

Black Jack Ketchum poem identified as work of S. Omar Barker

In the last *Review*, we mentioned receiving a letter from D.B. "Bruce" Babe, a bush poet from New Plymouth, New Zealand, who remembered a bit of a poem about Black Jack Ketchum and was hoping we could supply the rest. UCHS members Claud and Barbara Ann Smith of Azel, Texas, recognized the work of the late S. Omar Barker of Las Vegas and supplied the complete text. Barker, surely New Mexico's primo cowboy poet, often drew on Union County subjects with the likes of *Colonel Jack's Courtin'* and *Isom Like*.

Black Jack Ketchum

by S. Omar Barker

His name was Black Jack Ketchum, and he rode with Bronco Bill,
He done a heap of robbin' and he savvied how to kill.
He set up in his saddle crackin' jokes about the law,
But there came a time near Clayton when they beat him to the draw.
A train conductor's shotgun and a follow-up at dawn.
They brought him in a prisoner with one arm purt near gone.
He'd set up in his saddle and he set up now and talked
While the doctor cut his arm off, for at takin' dope he balked.
"Be sure you cut it plenty short," he grinned and told the Doc,
"For this coat sleeve's plumb ruined and my other coat's in hock!"
He gave out nary whimper. When the grisly job was through:
"Some day, if you should ask me, Doc, I'd do the same for you!"

They jailed him down at Santa Fé. On his cell he put a sign:
"Two bits to look at Black Jack, folks, and please don't shove in line!"
The jury found him guilty, "Boys, you guessed it right," says Jack.
"When you want an honest jury, Judge, just call these fellers back!"
Young Jerry Leahy, the D.A., had done his job right well.
Judge Mills must sentence Jack to hang. "Well, boys, I'm bound for
hell!"
They asked him what small favor they might grant before his journey:
"I'd make a damn good barber – let me shave the state's attorney!"

The day rolled round for hangin' and the mornin' hour grew late,
And Black Jack got to frettin' like he couldn't hardly wait.
So when they come to git him and to march him from his cell,
He said: "Let's hurry, Sheriff, for my dinner waits in hell!"
His name was Black Jack Ketchum and he rode a bloody trail
And he paid up for his doin's at the little Clayton jail.
He'd rode his saddle jokin', while his gun hand shot to kill,
And them that saw his hangin' say he met that, jokin' still!