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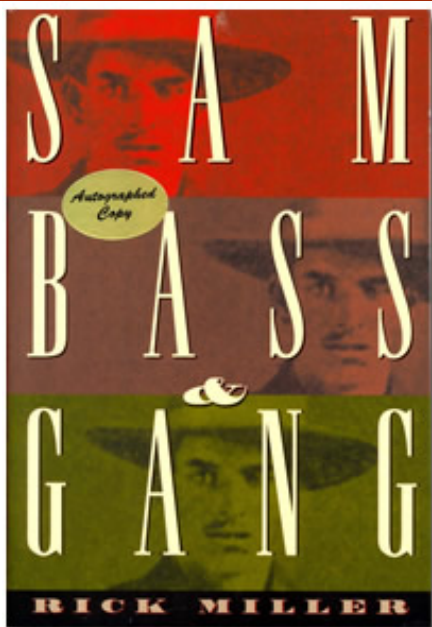

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Book Review

Sam Bass and Gang

By Rick Miller

Review by Chuck Parsons

Rick Miller, *Sam Bass & Gang* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1999), xii + 412 pages, index. extensive endnotes. 58 photographs and map. ISBN 1-880510-65-0. \$34.95 hardcover, 1-880510-67-7 \$24.95 soft cover. Limited edition of 50 numbered and signed copies, slipcased \$150.00.

Wayne Gard's 1936 biography of noted outlaw Sam Bass has, up to now, been the only solid effort to present a complete biography of the Indiana-born thief who has become a popular Texas legend. Rick Miller, a highly respected historian of Texas gunfighters, has now taken research and solid writing well into the second millennium with *Sam Bass & Gang*. Not only do we learn much new information about Bass and his immediate family, but we also find a great deal of new material on the gang members and the lawmen who worked hard to run them down. Wayne Gard could not have envisioned the amount of new biographical information Rick Miller has uncovered.

Tracing Bass from humble beginnings in Indiana, Miller provides in great detail the events that brought Bass to Texas. Once here, the fast life of being a sporting man, racing horses and playing cards, slowly steered Bass to illegal acts. Ultimately, his efforts at "cowboying" led him to his career of

crime: he drove the herds to market and sold them—but then kept the money!

Once Bass's first step into criminal activity had been taken, it was easy to continue. He joined up with the Collins Gang in the Dakota Territory and tried to get rich robbing stagecoaches. This failed miserably. After their disappointments in the Dakota Territory, the gang found great success in the Nebraska Territory. Here, they robbed a Southern Pacific train of \$60,000 in newly minted, gold coins. This triumph, however, ultimately led to their destruction as it brought virtually every able-bodied lawman to hunt and capture them—and get the reward!

Bass split from his pals in the Collins Gang and made it safely back to Texas. There, by 1878, he formed a new gang.

Several train robberies in the Dallas area created a new maelstrom of lawmen now chasing Bass and his gang. The thieves eluded capture for the most part, occasionally exchanging gunshots with local lawmen and also Texas Rangers under Captain June Peak.

However, Bass and his gang met their Waterloo at Round Rock, north of Austin. The bank there was a tempting target for a July 19, 1878, forced withdrawal. A traitor in the gang brought in the Texas Rangers, and Bass and his gang were attacked in a violent gun battle. Gang member Seaborn Barnes was killed on the street, and Bass was severely wounded. He managed to get out of town, however, thanks to his companion Frank Jackson. But Bass quickly knew he was a dying man, and he convinced Jackson to leave him and save himself. Bass was captured the next day by Rangers, under squad leader Lieutenant Charles L. Nevill of Comany E.

In this book, Miller describes clearly how traitor Jim Murphy betrayed Sam. He also depicts the efforts of Major John B. Jones of the Frontier Battalion in planning the action that resulted in the battle with the gang as well as the hard work of Lieutenant N. O. Reynolds to get to Round Rock in time with his squad. Reynolds did not make it for the street fight, but it was his man, Nevill, who found the dying Bass. The next day, Nevill brought Bass in to Round Rock doctors and, within hours, his grave.

Bass never ratted on his pals, which was an honor to him. He died on his twenty-seventh birthday from the deadly effects of bullets from the guns of Rangers Richard C. Ware and George Herold.

There is a significant amount of material in *Sam Bass & Gang* devoted to the law's efforts at tracking, capturing, and killing Bass. This is as much a worthwhile book on lawmen—essentially Texas Rangers—as a biography of Bass, the outlaw.



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