



Elmer Mccurdy: The Life And Afterlife Of An American Outlaw

Mark Senvold

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This is the story of Elmer McCurdy, a failed plumber from Bangor, Maine, who drifted west to become a failed outlaw. He arrived in Oklahoma a few decades after the golden age of outlaws and attempted to resurrect the lost art of train robbing. In 1911, after a short spree of comically bungled robberies, a sheriff's posse caught up with him and shot him dead. In death, Elmer McCurdy accidentally found fame. From the Oklahoma funeral home that propped up his preserved corpse and charged a nickel-a-look, to the sideshows of the Great Patterson Carnival, where he was exhibited as a felled outlaw, McCurdy became big business. His post-mortem career in show business lasted until 1976, when he was discovered painted orange and hanging by the neck in a California amusement ride. Mark Senvold has reconstructed the bizarre itinerary of the corpse through sixty years of freakshows, sideshows, carnivals, and exploitation movies, capturing some of this country's greatest fantasies and most elaborate publicity stunts.

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