

## **Elisha Marcus Reavis**

His first name was sometimes spelled as Elijah and he was also known as the "Old Hermit," the "Hermit of the Superstitions" and "Old Man Reavis." Whatever you call him, he was one of the most unusual individuals in old west history, and especially in the Superstition Mountains where unusual was the usual. He was born to James Alexander and Mary (Harlan) Reavis in Beardstown, Cass County, Illinois, in 1827. He was the brother to Logan Uriah, Louisa and perhaps one other that is lost to history. The parents both died when Reavis was around 11-years-old.

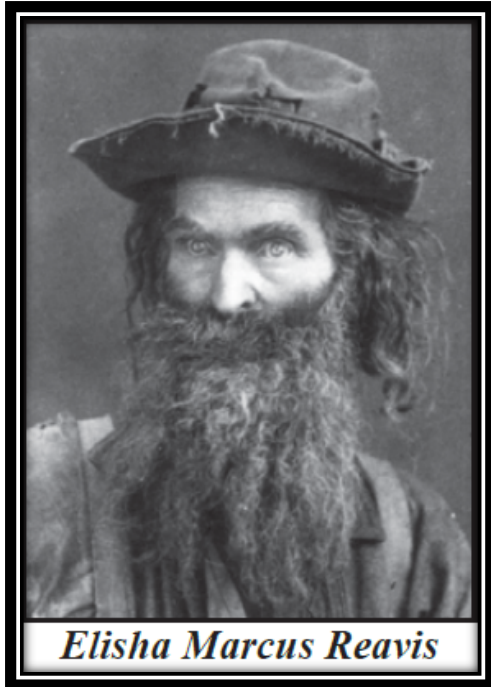
The children were then under the care of an aunt and uncle, on his father's side until he died in 1843. At that time the mother's brother, Uncle William Harlan, took charge of the Reavis children. The children received excellent educations in Illinois. Elisha attended a teacher's college in Illinois. He taught school briefly in Illinois before moving to a teaching position in El Monte, California.

It wasn't long before his interest was more in gold than teaching and he began prospecting along the San Gabriel River in the hills east of Los Angeles. Most of the 1850s was spent in California looking for gold. In early 1863, he headed for the Bradshaw Mountains, near Prescott, Arizona Territory, with a group of prospectors and fortune hunters. When that adventure proved unsuccessful he returned to San Gabriel in 1866.

On December 30, 1867, he married Mary (or Maria) Y. Sexton in San Gabriel. The couple had a son who failed to live to maturity, and a daughter, Louisa Maria, born November 22, 1868. Louisa became a nurse and died in California in 1940. In the fall of 1869, Mary refused to accompany Reavis with a young daughter when he returned to Arizona. She was afraid of the wild territory and refused to leave her parents. She died within a few years of a heart ailment. Louisa Maria went to live with Reavis relatives in St. Louis. President Grant appointed Reavis' uncle, Isham Reavis as Assistant Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court (1870-1973). The two traveled to La Paz County together. There Elisha separated and went to Vulture City near Wickenburg, Arizona.

By 1872, he had settled on a ranch near Fort McDowell on the Verde River. He raised and trained horses. It is also possible that he was working with the Army as a civilian packer which would have given him an intimate knowledge of the Superstition Mountains. Uncle Isham had also appointed him as a court officer and Deputy U.S. Marshall in the Fort McDowell precinct.

The "Old Hermit", moved into the high mountain valley in the Superstition Mountains that now bears his name shortly after 1872. In the afternoon of May 8, 1878, Reavis' mountain home was surrounded by a group of heavily armed Apache warriors. His home was really a defensive dugout and from there he soon picked off three of the ten Apaches with his deadly shooting. The Apaches decided to move across the creek, camp for the night and lay siege until Reavis was out of food and water. He realized he was trapped, but remembered that other pioneers had escaped the same situation by convincing the Indians they were crazy. He removed all his clothes, picked up two butcher knives and ran across his garden and the creek, screaming and shouting and showing no fear. When the Apaches heard and then saw a red headed, blue eyed, stark



*Elisha Marcus Reavis*

naked man with butcher knives charging the camp of seven well-armed Apaches, they fled in panic and Reavis was never bothered again.

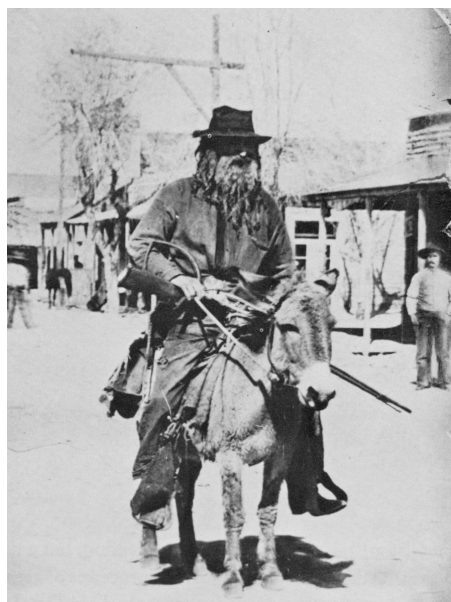
He lived in that home as a loner, never shaving or bathing, occasionally venturing into Tempe, Phoenix, or Florence to sell vegetables from his garden. On a trip to Florence, Arizona, in December of 1877, Reavis purchased two one-gallon oak water kegs. According to Reavis, he and a man named James Lewis were then driving some cattle toward the Superstitions. They stopped at a watering hole known as Bear Tanks, north of Picket Post Mountain. They made some tea from the water they had carried from Florence in the oak kegs. Both men immediately became very ill, and Lewis was violently sick and went into convulsions. Reavis was able to ride for help, but when he returned Lewis was dead and lying in the fire.

During the following investigation, the store clerk in Florence testified the kegs had contained some dirt and a red liquid that looked like port wine. The contents of the kegs were rinsed out at the store. The men had used the water as they crossed the desert and were refilled a couple of times. Lewis went to fill the kegs in the Bear Tanks while Reavis cooked supper. After supper they drank the deadly tea.

A coroner's jury was convened and upon arriving at the camp found the body still in the fire pit. The water kegs showed a thick white substance that was determined to be arsenic. The autopsy reported that Lewis had consumed and died from the arsenic. The jury declared the death was by accident and Reavis had no culpability. Reavis had also consumed some of the arsenic and, though very sick, survived the incident.

By the fall of 1895, Reavis was nearing 70 years old and his health was beginning to fail and that concerned making trips from his towns in central Arizona vegetables.

Reavis fifteen acres of land by turkeys, hogs, burros, two cared for. A fellow by the often checked on his friend. found "Old Hermits" today as Grave Canyon. He April. The badly half eaten by wild animals was found on May 7<sup>th</sup>. His from his home.



his friends. He was still mountain home to the small Territory selling his cultivated and irrigated about himself. He had chickens, horses and several dogs he name of James Dalabaugh On May 6, 1896, Dalabaugh remains in what is known had died around the 10<sup>th</sup> of decomposed body had been and was buried where he grave is about four miles

To find the grave today, follow your GPS to N33.44500, W111.17720 until you reach Roger's Trough Trailhead. That's as far as your vehicle can go. The grave is about one and one-eighth mile down a hiking trail. It is a rugged and fairly difficult trail to hike. Don't go, unless you are an experienced hiker.



**Elisha's Grave**



**Elisha's Marker**

**The above two photos are courtesy of Irv Kanode. See <http://SuperstitionMtnHikes.com> for more great photos of the Ranch.**

Today, Reavis and his Superstition Mtn. ranch are most famous for his apple orchard which still exists and bears delicious fruit. Irv Kanode tells me, "From memory, I'd guess that roughly 50 trees remain. Fall weekends see a lot of hikers visit the ranch with the excuse of picking apples. The parking lot at Roger's Trough Trailhead fills up. I've seen hikers stuff as many as a quarter bushel of apples into their backpack to hike the 7 to 9 miles back to the south or north trailheads. One guy carried in one of those long-handled fruit pickers so he could get apples off the tops of the overgrown trees."

**Sources: Tom Kollenborn author of articles, *The Bear Tanks Incident*, and *The Old Hermit—Elisha M. Reavis*; *Elisha Reavis* by Daniel K. Statnekov; *Wild West Magazine*, June 2009 issue, the Westerners feature.**