

The Legend of Cactus Jack

*Excerpts from the San Francisco & Tucson research & writings of the Great Great Grand Daughter of John Cacti, Jacquelyn Cacti (Cacti Jacki) (1986).



The Old West was never short of unique characters and **Cactus Jack** was one of the most mysterious. Was he a vigilante? Con man? Scout? Gambler? Highwayman? Probably. Soldier? Spy? Bank Robber? Possibly. Ladies man? Definitely! Some swore he was a well respected San Franciscan AKA John (Jack) Cacti who lived high on the hog at the Fairmont Hotel but was seldom seen in public which lent credence to his alter identity.

All who thought they knew John Cacti expressed widely differing impressions and from the multiple and varied sightings he was often in two places at once. He was credited with deeds both good and bad, daring and deceitful, saint to some, sinner to others, whatever the opinion it was a strong one. Everyone clearly agreed, however, that John Cacti, or whoever he really was, had money to burn. He was generous to those in need and had plenty more to lavish on the ladies, Often giving ladies he had never before met a Single **Red Rose** and telling her "I am so glad we are NOT in Tucson". That comment giving credence to those, who claimed his riches came from ill gotten means and it was even suggested he closely resembled the Tucson Area Highwayman **Cactus Jack** who brazenly handed out business cards to those he robbed.



Yet, wherever justice was challenged in San Francisco, he was there, his prickly nature quick to right a wrong but not necessarily to everyone's liking. A damsel in distress? John was there, the hero on the spot that saved her day although distress soon became epidemic once any female with a beating heart got a look at him.

John was undisputedly a crackerjack square dance caller, was at many a Hoedown giving free rein to his Wild West nature on and off the dance floor. There wasn't a call he didn't know nor a tune he couldn't croon. It's been claimed that thanks to **Cactus Jack's** many close escapes from the law - or possibly disgruntled spouses - we dance to the calls originally named **Peel and Run for Your Life, Walk and Dodge then Keep Goin', Pass Through the Closest Door, Chase and Skidaddle** as well as the always popular **Scout Back - Zoom Outta Here and Wheel Around and Get'im**. Even though callers nowadays use the shortened versions, they do keep **Cactus Jack's** presence alive and strong in spirit. He is, after all, a man for the ages so one can never be sure if he's not actually on the dance floor with us possibly wearing his Signature **Green Cowboy Hat**. There is no record of the death of either John Cacti or **Cactus Jack** and some folks still give credit or blame for things good and bad to **Cactus Jack**.

Like the song **The Highwayman** Says "**I am still Alive!**"

The Legend of Cactus Jack Part II

*2017 excerpts from the San Francisco & Tucson research & writings of the Great Great Grand daughter of John Cacti, Jacqueline Cacti (Cacti Jacki)

Because of ongoing interest and further research over the past year, Cacti Jacki uncovered what she believes to be an authentic journal found hidden in an old trunk detailing Cactus Jack's exploits during his most notorious years. Whether written in his own hand or by a close and intimate companion has (yet to be verified) but beyond doubt were the facts within which clearly described a man of extraordinary talents, charm and daring do. The journal confirmed and added compelling new details about Cactus Jack's escapades.



Most significantly, it revealed his influence in the development of Square Dancing. It bears repeating that Cactus Jack had an enchanting effect on all the ladies. This was not lost on their lovers and spouses who, by the looks of them, were ready to give him the 'what for' followed by a 'heave ho' if ever they caught him but in truth this was not the case. What the journal made clear - but no one would publicly admit - was the not so surprising evidence that whenever a woman encountered Cactus Jack, especially on the dance floor, she went home with an unmistakable and undeniable certain look in her eye that thrilled a lover or spouse later on. The law, however, was unimpressed and was too often ready and willing to intervene at many a hoedown to give Cactus Jack the justice he'd so long evaded.

Many thought he enjoyed the challenge of it all and was willing to take the risk of capture for the dual pleasure of having a female in his arms and outsmarting the law. Menfolk initially may have been jealous but they soon realized a good thing when they saw it twinkling in the eyes of their womenfolk. Square Dance calls were actually used to warn and aid in Cactus Jack's escapes. Most of the call names have been updated but think of him when you Scoot Back and Let'im Through, Chase Right and Don't Look Back or Cross Run Out the Door. Relay the Ducey signaled we'll 'delay the posse' and Scramble Home created confusion when that posse got too close for comfort. And happily, after danger had passed, Yellow Rocks added to everyone's relief. Modern day square dancers may not realize all the benefits they owe Cactus Jack but no doubt they would keep helping him outsmart the law were he with us today. Whatever his fate, Cactus Jack will live forever in Legend and his Spirit will always be present whenever there's a hoedown.

Like The song [The Highwayman](#) says, he is still alive!