

COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS – FEB. 1887

"Bloodiest of All County Seat Fights!"

Feb. 27, 1887

As the western portion of the state of Kansas was being settled, many fights occurred between small towns each vying to be named the county seat. Wichita County was no different. The Leoti/Coronado County Seat Fight was considered the *"Bloodiest of Them All."* On February 27, 1887, a shoot-out occurred on the main street in the town of Coronado. When the smoke cleared, three men lay dead in the street, with two more dying later. Newspapers from New York to San Francisco covered "the cowboy war" on their front pages. Many notorious gunfighters and lawmen walked the very ground of this small western Kansas town. In March of 1888, Leoti was determined the permanent county seat of Wichita County, business houses moved from Coronado to Leoti and in time Coronado became a ghost town.



Photographed before the Wichita Bank in Coronado are (standing l to r): Luke Short, Wyatt Earp, the next three men are unidentified, Doc Holliday, Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman, Red Loomis, Jim Masterson, Pat and Mike Sughrue.



Luke Short was a famous gambler from Texas who became well-known for the part he played in the "Dodge City Wars" in Kansas in the 1880's. From published newspaper reports, Luke was a "regular dandy, quite handsome...a perfect ladies man. He [dressed] fashionably, was particular as to his appearance, and always took pains to look as neat as possible." (Miller 397). He was known to associate with the best of society and took a leading role in social events.



As a lawman in Dodge, Wyatt Earp was paid two hundred and fifty dollars a month, plus a fee of two dollars and fifty cents for each arrest. He and his deputies arrested three hundred persons a month. He served two terms (* town records state that Earp was assistant marshal) from May 17, 1876 to September 8, 1879.



Called "Doc" because he was a trained Dentist. After finding out that he had tuberculosis, he moved out West because doctors told him that dry air would prolong his life by a few months. Met Wyatt, and became one of the most fearsome gunfighters ever. Most people say it was because of the tuberculosis. He didn't care about this life, as he was dying anyway. He participated in over 100 gun-fights and wasn't even shot once.



On the morning of October 25, 1921, Bat Masterson sat behind his newspaper desk, picked up his ink pen and wrote these words, "There are those who argue that everything breaks even in this dump of a world of ours. I suppose these ginks who argue that way hold that because the rich man gets ice in the summer and the poor man gets it in the winter things are breaking even for both. Maybe so, but I'll swear that I can't see it that way..." These would be the last words he wrote. He died of a heart attack at his desk.



Bill Tilghman retired but was persuaded by the citizens of Cromwell Oklahoma to become their city Marshal, Cromwell was an Oil Boomtown. On November 1, 1924 Tilghman was eating in a restaurant when a shot was fired outside by a drunken probation officer, by the name of Wiley Lynn, who had clashed with Tilghman on other occasions, and as Tilghman led Wiley Lynn toward the jail, the drunk pulled out a small automatic pistol and shot Tilghman, who died 15 minutes later. Bill Tilghman spent a lifetime protecting the good guys from the bad guys, and he did one heck of a job.



Jim Masterson was a man who never went back on a friend, and never forgot an obligation. He never pretended to keep up the conventional social amenities; but yet there was a man whom money could absolutely never make break a trust, and who would have done a kind act to a man on the gallows after all the world had given him the cold shoulder, and where there was no chance of any personal reward. Many who walk the conventional paths of social life are not as honorable in their obligations to their fellow men as he was.

BAT MASTERSON, A LEOTIAN'S IDEA OF HIM

Excerpt from The Wichita County Herald
(Leoti dispatch to New York Sun)
Coronado, Wichita County, Kansas,
Thursday, February 24, 1887

On Thursday, the electors of this (Wichita) county will decide at the polls whether the county seat will remain here or be removed to Coronado. The fight is one of the bitterest that was ever waged in the West. It began long ago, and was decided temporarily in favor of Leoti, but since then the people of Coronado have rallied and with the assistance of certain outsiders, they threaten to carry the day. Wichita County is some distance from Dodge City, but it is to that town that the Coronadoers look for the power which will enable them to overcome the natives. Since he retired from the desperado line, Bat Masterson has become something of a figure in frontier politics. The fact that he and his crowd are to be imported by the people of Coronado has caused intense excitement here, and every body is preparing for the worst. No man now goes out without his guns, and even the farmers go around with rifles and revolvers strapped to them. The election will be a bloody one if Bat takes part in it in the style which has made him celebrated at Dodge City.



In the fall of 1883 Pat Sughrue was elected sheriff of Ford County. His under sheriffs included his twin brother, Michael Sughrue, and Mysterious Dave Mather. The newspapers reported arrests of horse thieves, burglars, forgers, the transporting of prisoners, etc. by Sughrue. Pat must have been a good tracker as he went to Texas and even to New York to catch some of the lawbreakers.



No state ever had a more courageous officer than Mike Sughrue. The western outlaw, even before discovered, trembled as with a chill at the sight of Sheriff Sughrue with a white handled pistol in his belt.

History of the Historic Lawmen and Gunfighters Photograph

Felix A. Jones (pictured on the right) was the original owner of the photograph. Upon his death, his wife, Trix Jones, became the owner. When Trix died the photograph became the property of their daughter, Bobbie Lee Jones Mahler. After her death, Bobbie's husband, Dr. Charles Mahler, donated the photograph to the Wichita County Historical Society as he felt the it should be returned to Wichita County.

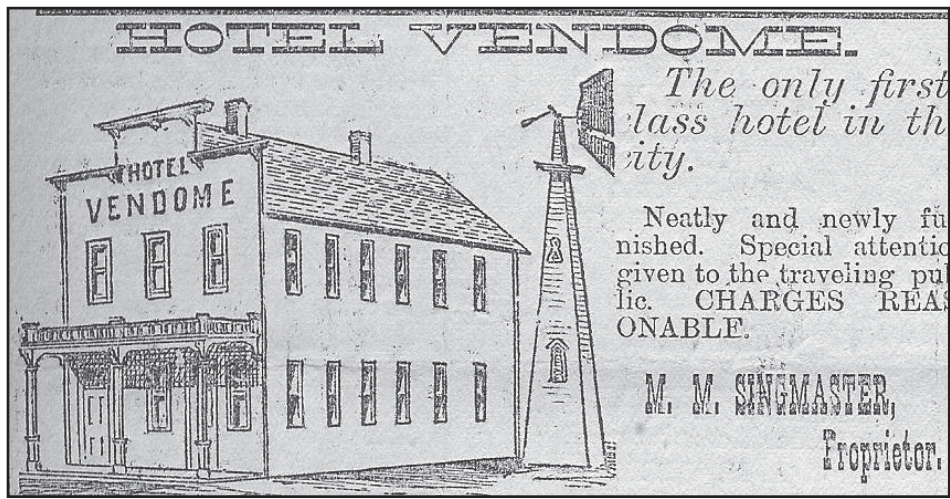


THE COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS.

CORONADO AND LEOTI PEOPLE ARMING FOR THE FRAY.
DENVER, Col., March 3.—A Wallace (Kan.)

Denver, Col., March 3 - A Wallace (Kan.) Special to the News says: The situation in the Coronado-Leoti war remains unchanged. Both towns are surrounded by a strong cordon of armed men, who permit no one to enter. The men in both towns sleep with their guns, and after admission the stranger finds a Winchester at every turn. They stand in doorways, and merchants bring their guns to wait on customers. Men patrol the street all day and night. The country surrounding is as excited as the towns and about equally divided. Coronado sympathizers are for the most part in town, with their ammunition and guns, and a Coronado man said today that within an hour 500 men could be recruited in the town, ready to defend it with their lives. At Leoti the cry is for revenge. The citizens are as excited as they were on the day following the shooting, and they are unanimous in their determination to sack Coronado at the first opportunity. This will probably be offered on Thursday next, when the county election occurs. Immediately after the shooting Sunday some men from Leoti came to Wallace and secured all the guns and ammunition they could get and representatives from Coronado paid a similar visit to Garden City, so that both towns are well equipped with ammunition for the war which every man believes will occur before the thing is settled.

The population of Leoti, which has been recruited by the county cohorts, is looked to for the first move, and the Coronado men will act on the defensive. Each town has plans, but they are in too chaotic a state for a logical forecast of the probable result. Since Sunday there have been no hostile actions beyond a harmless firing of guns in Leoti. Whisky and beer are freely imbibed, and those will be at the bottom of further trouble, should there be any. County Sheriff John Edwards, who is a Leoti man, has not made an attempt to arrest anybody, as he knows that such an effort would cost him his life. He has 12 warrants, but unless the State authorities lend the assistance of a couple of companies of militia they will never be served, and even then the Coronado men say that a man will never be taken alive. It was reported at the Hotel Vendome in Coronado, that the Governor had been appealed to for aid by Leoti, but no information has been received here to that effect.



Charlie Coulter and Bill Raynes, ringleaders of the Leoti crowd, went over to Coronado on Sunday morning and drank considerable beer and whisky. Coulter, who was a desperado of the worst type, and who is the fourth member of his family to die with his boots on, promised to return with beer in place of

Excerpt from *Of The Kansas Cowntowns, 1867-1888*

According to Bill's widow, Mrs. Zoe Tilghman, who wrote his biography in 1949, he was called by one of the factions in the Wichita County seat war to guard the polls at one of the several county seat location elections. Possibly this was the election of March 1888, for Tilghman was absent from Dodge city at that time and three months later was holding forth in Farmer City, Wichita County. This small western Kansas burg was located between Leoti and Coronado, the contestants for the county seat. So close were Leoti and Coronado that Farmer City was barely able to squeeze in between them, and even so was accused of squatting on a portion of the Coronado townsite. Little love was shared among the three towns; in fact blood had been spilled just the winter prior to Bill's visit. Possibly the intense feeling of the times had something to do with the action which occurred at Farmer City on July 4, 1888. On that day, Bill Tilghman's 34th birthday, the ex-Dodge City marshal shot and killed Ed Prather.

The Coronado Star, March 10, 1887

Pat Sughrue of Dodge City and Sheriff of Ford county, has purchased the west half of block 5 for a residence, and lots 9 and 10 in block 28 on north Main street. Mr. Sughrue says that we have the finest town site and one of the best built towns in this part of the state, and he has implicit faith in Coronado as the future county seat of Wichita County, and will erect a dwelling house at an early date and will move his family to Coronado as soon as he can settle up his official business. The STAR extends a hearty welcome.

The Coronado Star, October 13, 1887

Mrs. (Pat) Sughrue presented her husband with a fine daughter (Johanna) Friday.

Bat Masterson - "Every dog has its day, unless there are more dogs than days."

FRAUD AND INTIMIDATION

Excerpt from *The Wichita Standard, Coronado, Dec. 23, 1886*

Leoti went to Topeka with about five hundred names on her petition for county seat. Coronado filed a petition containing over seventeen hundred names, asking for the same. Leoti backs her petition with four hundred and fifty-one votes, while Coronado shows up with two hundred and eighty-five and then begins crying fraud.

Where is the fraud?

Who made the statement that they were bound to win if they had to pay fifty dollars a head for votes, and that was their only hope? Coronado.

Who got a Leoti voter drunk and left him on the prairie to prevent his voting for Leoti, the second day of the canvass? Coronado.

Who reported their town had a majority of votes when they were behind, to inspire confidence in their friends? Coronado.

Who imported a lot of men from outside the county and attempted to vote them in the interest of their town? Coronado.

Now lets see about the "intimidation" business:

Who first went to the polls armed with Winchesters? Coronado.

Who imported a "bad man" from Dodge City to aid them? Coronado.

Who run in a lot of foreign voters with the threat, in substance if not literally, that they would have their votes or their opponents blood? Coronado.

Who employed a U. S. Marshall (?) to watch the polls, regardless of authority? Coronado.



The Wichita Herald, Coronado, March 10, 1887 special edition claiming victory in the county seat election. (Printed in red!)

that consumed. He and Raynes returned to Leoti, got the beer, and with five companions, only three of whom were armed, returned in a wagon and buggy. They visited a druggist, who was sick in bed, and made him get up. Coulter ordered him to dance, and fired his gun at his feet to make him obey. The druggist offered to treat if Coulter would lower his gun, and the offer was accepted. The men then went into the street, and, according to the story, began firing indiscriminately. Coulter did most of the shooting. A Coronado man named Jackson happened to get in Coulter's way and was struck on the head with the butt of Coulter's gun. The Loomis brothers interfered and requested the Leoti men to stop abusing citizens. For a reply Coulter turned on Bob Loomis and struck at him, performing an old plainsman's trick, hitting Bob Loomis on the head and shooting John Loomis in the leg at the same time. John was standing back of Bob and as Coulter fired he sprang forward and clinched with him. The Leoti crowd, according to the story of the Coronado men, then began firing at two citizens who were running up the street. A dozen Coronado men, who had gathered in the store, then opened fire, and Coulter seemed to be a target for them all. The firing only lasted a moment, and when the smoke cleared away it was seen that Raynes, Coulter, and Watkins, who were on the pavement, had fallen to the ground dead. The other men were in the wagon, and James Denning and Johnson were seriously wounded. A. N. Borey, the seventh man of the Leoti crowd, escaped without injury.

The statement that the bodies of the dead men were permitted to lie in the street until midnight is denied by the Coronado men and sustained by

This fight will be a damper on the county, but it was a necessity after Coulter and Jenness commenced the fight. It was history repeating itself in frontier settlement; it was civilization putting down toughs: Leavenworth, Newton, Dodge, Wallace, and all other towns in Kansas have passed through this ordeal.

The Wichita Herald, Coronado, Mar 3, 1887

Leoti. There were 14 bullets in Coulter's body, and Raynes was wounded in 11 places. Every one of Raynes's wounds would have been fatal, The two Loomis boys were only slightly wounded. Jenness, it is thought would die, but Johnson and Denning will recover. Johnson, who is the least injured, says he and his companions went to Coronado at the invitation of some friends. They were having a little fun in the street and probably fired a few shots, but harmed on one. He acknowledged that some of the crowd had been drinking, but denied that any were drunk. He alleged that the bodies of his dead companions were permitted to lie in the street until midnight.

The New York Times
 Published: March 4, 1887
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The Wichita County Herald (Coronado), March 10, 1887 To The Press.

You have published a false statement about the shooting here sent out by parties from Leoti who did not witness it. Below is eye-witnesses' and non-interested parties' statements.

On Thursday, the 17th ultimo, the voters of the east side of the county left the polling precincts to avoid bloodshed when a few reckless characters threatened their lives. They came to Coronado and registered their name, occupation, age and residence, fulfilling all the requirements of the law, proposing to carry the matter to the supreme court, where it could be proven that these men acted under the instructions of a certain prominent man in Leoti. But last Sunday morning while the citizens of this place were at church several parties came over from Leoti and inquired "where all the people were." The streets were very muddy and scarcely a human being could be seen. They returned to Leoti and recruited their force with men and a case of beer and returned. They were Charles Coulter, William Rains, Frank Jenness, Johnson, (A. N.) Boorey, (George) Watkins, and (Emmett) Denning. They were very much under the influence of whiskey, and proceeded to make everybody drink with them they met.

They were partly masked. Not satisfied with such proceedings, they ordered a gentleman just in from the east to dance. They then proceeded to "do up the town" by commencing to knock down several citizens with pistols. F. S. Lilly and Louis Jackson were the first victims. Jenness and Coulter commenced it, saying "they were here to make the people fight and 'round up' the town."

Charley and Ezra (Red) Loomis were standing near by, and Coulter struck Charley two blows, shooting him as he dealt the second blow with his revolver, shivering his leg bone just above the knee joint. Charley clinched with Coulter, and threw him to the ground, holding his pistol arm in such position that he could not shoot him, his brother Ezra, or Mr. Nicols. In the meantime Rains had fired at Nicols. Then the firing commenced from the wagon, and a general engagement ensued, which resulted in the killing of Coulter and Rains, and the wounding of Johnson, Denning, Watkins, Boorey, Jenness, from Leoti. Ezra Loomis was shot twice in the leg by parties in the wagon, while Charley was shot in the right arm by Rains, yet with a broken leg and wounded arm he held the "terror of the west" down till he was removed. Charley was unarmed. Rains attempted to run but faced about and fired till he was shot dead.

Boorey escaped to Leoti with the wagon, shot through the spine. Frank Jenness run after the firing. We learn that he had five wounds in his body. He is the son of R. E. Jenness, a prominent citizen of Leoti. Watkins was shot in the mouth, body, and arm, and has since died.

John was shot in the leg, but he had not discharged his revolver. Emmett Denning was shot through the thigh. He was a very respectable young man, every one expressing sympathy for him. He was unarmed.

Coulter and Rains' bodies were put on the bank porch. Johnson and Denning were removed to Wright's drug store, and Watkins to the Matlock building. Loomis was removed to the Alamo House. Drs. McCain and Chesnut relieved the suffering of the wounded as much as possible, and both men and women did everything in their power to comfort them. Two of the injured ones were very penitent for coming here with dangerous men, and loudly denounced Jenness and Coulter for commencing the fight. - Last Week's Herald.

Monday Adjutant-General Campbell and Col. Richsecor, accompanied by Gerald Volk, of the Daily Commonwealth, arrived here. General Campbell requested our citizens to lay down their arms and submit to arrest. After talking to eye-witnesses to the shooting they admitted the people here acted on the defensive, and these gentlemen did not think the people here were such

a set of beings as represented to Governor Martin by that noble (?) Christian (?) Man (?), the president of the Leoti company. We are positive the governor by this hour knows who brought Coulter in the county, and how he was to drive our citizens from the polls with his pistols, to "round up" Coronado, and of the \$750 he was to receive for his hellish job.

The citizens told the adjutant-general that they were ready to put down their arms if he would remain and guarantee protection against the toughs imported to Leoti. Tuesday morning when it was known that Leoti men had surrounded Coronado and entrenched themselves in rifle pits during the night, the citizens told Col. Richsecor that they would again shoulder their rifles if Leoti's men were not unarmed. He immediately drove half mile south to a pit and ordered Patton and Wade, who were in the pits to leave. Later in the day warrants were served on thirteen citizens here, who willingly surrendered after the adjutant-general promised to accompany them. They went to Garden City.

Five of them were not near the scene of action when the shooting took place to out personal knowledge.

The final results of this shooting affair will result in the conviction of the son of the president of the Leoti town company, as he is the sole survivor of the originators of the trouble.



Certificate of Authenticity

THE COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS

February 1887

As the western portion of the state of Kansas was being settled, many fights occurred between small towns each vying to be named the county seat. Wichita County was no different. The Leoti/Coronado County Seat Fight was considered the "Bloodiest of Them All." Photographed before the Wichita County Bank in Coronado are (standing l to r): Luke Short, Wyatt Earp, 3 unknown men, Doc Holliday, Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman, Red Loomis, Jim Masterson, Pat and Mike Sughrue.

Presented by the Wichita County Historical Society, Leoti, Kansas
www.wichitacountymuseum.org