

Harold Elliott Bray

Jefferson County Sheriff 1962 to 1991

“Born on the Pecos and died on the Pecos” was a statement Harold Elliott Bray made to his family when he moved to Arizona to retire in 1991. He was born August 6, 1920, in Cuervo, New Mexico, only 15 miles from the Pecos River, and he died in August, 1998, at the Pecos Ranch in Chandler, Arizona. Bray attended and graduated from Santa Rosa High School. His pursuit of education brought him to Lakewood, Colorado, where he attended a local community college, and then enrolled in a school to learn the art of gunsmithing. In 1941 he enlisted in the United States Navy and was trained as gunner’s mate first class aboard a destroyer. During World War II he served with distinction in two major naval battles of Leyte and Iron Bottom Sound in the Pacific Theater.

In 1946 he met and married Geraldine Avon and returned to Jefferson County, Colorado. He enrolled as a full time student in the only gunsmith school in the United States, the Colorado School of Trades in Lakewood. During this time he had a part time job as Deputy Sheriff, and in 1952 he received a full time position with the Sheriff’s Office. He then was promoted to Sergeant, Investigator Sergeant, the Captain of Investigations. In this position he worked on many high profile cases, including the infamous Kostal-Watson case, in which he arrested two murderers, Mary Pearl Walker and Harold David Wooley; he was the lead investigator when Adolph Coors III was kidnapped and murdered.

In 1962 the Board of County Commissioners

appointed Bray Sheriff, following the resignation of Arthur Wermuth. After taking office his first mission was to rid Jefferson County of organized crime. This began years of proactive investigations into the underworld of organized crime that ultimately led to the eradication of illegal gambling and liquor distribution in

the County. He led the investigation into the Denver Police burglary scandal. Recognizing the need to insure communications between police agencies, Bray created the Law Enforcement Teletype System that later became a nationwide communication link. He led the fight to obtain legislation to create a statewide law enforcement basic training academy. In 1969 the Colorado Law Enforcement Training Academy opened at Camp George West in Golden to train police officers from all over the state. Harold Bray was the energy behind the construction of the Sheriff’s Complex and Detention Facility, which opened in 1986 to house 436 prisoners and work space for 480 Deputy Sheriffs.

Bray served 35 years as a lawman in Jefferson County and was sheriff for 26 years. No other government official held office as long and successfully as Harold Bray. In January 1990 he announced his retirement. “As Jefferson County Sheriff for almost three decades, Bray, the cop’s cop set the standard for the Office” (Dick Hilker, Golden Transcript).

Harold Bray was elected to the Jefferson County Historical Commission Hall of Fame in 2006.

