

Beeson, Ben

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fe of Early Days

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**The Mason County
"Hoo Doo" War,
1874-1902**

by David Johnson

Foreword by Rick Miller

Number 4 in the A. C. Greene Series

University of North Texas Press
Denton, Texas

Of the Olney brothers, only John remained in Texas. Sam, George, and Dan joined their brother in Arizona. Ed and Oscar moved to Montana, and Will Olney ended up in Idaho. Others moving to the Arizona-New Mexico area included the Redding brothers. Tom Redding was killed by Apaches while acting as a guard on an ore train in 1882. Bill Redding died in Glendale, California, on September 27, 1923.

With the exception of John, the Faris brothers remained in Texas. John Faris went to New Mexico where he ended up at Fort Sumner. On December 29, 1879, he opened fire on Barney Mason, a local gun-fighter, for no apparent reason. Mason killed him.¹⁹ Bud Faris eventually moved to Oklahoma where he died peacefully. Both Champ and Bill Faris died in Llano County during the 1900s.

Another feudist who did not fare well was M. B. Thomas. Following the dismissal of the charges against him in Mason County, Thomas also left the state, ending up in Montana. On December 11, 1888, he was killed in a dispute over a card game by William Austin at Alzada, Montana.²⁰

Bill and Ed Cavin's fates were far different. Ed Cavin finally left Texas for South America and reportedly never returned to the United States. Bill Cavin became a Texas Ranger, working with Lee Hall. He died peacefully in Texas during the 1900s. A. G. Roberts apparently remained in Texas working as a lawman. Like Gladden, his fate remains unknown.

Violent death also claimed most of Llano's mob leaders. William Clark, one of the leaders, met a violent death in New Mexico. Clark's granddaughter would write:

My Gran father William Barney Clark . . . was sheriff when they had the herd [?] war the Vigilantes come to put down the out laws but got so bad the rangers had to come in to put down the Vigilantes. My gran father Mother Father went to New Mexico after 2 men that killed a whole family in Mason Co. he was shot down & is buried in Roswell, New Mexico.²¹

Ben Beeson survived the feud and went on to be a lawman in Llano. In 1889 Beeson met M. C. Roberts, a former sheriff of Llano County, in the public square at Llano. The two men had "a misunderstanding of several years standing."²² The *Statesman* reported:

This morning at about the hour of 9 your reporter was startled by a rapid succession of several pistol shots on the north side of the square. On going to the scene of action the following particulars were gathered: M. C. Roberts was sitting in front of Roberts & Phillips' saloon. Ben F. Beeson came up. Some words passed between Beeson and Roberts relative to some trouble they had yesterday. Beeson remarked that he was not fixed, but that he would fix himself, and went to his hotel and returned with a pistol in his hand. Roberts drew his pistol. Both parties commenced firing and advancing towards each other.

Roberts fell first. Beeson approached with his pistol in hand, when Roberts fired a shot which struck Beeson in the head. Beeson fell lifeless. Roberts was shot in the face, the ball lodging in the jaw. His wound is serious but thought not fatal.

They were brothers-in-law and had had trouble before.²³

A second account in the same paper indicated that seven shots were fired during the fight. Beeson was struck in the side of the head and killed instantly.

Perhaps the cruelest fate overtook former sheriff John E. Clark. Clark had fled for the safety of Ripley County, Missouri. Even here he feared that the relentless Cooley would track him down and kill him. He purchased a farm in the remotest, ruggedest part of the county, living almost as a recluse for the rest of his life. Clark died on May 4, 1888, still terrified of the specters of his enemies.

By the 1890s there was peace in Llano and Mason. The philosophy of an eye for an eye had given way to live and let live. Men returned to their lives and dreams for the future. Yet not everyone had forgotten the wrongs they suffered during the feud. There remained one last act of revenge. Ironically it would fall on mob leader Bob Rowntree.

On July 20, 1893, Rowntree was hauling supplies from Llano and stopped at the home of James Byfield, an acquaintance, for the night. The following morning Rowntree was ambushed and killed a short

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10. *Tombstone Epitaph*, July 22, 1882.
11. *New Southwest and Grant County Herald*, July 22, 1882.
12. *Tombstone Epitaph*, July 22, 1882.
13. Gamel, 31.
14. O'Neil, *They Die*, 136.
15. Convict Record Ledger, Huntsville Penitentiary Records, TSA.
16. Executive Clemency Documents, TSA.
17. Dave Johnson, "George W. Gladden: Hard Luck Warrior," *NOLA Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (September 1991): 1, 3-6.
18. *Arizona Weekly Citizen*, December 13, 1884.
19. *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 19, 1880.
20. *Daily Yellowstone Journal*, December 15 and 16, 1888.
21. Mrs. Lou Metcalfe to the author, undated letter. Author's files.
22. "A Duel To The Death," *Frontier Times* 10, no. 4 (January 1933): 160.
23. *Austin Statesman*, October 3, 1889. Matthew Caldwell Roberts was the son of Abraham and Cinthia Jeffery Roberts born November 23, 1848, in Caldwell County, Texas. He had married Lenora Beeson, Ben Beeson's sister, in Caldwell County December 13, 1866.
24. Oatman, 48.
25. *San Antonio Express*, July 21, 1893.
24. *Ibid.*, July 22, 1893.
26. *Austin Daily Statesman*, July 24, 1893.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *San Antonio Express*, July 26, 1893.
29. *Austin Daily Statesman*, July 27, 1893. Turner had been convicted of rape years earlier in Burnet County.
30. Petition to Charles A. Culberson, Governor's papers, TSA.
31. Miles Barler to Lee Barler, January 12, 1902. Barler Papers. University of Texas at Austin. The date is probably an error for 1903, quite common immediately following a year change. Scott was charged with murder on December 29, 1902.
32. Llano County District Court Records, Cause 2203.
33. Interview, Foster Casner with the author, October 11, 1982.

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making ineffectual attempts. Lieutenant Reese, coming near an Indian, who was running and throwing his shield back and forth around his back and shoulders to ward off bullets, called to Jake Banta close by, who had a good gun and good powder, if he could not kill the Indian. Banta dismounted, so that his aim would be better, and brought him to the ground. Other Indians turned back to the fallen one and stood him on his feet, but as he was not able to go they let him loose again. He fell to the ground again, but as he did so he drew a knife and stabbed himself to the heart. The Indians scattered widely and the rangers scattered after them. Lieutenant Reese had a shot gun, and coming in range of one fired and brought him down. The Indian lay stunned for a few minutes, but then began to get up and Reese's gun was empty. At this time Adolphus Reese came up with a loaded gun, and his brother said, "Look out, Dolf, that Indian will shoot you," as his brother started to go up to the Indian who at this time was resting on his knees. Adolphus, thus warned, stopped, and aiming his rifle shot the Indian through the head and finished him. The Indians, by scattering and taking advantage of the ravines and thickets and the bad condition of the ranger's guns and ammunition, had only one more killed, but several wounded. The dead Indians were scalped and their shields, bows, and other things taken. Of the rangers, J. W. Benson was wounded in the thigh with an arrow, and McCann in the thumb. This terminated the scout and the rangers went back to camp. Lieutenant Reese was afterwards captain of the company, Captain Hunter being promoted to Major.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH

Llano Iron News, 1884. Last Monday Ben F. Beeson and M. C. Roberts, two ex-sheriffs of Llano county met in front of Swanson's Clothing Emporium, on the north side of the Public Square, and a duel with pistols ensued. Seven shots were fired, five of which too effect, Mr. Beeson being instantly killed and Mr. Roberts receiving a painful and perhaps dangerous wound.

Beeson was shot four times; two of the balls making scalp wounds, another disabling his right arm, and the fourth passing through his head, just in rear of the ears, causing almost instant death.

Roberts was hit but once the ball entering the right cheek near the nose and, ranging down, broke the upper and lower jawbones, knocking out several teeth and lodging in the neck near the surface. At least a part of the ball lodged there. The contact with the teeth cut the ball in two pieces, one of them passing to the middle of the back and lodging between the shoulders, just under the skin.

This sad occurrence is regretted by the whole community, as both men had many friends in the county.

The shooting was the result of a misunderstanding of several years standing.

Justice W. R. Hadley, Monday afternoon held an inquest over the body of Mr. Beeson and from the evidence rendered a verdict is that the deceased came to his death from a shotgun wound inflicted by Mr. Roberts.