the rest of it, which is funny.

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True Name

He was born Robert Leroy Parker in Beaver, of goodly parents who came over as handcart pioneers. His parents were then the only children, but they came with their parents in two different handcart companies. Before he became Butch Cassidy he was known as Roy. His first name was Robert but many writers, including his sidekick Matt Warner, wrongly tabbed him as George Leroy Parker.

He took the name Cassidy from another outlaw, Mike Cassidy, who took a shine to young Robert Leroy Parker and vice versa. He acquired the Butch, according to his sister, when he was working in a Rock Springs, Wyo., butchershop.

One of the hideouts of Butch's gang — known as The Wild Bunch (no relation to the recent movie of that name) was Robbers Roost in the Price country. Castle Gate near

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There are other accounts, some undoubtedly legend, some carrying weighty evidence, that Butch was seen in America long after 1909. And there are the words of his own sister, whom we interviewed recently: "Butch came back. There are so many people who have seen him here in the United States that we know it isn't true . . ." (referring to the stories that he was killed in Bolivia.)

Ages Given

Butch was born in 1866. In 1919 he was 43. In 1923 when Clifford McMullin claims he saw him on the Colorado River, he would have been 57. Since today he would be 103 it is fairly safe to assume he's dead — but where and when apparently remains his sister's secret until she reveals it in her book.

In his sister's eyes, and understandably so, Butch looms today as a combination of Galahad and Robin Hood. He was, from all accounts, a very amiable outlaw and certainly not a vicious one. The legend that

he never killed a man will stand a little scrutiny in view of the fact that the last fight in Bolivia was an all-out, no-holds-barred battle for survival against a troop of Bolivian cavalry. Even his sister admits he may have killed someone in Bolivia, but stoutly insists he didn't prior to that.

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dirty," he said candidly. "What I ended up with was five sticks of Blackjack gum."

As for the movie itself. You'll love it. It's screamingly funny — a spoof of Westerns but done better than any spoof yet tried. It is not a bloody film, until the Bolivian scene. It is not really a risqué film although it has an "M" rating. The sex scenes are as funny as the rest of it, which is pretty funny.

The film ends in Bolivia with the last battle, and the death of Butch and the Sundance Kid.

As his sister claims, and we now firmly believe, Butch didn't die there . . . but that's another story as Mrs. Betenson says.

Of the film we might say: History it ain't. Entertainment it certainly is.