

# The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas History

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On this day in 1908, James Harper Gillett made his first appearance as a novillero, or apprentice matador, at the bullring in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

Gillett, the son of Texas Ranger James B. Gillett, was born in Ysleta, Texas, in 1884. His parents divorced in 1889, after which he had no contact with his father for 24 years; his mother, the daughter of George W. Baylor, married Guadalajara resident Samuel M. Lee in 1895.

Young James also moved to Guadalajara and began calling himself Harper Baylor Lee. Under the tutelage of his friend Francisco Gómez, El Chiclanero, a retired matador from Spain, Lee quit his railway construction job to try his hand as a professional torero.

In 1910 he became the first American to attain the rank of matador de toros. The public cheered him as "Opper Li." He appeared as a professional matador in 52 corridas and killed 100 bulls. Twice he suffered nearly fatal gorings.

His career was cut short by the chaos of the Mexican Revolution and its accompanying anti-American feelings. After reconciling with his father in 1914, he changed his name to Harper Baylor Gillett, and later owned and operated a poultry farm on the outskirts of San Antonio. Gillett died in 1941.