

El Paso Gunmen and the Tools of Their Trade

by Bob McNellis

In January of 1881, El Paso was a wide open town. The little adobe village boasted more than its share of saloons where a paying customer could try his luck at poker, craps, faro or any number of other games of chance. Down on the "line", there were scores of cribs and brothels to visit and the prostitutes that worked there were eager to relieve a customer of his money. Mexico was just a short walk and a splash away. If a man wanted to get lost, that was the place to go. For these reasons, fugitives, outlaws, and other gunmen found El Paso a good place in which to live. The tough towns of the 1870's were reforming themselves. Dodge City and Abilene, Kansas were purging themselves of the lawless element and Tombstone was not the same old town any more. So the "Hard Cases" came to the "Pass" where they could continue their lawless ways just as they had in the past.

El Paso was on the eve of one of the most important events in her history. The Southern Pacific Railroad would arrive in May and the town Fathers wanted to be ready for the progress that this occurrence would inevitably bring.

The town was divided into two camps, the "Sporting Crowd" with the Manning Brothers as its leaders, and "The Reformers" who were the substantial citizens of the hamlet. The Mannings were powerful saloon owners and counted among their supporters Johnny Hale, a rancher and George Campbell, the City Marshal. Many of the reformers were on the City Council and in desperation they decided to bring in a "town tamer" to clean up the little village.

The man selected to make El Paso safe for the soon to arrive settlers was Dallas Stoudenmire, an ex-Texas Ranger who had a reputation with a six-shooter. The 6'2" Dallas was appointed Marshal on April 11, 1881. His first official duty was to march into a saloon and take the Marshal's keys and badge away from the reluctant acting Marshal, a drunkard named Bill Johnson. Since Johnson was a Manning man, this humiliation angered the saloon faction.

It was only a matter of four days until the situation in El Paso exploded and what resulted was one of the most spectacular gunfights in the history of the West. The bodies of two Mexican cowboys were found on the ranch of Johnny Hale. The murdered men had gone to look for stolen cattle which were known to be on the ranch.

The bodies were brought into town for an inquest. Armed and angry men began to gather in the street. On one side stood the friends of the Mexicans, Constable Krempkau and Dallas Stoudenmire; on the other side Johnny Hale, George Campbell, and numerous Manning henchmen. When it appeared that there would be trouble, the judge cancelled the inquest and told everyone to go home. When most of the adversaries had gone, Dallas went across the street to have lunch, leaving Krempkau in



charge. An argument ensued between Campbell and Krempkau, just as soon as the Marshal was out of sight. The harsh words were interrupted by Hale who shot Krempkau with his .45. At the sound of the report, Dallas came crashing out of the restaurant with both guns blazing, his first shot hitting an innocent bystander. The Marshal's second shot hit Hale right between the eyes and he fell dead. During this time, the dying Krempkau managed to draw his pistol and fire two shots at Campbell, hitting him in the wrist and foot. Dallas now turned his attention on Campbell and shot him in the stomach. The dying Campbell looked up at the Marshal standing over him and said, "You big son of a bitch, you murdered me." Campbell died the next day. The whole episode lasted only five seconds, left four men dead (including the innocent bystander) and set the stage for a series of events that were to shake the very foundations of El Paso.

The Mannings decided on a plan to get rid of the new Marshal and convinced Bill Johnson with a few drinks to ambush the big man. On the evening of the 17th of April, while Dallas and his brother-in-law, Doc Cummings, were walking down the street, Johnson appeared on a brick pile with a shotgun. He fired both barrels, missed, and was sent crashing to the ground by eight balls from Dallas' and Doc's guns.

Open hostility between the Mannings and Stoudenmire subsided for a while, but under the calm the adversaries were readying for another encounter. Dallas carried on his work as Marshal and arrested the Mannings every month for "Gaming" (a formality instituted by the City in order to bring money into the Treasury) and the brothers resented this greatly.

In February of 1882, Dallas went to Columbus, Texas to get married. While he was gone the other shoe dropped. Doc Cummings was killed by Jim Manning in a gunfight. When Dallas returned and found that his brother-in-law and friend was dead, he became outraged and vowed to kill all of the Mannings. The feud became so bad that it threatened to engulf the whole town. The City Council

was forced to ask Dallas for his badge in May of 1882. Dallas had served as El Paso's Marshal for just over a year. Dallas then became a Deputy U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Texas with headquarters in El Paso, but he was seldom in the city. His new job took him all over the western part of Texas and New Mexico in search of federal fugitives and criminals.

Stoudenmire was in town looking for a fugitive on September 17, 1882. The big man got off the train and started down the dusty street looking in all the saloons in search of his man. He peered in the Manning establishment as he passed but the man was not there. Continuing on his way he decided to have a drink at the Acme Saloon. One of the local trouble makers told the Mannings that Dallas was looking for them and making threats. It wasn't long before the whole town was humming with stories of impending violence between the parties. The next evening Dallas went over to the Manning saloon to assure the brothers that he was not looking for trouble. As he entered the saloon, he was met by Doc Manning and an argument



Dallas Stoudenmire's S&W American #7056, Colt Richard Mason #6904, his City Marshall badge, and picture of his sister, V. M. Cummings. The picture helped deflect the bullet fired by Doc Manning.

began. The words grew hot and both men went for their guns. Doc drew first and shot Dallas in the arm. The slug glanced off a bone and entered the big man's chest and his Smith & Wesson went spinning across the barroom floor. Doc fired another shot which was stopped by some papers and a picture that Dallas had in his coat pocket. But the force of the impact careened him out into the street. The big man drew his Colt belly gun and fired, hitting Doc in the right arm. The two men wrestled into the street with Dallas trying to get off another shot and Doc trying to stop him. Jim Manning heard the commotion and ran up behind Dallas firing two shots from his .45 Colt. The first shot missed. But the second hit Dallas in the back of the head. The huge man dropped like a shot. The feud was over.

In the long run, the railroad did bring progress to El Paso. The gambling and prostitution were found to be assets and they were allowed to flourish. By 1886, many of

the cribs were replaced by fancy parlor houses, where customers could be entertained in luxury and the girls were prettier and the prices higher. One of El Paso's most amusing shootings took place outside one of these parlor houses in 1886.

Alice Abbot and Etta Clark had come to El Paso along with the railroad in 1881. Both girls were successful at their profession, eventually becoming rival madams. Alice's and Etta's houses were across the street from each other. Alice had a popular inmate in her house named Bessie Colvin. While she was a real money maker, she was unhappy with her arrangement with Big Alice. Bessie decided that she liked the deal that Etta offered her and moved across the street. Alice, who weighed 200 pounds, stormed across the street to retrieve her wayward girl and was met at the door by the dainty Etta, who weighed in at 100 pounds. The pushing and shoving that ensued was climaxed by Etta's hitting Alice on the head with a gas lighter. Alice threatened violence and walked down the stairs and into the street. Etta ran into her bedroom and



Ranger Ed Aten's Colt M1878 #6831 and M1889 #7105. He was with Capt. Jones at the Island in 1893.

came out with her .44 bulldog revolver. Alice stopped and turned in the street in order to add another insult to the long list she had already heaped upon Etta, but was silenced abruptly when she was shot in the public arch. The El Paso newspaper in reporting the incident stated that Alice had been shot in the "Public Arch". After Alice recovered, she is said to have gone to the newspaper office and dared the editor to come out and fight. The challenge went unanswered. Alice got her revenge two years later. She and a few cohorts sneaked over to Etta's and burned her place to the ground.

The Texas Rangers played a critical role in the history of El Paso. The Rangers kept the peace when there was a breakdown in law enforcement. They tracked down fugitives in other jurisdictions when El Paso peace officers could not pursue. One of the most tragic events in Ranger history took place near El Paso in June of 1893.

During one of its floods, the Rio Grande River created

an island thirty miles down river from El Paso. In the 1880's and 90's this island became the headquarters for gangs of cattle rustlers, thieves, and murderers. No one seemed to know which country, the U.S. or Mexico, had jurisdiction over the island. The bandits that lived on the island were free to steal from both sides of the border and nobody dared bother them in their island stronghold. Captain Frank Jones moved his Company of Texas Rangers from Alpine to Ysleta, Texas in June, 1893. His orders were to get rid of the outlaws that infested the island. On June 30, Jones and five of his men, Eddie Aten, Carl Kirchner, Tommy Tucker, Ed Bryant, and Wood Saunders went into the neighboring area to scout the rustlers' camp and make plans for a sweep that would rid the place of the outlaws. The Rangers crossed into Mexico without realizing it and were ambushed at a place called Tres Jacales. Captain Jones was mortally wounded, dying during the battle which ensued. The gun fire from the outlaws was so intense that the other Rangers were barely able to escape with their lives. However, the Rangers of Company "D"



John Wesley Hardin's Colt Lightning #84304, his Elgin watch #4069110. Presented to him by James B. Miller on Apr. 7, 1895.

had their revenge. Over the next few years all of the outlaws who participated in Jones' killing were found dead, each under mysterious circumstances.

One of the Rangers of Company "D" who was always getting into trouble was Bass Outlaw. Outlaw was an adequate Ranger, but he could not hold his liquor. When he had a few he became uncontrollable and violent. Bass was finally forced to resign from the Rangers because of his drinking. Still, with his experience, he was promptly made Deputy U.S. Marshal. He was in El Paso frequently. Every time he came to town there was always some type of confrontation. Bass came to town on April 5, 1894 to testify in Federal Court which was to begin sessions the next day. As usual, he began drinking and went over to Tillie Howard's Parlor House to visit Ruby, his favorite girl. Bass fired his pistol in Tillie's house, which brought Ranger Joe McKidric and Constable John Selman on the run. Bass was on Tillie's back porch by the time the officers arrived

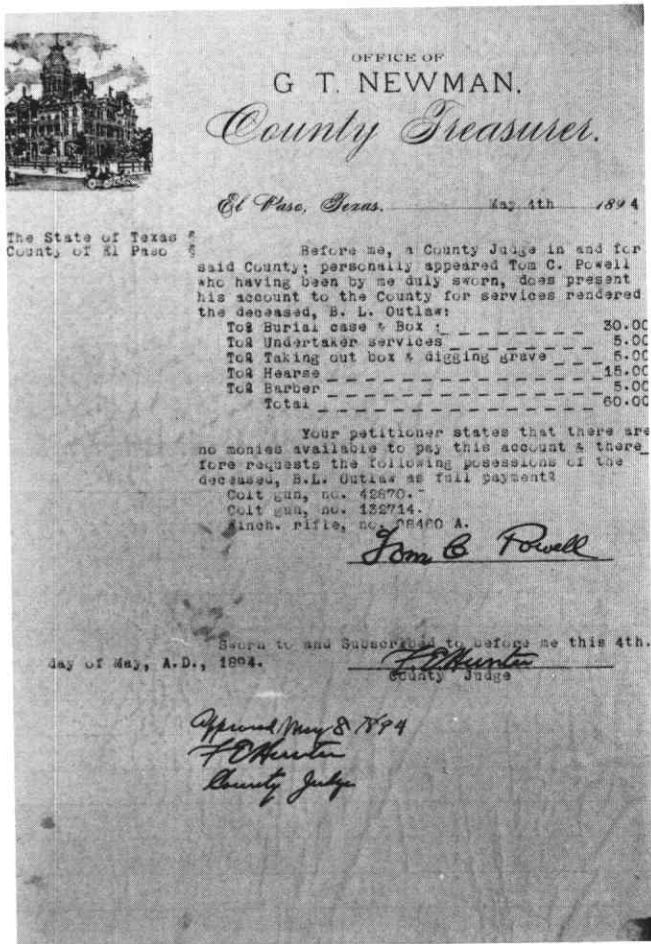
with his sawed off Colt in his hand. McKidric, who had served in the Rangers with Outlaw, shouted; "Why did you shoot?" At that instant he was shot and killed by Bass. Constable Selman drew his gun and fired at Bass, mortally wounding him. Bass aimed and fired at Selman, but with a bullet near his heart, could only raise his gun high enough to hit the Constable in the leg. With great effort, Bass jumped the fence surrounding Tillie's place and staggered up the street, where he surrendered to another Ranger. Bass died a few hours later on a pool table in Barnum's Show Saloon thus ending another of the controversial gunfights in this City's history.

Probably the most famous of the gunfighters to come to El Paso was John Wesley Hardin. Hardin came here in April of 1895 to help a relative in a legal matter. During his 15 years in the Texas State Prison, Hardin had studied law and upon his release in 1894 passed the bar examination. Jim Miller, a notorious killer in his own right, was married to Hardin's niece and asked for the gunman's help in prosecuting an enemy. After a short trial, which ended in a



Wes Hardin's Colt Thunderer taken from him on May 2, 1895.

hung jury, Miller gave Hardin a Colt Lightning and a pocket watch for his help. Miller then went back to Pecos, Texas, but Hardin stayed on in El Paso. Hardin did not have very much luck making a living as an attorney so he resorted to gambling as a means of support. But gambling also proved unfruitful and Hardin began to lose heavily. In late April Hardin was engaged in a poker game at the Acme and as usual was losing. He didn't like this and stood up, scooped the pot into his hat, and walked off. No one said a word or tried to stop him. On May 1, Hardin was at it again. He was shooting craps at the Gem Saloon when the dealer made a remark that he didn't like. Hardin pulled his Colt Thunderer, walked around the table, counted out his losses from the house winnings and walked out. Again, no one tried to stop him. Hardin was a bad man, people thought, and they'd better not cross him. Old Constable John Selman was not intimidated, he was himself an ex-outlaw and a killer in his own right. Hardin's



Document showing that Bass Outlaw's guns were given to the undertaker in lieu of payment for burying him.



Colt 45 #154940 and gold badge which belonged to Frank B. Simmons, Sheriff of El Paso County 1892 to 1899. He arrested John W. Hardin on May 6, 1895. Note original warrant.

cockiness plus the fact that he threatened the son of the old Constable, caused Selman to shoot Hardin August 19, 1895. Selman knew that he could not kill Hardin in a gunfight, so he shot the attorney in the back of the head as he stood at the bar of the Acme Saloon.

The mysterious disappearance of Col. A. J. Fountain and his young son, Henry, caused a stir in New Mexico bringing Pat Garrett to the El Paso vicinity. Fountain was bringing indictments against several cattlemen to Las Cruces from Lincoln County. It was rumored that several of the indicted cattlemen had ambushed the Fountains and killed them in the vicinity of the White Sands. Governor Thornton, realizing the impact the case would have on the State of New Mexico, called in the best man to handle the investigation: that man was Pat F. Garrett. Pat had gained fame as the Sheriff who rid the state of the infamous outlaw, Billy the Kid, in 1881. In March of 1896, when he received the Governor's call, Pat was living in Uvalde, Texas.

Because of political pressure the cattlemen were not convicted of the murders. Garrett was unable to get a conviction because the murderers had enough pull to have a new County formed, where he, as Sheriff of Dona Ana County, had no jurisdiction.

In 1902, Pat Garrett became the Customs Collector at El Paso. He was appointed by President Teddy Roosevelt and served admirably in that position until 1906. Pat retired to his ranch in New Mexico, near Las Cruces. On February 29, 1908 he was murdered over a land dispute.

This brief glimpse into the development of El Paso from a dusty shanty town to a modern-day metropolis offers but a select few personalities and instances that illustrate how the gun, the outlaw, and the settlers interacted through El Paso's history.



Colt Thunderer #138671 presented to Pat Garrett when he was Customs Inspector in 1903.