

Law Enforcement

From the beginning of the Spanish settlement of New Mexico a major problem was the protection of settlers and Pueblo Indians from raids by nomadic tribes, especially the local bands of Apaches and invading Comanches from the east. The governments of Spain and Mexico were never able to deal with the raids effectively.

From 1849 to 1859, a few years after the Mexican War, the United States Army explored and mapped New Mexico in preparation for building a series of roads and forts to promote settlement and suppress hostile Indians. After the capture of Geronimo in 1886 the Indian raids ceased, but outlaw Anglos presented a new problem. Neither the Territorial nor Federal governments could bring law and order to Socorro County. Vigilante organizations arose, the most notable being the Committee of Justice headed by E. W. Eaton. Colonel Eaton commanded Fort Craig during the Civil War and resigned afterward to take up ranching and mining. The Committee was active from 1881 to 1885 and it hanged a number of criminals on Death Alley (now Fisher Avenue). Photos of Death Alley and a legal hanging not involving vigilantes appear below. The last big vigilante event was the execution of Joel Fowler, a notorious robber and murderer, whose photo is included.

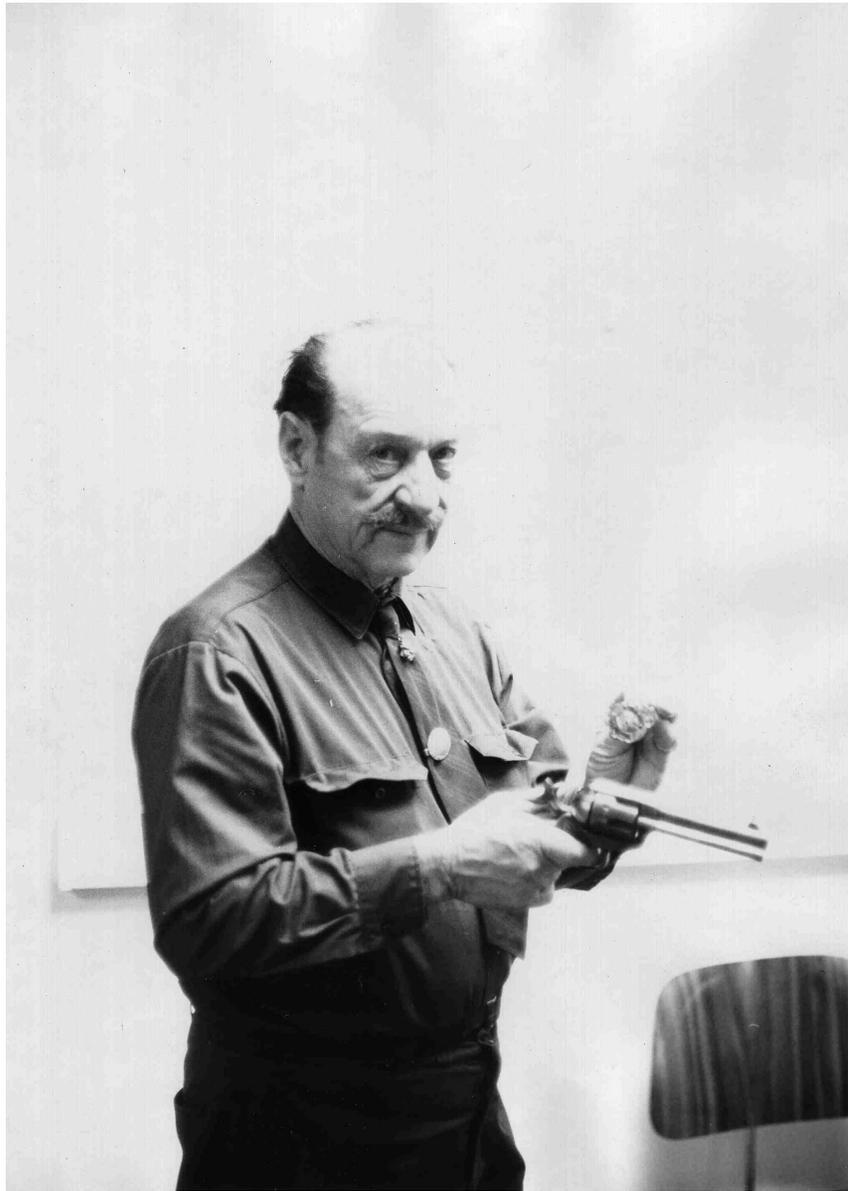
The most famous law enforcement officer in Socorro County history was Elfego Baca, best known for his survival of a siege staged by cowboys in a town formerly called Frisco (now Reserve) in the year, 1884. Baca was summoned from Socorro to help control rampaging cowboys from the Slaughter Ranch. He arrested one of them and was forced to take refuge from the remaining 150 cowboys by barricading himself in the house of Geronimo Armijo. By the time the cowboys got bored and ceased firing, 4,000 bullets had been discharged into the house.) One of the men shot and killed by Baca was named Curran. (Altogether he killed four and wounded eight.) At the conclusion of the affair, Baca was tried for murder but was acquitted. According to a nephew, A. B. Baca, Elfego once confronted one of a pair of escaped prisoners after recapture and said he would bet \$10 that the prisoner was going to find and bring in his partner. The prisoner asked, "What if I don't come back, Mr. Baca?" Elfego said "Oh I know you'll come back. If you don't, I'll bring you in myself, dead or alive." A short time later, both men surrendered.



Death Alley (Fisher or Garfield Avenue), Socorro Peak in background



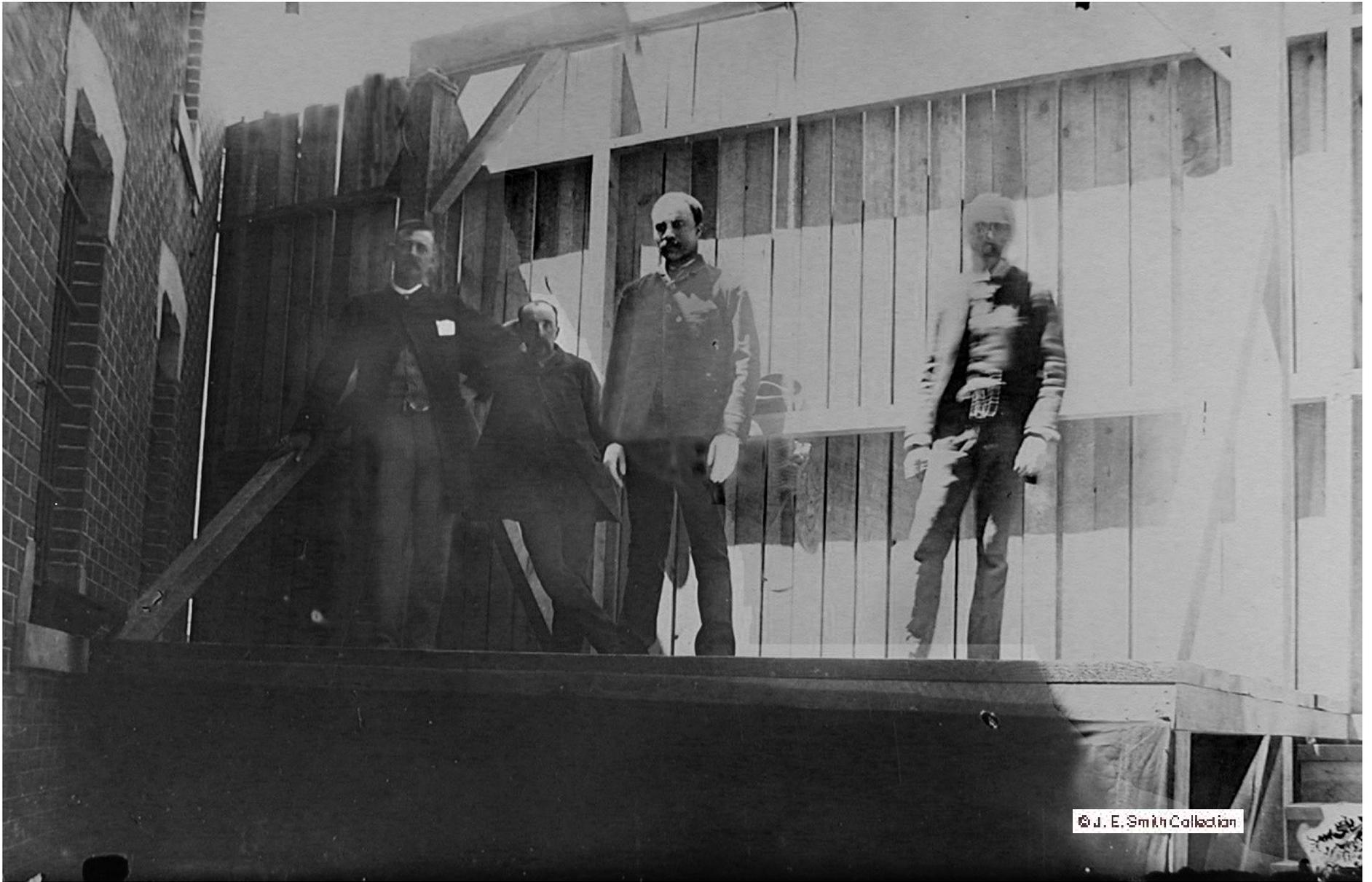
Elfego Baca



A. B. Baca with Uncle Elfego's Revolver and Badge



Joel Fowler, robber and murderer



Hanging of a prisoner named Anderson



Private legal action, a duel in which both men died



Old Court House and Jail in background



Former Police Station



The New Courthouse