

## News

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## HISTORY

# Marshal Mart Duggan: Limerick's Wild West lawman

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Thursday, November 10, marked the 168th birthday of Martin J. Duggan, better known as Mart Duggan, and even better known in Colorado than in his place of birth: Limerick!

Mart was born to James and Mary Duggan in 1848, a time when famine ravaged the land. Within a few years of his birth, the young Mart and his parents went in search of a better life across the Atlantic ocean.

The Duggans settled in New York City where two more children were added to the family, Tom and Margaret. Mart disliked life in New York where the family had set up home in an Irish slum in the notorious Five Points district and in the summer of 1863 he headed west.

Mart ventured to Colorado where he spent some time as a miner before finding work as a bouncer in the Occidental Dance Hall and Saloon. Although he only stood at 5'5" tall, Mart was physically well built with wide shoulders and with it he held a fearsome attitude.

His first gunfight took place not long after he was hired as a bouncer and it involved a drunken unruly customer. The drunk man was ranting and raving while waving a pistol in the air but Mart managed to quiet him when he pumped three bullets into him.

In 1878, Mart took his fearsome reputation to Leadville, a rough mining town where crime ruled the streets. He arrived just as the town's Marshall had been run out of town and his replacement shot dead. The townspeople decided to appoint the Irishman who was known to dish out rough justice and Mart took on the role with no qualms.

The new Marshall of Leadville quickly set about reducing the crime rate in the town with his own version of rough justice. The tough Limerick man fearfully used his Smith & Wesson on lawbreakers and when he ran out of bullets he would resort to using his fists.

While Mart was Marshall of Leadville, it didn't matter what colour or creed you were or whether you were rich or poor, if you broke the law he would make you pay.

One of the richest men in Colorado, August Rische, was causing a disturbance in a saloon when Mart walked in, hit him over the head with his pistol and carted him off the jailhouse. Many in Colorado were shocked that its richest man was arrested and people in high places pleaded with Mart to release him. After a few days, Rische was eventually released and ordered to pay a fine for being drunk and disorderly.

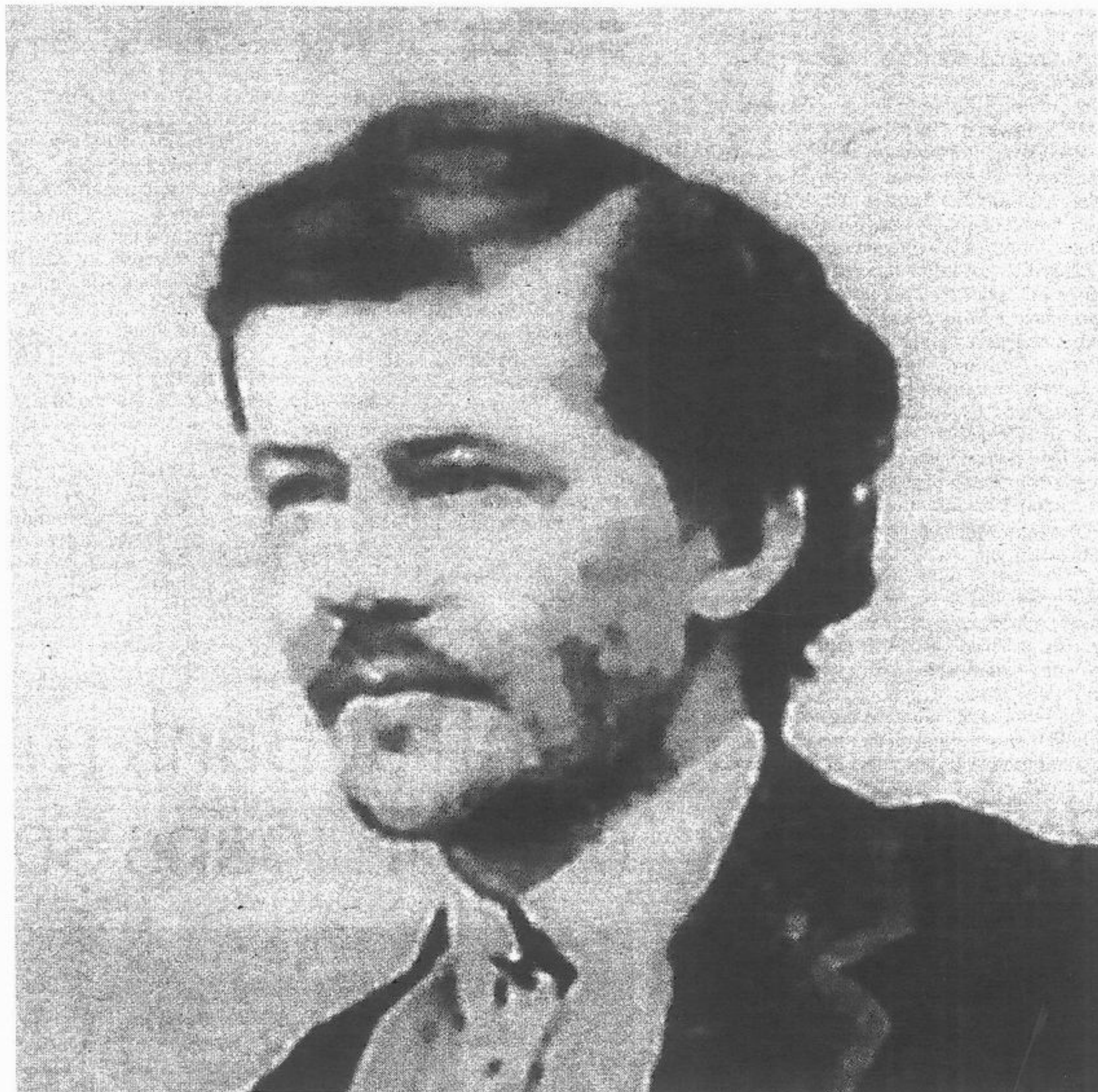
On another occasion, a fight between two gamblers in a saloon in Leadville resulted in one of them stabbing the other. The victim was a white man, the culprit was a black man and a mob gathered outside the jailhouse demanding to lynch him. Mart stood in

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front of the door of the jail with two pistols pointed at the mob and remained there until they eventually dispersed.

Mart, who was as hard a drinker as he was a fighter, was fired in February 1879 after a drinking binge and by April of that year he and his wife left for a new life in Flint, Michigan.

Without the Limerick lawman in Leadville, the town quickly descended into a state of criminal anarchy once



again, so after receiving pleas to return from its law-abiding citizens, Mart was back in December and, within a few weeks, he had cleaned out the criminal element.

In 1882, Mart left Leadville when his second term as Marshall expired. He set up home in Douglass city with his family for five years in what was to be a retirement from the duties of law and order but his old ways were hard to leave behind.

In 1887 a conman rode into Douglass where he sold fake jewellery to dance hall girls. When they realised they had been conned out of their money, they turned to Mart for help. The former Marshall tracked down the conman and after beating the bejaysus out of him he then brought him to the dance hall where he forced him to pay back his victims and buy everyone drinks until he was cleaned out.

A year after that episode, Mart returned to Leadville. The lure of dishing out law and order had been too strong for him to resist, but his return to Leadville would only result in his downfall.

In the early hours of the morning on April 9 1888, Mart, who had been

drinking in the Texas House Saloon, got into an argument with two gamblers. He wanted to settle the fight out on the street but the two gamblers refused. The saloon proprietor urged Mart to go home and sleep it off and, as he was making his way down the street, a bullet hit the back of his head.

Mart staggered into the nearby Bradford Drug Store where he collapsed

and died some hours later.

He was buried in Denver's Riverside Cemetery where today you can find an impressive granite headstone marking his final resting place.

On it is inscribed how Mart was "Murdered by a street gang ruffian" and "when asked his assailants name, Duggan's last words were 'I'll die before I ever tell you'."

