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THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF TURKEY PETE

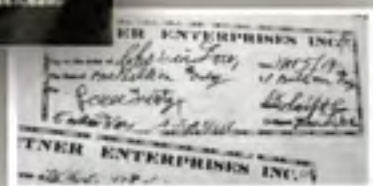
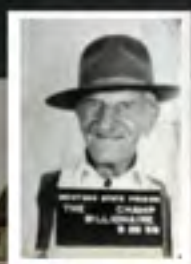
By Jim Blodgett and Joy Morris

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The Life and Legend of Turkey Pete

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF PAUL G. EITNER
MONTANA STATE PRISON PRISONER NO. 6235



BY
JIM BLODGETT & JOY MORRIS

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Prologue

Ever since Paul Eitner was a young boy in Germany, he dreamed of one day meeting real cowboys and possibly even becoming one himself. After his family came to America and settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey, his dream never died, but the reality of it ever happening looked dim. It appeared to him that he was destined to spend the rest of his life working in the Hoboken shipyards.

Paul came from a very close immigrant family and it was not until his parents had passed, and his only sister Ida was married, that he seriously considered leaving New Jersey.

In 1914, at age thirty-six, Paul said his goodbyes to sister Ida and her family and boarded a train with no particular destination in mind, as long as it was headed west. After several weeks on the road he ended up in the infamous cow town of Miles City, Montana. As Paul walked the muddy streets of Miles City he knew this was the place where his dreams would come true.

The years between 1916 and 1918 were difficult for the country due to involvement in World War I. Locally, German immigrants had to be especially careful because of federal and state sedition laws. Just one negative, anti-war comment could result in a prison sentence or worse. During those years, Miles City had one of the largest conviction rates in Montana for the crime of sedition. That fact weighed heavily on Paul Eitner. It took only one threatening comment to convince him he had to arm himself.

Eitner was a shy and reserved man who was conscious of his five foot three inch height and appearance. Although he was not someone who made friends easily, he found friendship at a boarding house where he lived for more than two years. One boarder in particular, Hope Mathena, became a close friend. Unfortunately, Eitner had stronger feelings than just friendship. Those feelings led to a shooting and a tragic loss of life.

On March 2, 1918, Paul Eitner appeared before Custer County Judge Joseph C. Smith and was sentenced to Montana State Prison. On March 4th, he arrived at Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge, and his sentence began.

In 1963, a police detective knocked on the front door of Wesley and Joy Morris. The detective informed them that the deputy warden of Montana State Prison was looking for living relatives of Paul George Eitner. Wesley Morris told the detective that he was in fact a relative. Paul Eitner was the only brother to his grandmother, Ida Eitner Engisch. The detective relayed the message that his Uncle Paul was in declining health, but the deputy warden wanted the relatives to know he was still alive.

This information surprised the Morris's as Wesley had been told many years earlier that his uncle had died. Wesley's only recollection was that Paul Eitner had killed a man during a range war in Montana.

In 1967, the Morris's were notified that Paul had passed away. For years after that notification, several stories were told among surviving family members. Wesley and Joy Morris became increasingly intrigued and curious regarding the true story of their uncle. Joy decided it was time to provide the details about Paul's life before and after he went to prison.

In 1992, when Wesley and Joy were living in Colorado, they decided to take a trip to Deer Lodge where they visited old Montana State Prison. The territorial prison had been vacated in 1979 and had become a museum, open to public tours. Wesley and Joy visited the cell house and the very cell where Paul spent most of his final years. In the old prison museum they discovered several short stories written about Paul Eitner, focusing primarily on the last stage of his life at the prison. Little had been written or recorded about the years before he was sentenced or the early years of his incarceration. Joy made the commitment to ensure that the story was told.

Joy had confidence that tracking the steps of Paul Eitner's life from his 1877 birth in Germany to the tragic events in Miles City in 1918 was something she wanted to do. To make the story complete, she would need to include his life during his years of incarceration.

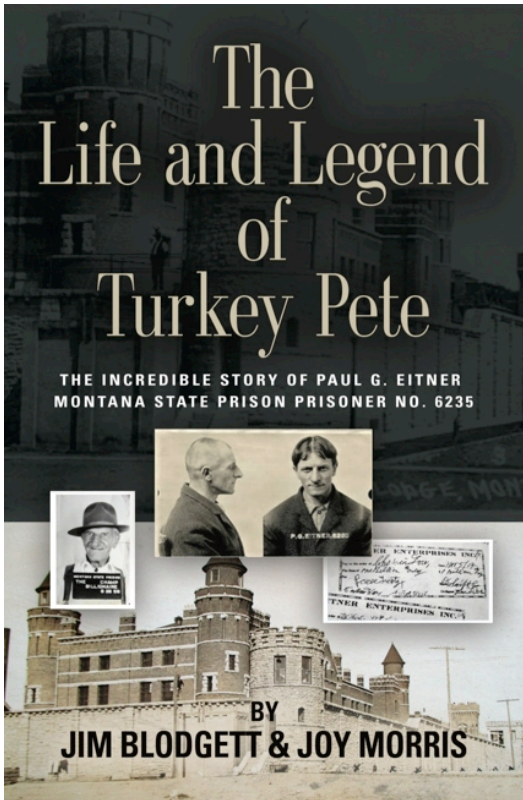
Joy contacted retired corrections administrator and prison historian Jim Blodgett to see if he would be interested in co-writing the book. Jim was familiar with the prison as he started his career at the Deer Lodge facility in 1962 as a correctional officer and served

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twelve years as deputy warden. He knew Paul Eitner very well, was one of the pallbearers at Eitner's funeral, and has been a consultant to several short stories written about him.

Jim agreed, and together they have written this story about a shy, quiet man who became one of the most famous prisoners in the history of Montana State Prison.

This is the life and legend of Turkey Pete.



Paul “Turkey Pete” Eitner went west in search of cowboys, but found much more than he bargained for. Unrequited love eventually landed him behind bars in the Montana State Prison, but that did not end his adventures. From rabbits to turkeys, boxing to breakouts, and riots to riches, Paul’s life became a legend larger than even the Rocky Mountains.

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