

Ernest Bush, a Danish-American Outlaw

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Ernest Bush, aka Gus Grimes and Fred Brown, was born in Denmark in the 1880s and brought to the Omaha, Nebraska area as a child. His crimes included arson, horse thievery, kidnapping, rape, and multiple murders. He escaped from the Iowa State Penitentiary in 1912 and was killed while attempting to escape from the Nebraska State Penitentiary in 1925.

This report is incomplete. I am seeking additional information about Ernest Bush's life. You can contact me through the contact form on my website or through the Queries contact form at *danishheritage.org*.

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Brief Ernest Bush Timeline (See page 4 for a fuller timeline.)

c. 1883: Ernest Bush was born in Denmark. Date, location, and surname spelling are unknown.

c. 1892: Family emigrated and settled in the Omaha area. The family was known in the U.S. as Jim and Mary Bush with children Louise and Ernest.

7 Feb 1899: Ernest Bush murdered Silas Bailey, a Civil War veteran, near Benkleman in Dundy County in southwestern Nebraska.

1999: Charley Siringo tricked Ernest Bush into a witnessed confession of the Bailey murder. Bush was sentenced to life in the Nebraska penitentiary near Lincoln.

11 Dec 1906: Ernest Bush paroled to custody of parents in Boomer Township, Pottawattamie County, Iowa, north of Council Bluffs.

24 Mar 1910: Ernest Bush stole a team and spring wagon from a neighbor, Peter T. Petersen

Mar 1910: Ernest Bush was apprehended in Silver City near Central City in Merrick Co., Nebraska.

1910: Ernest Bush sentenced to ten years in Iowa Penitentiary in Fort Madison.

1 Aug 1912: Ernest Bush escaped from the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison.

c. Oct 1912: Boomer Township homes of Peter Peterson and Peter T. Petersen burn.

7 Feb 1920 Fred Brown entered the Nebraska State Penitentiary to begin serving a term for receiving stolen property. The authorities didn't realize that "Fred Brown" was an alias for Ernest Bush. Brown was paroled in mid 1921.

May 1922: Two women were found chained in a shack near Omaha, Nebraska. Captor escaped and becomes known as the "chain man".

17 Jun 1922: Fugitive was wounded and captured after a gunfight near Medicine Bow, Wyoming and taken to the Rawlins jail. Locals identified him as "Bush"; a New York Times article identifies him as Fred Brown with aliases of Gus Grimes and Ernest Busch.

14 Nov 1922: Fred Brown began a life sentence at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

28 Sep 1925: Fred Brown was shot and killed while attempting to escape from the Nebraska State Penitentiary. A guard was also killed and others were wounded.

17 Nov 1937: Fred Brown's chain man story is dramatized on the "Gangbusters" radio program.

The Major Players: Ernest Bush, Charles Siringo, Peter T. Petersen

Ernest Bush, aka Fred Brown and Gus Grimes, was born in Denmark in the 1880s and brought to the United States as a child. As a teenager he killed his first man. He escaped from the Iowa state penitentiary in 1912 and was killed while attempting to escape from the Nebraska state penitentiary in 1925.

At the time of his death, the press referred to Ernest Bush as "Chain-Man Fred Brown." His death was reported in both the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

Charles Siringo and Peter T. Petersen each were instrumental in apprehending Ernest Bush during his early career as a criminal.

Charles A. Siringo was a cowboy in Texas as a young man. Later, from 1886 to 1906, he was employed as a Pinkerton Agency detective, working out of Denver. Charley Siringo retired to his ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where a street is named for him. When his health failed he moved to California to be near a daughter.

One of Charley Siringo's many assignments was infiltrating the union movement in the Coeur d'Alene mining district of northern Idaho in 1891 and 1892. From 1899 to 1903 he gathered information on the Hole in the Wall Gang. Today most of us recognize the names of two members of this gang, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

Factoid: A character named Charley Siringo appears in several western movies, but the events depicted appear to be entirely fictitious.

Peter T. Petersen was the father of my late uncle, Victor T. Petersen. He emigrated from Denmark to Missouri Valley, Iowa as a young man, worked hard as a farmer and carpenter and built a handsome two-story house on his farm in Boomer Township in northwestern Pottawattamie County.

After the teenaged Ernest Bush murdered a coworker early in 1899, the Dundey County, Nebraska county commissioners hired the Pinkerton Agency to collect evidence against Bush. Charles Siringo tricked Bush into a witnessed confession. Bush was convicted of first-degree murder, given life sentence, and sent to the Nebraska state penitentiary in Lincoln.

In 1906 Ernest Bush was paroled to his parents who lived on a farm in Boomer Township north of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

In 1910, while staying with his parents in Boomer Township, Ernest Bush stole a team of horses and a spring wagon from his neighbor, Peter T. Petersen. Due to the efforts of Mr. Petersen, Ernest Bush was apprehended in Nebraska and extradited to the Pottawattamie County jail in Council Bluffs. He was tried in the District Court in Council Bluffs and sentenced to ten years in the Iowa State Penitentiary, from which he subsequently escaped.

The Minor Players, Silas Bailey, Gus Grimes, Clarence E. Morse

Silas Bailey, the first known victim of Ernest Bush, was a widowed Civil War veteran. His wife, Francis (Burge) Wain Bailey, died in 1892 and Silas was murdered in 1899. Silas and his wife were buried along the Republican River in the Max Cemetery northeast of Benkelman, Nebraska. In 1935 the Republican River flooded and wiped out the cemetery. The stones were salvaged and moved to the Benkelman Cemetery.

Gus Grimes was one of the aliases used by Ernest Bush. The actual Gus Grimes was an Arkansas native who lived in north central Iowa. Grimes married Myrtle Kussong in Hancock County in 1902. Grimes was sentenced to ten years in prison in 1909 for burglary. Gus Grimes and Ernest Bush served together at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison. Gus Grimes was paroled in 1913 and returned to his wife and children in north central Iowa. Gus Grimes registered for the World War I draft in Humboldt County in 1918, lived in Humboldt County in 1920 and in Webster County in 1925.

I don't know why or when Ernest Bush started using the alternative alias of Fred Brown, although one article at the time said he was thought to have an uncle named Brown living in Nebraska.

Clarence E. Morse, a guard at the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln, was killed when Ernest Bush attempted to escape on September 28, 1925. The State of Nebraska Board of Control awarded his widow compensation for 350 weeks at \$15 per week, along with a \$150 burial benefit.

Full Ernest Bush Timeline (see the family timeline later)

- 1892? Ernest Bush, his parents, Jim and Mary, and sister, Louisa/Louise, immigrated, perhaps to Omaha, from Denmark. (I suspect that, sometime after emigrating, they changed their names, as was not uncommon with immigrants. I can't find them in the Danish Emigration Archives and, except for Ernest, I can't find them in the 1900 census.)
- early 1899 Ernest Bush, age 16 or 17, and Mr. Silas Bailey, a widowed Civil War veteran, are employed by Leonard Morse on his ranch three miles west of Benkelman in Dundy County in southwestern Nebraska.
- 7 Feb 1899 Ernest Bush murdered Silas Bailey by shotgun and dumped Mr. Bailey's body in the nearby Republican River.
- Silas Bailey's body was found a few weeks later. Ernest Bush is arrested, there is a hearing, and Ernest Bush was released due to a lack of evidence.
- The Dundy County Commissioners, Leonard Morse being one of the members, hired the Pinkerton Agency to collect evidence against Ernest Bush. Charles Siringo was assigned to the case. Siringo enticed Ernest Bush to his ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico and elicited a confession. Siringo and Bush then drove some horses to Denver, where Bush repeated his confession in the presence of a witness, was arrested and returned to Dundy County. (The Ernest Bush case comprises most of Chapter XIII of Charles Siringo's memoir *Cowboy Detective*.)
- 9 May 1899 (Omaha Bee) "Boy Charged With Murder – Ernest Bush Rearrested and Now in Benkelman to be Tried For Killing Silas Bailey".
- 28 Nov 1899 Ernest Bush's trial began in Benkelman, Nebraska.
- 1 Dec 1899 Ernest Bush convicted of first-degree murder, and sentenced to life in prison.
- 7 Dec 1899 Ernest Bush began his life sentence at the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln. His prisoner number was 3517.
- 14 Jul 1900 (1900 census) Ernest Bush, age 18, was a prisoner at the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln.
- 19 Jun 1901 The State of Nebraska Supreme Court, in filing No. 11,779, "Ernest Bush v. State of Nebraska", rejected the appeal of Ernest Bush's conviction filed by his lawyers, Charles W. Meeker, James S. West, and Burr & Spencer.
- 1906 Sophus Neble. Editor of the "Danish Pioneer" weekly in Omaha, and L. C. Burr, a Lincoln attorney, interceded on Ernest Bush's behalf. (Ernest Bush and his parents were born in Denmark and his father may have been a baker in Omaha before moving to rural Pottawattamie County, Iowa.)

- 11 Dec 1906 Nebraska Governor Mickey paroled Earnest Bush to the custody of his parents in Boomer Township, Pottawattamie County, Iowa.
For a time Ernest, now in his 20s, attended the Boomer #4 rural school where he was said to carry a gun.
- 24 Mar 1910 Ernest Bush stole a team (Nancy and Beauty) and spring wagon from a neighbor, Peter T. Petersen.
Peter T. Petersen distributed handbills, offered a reward, and learned that Ernest Bush had driven the team across the bridge to Omaha.
Ernest Bush was apprehended in Silver City near Central City in Merrick Co., NE.
Peter T. Petersen traveled to Nebraska to retrieve his team and wagon. Ernest threatened to get even with Mr. Petersen.
- 15 Apr 1910 (1910 census) Ernest Bush, age 27, was a prisoner at the Pottawattamie County jail in Council Bluffs.
- 31 May 1910 Ernest Bush received a ten-year sentence to the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison.
- 6 Jun 1910 Ernest Bush admitted to Fort Madison. He weighed in at 136 pounds and was 5' 2 3/4" in height.
- 25 Jul 1912 Ernest Bush escaped from the Iowa State Penitentiary. His sister, Louise, notified Peter T. Petersen by telephone.
- 1912? A stranger subsequently came to the country store at the Reels corner north of Crescent in Pottawattamie County and asked directions to the Peter Petersen home
- 1912? That night the house of Peter and Rachel Peterson, early Boomer Township settlers who lived up the North Pigeon Creek road from the Reels store, burned.
- Oct 1912? On a Sunday afternoon shortly after, the house of Peter T. and Karen Petersen, who lived on the next road to the west, also burned.
Both houses were in southwestern Boomer Township. As of 2010, both houses built to replace the burned structure are still standing.
- 1912 (This entry has not yet been confirmed.) Ernest Bush was captured in Omaha. However, he was wanted in Illinois for beating an old man to death.
- 29 Oct 1916 Ernest Bush was returned to the Iowa State Penitentiary.

- 3 Jul 1917 Ernest Bush was paroled from the Iowa State Penitentiary. (RAC: I don't understand this parole. Perhaps it was with the intent that Bush join the army - we were gearing up to fight in World War I.)
- 7 Feb 1920 Fred Brown entered the Nebraska State Penitentiary to begin serving a sentence of one to ten years for receiving stolen property (an automobile). His prisoner number was 7694. Authorities didn't yet realize that "Fred Brown" was an alias for Ernest Bush.
- Jun or 27 Jul 1921 Fred Brown was paroled from the Nebraska State Penitentiary.
- 27 May 1922 Fred Brown kidnapped Mrs. Roy Jenkins and Katharine McManan and chained them in the cellar of his shanty in Benson near Omaha. Subsequently he also chained H. E. Boyd, a truck driver who came to their rescue. Boyd escaped and contacted the authorities. Fred Brown managed to escape to Lincoln, Nebraska. Subsequently Brown was sometimes called the "chain man".
- 8 Jun 1922 (Nebraska State Journal): Dodge County Sheriff William Condit realizes that Ernest Bush and Fred Brown are the same person.
- 16 Jun 1922 Mrs. John Burnett, postmistress at Little Medicine in Albany County, Wyoming, north of Medicine Bow, phoned law officials in Medicine Bow that Fred Brown had stopped that evening. The Burnetts knew Fred Brown as Ernest Bush from his previous residence in the area.
- 17 Jun 1922 A posse left Medicine Bow in an automobile for Little Medicine. Fred Brown attempted to escape in a stolen automobile but was stopped by an irrigation ditch. Brown was wounded in a gunfight with authorities and captured. Brown was taken to the jail in Rawlins, the Carbon County seat. Locals identified him as "Bush", while a New York Times article identified him as Fred Brown with aliases of Gus Grimes and Ernest Busch.
- 19 Jun 1922 Fred Brown was returned to Omaha by car. Near Ansley, Nebraska the car was involved in a traffic accident.
- 9 Oct 1922 Jury selection begins in Omaha for the trial of Fred Brown.
- 19 Oct 1922 Fred Brown was sentenced to life in prison for kidnapping.
- 14 Nov 1922 Fred Brown entered the Nebraska State Penitentiary. His prisoner number was 8479.
- 28 Sep 1925 Fred Brown was shot and killed while attempting to escape from the Nebraska State Penitentiary. Guard Clarence E. Morse was also killed and others wounded.

17 Nov 1937 Aspects of Fred Brown's story were dramatized on the *Gang Busters* radio program.

Ernest Bush Clippings

Nebraska State Journal 10 Feb 1899

(courtesy of newspapers.com May '16)

BENKELMAN, Neb., Silas Bailey, an old gentleman, left the home of Leonard Morse, who lives three miles west of here, last Tuesday afternoon and has not been heard of or seen since, though inquiries and searches have been made in all directions. He has been a highly respected farmer. He has suffered some with heart disease, but he has never shown any disposition towards dementia. He left the house with his work clothes on, which precludes the idea of his having gone on a visit anywhere. A reward of \$25 is offered for his discovery.

Omaha Bee Sunday 24 Apr 1910

(courtesy of nebnnewsapers.unl.edu May '16)

Sheriff McCaffery learned yesterday that Ernest Bush, under arrest for the theft of a valuable team of horses, buggy and harness, the property of P. T. Peterson, a farmer of Honey Creek, is also wanted for the theft of a horse and saddle from Anton Hiersch, a farmer of Scott's Bluff, Neb., on December 5 last. Bush, it is said, stole three horses belonging to Hiersch, but abandoned two when the owner started on this trail.

Washington Post, 18 Jun 1922

(purchased from ProQuest 2007)

MAN WHO CHAINED GIRLS IS BELIEVED TO BE SHOT

Former Convict, Near Death in Wyoming, Declared to Have Admitted Identity.

Rawlins, Wyo., June 17

Hovering between life and death, Fred Brown, believed to be the man who in Omaha kidnapped and held chained two young women in his shack, tonight rests upon a cot in the hospital at Wyoming prison, captured by a posse near Medicine Bow early today, after leading officers of three States in his hunt. He is believed he admitted his identity at Medicine Bow. Brown is a former convict.

Brown has not talked since he was brought to the prison.

New York Times, June 19, 1922

LAYS CAPTURE TO FAINT

Wyoming Outlaw Says He Would Never Have Given Up

RAWLINS, Wyo., June 18 – Fred Brown, alias Gus Grimes, alias Ernest Busch (sic), wanted in Omaha for holding two women and a man as prisoners in his shack after he had bound them in chains, today declared that, if he had not fainted from loss of blood when shot by a member of a posse near here yesterday, he "never would have given up."

Why didn't I throw up my hands when the odds were all against me?" Brown said. "Well, odds are never against me as long as I have a gun. I never would have put up my dukes, I never would have given up, if I had not fainted from loss of blood."

Brown, in describing how he had outwitted officers, told of binding two in Sidney, Neb. with their own suspenders. He will be held on suspicion of committing three murders among other crimes.

Time Magazine, Monday, October 12, 1925

Bad Men

Three years ago, one **Fred Brown** kept two **Nebraska** girls chained in a hut for two days. A rescuer appeared, whom Brown also chained up. Finally the rescuer escaped, notified the police, and Brown became a "lifer" at Lincoln, Neb., penitentiary.

Last week he called nitroglycerin to his aid in an attempt to get out. Just as he was about to touch off an ill considered charge which would have blown the jail and himself to atoms, he was shot at by a prison guard, and several other prisoners were wounded before he was killed.

Benkelman, Nebraska Post, October 1925

Fred Brown (Ernest Bush?)

Fred Brown, notorious gunman and killer, lost his life in an effort to gain his liberty from the Nebraska penitentiary Monday afternoon. Another prisoner had his arm so badly injured through a gunshot that amputation was necessary and one guard died from a bullet fired by Brown.

Quick action on the part of guards prevented what promised to develop into perhaps the most serious prison outbreak in years. After his death, an automatic gun, nitroglycerine and other death-dealing instruments were taken from Brown's body. How he came into possession of these is not known but Warden Fenton said that so long as car shipments of coal are unloaded within the prison walls, just so long will these weapons be smuggled in.

Brown attempted to kill the warden first, thus throwing the penitentiary organization into a state of chaos so that it could not function properly. Twice his gun failed to go and twice bullets glazed the warden's head. After the battle started, reserve policemen were sent out from Lincoln and the militia was called. The break ended with the death of Brown who was shot through the head with a charge of buckshot from a sawed-off shotgun as he attempted to scale the wall. Order was then soon re-established.

Fred Brown came into the limelight two years ago when he chained two women and held them captive for days. A manhunt followed that was one of the most sensational in the history of Nebraska crime.

At that time it was thought that Fred Brown was the original Ernest Bush, convicted of the shooting of an aged man by the name of Bailey who was employed on the L. Morse ranch in 1899. The boy came to the ranch in midwinter and was given employment. He claimed that he was 16 years of age. He shot Bailey while the aged man was working in the construction of a feed rack in the cattle yard. He tied a rope around the body and

with the aid of a saddle horse dragged it to the river where the body was submerged in the ice at a point where the cattle were watered. All tracks were covered up through driving a herd of cattle over the trail.

Bush denied knowledge of the whereabouts of the unfortunate Bailey and a hunt followed in which hundreds of citizens of that time took part. It lasted for nearly a week when the body was found in the river. Suspicion at once pointed to Bush but his native cunning and the fact that he was undersized and appeared so youthful even for his years made his conviction difficult. Skilled detectives were sought and sufficient evidence procured to bring about his conviction and he was sent up for life.

The trial cost Dundy County many thousands of dollars. He had not been in the penitentiary long, however, until influential parties in Chicago secured his release and nothing further was heard of him until the Fred Brown "Cave Man" incident came to light. Then prison attaches expressed the belief that Fred Brown was Ernest Bush in fact and most of the old-timers who knew him identified the pictures printed in the daily papers as those of Ernest Bush.

The Rev. B.F. Eberhart, who was at the time of the Bush conviction county attorney of Dundy County, was called to Lincoln and identified Brown as Bush.

There is but little doubt in the minds of people here that Fred Brown and Ernest Bush were one and the same person, and none are surprised at his tragic ending in Monday's prison break.

The Daily Nebraska, Wed, 17 Nov 1937

(nebnewspapers.unl.edu May '16):

The life of one of the local bad boys will be aired by Phillips H. Lord on his Gang Busters program over KFAB at 9 this evening. Fred Brown, famous chain man in crime annals, will be the principal in the first of a series of two episodes to be heard tonight.

Ernest Bush Questions

The Danish American Heritage Society has some interest in publishing Ernest Bush's story in their journal, *The Bridge*. However we need further information such as the following:

- Where did the family come from in Denmark?
- What was the family name in Denmark?
- Did Ernest Bush have relatives named Brown living in Nebraska?
- Where was Ernest Bush's family in the 1900 census enumeration?
- When did Ernest Bush live in Wyoming?
- Did Ernest Bush have a criminal history in Illinois?
- Are there any family photographs or additional sources of information that could be used in an article?
- Was Ernest Bush 19 (as Charles Siringo says) or 16 (as Peter T. Petersen says) or 22 (as reported in an Omaha newspaper) when he murdered Mr. Bailey?
- When did the Peter Peterson/Petersen houses burn in Boomer Township?
"Two Families from Boomer Township" which includes the family history of Peter and Rachel Peterson gives a year of "around 1907." However, Peter T. Petersen's autobiography says their house was four years old when it burned. Their house was began just after their fifth child, Helga, was born in May, 1908. Their sixth and final child, Victor, was born in March, 1912 and Peter T. remembers the fire as being in October with Victor having already been born. Perhaps the fire was in October 1912.

Appendix - Known Descendants of Jim and Mary Bush

James "Jim" Bush
b. abt 1856, Denmark
d. 1930-1940, Los Angeles Co., CA
& Marie "Mary" unknown
b. abt 1853, Denmark
d. aft 1940, California
m. abt 1877, Denmark

Ernest Bush
b. 1882-1884, Denmark
d. 28 Sep 1925, Nebraska Penitentiary, Lincoln, Lancaster Co., NE

Louisa Bush
b. 6 Sep 1878, Denmark
d. 24 Feb 1965, Los Angeles Co., CA
& Louis Rasmussen
b. abt 1872, Denmark
m. Sep 1897, Omaha, Douglas Co., NE

Noble Rasmussen
b. abt 1898, Nebraska
d. Nov 1910, Council Bluffs, Pott. Co., IA

Louis Ingwold Rasmussen
b. 30 Apr 1902, Nebraska
d. 15 May 1983, Orange Co., CA
& Nellie Grace Bright
b. 18 Nov 1896, Kansas
d. 7 Mar 1969, Orange Co., CA
m. 6 Aug 1930, Glendale, Los Angeles Co., CA

Appendix - Bush Family Timeline

- 1892? Ernest Bush, his parents, Jim and Mary, and sister, Louise/Louisa, immigrated, perhaps to Omaha, from Denmark. (I suspect that, sometime after emigrating, they changed their names, as was not uncommon with immigrants. I can't find them in the Danish Emigration Archives and, except for Ernest, I can't find them in the 1900 census.)
- Sep 1897 Ernest Bush's sister, Louisa Bush, married Louis Rasmussen in Omaha.
- 1902 J. Bush, M. Bush, and W. Bush were landowners of small parcels in Boomer Township Section 19 in the 1902 Ogle atlas of Pottawattamie County.
- 11 Dec 1906 Ernest Bush was paroled by Governor Mickey of Nebraska to the custody of his parents in Boomer Township, Pottawattamie County, Iowa. Ernest attended the Boomer #4 rural school for a period during this time.
- 16 Apr 1910 Household 19 in the Boomer Township census consisted of James and Mary Bush (Ernest Bush's parents), parents of two unnamed children. (These are Ernest and his sister, Louise).
- 1913 J. Bush was a landowner in Boomer Township Section 19 in the 1913 Anderson/Bee atlas of Pottawattamie County. (Later Caleb W. and Ella (Green) Plummer owned and lived on this farm from before 1919 to after 1930.)
- 1910-1920 Jim and Mary Bush, and the son-in-law and daughter, Louis and Louisa Rasmussen, move to California.
- 1920 (census) Louis and Louisa Rasmussen and son Louis Jr. were living in Los Angeles County, California.
- 4 Apr 1930 (census) Jim and Mary Bush were living in Los Angeles, California.
- 15 Apr 1940 (census) Widow Marie Bush age 87 was living with son-in-law and daughter, Louis and Louisa Rasmussen, in Walnut Park, near Huntington Park several miles south of downtown Los Angeles.