

James Watts, McGinty Club Member, Dies Here At 83

James J. Watts, 83, believed to be the last surviving member of the famed McGinty Club, died Thursday in his home at 305½ San Francisco St.

With him died many vivid memories of the lusty El Paso that was — memories of McGinty Club antics, the town's first water works (for which he worked), the gunmen who made El Paso their headquarters, the stage coach line he once operated, and many others.

Watts came to El Paso in 1884 at the age of 14 to work for his uncle, Sylvester Watts, who built the town's first water works. He worked as a collector and soon became acquainted with everyone in town, from tycoons to gamblers, from high-born ladies to sporting girls.

Watts was one of the charter members of the McGinty Club, which was organized about 1890 and lasted until about 1905. The club was primarily a musical organization, comprised of the concert band, brass band, choir, orchestra, drum and fife corps, tipica orchestra, banjo troubadours and maenner-cohr.

GOT WET

Watts was secretary of the group, which maintained a clubhouse, called Ft. McGinty, atop a sand hill on West Franklin Street. It was

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JAMES J. WATTS

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there that the club entertained a group of rainmakers who came to El Paso to bring rain to the community. The rainmakers failed, but got wet anyway — Watts and his friends turned a hose on them from the rafters of Ft. McGinty.

John Selman, constable of Precinct 1 and killer of the West's most dangerous gunman, John Wesley Hardin, was a good friend of Watts.

In an interview two years ago, Watts said, "John Selman wasn't afraid of anybody. And that's saying a lot, because El Paso in those days was the place outlaws and bad men came to get another notch on their pistols. But Uncle John faced them all down."

While working for the water works he acquired a stage coach line that operated from Pioneer Plaza to Old Fort Bliss and the Smelter. Coaches made three round

trips a day, charging 50 cents one way for passengers.

Watts believed he was the only man to face the drawn pistols of an enraged Bass Outlaw and live to tell about it. In the interview, he said:

"Bass was still a Texas Ranger when it happened. He was a good man when sober, but when drunk he was a killer.

"One day he and Ed Dowd, a conductor for the GH & SA, came to town and got drunk and shot up the Gem Variety Theater. Next day some friends came to me and asked me to help find Dowd, that if they could get him out of town he wouldn't lose his job.

"I agreed, and set out to find Ed.

I went in the Wigwam Saloon and there was Bass, drinking at the bar. I walked up to him and asked him if he'd seen Dowd.

"He didn't say anything. I asked him again, and suddenly he drew his pistols and poked them right at my belly. M. F. McClain, who ran the saloon, saw it and got between us, and nothing happened."

Watts had an excellent memory and was a source of information for many students of history. He contributed materially to the series of articles currently running in the Sunday editions of The El Paso Times by Cleofar Calleros.

Funeral arrangements were under the direction of Rodchaver-Miller.