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Old Ephraim Didactic

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WHO WAS OLD EPHRAIM?

He was a large grizzly bear who gained a reputation for killing sheep that grazed in the Bear River Mountains in the early 1900s. Frank Clark trapped and killed him, probably during the summer of 1922.

WHO WAS FRANK CLARK?

Clark was a local sheepherder from around Malad City, Idaho. He spent nearly 10 years trying to catch Old Ephraim, who occasionally stole sheep from his flock. Stories say Frank Clark killed 43 bears in his 34 years on the range.

WHY WAS HE CALLED OLD EPHRAIM?

“Old Ephraim” was not in fact a name unique to the Utah bear; it was a general term for grizzlies used in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American West. In his 1885 book, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, Teddy Roosevelt used the name to identify a different bear that roamed Wyoming’s Bighorn Mountains, though Clark claimed the Utah grizzly was named for a bear in a P. T. Barnum story. Either way, the name was probably derived from Ephraim, a figure in the Bible’s book of Genesis.

HOW BIG WAS HE?

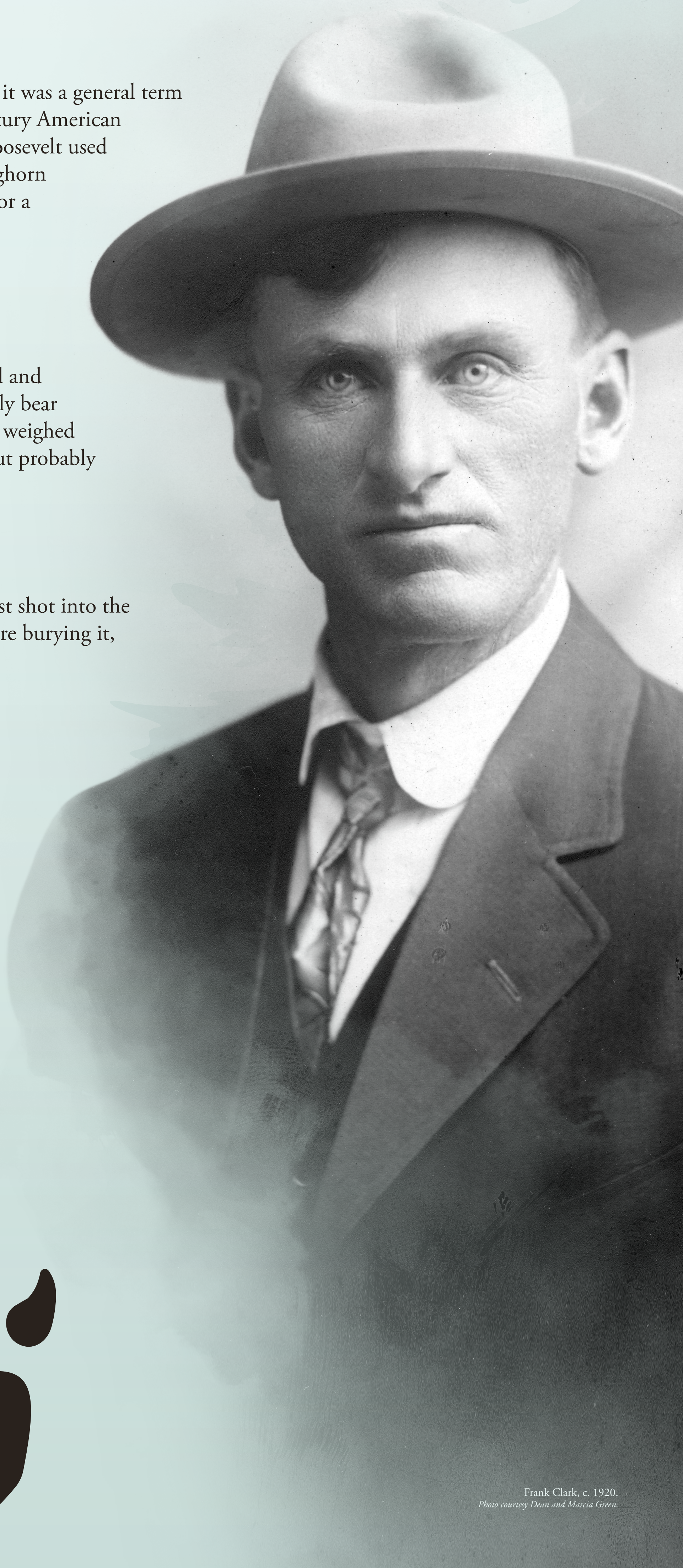
Many stories say that Old Ephraim stood at 9 feet, 11 inches tall and weighed half a ton. However, based on the size of his skull, grizzly bear experts estimate he was approximately 7 feet, 6.5 inches tall and weighed around 550 pounds. He was still a larger-than-average grizzly, but probably not as big as the stories suggest.

WHY IS THE SKULL DAMAGED?

Portions of the skull are missing because Frank Clark fired his last shot into the bear’s head, shattering the bone. He also burned the carcass before burying it, further damaging the skull.

HOW DID THE SKULL END UP AT USU?

A couple of months after Old Ephraim died, local Boy Scouts heard the story and decided to dig up the bear skull. They sent it to the Smithsonian where it remained for more than half a century. Then, in 1978, at the request of U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch, the Smithsonian agreed to loan the skull to USU. It has been housed in USU’s Special Collections & Archives ever since.



Frank Clark, c. 1920.
Photo courtesy Dean and Marcia Green.

