

Custer County Historical Society Monthly Program

Lois Wells – Program Director

Rachel Nepper -- Recorder

“Webster’s Bandit Buster”

Dr. Arley Fadness – January 2, 2016

Lois introduced Arley Fadness, retired pastor and frequent program speaker at our historical society meetings. Arley said that this presentation started because of a book he was given by Mark Gardner called “All Shot to Hell”. Arley and Mark were from Webster, SD. The topic of the program was about a young man, Asle Oscar Sorbel, who when he had been a teenager in 1876, had spread the alarm that some of the gang that had robbed the Northfield, MN bank were in the area of Madelia, MN. Arley had researched the background and family history of this man. He first told of the James and Younger gang coming into Northfield, MN to rob the First National Bank and how the robbery turned into a rout with several wounded on both sides along with some deaths. The robbers took off with hundreds after them and took to stealing horses, impersonating various people and suffering because of wounds and the cold rain. The Younger gang (three brothers) along with a man named Pitts had split off from the others and was near Madelia, MN, asking for food from Asle Oscar’s family. He believed them to be some of the ones from the robbery two weeks earlier and jumped on a draft horse to head for town to let the authorities know of the robbers’ whereabouts.

A posse was formed (the Magnificent Madelia Seven) and they caught up to the robbers and a gunfight ensued. Pitts was killed and the three Younger brothers were captured; two of the posse members were slightly injured. Oscar Sorbel became notoriety, but then had to disappear because of possible reprisals by those who thought the Younger gang as heroes. Later (in 1929) Oscar admitted as being the one who had alerted authorities about the robbers’ location. Arley told of Oscar life – moving to Webster, SD, marrying and having eight children, becoming a well-known horse vet and dying in 1930. Arley told of the Younger brothers in prison and what had become of each of them (Bob died in prison of TB in 1889; Jim committed suicide in 1902 after being released from prison for a year; Cole became a celebrity – author and lecturer dying in 1916 of a heart attack (autopsy

showed 14 bullets in his body)). Arley told of Jesse and Frank James. He introduced persons from the audience who had heard about Asle Oscar Sobel in Webster including a grandson who had a ring that Oscar supposedly bought with the reward money. The audience found the program highly entertaining.