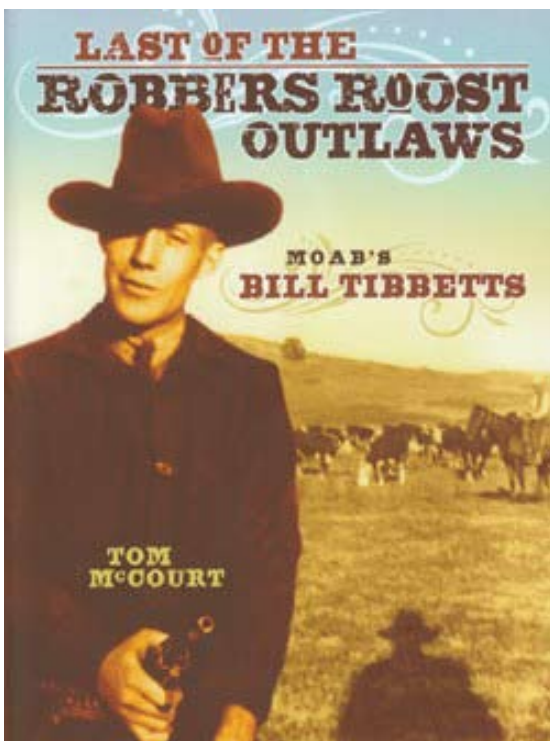


AN EXCERPT FROM:
LAST OF THE ROBBERS ROOST OUTLAWS
Moab's BILL TIBBETTS
 Tom McCourt

INTRODUCTION:

This book tells a true story. James William (Bill) Tibbetts, Jr. was a real man, a real cowboy, and a real outlaw. And he really was the last of the Robbers Roost outlaws. He was also a good man by most accounts, a devoted family man who loved his wife and children and took care of his twice-widowed mother. Even some of his strongest enemies came to like him and call him friend. Few people have ever heard his name and only a handful have ever known his story, until now. It is a fascinating tale, beyond fiction and imagination.

Most of this story is in the public record. Early newspaper accounts have many references of Bill Tibbetts, and most are used in their entirety in this book, even though the news stories don't always tell the same story Bill told his children. There are other first-person accounts besides Bill's that cast doubt on some of the things reported in the newspapers, too. News reporting has always been inexact, and that was especially true in the early 1900s when news and editorial opinion were often intertwined. For the purposes of this book, the author follows the Tibbetts family account while using the newspaper stories for backdrop, contrast, and a taste of the times.



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BEGINNINGS...

In the 1890s, Utah's San Juan County was still a blank spot on most maps. The area was one of the last frontiers in the continental United States, a vast region of tangled red rock canyons, cedar mesas, and dusty-blue sagebrush flats. Roads were primitive, distances were long, and the westerly wind swept wild and free across millions of acres of empty sage and canyon country.

On the south side of the La Sal mountain range, a few pioneer farms and ranches were scattered through the sage and oak brush. There was no town there in the true sense of the word, only a general store with a few outbuildings, but the site was called La Sal. In later years, it would be known as old La Sal.

It was a land of many perils. Lawmen, clergymen, doctors, merchants, and neighbors were often hard to find. Pioneer families dealt with sickness, accidents, birth, death, and bad men as best they could.

It was a cold afternoon when eighteen-year-old Ephraim Moore came down the muddy wagon road toward old La Sal. The tops of the mountains were still wrapped in snow and a forest of oak brush spread leafless and barren across miles of rolling foothills and up the mountainsides. A blue winter's haze hung heavy in the air, filtering the sunshine like fine indigo silk.

The young man was sitting high on the buckboard wrapped in an old wool coat with a widebrimmed hat pulled low over his eyes. The horses sloshed through the sticky mud with shoulders tight against the harness, the wagon following obediently while rocking like a ship on the uneven roadway. The boy mumbled a popular song of the day, low and to himself, into the collar of his coat and under his breath. From a few feet away his off-key efforts sounded more like a moan of pain than any song another person might have recognized.

Young Ephraim was on his way to visit the wilderness homestead of his older sister, Amy Moore Tibbetts, and her new husband, Bill. He had been traveling all day over the rocks and ruts of the pioneer wagon track and he was tired, hungry, and eager to have his journey done. His feet were braced against the splashboard to help cushion the jarring punishment of the hardboard spring seat and his fingers were numb from holding

the reins for hours in the cold, high desert air. The horses plodded along wearily with heads down and legs covered with mud to their knees.

The wagon squeaked and rattled.

The weary horses finally topped a long rise and the young man could see his destination. The little cabin nestled snug against the shelter of a wooded ridge with pole fences and corrals spread wide across the frozen meadow. It was a welcoming sight with the early shadows of evening beginning to creep across the valley.

The homestead presented a scene of peace and tranquility, but as Ephraim got closer, he could sense that something wasn't right. Before he reached the yard he could hear livestock in the corral bawling to be fed, and the big dog that ran out to greet him seemed tense and agitated. He noticed that the cow hadn't been milked that afternoon and there was no smoke from the chimney of the cabin. The March weather was much too cold not to have a fire.

Ephraim pulled the wagon up near the cabin and climbed down. From the look of things, no one was at home, and it didn't appear that anyone had been there all day. The boy was concerned about that. He'd been sent by his mother to check on his sister who would soon deliver her first child. His instructions were to take her back to Moab where she could have the baby in the comfort of her mother's home with a proper midwife in attendance. But where could his sister be?

Ephraim had traveled almost forty miles and he needed a place to spend the night. The young man rapped on the cabin door, then pulled it open a crack and hollered cautiously, "Hello sister, it's Ephraim. Don't shoot me." Immediately there was a groan from the semi-darkness within the cabin, and then he heard his sister's tearful cry, "Ephraim! Oh, thank God! ...I need some help, Eph. ...I need some help."



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Ephraim rushed into the cabin to find his sister lying on the bed covered with a blood-stained blanket. "The baby's coming, Eph. I need some help," she pleaded. She then slammed her teeth together on a corner of the blanket to suppress a wild animal scream.

"What are ya doin', Amy?" the boy muttered in complete shock and bewilderment. "That baby ain't due fer another month or more. You can't have it now, not here, not like

this.”

“You gotta get some help, Eph. Run to the Cross-H Ranch and get that lady who cooks down there. She knows me and she’ll come.”

“Where’s Bill, Amy? Your husband ought ta be here.”

“He’s on the range with the cows,” she groaned through clenched teeth. “Won’t be back until tomorrow. Go get that woman at the Cross-H.”

“Gawd, Amy, I can’t leave you here like this. Not like this.”

“Git!” she screamed with pain, impatience, and anger. “You go get that lady cook and don’t you waste one minute!”

Ephraim charged from the cabin and vaulted to the wagon seat. He left the yard with the wagon wheels throwing mud and the horses’ necks bowed under the threat of his stinging whip. The big dog ran alongside, yapping excitedly while chasing him down the muddy road. The Cross-H Ranch was two or three miles down the valley.

When Eph got to the ranch he found the lady cook was gone and wouldn’t be back for a few more days. None of the cowboys was willing to volunteer for midwife duty. The young man was stuck. There was no doctor, no hospital, no midwife, no woman, no relative, and no friend to come to his aid and help him deliver his sister’s baby. Panic overwhelmed him as the reality set in.

As the boy turned to go back to his sister’s cabin with his heart in his throat, one of the cowboys handed him a doctor book. “The part about delivering babies is on page twenty-three. Good luck, kid.”

That’s how it happened. James William (Bill) Tibbetts, Jr. was born in that cold log cabin with his teenaged uncle, Ephraim Moore, acting as midwife. The date was March 23, 1898. It was the rough and tumble beginning of a remarkable life.

The Bill Tibbetts story really began in the late 1880s, when his father, Bill Tibbetts, Sr. filed for a homestead near old La Sal. Like a lot of young men on the frontier, Bill Sr. was a cowboy who made his living tending his own livestock while working part-time for one of the big cattle outfits

‘A MURDER MOST FOUL’

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When the young man decided to build a ranch of his own, he picked a good location in the shadow of Pine Ridge, where a spring of cold water bubbled up from the oak brush. He made a fine two-room cabin there, with outbuildings, corrals, and pine pole fences. Bill was proud of his place, and he worked hard to build up a good herd of cattle.

Available women were in short supply on the Utah frontier, and Bill was approaching middle age and still single when he met and fell madly in love with Amy Moore, a teenaged girl from Moab who came to cook for the Cross-H Ranch. It was common in those days for older men to court and marry younger women, and the two of them hit it off very well. Amy was a pretty girl who had many suitors, but she was charmed by the handsome cowboy who owned his own spread and offered a ready-made cabin all furnished and waiting. They were married in 1897. He was forty and she was almost twenty when they began life together at the Tibbetts Ranch.

Amy Ellen Moore was the perfect wife for a frontier cowboy. She was strong, independent, and resourceful, the daughter of Mormon pioneers who had walked to Utah from Nauvoo, Illinois, pulling a handcart. She was no stranger to hard work and wilderness. Her parents, Joseph and Hannah Moore, had helped pioneer the settlements of Pleasant Grove, Utah, and Bennington and Fishhaven, Idaho. Then, in 1889, when Amy was twelve, the family moved to the red rock country of Moab and broke ground for a farm along the southern edge of the little community.

Amy loved her husband. He was everything she ever wanted in a man. He was tall, handsome, and well mannered. He treated her with respect. He was considerate of her moods, mindful of her needs, and he loved the desert country the way she did. He promised her that just as soon as he could, he was going to build her a fine home of red desert sandstone, with bedrooms upstairs and white-painted porches. Their marriage was blessed with two sons: Bill Jr., born in the wilderness cabin in 1898, and Joe, who was born in Moab in November 1899.

The sound of an ax echoed across the frozen meadow. It was the evening of March 19, 1902, and Bill Tibbetts, Sr. was chopping wood and stacking it against the side of the cabin. Tomorrow he would leave to spend a few days with his cattle and he wanted Amy to have a good supply of firewood. Household chores and little boys kept her very busy.

It was a pretty time of day. Shadows were growing long and the late afternoon sun lit the snowy tips of the mountains with a soft, orange sheen. Bill’s little boys were playing in the dirt near the woodpile and Amy was peeling potatoes in the cabin.

The barking of the dog drew Bill’s attention to a surrey coming down the muddy lane. He recognized the roan horse and the black-topped carriage as belonging to his old friend, Charlie Rose. Charlie might have been the oldest man in San Juan County, as far as Bill could tell. Old man Rose always told people that he was ninety, but he’d been saying that for years. The old man drove the buggy into the yard and Bill was shocked to see a very haggard and bloody young woman sitting next to him on the seat. Bill recognized

the woman as the teenaged wife of Charles Bothe, a neighbor from up the valley. Charlie Bothe had a bad reputation. He was known to be a bully and a drunk.

“What’s going on, Mr. Rose?” Bill asked as he walked up to the surrey, but he already knew the answer. Dutch Charlie, as the locals knew Bothe, had done this thing before. The man had a horrible temper. He was callous, cruel, and fond of the devil’s brew. His young wife was a constant target of his drunken fury. He had beaten her terribly several times in recent months.

“Saw her hidin’ in the oak bushes up on the hillside,” old man Rose offered. “That red apron and bloody face gave her away. She ain’t got no coat and she’ll freeze fer shore if she stays out all night. I didn’t know what to do with her, so I brought her to you. I figured maybe your missus could fix her up and get her somethin’ to eat. She’s been beat up somethin’ awful.”

Bill could see that both of the girl’s eyes were black and her lip was split and badly swollen. Her dark hair was a tangled mess and there was blood on the front of her dress and apron. He tenderly extended a hand to help the girl down from the buggy. “Are you going to be all right, Mary?” he asked.

“Dutch Charlie’ll kill us both if you help me, Mr. Tibbetts.” The young woman sobbed. “He’s really on one this time. He said he’d kill me if I ran away and he’s out lookin’ for me now. He’s got a gun and he’ll kill us both, for sure.”

“Now, now, don’t you worry about that,” Bill assured her. “Old Charlie is drunk and he’ll come around when he sobers up in the morning. You come in the house and let Amy take a look at that lip. We’ve got a place you can stay tonight and supper’s almost ready.”

Amy came from the cabin as Bill was helping the girl down from the surrey. She stopped in stunned silence and put her hand over her mouth in shock as she saw the damage done to the pretty young face. Tears came to her eyes and it took a moment to regain her composure. Then, taking a deep breath, she stepped forward and said, “You come inside, Mary. I’ve got hot water on the stove and we’ll get washed up for supper.”

As Amy helped the whimpering girl into the cabin, Bill turned to old man Rose. “You might as well stay tonight, too,” he said. It’s a long ways back to your place and you’ll be travelin’ in the dark before you get there. You might as well stay and make an early start in the morning.”

“Thank you, Bill. I’ll do that,” the old man said. And then he turned and looked back up the road, the way he had come. “Old Dutch Charlie might be here in a little while. I’m sure he’s out lookin’ for her. You might want to load that 30-30 and keep it in yer hand.”

“Ole Dutch Charlie doesn’t scare me any,” Bill said with real conviction. “I know the man pretty well. I’ve even hired him a couple of times. He’s a holy terror to that little girl when he’s drunk, but I’ve never seen him tangle with a full-grown man. I got no respect for a man like that. I wish he’d try me one time. I’d like to bust his face for all he’s done to that little wife of his.”

“Yeah, but it’s a family matter,” old man Rose said quietly. “Outsiders shouldn’t get involved in family matters.”

“Maybe so,” Bill growled. “But that man is gonna kill that girl one of these days if someone doesn’t get involved. She shouldn’t have to take a beating like that for any reason. I’m gonna talk to the sheriff about it the first chance I get. Maybe the law can do somethin’ about this.”

The Tibbetts family and their invited guests had just settled down for their evening meal when the dog announced the approach of a stranger. The cabin was crowded and there weren’t enough chairs. Bill put his plate down on the bed where he had been sit-

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