

John T. Pope

TAMING THE WILD WEST



Family History StoryBooks

John T. Pope was born in the Utah Territory in 1860. His father was from England, and his mother was from French Canada. They were pioneers who had crossed the plains in a covered wagon. The Popes were sent by Brigham Young to settle the Bear Lake area.

As a boy, John had many encounters with Native American Tribes. When he was 13 his father entrusted him to go alone on a three-day journey to buy furs from some trappers that they could sell in their store. The trappers were shocked to see such a young boy arrive by himself. He felt like a man afterwards.







John worked on various ranches until he was about 17 years old, learning how to track and herd animals and survive off of the land. He then spent about 2 years working as a miner in Tooele until the mine closed down. These mining and prospecting skills came in handy in his later years.

Next he began working at his uncle's ranch where he was given the responsibility of protecting the herd of horses from thieves. He gained a reputation for being totally honest and had the complete trust of his uncle. Little did he know, his reputation for honesty and defense of the law would shape the rest of this life.

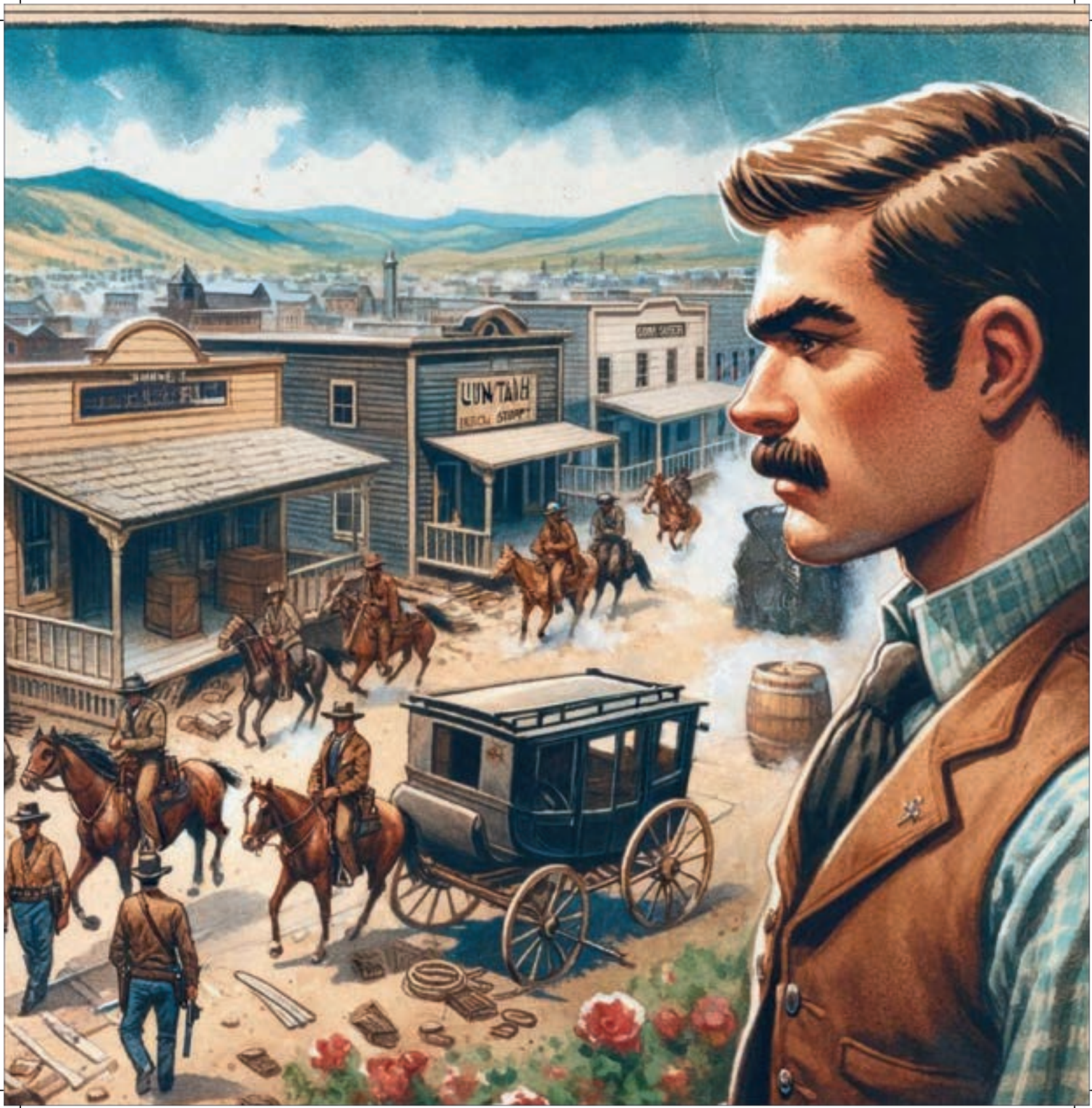


John returned to Bear Lake and married Charlotte Ann Stock, whom he had known while growing up. In 1884 they were sent by Brigham Young, along with John's father's family, out to the Uintah Basin to help settle the land. This remote area included corners of Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado. Vast expanses of open wilderness made cattle ranching an ideal way to make a living.

However, the remoteness of the area also made it easy enough for thieves and rustlers - outlaws - to hide out, steal from, and rob the people who lived there. Because the area bordered three states, outlaws could slip across a state line and hide from the justice system until things died down.







These outlaws traveled between Arizona and Montana along the infamous “Outlaw Trail,” robbing banks, stage coaches, trains, and homesteads. When they were chased by a sheriff or an angry posse, they could ride for days along treacherous trails and hide out near secret water holes to avoid being caught. This was the era of the famous “Wild, Wild West” and John T. Pope was right in the middle of it.

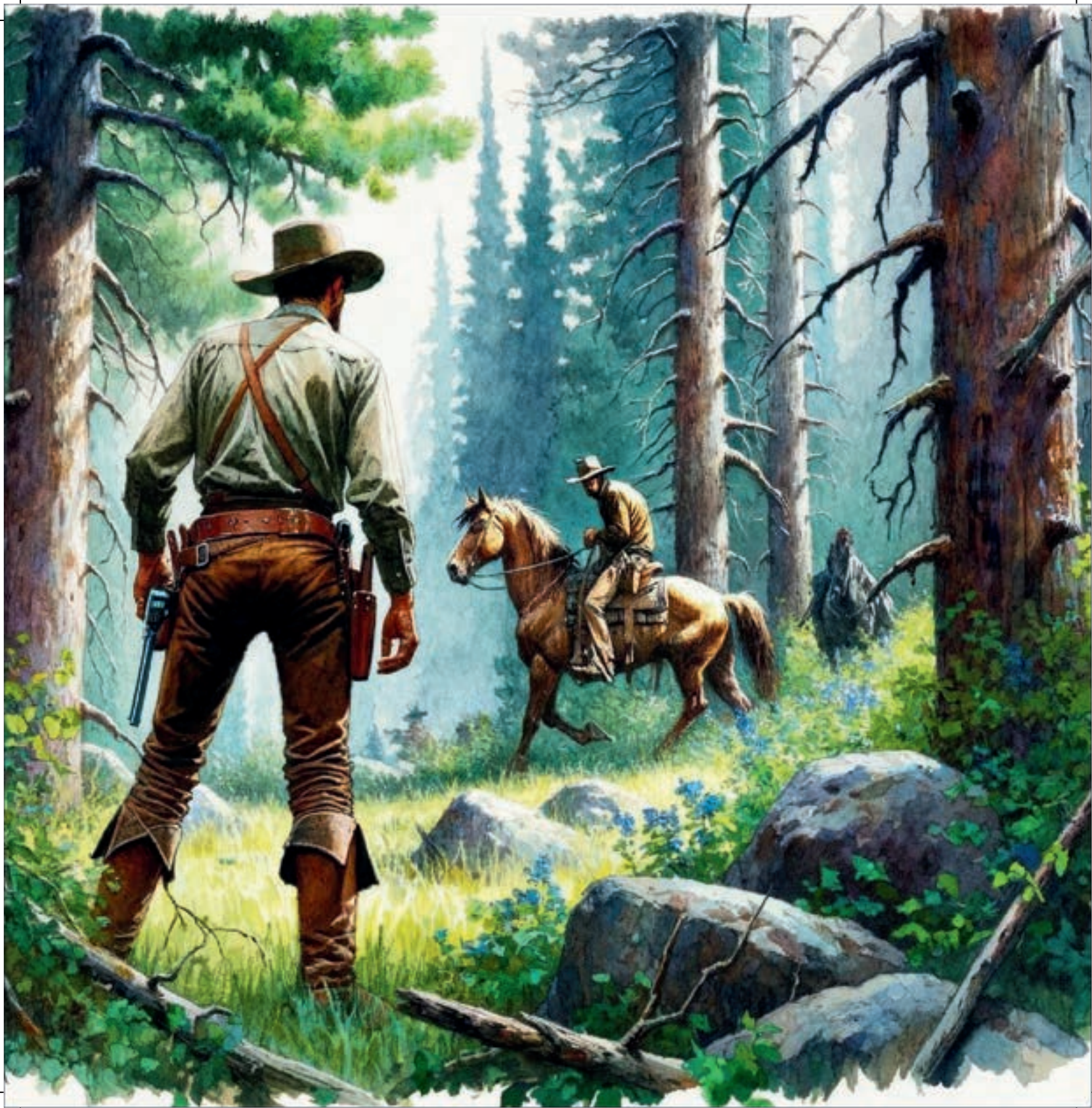
After about five years living in Vernal, the biggest town in Uintah County, there was an election for the role of Sheriff. Although John didn’t ask for the job, he was selected by unanimous vote. His friends and neighbors knew that he was a man they could rely on to enforce the law fairly and to keep them safe. Sheriff Pope accepted the job and got to work.

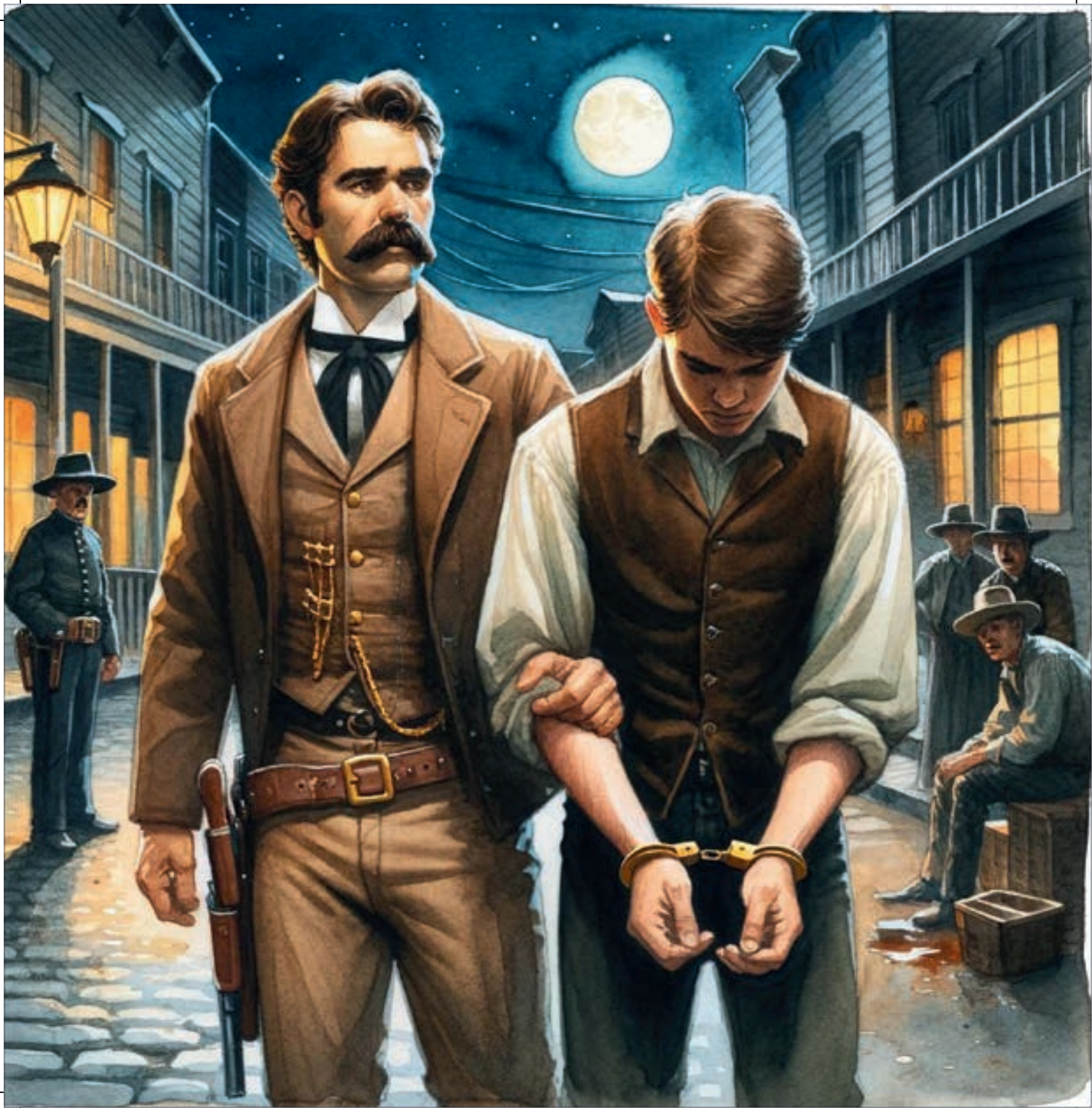


One day a horse disappeared from the middle of town and Sheriff Pope was called to track it down along and catch the thief. He followed the tracks a few miles out of town and then received a tip from a local rancher of the horse's location. John spotted the horse out in some bushes and carefully sneaked around until he spotted the thief waiting in an ambush.

John inched up behind the man, drew his gun, and announced, "Put your hands in the air and be mighty careful-like, or this thing might explode." He handcuffed the man and brought him back into town on the stolen horse.







One day Sheriff Pope heard shooting in the town and went to investigate. He found a drunk teenager shooting his revolver at anything and everything. The teen was angry and combative and threatened to shoot John. John laughed, telling the boy that he couldn't even hit the moon in his state of mind. The boy started firing into the sky, and John was able to take the gun from him while he was distracted.

The next day the sorry boy apologized and sheepishly asked John to take his money and horse as payment for the damages, but to let him go. John listened to his story, and then they had a long talk. The Sheriff sent the boy on his way with his belongings after making him promise to shape up.



Many years later John was approached by a stranger he didn't recognize. The man explained that he had been the troubled boy Sheriff Pope had listened to, and stated, "That day, with the good advice you gave, marked a turning point in my life... I have never ceased to appreciate and respect the man who started me going right."

This was one of the few times that someone Sheriff Pope arrested actually came back to thank him for offering them a way off the criminal path. Instead, most of the time they swore they would come back for revenge.







The outlaws grew to hate Sheriff Pope. They placed a bounty on his head of \$4,000 (about \$135,000 today!). John had to be extremely cautious at all times, watching and listening for traps. Fortunately, he had lots of friends among the people and they always warned him if they saw something out of place or heard a dangerous rumor.

While traveling on horseback through a canyon early one morning, a shot rang out. The bullet went through John's leg and killed his horse. Sheriff Pope shot the outlaw and then limped five miles to a nearby ranch, bought a new horse, and continued his journey.



The most famous Outlaw gang during this time was Butch Cassidy's "Wild Bunch." Sheriff Pope had many run-ins with Cassidy, who often frequented areas of Uintah County along the Outlaw Trail. They had a mutual respect for each other. He would often stop at Pope's ranch along his journey — that is, until Pope received a warrant for Cassidy's arrest.

On one occasion Pope spotted Cassidy's horse outside a tavern. He burst through the door looking for the outlaw, but he was nowhere to be found. A few weeks later, Pope received a postcard from Cassidy that said, "Pope... Lay off me. I don't want to kill you. Butch." Butch Cassidy never returned to the Vernal area again — he didn't want to get in Sheriff Pope's way!







Another time Sheriff Pope arrested Matt Warner, an outlaw from The Wild Bunch, and a few other men for murder. The townspeople were so angry at the outlaws that they formed a mob and tried to break into the jail and take justice into their own hands. Pope and his brother, a Deputy, set up to defend the jail. Their father, then over 70 years old, joined them. He said, "When men threaten to kill my boys for enforcing the law, I'll take a hand."

The townspeople weren't the only ones coming after the prisoners though; the rest of the gang members wanted to free their friend and knew that they had to get the Sheriff out of the way first. They set up a trap for Pope along the road he would need to travel to take the outlaw to trial in Ogden.



Pope recognized the danger he was in from the rest of the Wild Bunch and came up with a plan to outsmart them. He announced that he would be leaving for Ogden on a certain date and then prepared the stagecoach and supplies for the journey.

The night before he was supposed to leave however, he got up in the middle of the night and loaded the handcuffed prisoners on horses. They took an old prospector's trail through the mountains to avoid the trap set by the rest of the outlaws on the road. They rode 120 miles straight through two days until they could board a train to finish the journey.







One day Pope set out to arrest an outlaw called "Buckskin Ed" and found him at a remote cabin. Pope handcuffed Ed and started the long journey back to Vernal. They had to cross the Green River in a little rowboat. In the middle of the river, Buckskin Ed pulled out a hidden knife and attacked Pope from behind.

Pope whipped his gun out and shot over his shoulder, sending the outlaw into the river. John then rode 50 miles back to Vernal where a doctor stitched up his wound. When asked about Buckskin Ed's whereabouts later, Sheriff Pope replied, "Last I saw him, he was headed down the Green River."



John wasn't only a sheriff. He was also a prospector and miner in the area, and ran a shop selling leather goods like horse saddles and harnesses. He was credited with the idea of using an asphalt mixture of oil and sand from his land to make paved roads in much of Vernal, which he offered at no cost to the citizens.

He wanted to bring affordable electricity to the city as well, and scouted all around the area to find a river that was suitable to create a hydroelectric dam. To cap it off, John also played the trumpet in the town's brass band with two of his brothers.







John served as County Sheriff for about six years and then as Town Marshall for a few more. Afterwards he was elected as County Attorney, so he continued working in the justice system. He was also asked to serve as Assistant Health Officer for the County, making sure their water remained clean.

He spent the later years of his life as a pioneer in the oil industry, selling what was known as "Pope Oil." His oil-based roofing products were used on the Salt Lake Tabernacle, as well as many homes in Vernal. The oil was even sold as medicine for a time!



John T. Pope lived until he was 82 years old. He had nine children, twenty-seven grandchildren, and ninety-eight great grandchildren. He is best remembered for his role as the Sheriff of Uintah County who helped make the land safe for the people who lived there.

Sheriff Pope's adventures have been included in many different books and continue to entertain, inspire, and delight children and adults alike. His legacy is one of fierce determination and immense courage. His commitment to honesty and justice sets an example for everyone.





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TAMING THE WILD WEST

MARCH 2, 1860 - JANUARY 1, 1943

My Relationship:



FamilySearch.org ID: KWZC-QNM

Book Created for John's Great-Great-Great Grandson,
Jake Harmer

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John T. Pope



John & Charlotte Pope Family



**Sheriff Pope in a Pinkerton
Detective Photo in 1886**



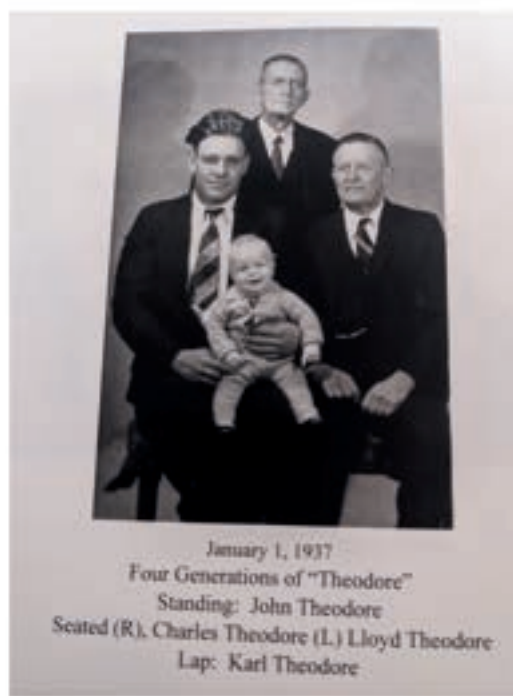
John & Charlotte's Family



John (Top Left) and His Siblings



John & Grace Pope in Front of a Mine



January 1, 1937
Four Generations of "Theodore"
Standing: John Theodore
Seated (R), Charles Theodore (L) Lloyd Theodore
Lap: Karl Theodore

Four Generation Photo



Attorney John T. Pope



Sheriff Pope



John T. Pope Home in Vernal Today