

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Frontier Tales

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The Bandera Prophet

Every locale has a tragic story in their history. One that can bring shame so great the feelings of despair do not diminish with the passage of time. Bandera County was not spared such an incident. We lament the discord found in our country today but our time of dissension cannot compare to what the country suffered during the Civil War. A grim crime fell upon Bandera County during this time that is still spoken of with hushed voices.

Not all supported the secession of Texas from the Union. The Germans of Comfort have been well-known for their unionist loyalties, but there were many others in Texas who did not support the dissolution of the country. In 1863, a party of men left their homes in Williamson County to avoid conscription by heading to the neutral grounds of Mexico. They left well-prepared with good horses, well-armed, and carrying several hundred dollars in cash. The eight men and a boy stopped briefly in Bandera to rest and buy supplies. Not feeling the need to be secretive, they were quite open with the townsfolk about their journey.

At the time, the Confederate army occupied Camp Verde, twelve miles north of Bandera. Hearing of the men, a detachment of twenty-five soldiers were deployed to apprehend them. The men were captured just below Hondo. They were promised a fair and impartial trial if they surrendered. Agreeing to the terms, the men gave up their weapons and started back with the soldiers, never dreaming their time on earth would be fleeting.

When the party returned to the Bandera area, camp was made for the night beneath a large tree. After supper, some of the soldiers suggested

they hang the men for treason right then and there. Others opposed but were overruled. Wanting nothing to do with the crime, many soldiers left the camp. The men were led to the tree. One by one, each man was pulled up to the strongest branch by a rope to be slowly strangled to death. As one body was cut down, the next unfortunate soul would be pulled up to suffer the same fate. Unable to face such a death, one man pleaded to be shot. His request granted, he was shot so violently the gun's ramrod penetrated through his body.

In the morning, while looking for his stray horses, Joe Poon of Middle Verde Creek, stumbled upon the gruesome scene. He quickly fled to Bandera to report the murders. Town leaders raced back to the area where they found the bodies scattered about as they were left by the soldiers, a ramrod protruding from one corpse. A shallow grave was dug, the men were wrapped in blankets and laid to rest. One body was missing, that of the boy who was taken away by the soldiers, never to be heard from again. His fate remains unknown to this day. While court records show the names of the murderers, they were never charged. A monument was erected beneath the Hanging Tree with the names of the men killed, marking their grave and marking a dark stain on our history.