

**1882 Wild Shoot out
in downtown Llano
Coggins/Carter**

1882: A wild shoot-out in downtown Llano

By DALE FRY
BUZZ FEATURE WRITER

From the pages of the past comes another tale of tragedy in Llano, but this one has nothing to do with warring redskins. This one deals with warring whiteskins--several families of them, in fact--whose hatred and unbridled anger for each other resulted in a bloody shoot-out which left two people dead and four wounded on East Main Street in downtown Llano.

This story has to do with a feud between the Coggins and the Carters, and with the other families which sided in with them: the Hatleys with the Coggins, and the Herridges and the McNutts with the Carters. Collectively, they were known as the Coggins-Hatley party and the Carter-Herridge-McNutt party.

Accusations

Apparently there had been no love lost between the two after both sides had accused the other of having sticky fingers. It's not known to this day which side was right, or whether, indeed, there had ever been any thieving going on between them. But something had to have happened to bring the simmering situation to the roiling boil that developed--and which eventually erupted into a murderous showdown of revenge.

Armed, Angry and Mean

On the morning of June 14, 1882, the situation came to a head and boiled over. On this day, district court was in session in the courthouse, and the area around the square was filled to capacity--as was typical in those days--with people and their horses, carriages and wagons.

It was a pleasant summer day, a day of business as usual. No one would have any reason to suspect that very soon that area would become the scene of uncontrolled anger and unbridled lust for revenge which, in turn, would produce blazing guns, ricocheting bullets, serious wounds and, finally, death and destruction.

Alarming News

Sometime that morning news quickly spread around the square that someone had seen Johnny Coggins and a number of the Hatley men riding toward town, and, later, a group consisting of members of the Carters, Herridges and McNutts also heading into town. Both factions, containing about eight or nine men to each side, were heavily armed--primarily with Winchester rifles--looking as mean as evil itself and hell-bent for trouble.

Apparently the feud between the families was common knowledge around town, because when the news sped through the

crowd like wildfire, people scattered in all directions, scrambling to safer sites.

The more daring of the locals, however--knowing that the two groups were fairly itching for a fight--stationed themselves closer in to watch the melee. It wasn't every day that such pulse-pumping drama occurred in this neck of the woods, and, like the Romans glued to their seats in the colosseum, there was no way they were going to miss the action.

They didn't have to wait long. A little past noon the promising parties appeared downtown. For reasons unknown, Coggins first dismounted and walked calmly into one of the stores. When he spied two of his nephews there--the Perry boys--he told them he would buy guns for them if they would join the pending gunfight. When the nephews refused to the man on the grounds that it was none of their business, Coggins is supposed to have hotly replied, "I thought your eyes were too d... pale to fight"--whatever that meant.

Poised for Battle

Coggins left the building in a huff, and he and his gang lined up on one side of Main Street while members of the Carter-Herridge-McNutt group ganged up on the opposite side, both pathetic crews armed to the teeth and seething hatred.

Apparently one of the Herridge boy's eyes were not so pale, because he suddenly stomped out into the street and hollered that if any of the Cogginses "wanted anything," for them to "open up."

No one moved. No one said anything. Both sides--guns in hand, poised as taut as a guitar string, ready to spring into action--waited for the other to dare make a move...

A Reluctant Sheriff

Sometime during the foregoing few seconds, Sheriff R.A. McIness, apparently not relishing the idea of confronting any of the crazies out on Main Street, chose to remain ensconced inside the walls of his office and refused to budge--but sent out his trusty deputy, Miles Barlor, to see that law and order prevailed in downtown Llano.

As it turned out, this was not the best decision in the world. It was a known fact that for one reason or another, Barlor hated the whole Coggins family. Not only that, it was also a known fact that Deputy Barlor favored the Carter-Herridge bunch. This was definitely not a good position for him to be in at the moment.

Be that as it may, Barlor had no choice but to follow orders. And so, drumming up the courage, he headed for Main Street. When he arrived he found--no doubt thankfully--that at that

point no one had yet fired a shot. By this time, the Carter-Herridge-McNutt men had taken cover, and the Coggins-Hatley gang were moving out into Main Street, guns at the ready.

Barlor immediately demanded that everyone put down their weapons. He might as well have demanded that of the wind: both sides refused. What to do?

The Gunfight Begins

As it turned out, he didn't have to make a decision. He didn't have time. In an instant someone fired a shot at him, but missed the target. In a desperate move, Barlor jumped aside, then high-tailed it to a nearby row of buildings, where he dashed behind Zinke's Saddle Shop.

And none too soon. Following that single shot, a frantic barrage of gunfire erupted from both sides, raining bullets down in an ear-splitting and destructive torrent. In a matter of seconds, Johnny Coggins and Ben Carter, leaders of the two groups, had each caught a bullet. Another wild bullet had grazed Jack Herridge's chest. A completely innocent bystander, a man known only as "Harwell," received a bullet in his left arm. (Was Harwell one of the Romans in the colosseum? No one knows.)

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Community

Shootout: Mysteries still remain

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fell dead in the street.

Suddenly Johnny Scoggins, wounded and bleeding, saw his son, "Little Johnny," as he was known, also fall to the street when another of the bullets found its mark.

Taking no heed of his own safety, the desperate father jumped up and ran amid racing bullets to his son, fell down beside him and gathered him quickly into his arms. Just as he pressed Little Johnny to his own bloody body, he felt the terrifying impact of a second bullet tear into his son.

A Fearless Deputy

Within those few seconds, the sheriff apparently realized that Deputy Barlor, who was safely fortified behind Zinke's Saddle Shop and wasn't about to come out, needed help. So he immediately dispatched a second law officer, Deputy Sam Stoudenmire, to the O.K. Corral. Again, the sheriff remained behind.

History tells us that "the human fatalities would doubtless have been much

greater but for the arrival of deputy Sam Stoudenmire, who came fearlessly down the middle of the street, firing into the air and shouting for both sides to cease firing." Which, inexplicably, they promptly did.

History says also that the firing had no sooner ceased than members of the district court burst through the courthouse doors and "swarmed pell-mell" out of the building.

At this point, the recorded facts leave us mystified. Deputy Stoudenmire made no arrests; why he didn't throw them all in jail is anyone's guess. Both of the feuding factions, now subdued, simply collected their dead and wounded and went their way as if nothing had happened.

"Little Johnny" Coggins died before the day was out. He was only 17. He and Henry Hatley were the only fatalities of the senseless confrontation.

The flying bullets had not only taken two human lives and wounded four human beings, they had wreaked even more damage. One of them slammed

through a wall of District Attorney Lessing's office in the courthouse and buried itself in his desk barely a foot from the chair he was occupying.

Other bullets splintered a wagon, shot through a half-dozen houses nearby and killed several hogs and three horses—which, in those days, the city allowed to roam freely across town.

Today, this tragedy remains one of the worse Llano has ever witnessed—one which those involved could easily have avoided had they only sought to settle their differences through civilized means.

A Surprise Turn of Events

No one knows which gun(s) fired which shot(s) that killed two people and wounded four others in the heat of the moment on that summer day of 1882. But after everything was said and done, some semblance of rectitude did ultimately prevail. Ten days later, each of the members of the Carter-Herridge-McNutt group, along with a few of the Coggins-Hatley men, rode into town and surrendered. The

sheriff released them all on a thousand-dollar bond each.

Whether any of the people involved in the shootout were ever brought to trial, however, remains a mystery to this day.

Another Mystery

On April 30, 1883—10 months after the blazing showdown—Johnny Coggins, along with one of his small sons, was riding down a road which led to their home in the country, when suddenly an ambusher stepped from the shadows and opened fire on the pair.

The child received a wound in his forehead, while a bullet penetrated and exited Johnny's bowels. Both of them lived, but Johnny's wound never healed. He died, as a result, several years later.

The identity of the assailant also remains a mystery to this day.

Note: The Buzz is grateful to C.L. Yarbrough of Hamilton, author of "Canyon of the Eagles," who granted us permission to use information from his book for this rendition of the famous tale.

News

Shootout: Deputy tries to stop downtown gun fight – to no avail

From Page 1A

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