

## Tombstone by Tombstone

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### Andrew Augustus "Gus" Gibbons and Frank LeSueur

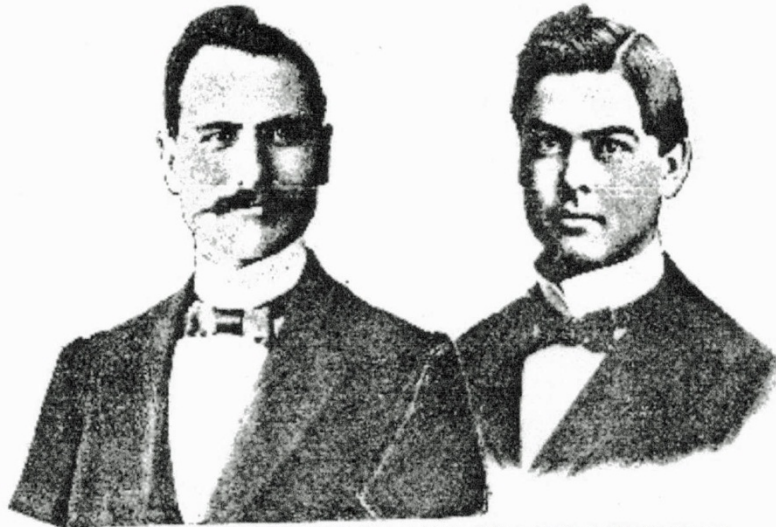
On March 26, 1900, the local mail driver arrived in St. Johns, Arizona Territory, with the news that five men had been seen butchering a beef on the road to Springerville. Apache County Sheriff Ed Beeler formed a posse and engaged the outlaws about three miles west of town. More than 50 rounds were fired in the ensuing battle with no injuries to either side. And a prolonged chase of the Smith Gang was underway. This was not the first encounter the area had with the Bill Smith Gang.

Bill Smith and his three brothers wandered into the White Mountains of eastern Arizona and settled near Springerville. In 1898, Bill was arrested and placed in Jail in St. Johns for cattle rustling. Brother Al soon smuggled a pistol into Bill's cell and the gang was back to their old New Mexico tricks of rustling cattle and horses, holdups and killing.

Andrew Augustus "Gus" Gibbons was born in Glendale, Kane County, Utah, on February 16, 1874, and was the son of William and Evaline A. (Lamb) Gibbons. He was married to Priscilla Smith.

Frank LeSueur was born in Saint Johns, Arizona Territory, on September 4, 1880. He was the son of John Taylor and Geneva (Casto) LeSueur and was still single when he died before his twenty-first birthday.

Courtesy Apache County Museum, St. Johns, AZ



**AUGUSTUS GIBBONS AND FRANK LESUEUR  
AMBUSHED AND KILLED BY TWO OUTLAWS  
NEAR ST. JOHNS ON MARCH 27, 1900.**

On the morning of March 27, 1900, Dick Gibbons, a local rancher formed a posse to assist Sheriff Beeler. Dick was the uncle of Gus and he asked Gus and Frank to become members of the posse attempting to capture a gang of outlaws camped nearby. It was thought the gang was led by Bill Smith, a notorious horse thief.

Upon arriving at the camp it was learned that the gang had been in a shoot-out with Sheriff Beeler and fled. The sheriff was in pursuit of the outlaws and had left word for late arrivals to follow. Gus and Frank, along with Gus' uncle Dick and five others were among the late arrivals. They followed the trail for some distance and decided to split up. Dick Gibbons and three others took a route they thought might head off the gang. Gus, Frank, and two others, Antonio Armijo and Frank Ruiz, would continue following the trail of the gang

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and the sheriff. It was agreed that they would meet at Cedro Creek. When they arrived at Cedro Creek, Dick discovered that Gus and Frank had not arrived and was informed by a sheepherder that the outlaws had turned south and the other party was following them with tired horses.

Dick decided to return to Saint Johns and take up the trail the next morning. The other four who had followed the outlaws trail also decided to split up and rest for the night. Two were to go to Cedro and Gus and Frank were to follow the trail as far as Joe Carns' ranch and stay there for the night. They never made it to the ranch.

The next day Dick Gibbons met up with Armijo and Ruiz and began a search for Gus and Frank. Following the trail of the two and the outlaws, they came upon some rough country and almost immediately discovered the two bodies in a mountain canyon. Dick's diary tells the horror that befell the young men:

"It looked like the body of a man, but I would not admit to it to myself. I was still too far away to be able to identify it, and while I was thinking about it I saw another object that looked like a quilt had been thrown away by the outlaws and had been rolled up by the wind and lodged in the wash where it now laid, but as we drew nearer, I saw that it was the body of my nephew Gus Gibbons.

It was lying in the bottom of a little draw with head down hill and face upwards, with three ghastly bullet holes through the head. One of them had entered his mouth and had come out the back of his neck. One had gone in the left ear and come out below the mouth, breaking the lower jaw and disfiguring the face awfully.

We well knew what the other object was that we had noticed lying on the hillside. The sight was horrifying to the senses. To see the two boys lying there, boys I had known since they were in the cradle and had watched them grow up. They were just in the pink of manhood and for them to be ambushed and shot down like dogs, without even a chance to fight for their lives made me sick.

It was murder in the worst form and there is not another crime beneath the roof of heaven that can stain the soul of man with a more infernal hue than an assassination such as this."

It was easy to look at the scene and reconstruct what had happened to the two young men. They had been on foot, leading their horses up the ridge, when the rifles, hidden in ambush barely 30 feet away, opened up. The bodies had been stripped of all possessions, including their hats.

The next day, in Reserve, New Mexico Territory, the Smith Gang stole seven horses and rode off in the direction of the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona. Sheriff Beeler was soon in pursuit of the gang. In fact, there were several posses that were out in the southwest at the same time in search of the Smith Gang and a couple of escapees from the Silver City jail. In addition to Sheriff Beeler, John Horton Slaughter (see Volume One), former sheriff of Cochise County, Arizona Territory was in the area leading a posse. US Marshal George Scarborough (see story in this volume) and his deputy, Walter Birchfield, were tracking a group that had butchered a beef near the Triangle Ranch. It is almost certain that Scarborough and Birchfield had the misfortune of finding the Smith Gang on April 3rd in a remote section of the Chiricahua Mountains known as Triangle Springs where they were ambushed. Both men were wounded and Scarborough's wounds would prove fatal two days later.

Despite the best efforts of men like Sheriff Beeler, the Smith Gang eluded capture. Dick Gibbons was most unhappy with this outcome and decided to do something about the lawlessness of the Territory which was so bad that it was preventing Arizona from becoming a state. In the 1900 election he ran for the Territorial Legislature campaigning on the issue of the need for the Arizona Rangers. Gibbons won and in March of 1901 the Rangers came into existence.

The first gun battle that the Rangers had was with the Smith Gang (for details see Carlos Tafolla in this volume). Again, the gang managed to escape with only two members be-

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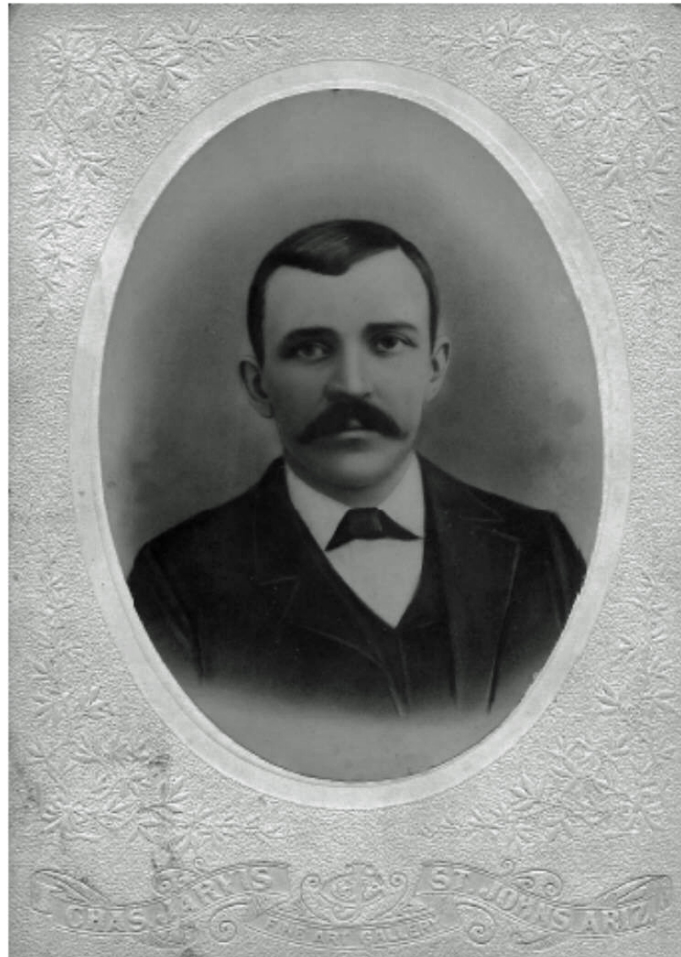
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ing wounded. A Ranger posse led by their captain, Burt Mossman, rushed to the scene and conducted a massive manhunt for the gang. Among the posse members was Ed Scarborough, son of recently murdered George Scarborough. Unfortunately, snow covered the outlaw tracks and they escaped into Mexico.

What happened to the Smith Gang after that is not really clear. It was said they never set foot in Arizona again, but that can't be verified. Smith's mother said they caught a boat in Galveston, Texas, and sailed to Argentina.

In mid-1901, more than a year after the murder of LeSueur and Gibbons, Ed Scarborough followed up on a reported sighting in New Mexico of a fellow by the name of Tod Carver (alias T. C. Hilliard) and placed him under arrest. Scarborough took Carver to St. Johns where there was an outstanding warrant for Carver for the murder of LeSueur and Gibbons. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, he was bound over to the Apache County grand jury under his real name, T. C. Hilliard. Authorities in Utah claimed to have an iron-clad case against Hilliard for the murder of two Utah lawmen in May of 1900. Utah was granted an extradition in August under the condition that he would be returned to Arizona if Utah failed to get a conviction. In January 1902, Utah dropped the case for lack of evidence and released Hilliard. No one ever answered charges for the murder of the two young men.

On April 11, 1901, Beeler, out of office as sheriff, was ambushed on a country road about 30 miles outside St. Johns. As he got down off his wagon to open a pasture gate, the killers, hidden in rocks about sixty feet away, opened fire. Again, no one was ever brought to justice.



**Edward Beeler**

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### Photo courtesy of Nonie Harmon

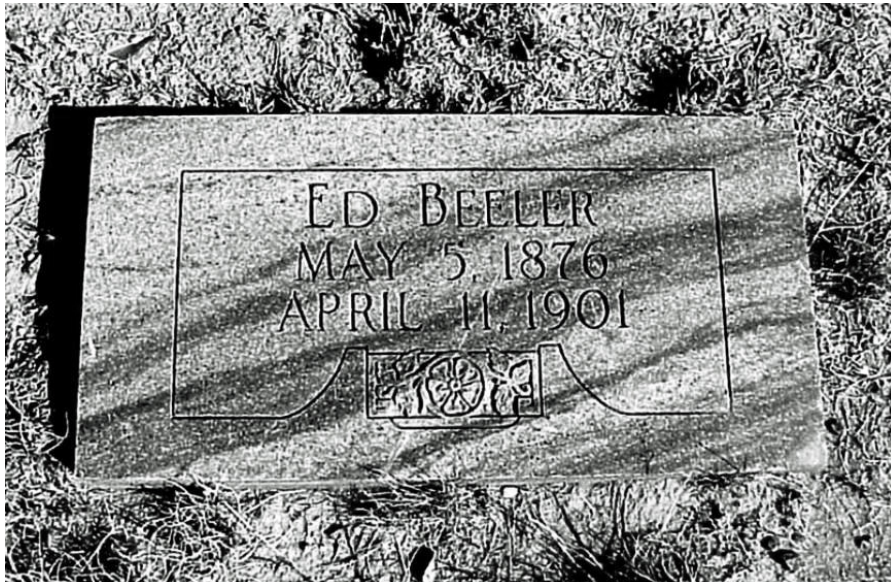
Beeler, LeSueur and Gibbons are buried in the St. Johns Cemetery. The boys were Mormon and Frank had been called on a mission, but his older brother was already on a mission and the Stake President advised him to wait until his brother's return. The base of each of the young men's tombstones is engraved with the message: KILLED BY OUTLAWS WHILE SERVING HIS COUNTRY IN A SHERIFF'S POSSE.



**Frank LeSueur**



**Gus Gibbons**



**Ed Beeler**

Photo courtesy of Nancy Brown

**Sources:** St. Johns Herald article *Days of Destiny*, author unknown; *George Scarborough: The Life and Death of a Lawman on the Closing Frontier*, by Robert K. DeArment