

Politics could be ugly and deadly in Old West

By Abby Stevens, Moonshine Ink

The vote was simple – to elect Truckee’s next town constable – but the politics turned deadly.



Jacob Teeter

The role of town constable wasn’t easy back in the late 1800s. Truckee’s reputation as a town was fraught with poker-playing gun-toting transients. The Truckee jail was built in 1875 out of a necessity to create order, and elected officials put it to use.

Of the Truckee lawmen, Arthur Andrus was first town constable, elected by the Nevada County Board of Supervisors in 1867. Andrus lasted only a few months before turning the position over to Jacob Teeter. The patrolling area was the Meadow Lake Township, which included the town of Truckee and the entire eastern end of Nevada County, according to Guy Coates of the Truckee Donner Historical Society. This large swath of unsettled wilderness mixed with the bursting town of Truckee made the area every lawman’s nightmare.

Teeter was appointed constable at age 26, a job that combined the full power of a policeman with judicial functions as well. He earned the respect of the town after tracking down and jailing a couple of well-known bandits. Teeter had his quirks:

He never carried a firearm although he knew how to use them, and instead carried a pickaxe around as his main weapon, according to the historical book Fire & Ice. Teeter would often remark that his pick never once “misfired” on him.

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