

all cars considered

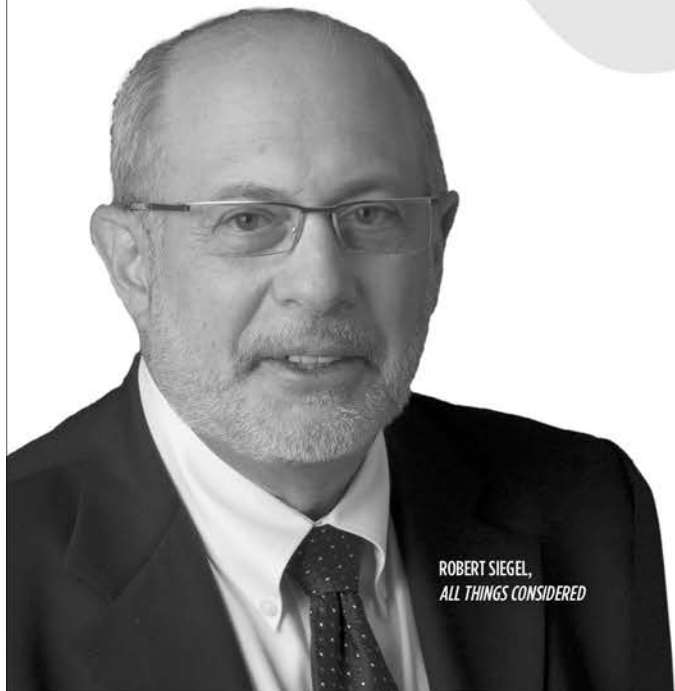
KTEP and Robert Siegel want your car!

Donate your vehicle to KTEP and turn it into the programs you love. You get free towing and a tax deduction!



Make it happen
by calling
855-277-2346

ktep.org



ROBERT SIEGEL,
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

1884 'Giant' hoax almost ended in saloon shooting

The Cardiff Giant, one of the biggest hoaxes pulled on the American people, almost resulted in a shooting in El Paso back in 1884.

The real Giant was supposed to have been a petrified prehistoric man, 10 feet 4 inches in height, weighing 2,900 pounds with shoulders 3 feet wide. He was dug up at a farm in New York in 1869. Turns out, of course, that he had been planted by a practical joker who had no idea how far the giant would range.

The entire business started over an argument about religion. An Easterner, George Hull, got into a biblical discussion with a revivalist minister while visiting family in Iowa. The preacher kept saying there were giants back in those days, referring to Genesis 6:4, where it states, "There were giants on the earth in those days." (That's in the King James Version — later versions refer to the giants as "Nephilim.")

The Easterner was an agnostic and the argument got a little out of hand. As the Easterner was returning home, the argument still fresh in his mind, he thought, "I'll show that preacher and maybe make some money on the side." It made him a fortune.

So, taking in a few friends in the strictest confidence, they had a giant sculpture cut out of a five-ton block of gypsum and buried it on a farm in Cardiff, New York. They let the old giant remain there for a year, until he was "accidentally" dug up when the farmer hired two men to dig a well. The farmer, who was in on the hoax, showed them the exact spot where to dig. The workmen did as directed, soon making that startling discovery.

Of course, the uncovering of this "pre-historic giant" caused a tremendous furor, not only in Cardiff, but all around the country. Reporters and archaeologists went to view the find of the century. Soon arguments arose over its nationality, in what period the giant had lived, and the way he had been preserved.

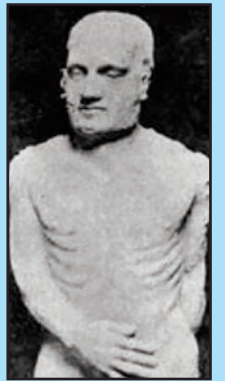
Publicity raged to the point that P.T. Barnum, the circus owner, offered \$60,000 just to lease the giant for three months. The offer was refused so Barnum had a copy made to be exhibited in New York City. It was finally determined that the entire thing was a hoax, but nevertheless copies of the Cardiff Giant went on tour all over the country. That's how the giant almost caused a killing here in El Paso.

How he got here is lost in the pages of time. Reports by the El Paso Times suspected an owner of one of the finer saloons, Si Ryan, and a prominent businessman, Robert Lightbody, arranged to have the giant brought to town as a prank.

Taking a Look Back

by John McVey Middagh

Anyway, rumors ran through the streets and saloons of El Paso in 1884 that a "giant of a man," who was awful mean and fast with a gun, had made his headquarters at the Ryan saloon on Overland Street, and he planned to take over the town.



The 'Cardiff Giant'

With the prank in place, Lightbody started telling everyone he'd heard the big man was threatening to run some of the big names out of town, and one of his main targets was Judge T. A. Falvey, one of El Paso's most respected lawyers. The rumor started was that the stranger was telling everyone that the judge had fleeced a widow out of \$400 before coming to El Paso.

Judge Falvey went ballistic when he heard that a stranger was making big talk about him in Ryan's saloon. The judge grabbed a friend's pistol and charged down to the saloon, intending to confront the big man. All this time the replica of the giant was lying in the back room of the bar.

A few friends who were in on the joke followed the judge to the saloon. When they got there the barkeep told the entourage that they had just missed the big man. Well, as circumstances would have it, a very large man, a stranger to everyone, walked into the saloon just as the judge was turning to leave.

The stranger was completely unaware of all the goings-on. But to the judge here was the "big man" who had been lying about him. He lifts his pistol when one of his friends grabs his arm. Watching from the sidelines, Ryan hollers, "Hold it, Judge! That's not the man. Your man is in the back room."

The judge, with his friends, stormed into the room and there stretched out in a box was the Cardiff Giant replica. Everyone almost died from laughter seeing the look on Falvey's face. With Ryan blurting out, "There's the man who's been spreading those rumors. He's the trouble maker." Still laughing they all went back to the bar where the judge ordered a round of drinks for the house.

The replica left El Paso after giving all a big Texas laugh. The "real" fake Cardiff Giant may still be seen in the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y. A replica that was created much later is on display at the Fort Museum in Fort Dodge, Iowa.

John McVey Middagh is a former saddle shop owner. You can reach him at jmiddagh@yahoo.com.

Get El Paso Scene Weekly by email

FREE weekly preview of the week's top events.

www.epscene.com/newsletter.php