

Author calls books on vigilantes revisionist

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“God’s Thunderbolt: The Vigilantes of Montana”

As far as Montana author Carol Buchanan is concerned, people who portray the Montana vigilantes of the pioneer days as thugs and murderers are nothing more than revisionist historians.

Buchanan is the author of “God’s Thunderbolt: The Vigilantes of Montana,” a historical novel set in the winter of 1863-64. The book was released in July 2008.

The novel tells the story of Dan Stark, an abolitionist attorney who becomes a vigilante prosecutor.

According to Buchanan, history shows that the vigilantes acted justly to restore order against road agents who were part of a gang that terrorized the region of Bannack and Alder Gulch.

Specifically, Buchanan refers to R.E. Mather and F.E. Boswell, who together wrote three nonfiction books about the vigilantes in the late 1980s and early 1990s asserting that the road agents were innocent victims of the vigilantes. In addition, Ruth Mather wrote a novel about Henry Plummer, titled “Henry Plummer, a Novel.”

Another recent historical novel, “Where Law Ends” by Kevin Emmet Foley, released last year, reiterated some of the claims.

Buchanan says the works that discredit the vigilantes cherry pick facts to support their claims while ignoring other facts.

One point of contention is the case of Henry Plummer, sheriff of the Bannack Mining District, who was hanged by the vigilantes. Foley asserts that the trial was unjust.

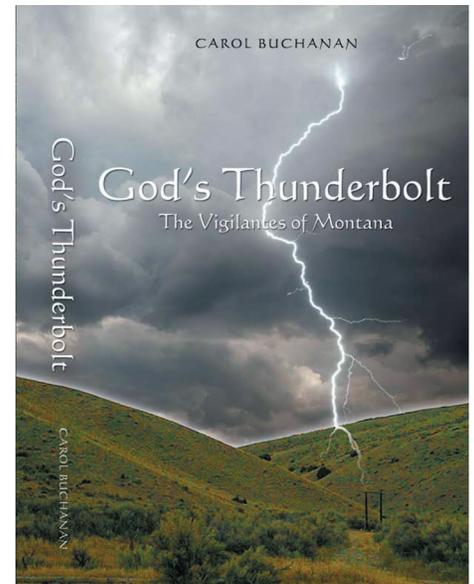
According to Buchanan, Mather and Boswell wrongly assumed that Plummer was elected sheriff of the entire region. In fact, she said, miners in other areas chose their own officers, including the sheriff, whom Plummer later persuaded to step down.

Also, Buchanan says, the books ignore the evidence of a conspiracy that arose at the trial of George Ives, Dec. 19-21, 1863.

She also takes issue with the assertion that Thomas J. Dimsdale’s “Vigilantes of Montana” was written to justify the vigilantes’ actions, purportedly because he, like the vigilantes, was a Mason.

The vigilantes alleged that the high incidence of robbery and murder in the area was the result of a criminal conspiracy led by Plummer.

While Dimsdale’s account may not conclusively prove the conspiracy existed, Buchanan writes, diaries and letters of his contemporaries independently express the opinion that an organized gang was operating in the area.



“God’s Thuderbolt: the Vigilantes of Montana”