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— Daniel Buck, co-author, *The End of the Road: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid in Bolivia*



## **Life and Death on the Mormon Frontier** The Murders of Frank LeSueur and Gus Gibbons by the Wild Bunch

By Stephen C. LeSueur

**Available June 6, 2023, in paperback and ebook.**

331 pages, ISBN 978-1-58958-787-8

\$32.95 Retail | \$19.77 Wholesale

\$24.99 ebook | Kindle, Apple, Kobo, and Google Play

### **Description:**

On March 27, 1900, Frank LeSueur and Gus Gibbons joined a sheriff's posse to track and arrest five suspected outlaws. The next day, LeSueur and Gibbons, who had become separated from other posse members, were found brutally murdered twenty miles outside of St. Johns, Arizona, a small town where their families had settled with fellow Mormons. The outlaws belonged to Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch gang. Frank LeSueur was the great uncle of the book's author, Stephen C. LeSueur.

In writing about Wild Bunch, historians have played up the outlaws' daring heists and violent confrontations. Their victims serve primarily as extras in the gang's stories, bit players and forgotten names whose lives merit little attention. Drawing upon journals, reminiscences, newspaper articles, and other source materials, LeSueur examines this episode from the victims' perspective and makes clear that these bandits were not heroes but stone-cold killers who preferred ambush over direct confrontation and had no qualms about shooting people in the back. He then takes the narrative further to show how these murders not only affected the victim's families and community, but how they impacted the Mormon presence in Arizona for several decades to come.

The LeSueur and Gibbons families that settled St. Johns served as part of a colonizing vanguard for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as Mormons. They contended with hostile neighbors, an unforgiving environment, and outlaw bands that took advantage of the large mountain expanses to hide and escape justice. By focusing the historian's lens on this incident and its aftermath, this exciting Western history offers fresh insights into the Wild Bunch gang, while also shedding new light on the Mormon colonizing experience in a gripping tale of life and death on the Arizona frontier.

**Subjects:** Wild Bunch, Old West, Mormon colonies in Arizona

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# Life and Death on the Mormon Frontier

*Life and Death on the Mormon Frontier* examines a murderous spree by one of the West's most notorious outlaw gangs and the consequences for a small Mormon community in Arizona's White Mountains.

## Key topics:

1. The Wild Bunch and Old West outlaws
2. Violence in the American Frontier
3. Early Mormon colonies in Arizona

## Praise from early reviewers

- “Stephen LeSueur takes the reader on a ride into the dark, murderous world of the Wild Bunch in the Mormon settlements of the Utah-Arizona frontier. A compelling, deeply researched, and well-written study that will grab the attention of Old West historians.” — Daniel Buck, co-author of *The End of the Road: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid in Bolivia*
- “Stephen LeSueur unearths the circumstances that led a gang of outlaws to kill Frank LeSueur (the author's great-uncle) and Gus Gibbons near St. Johns, Arizona, in 1900. LeSueur punctures popular myths about the Wild Bunch, but the true history of poverty, faithfulness, criminality, and family is more compelling and just as wild. It's a hard book to put down.” — John G. Turner, author of *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet*
- “Unlike romanticized versions of Western bandits, *Life and Death on the Mormon Frontier* portrays a grittier, authentic Old West in a manner that draws the reader into another era. As a descendant of one of the many victims of Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch, LeSueur thoroughly and compellingly recounts the murder and its devastating effect on the family—something often overlooked. In the current climate of winking at contemporary scofflaws, it is good to be reminded that character still counts—and that its opposite still destroys.” — Gregory A. Prince, author of *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* and *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History*

## Recommended Chapters

Chapter 1: The Unfolding of God's Plan Across Arizona – Provides a history of early attempts by Mormons to settle the Arizona territory, particularly the St. Johns settlement, detailing the difficulties and challenges they faced while attempting to domesticate the rough terrain.

Chapter 2: Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch – Provides backgrounds and biographies of key members of Butch Cassidy's Wild bunch gang and their activities leading up to the murders of LeSueur and Gibbons.

Chapter 6: Hunt for the Killers – Profiles Sheriff Edward Beeler, a friend of the LeSueurs and Gibbonses, and follows the beginnings of his quest to identify and capture the murderers.

## About the Author

**Stephen C. LeSueur** is a former journalist and magazine editor. His book, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (University of Missouri Press) won the 1987 Best Book award from the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has written extensively on Mormon history, including a chapter for *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century* (Greg Kofford Books). He and his wife, Kathy, live in Arlington, Virginia.

Stephen is available for interviews. He can be reached directly at [stevesueur@comcast.net](mailto:stevesueur@comcast.net) or through Greg Kofford Books.