

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Frontier Tales

By Rebecca Huffstutler Norton
The Bandera Prophet

West of the cosmopolitan city of San Antonio in the late 1800s, was the beginning of the wild Texas frontier. Despite the rugged landscape, entrepreneurs were not discouraged from looking upon the vast emptiness and seeing the potential for development and financial gain. Among the first were the railroad companies, determined to build a transportation network to ferry goods and travelers across the Texas desert. But the opportunists were soon faced with the reality of the lawlessness that thrived so far from the conventions of polite society. In desperation, the railroad contractors sought the help of the Texas Rangers to impose order.

When the Texas Rangers arrived, they found the legendary Roy Bean who, after leaving San Antonio under a cloud of duplicity, had opened up a saloon near the Pecos River in a railroad tent village called Eagle Nest. The Rangers were astounded by the level of sheer mayhem they encountered. One captain wrote back to his superiors, “There is the worst lot of roughs, gamblers, robbers and pickpockets collected here I ever saw, and without the immediate presence of state troops, this class would prove a great detriment towards the completion of the railroad.” They needed someone to take control of this tempestuous outpost so, in a questionable move, recommended Bean to be appointed Pecos County Justice of the Peace in August of 1882, regardless of his lack of legal training. This rough, uncouth character, who J. Marvin Hunter declared, “would not shine in society in other parts of Texas,” found his calling. Declaring himself, “The Law West of the Pecos,” he imposed an unorthodox form of justice and became a favorite of newspapermen who

reported on his lively courtroom antics with both fact and fancy. One notable case was when he was sent to do an inquest for a tragic accident where a trestle over a deep gorge collapsed, killing five workers outright and injuring two. Judge Bean traveled the 20 miles to find the seven men laid out side by side. He proceeded to hold the inquest for all the men despite the two that were still alive. When called out for this, he replied, "Oh it's all right. Them two fellers are going to die anyhow, so we'll get it over now. Darned if I'm going to ride a contrary mule back over here to hold a second inquest."

The men died the next day.

His crude courtroom was located in his saloon, which he named the Jersey Lilly for the famous British actress Lillie Langtry. He was instantly smitten with the beauty after he had seen her picture in a newspaper. He regularly wrote to her, imploring her to come to Texas. By then, the town's name was changed to Langtry after a railroad employee, George Langtry. That didn't stop the judge from telling Miss Langtry, it was he who changed the name in her honor.

He died at the age of 78 in 1903 after a bout of heavy drinking, never having the chance to meet his love. Almost a year later, Miss Langtry had the opportunity to visit her namesake, a brief visit that she cherished the rest of her life.