

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS:

ROOM 423: JOSEPH A. WALKER

BORN IN PORT HENRY, N.Y., FEBRUARY 12, 1856
DIED IN HESPERUS (NEAR DURANGO), CO NOV. 3, 1907

SECRET SERVICE AGENT WHO'S IMPORTANT STORY LAY
BURIED FOR 103 YEARS

WHAT WAS HIS STORY?

Around the turn of the last century, the Homestead Act enabled citizens to settle on plots of 160 acres of land that they could use for farming, ranching, or timber. Mining on this government granted land was illegal, as was selling the property to those who wished to mine it for coal. During this time homesteading claim frauds spread all over the West. The corruption prompted President Roosevelt to step into action with the help of the Secret Service.

Joseph Walker was a U.S. Secret Service Agent who came to Durango in 1907 to investigate over 70 cases of illegal homestead operations in the West. He was killed in the line of duty and his death was no accident. His murder trial was one of the largest in Colorado's history.

On the fateful Sunday morning of his death, Joseph was with three men: Thomas Callaghan, also an Operative, Tom Harper, a prospector and miner who was hired as a special agent, and John Chapson, a civil

engineer for the Dept. of the interior. They went to investigate an airshaft on a homestead in Hesperus. The homestead was owned by William Mason, Superintendent for the Porter Fuel Company.

Walker stood guard as the other three men descended the shaft by rope. Inside, the men crawled about 25 feet. According to a written report by Callaghan, "we were very much surprised to find ourselves in the workings of a large coal mine". They determined that they were inside the Hesperus Coal Mine.

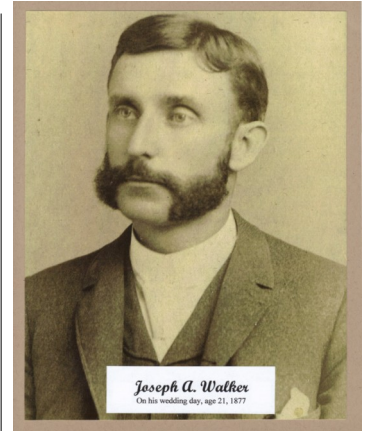
When they returned to the airshaft, they were dismayed to see their rope severed and laying at the foot of the shaft. The opening had been covered. They yelled for Agent Walker but got no response. They were trapped! Tom Harper, being a robust miner, attempted several times to reach the top of the 60 foot shaft, which was lined with round timbers. When he succeeded in reaching the top, he found the body of Joseph, shot in the back

with a shotgun, with over 17 buckshot wounds. These wounds were later determined to be shot at close range with a double barreled shotgun.

Callaghan set out at once with the only horse toward Durango to get the Sheriff. Harper set off on foot to get help at a nearby ranch. Chapson stayed to guard Joseph's body. On his way to Durango, Callaghan came across a buck-board with William Mason, owner of the homestead, and Joseph Vanderweide, a miner. Joseph was carrying a double-barreled shotgun! Mason and Vanderweide claimed self-defense.

What is the connection to the Strater Hotel?

Joseph Walker was well respected in the Secret Service and was good friends with Chief John Wilkie, the head of the Secret Service in Washington. Upon hearing of Walker's death, Agent Wilkie came to Durango himself. He secured the top floor of the hotel for his headquarters during the investigation and the sensational trial.



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST ABOUT JOSEPH WALKER:

- In 1894 he was placed on temporary assignment to protect President Grover Cleveland as well as President Coolidge.
- He never drew his gun in the line of duty, nor did he have to show his badge.
- As a result of the land fraud investigations conducted by the U.S. Secret Service, millions of acres of land were returned to the government.
- Joseph was the Agent in Charge of the Denver Field Office, which included CO, WY, MT, ID, UT and the territories of NM and AZ.

Want to learn more? You are welcome to check out the book *In the Line of Duty* from the front desk. It is a compilation of newspaper articles, documents, letters and pictures of Joseph's story.

Hungry for history? *The Strater Hotel Story* is available for purchase for \$29.95. Call the front desk to request your copy.

THREE IMPORTANT CHANGES

Operative Joseph Walker was the first Field Operative killed in Secret Service Investigations. The result of his death brought about three incredible changes.

One of these changes was a liability law President Roosevelt enacted Congress to pass, giving compensation to government employees and their families for injury or death incurred while in service. Joseph's wife, Alida, had to pay to retrieve his body from the mine in Hesperus and have it brought to Denver. She also paid the funeral expenses.

The second change was a

statute making the killing of a federal officer on duty an offense against the United States as well as against a State.

Thirdly, before leaving office, President Roosevelt assigned eight Secret Service agents to the Department of Justice thereby forming the nucleus of the organization known today as the FBI. Corruption of some members of Congress uncovered during the land fraud investigation was determined a conflict of interest for the Secret Service, sworn to protect Congress.



ALIDA WALKER, WIFE & WIDOW

Alida and Joseph were married in 1877.

She wrote the following to her son Robert in July of 1942:

"I have never been able to get the nerve and strength to see (his grave site) since. Every time I think of it even, I feel as if I would go to pieces and cannot bear it. No one can know how I miss him."

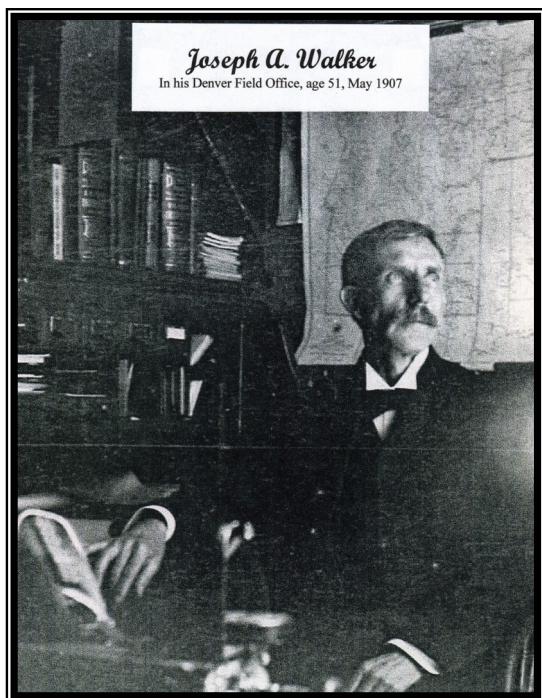
This was 35 years after he died and 6 months before she passed.



Robert Tunstall Walker (Alida & Joseph's son) kneeling in front. His wife, Mary Elizabeth Walker, right side, and their four children from left: Woodville J. Walker (kneeling), Elizabeth Tunstall Walker, Robert Tunstall Walker, Jr., and Mary Alida Walker.



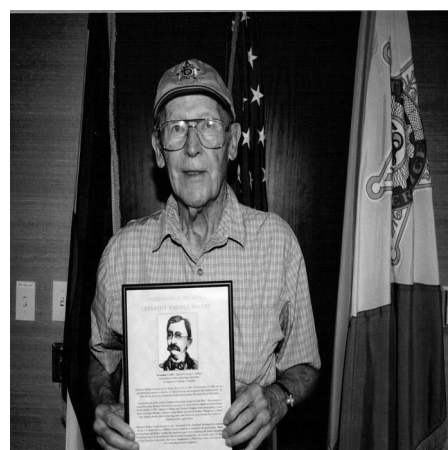
THREE GENERATIONS OF WALKER MEN



Joseph A. Walker
In his Denver Field Office, age 51, May 1907



ROBERT TUNSTALL WALKER, SR., ON HIS GRADUATION DAY FROM COLORADO COLLEGE, PHI BETA KAPPA, 1896-1900



ROBERT WALKER, JR., ON NOV. 3, 2010, HOLDING THE PLAQUE FOR HIS GRANDFATHER WHICH HANGS ON THE SECRET SERVICE WALL OF HONOR.



UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE HISTORY

1865 The US Secret Service Division was created on July 5, 1865, in Washington, D.C. to suppress counterfeit currency. Chief William P. Wood was sworn in by Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch.

1867 Responsibilities were broadened to include "detecting persons perpetrating frauds against the government." This appropriation resulted in investigations into the Ku Klux Klan, non-conforming distillers, smug-

glers, mail robbers, land frauds and a number of other infractions against the federal laws.

1870 Headquarters were relocated to New York City.

1874 Secret Service headquarters returned to Washington, D.C.

1875 The first commission book and a new badge were issued to operatives.

1877 Congress passed an Act prohibiting the counterfeiting of any coin, gold or silver bar.

1883 The Secret Service was officially acknowledged as a distinct organization within the Treasury Dept.

1894 The Secret Service began informal part time protection of Pres. Cleveland.

1895 Congress passed corrective legislation for the counterfeiting or possession of counterfeit stamps.

1901 Congress informally requested Secret Service Presidential protection following the assassination of Pres. McKinley.

1902 The Secret Service assumed full time responsibility for protection of the President.

1906 Congress passed Sundry Civil Expenses Act for 1907 that provided funds for Presidential protection by the Secret Service.

1908 The Secret Service began protecting the president-elect. Also, President Roosevelt transferred secret service agents to the Dept. of Justice. They formed what is now known as the FBI.



MORE INFO REGARDING
THE EXPANSION OF THE
SECRET SERVICE AGENCY
CAN BE FOUND AT
www.secretservice.gov

STILL WANT MORE?
CHECK OUT THESE
BOOKS: *NOTORIOUS
SAN JUAN'S* WHERE
LOCAL AUTHOR
CAROL TURNER
DEDICATES THE
FIRST CHAPTER TO
AGENT WALKER &
*THE SECRET
SERVICE* BY PHILIP
H. MELANSON

GOVERNMENT SECRET SERVICE GATHERING THE EVIDENCE FOR THE TRIAL OF WALKER'S SLAYER



T. J. Callaghan, government agent, standing where Mason and Vanderwilde claim they were when the fatal shot was fired. Walker's body was found on top of the mound and the bullet wounds show he was fired on from above. The prosecution will use this point in attempting to controvert the prisoners' stories.

THE REST OF THE STORY

On November 3, 2010, exactly 103 years after the death of Joseph Walker, his descendants and members of the Secret Service held a special ceremony at Fairmount Cemetery in Denver, during which they unveiled Joseph Walker's new marker. The truth of this case found light at last. The two men who murdered Joseph Walker, Joe Vanderweide and accomplice

William R. Mason were first acquitted in Durango because there was a strong anti-government sentiment in town at that time. They were then re-arrested and charged in federal court but the Judge ruled in their favor relying on the rule of double jeopardy (one cannot be tried twice for the same crime.). Due to Walker's death and his inability to testify in the government's land fraud cases, the

prosecution was forced to drop their suits. A number of others were implicated in the murder, but conspiracy to murder was an even more difficult charge to prove in court. The two murderers went free. It was said they committed suicide. They did not. One returned to his home in California, the other lived out his years in Kansas. They are both on the other side now, perhaps working it out with Joseph

himself.

Joseph Walker's family finds comfort that though his life was cut short at 51 years, his case has impacted the United States and countless families for over a century.

The Strater applauds his bravery and heroism, and his family also, for bringing his remarkable and important story to light for all to appreciate.



JOSEPH'S STORY, BROUGHT TO YOU BY HIS GREAT GRAND-DAUGHTERS
SHARON & ROBYNN. (PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE STRATER HOTEL, ABOVE)

THE WALKER FAMILY LEGACY CONTINUES

Joseph and Alida had one son, Robert. Robert and his wife, Mary, had two sons, two daughters and fifteen grandchildren.

Sisters Sharon Stackhouse and Robynn Thomas worked with their family to commemorate their great-grandfather's heroism, and to preserve his story from falling into obscurity. They contacted dignitaries and successfully commemorated the memory of Joseph Walker, with a ceremony hosted by their father and sole surviving grandson of Joseph, Robert T. Walker, Jr., to identify his unmarked gravesite.

With the support and blessings of



AFAUSSS (the Association of Former Agents of the U.S. Secret Service) the Walker family honored the memory of Joseph on the 103rd anniversary of his death with a proper headstone. That day, November 3rd, 2010, was officially declared as "Joseph Walker Day" by Denver's Mayor John Hickenlooper.

The sisters compiled a wonderful book, available for your review at the front desk, and they are happy to see that their great granddad has a room named after him at the Strater Hotel.

We wish to thank these lovely sisters for all of their good work, and for their warmth and willingness to preserve history and share this information.