

THE COURAGEOUS CLERK OF CLEEVER COUNTY

Mild-mannered and small in frame, Calvin Clark didn't seem like the pioneer-type that braved the rugged journey west. He made his way to Cleever County by hitching a ride aboard a wagon owned and driven by Jeremiah Bodie, a tough, solitary man more fitting for the arduous journey. For the first fifty miles of their shared ride, they exchanged the polite pleasantries of family, places, and other journeys. For the next five hundred miles, they spoke barely a word.

Jeremiah's leg of the journey ended in a small town at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. He purchased a small farm just outside of town and settled in for a life of raising horses. Calvin picked up a stage in town and continued his trek to Cleever County. The county seat and eventual home for Calvin was Culver City. One of dozens of towns to sprout up in the gold and silver mining area, Culver City comprised miners, storekeepers, miners, bar entrepreneurs, miners, assayers, miners, six bank employees (including Calvin), miners, and a

solitary preacher bent on saving anyone who felt compelled to be saved.

Calvin's skills fit perfectly in his job as a bank clerk. Since the Culver City Bank had no competition, Calvin got to know just about everyone in town, or at least everyone that would trust a bank. The miners were perhaps the strangest lot, depositing hundreds of thousands of dollars one week and withdrawing it all the next week. Mountain men, big city lawyers from the East, journalists, gamblers, and vagabonds swelled the ranks of those seeking fortune from the bowels of the earth.

Culver City was generally a peaceful town compared to many others of the same nature. An abundance of alcohol fueled celebrations for those whose vein came through and misery for those whose weary toil produced nothing. A walk down Main Street during the day posed little risk, but in the dark of night, a locked room greatly reduced the chance of getting hit by a stray bullet from the saloons.

One particular group, called the Mason Gang in reference to their leader—Jake Mason, paid no attention to whether the light shone brightly or not. Though they earned the title of “menace”, they always managed to skirt just outside the law or at

least the enforcement thereof. Whenever Calvin took a break to walk to the diner for lunch, the Mason Gang always seemed to occupy the same boardwalk. Jake Mason took every opportunity to harass Calvin. One day, it might consist of taking Calvin's hat and dipping it into the horse trough. The next day, they might block the boardwalk so Calvin would have to walk in the muddy wagon tracks of Main Street.

The Culver City Bank opened a branch bank in Gold Junction about a month after Calvin arrived. The bank assigned Calvin duties at the new branch for three days of the week to help them get organized. Most riders on the stage to Gold Junction thought the trip barely rose above the level of uneventful. On one particular day, though, as the stage traveled along the banks of Dawson's Creek, the driver brought the stage to a sudden stop. This time of year, with the snow melt, Dawson's Creek challenged its banks as a raging torrent instead of a lazy stream. When Calvin looked out the stage window, he could see some type of commotion going on along the bank. It appeared as though a group of riders attempted to cross the creek, and one of them got thrown off his horse into the raging waters. The other riders got back onto the bank and desperately

tried throwing their lassos to the man. They were unsuccessful in their efforts, and none dared jump into the water. Without giving it a second thought, Calvin jumped from the stage and dove into the water. His small, wiry frame maneuvered through the flowing water with relative ease until he reached the struggling man. Grabbing the man by the back of his shirt, Calvin swam to the shore. Calvin's courage and their own lack of bravery stunned the onlookers.

Calvin got up on his knees and looked at the man he had just saved. The bank clerk and the man shared a mutual shock as they looked at each other, for the man that Calvin rescued was none other than Jake Mason, his constant tormentor in town.

The next edition of the Culver City Crier carried a big bold headline — 'Calvin Clark, the Courageous Clerk of Cleever County'.

Life in Culver City for the mild-mannered bank clerk changed dramatically after that fateful day. The Mason Gang no longer tormented Calvin, always giving him the right-of-way on the boardwalk. Jake Mason personally challenged anyone who appeared to be harassing Calvin. Not that the Mason Gang changed their behavior in any other way, for the town still regarded them as a menace.

One Sunday morning, the gang came busting out the doors of the Nugget Saloon and almost bowled over their new friend.

“Howdy, Calvin, old boy,” said Jake Mason. “Where are you headed this morning? ... it is morning, isn’t it?”

“I’m going to the church,” answered Calvin.

“The church? Well, I reckon if you can go to the church, we can go, too. Come on, boys. We’re going to the church.”

The boys did a lot of grumbling, but they followed their leader. A sudden hush came over those already in the church when the Mason Gang entered. Fully expecting trouble, the congregation didn’t know what to do. The preacher sized up the situation and got the service going early to distract his flock. But the parishioners’ worries were unfounded, for the Mason Gang caused not a stir. When it came time to pass the collection plates, Jake Mason took off his hat and made his boys pony up from their gambling winnings. Then he emptied his hat into the offering plate. When asked about it later, the preacher said he once knew a man that would cuss up a storm on the steps of the church, sit like an angel during the service, and then when he was back outside, would resume

cussing up a storm. He figured Jake Mason must have had a mama that made sure he behaved in church when he was a young'un.

The Mason Gang came to church for two more Sundays with Calvin. Then one day they were gone. No one in town ever saw them again. Of course, rumors abounded on the bench outside Butch's Tonsorial Parlor. Some said that the Texas Rangers finally caught up with them or they were the victims of a revenging ambush. Others were kind and said they thought that Jake Mason had finally seen the error of his ways and just wanted to make a clean start some place where no one knew him. But no one really knew for sure, except maybe God.

Some in the town claimed to have heard the preacher say he kinda missed 'em. When asked about it, he admitted to the feeling. He lamented over the common occurrence in the territory of having people come and disappear so frequently, but that was just the way it was in the mining towns. Yet, when he wrote to some of his friends back east, they would often lament about the same thing in the big cities.

The Culver City Bank took full advantage of the publicity that Calvin had generated as an

employee. They hung a sign by the door that said, 'You can trust this man and this bank'. Under those words was a copy of the Culver City Crier's Headline — 'Calvin Clark, The Courageous Clerk of Cleever County'.

Occasionally, someone would stop Calvin on the boardwalk and ask him if he missed Jake Mason and the boys or if he ever heard from them. Calvin had few words to say, but perhaps the tear in his eye said more than enough.