

OLD WEST STORIES

Murder at Goddard's Station

I first became interested in this story when I read an article in *True West Magazine*, May-June 1958, *Last Hanging in Arizona*, by Walt Coburn. As I investigated a little further I found out that they were actually the 32nd and 33rd out of a total of 69 hangings. Then I thought maybe I could write about the last double hanging. That didn't work either as there were three double hangings and one quadruple hanging afterwards. After these hangings there was a period when hanging was banned. I thought the story interesting enough to include and that led me to a couple more Arizona hanging stories. The last hanging actually took place July 12, 1936, and it was a botched Federal hanging

February 1, 1903, started out like most other days in the small store at Goddard's Station in Stanton, Arizona. It was the time for shearing of the sheep. Charlie Goddard and his brother Frank were successful sheep shearers and they recently began using their patented steam powered sheep shearing machines capable of shearing 200 to 300 sheep per day. Now they had the capacity to shear more than 200,000 sheep per year. Word had gotten out to the sheep ranchers and several herds of sheep were headed their way.

The Goddards were hoping to improve their production over the previous year when they had sheared just over 200,00 sheep. Then they were going to move their business to the northern part of the state.

There was nothing to make them believe their peaceful day was going to end in violence as they sat down to the supper table. Seated around the large table was Charlie with his wife, his brother Frank, Frank Cocke and his wife and Milton Turnbull. The work day was over and the men were digging into the large platters of food that the women had labored to prepare. It was 6:00 pm by now, lamps were lit on the table and the sun had set on as peaceful a surrounding as the Goddards could have hoped for.

As they had almost finished their evening meal a door opened and two armed, sombrero covered Mexicans entered the room. One walked to the head of the table where Charlie Goddard sat and the other man stayed by the door.

Charlie turned and talked to the man near him in Spanish and as he did so he recognized the man by a scar on his face that was visible through his beard. He also remembered how the man came by the scar.

Charlie recalled the fight between the bearded man, Francisco Rentezia and a Mexican sheep shearer named Monte. Rentezia (often spelled and maybe correctly, Renteria) was in the act of killing Monte with a pair of sheep shears when Charlie brought his pistol down alongside Rentezia's face. The fight was over as Rentezia fell to the ground with blood pouring from a large gash in his cheek.

Charlie also remembered the long forgotten threat that Rentezia had made two years ago after being struck by the pistol: "I'll kill you for this, *gringo cabron*." Knowing that a Mexican could nurse a grudge for a long time, Charlie jumped to his feet. At the same time Rentezia jerked his pistol and fired into Charlie's body.

"My God, I'm shot!" Goddard cried as he fell to the floor

Frank Cocke jumped to his feet and Hilario Hidalgo, the other Mexican, standing by the door put a round through his head, killing him instantly.

Mrs. Goddard ran out of the room yelling, "I'll get the rifle." At the same time someone extinguished the lamp, leaving the room in total darkness and the smell of burnt gunpowder. Though their ears were almost deafened by the gun shots, the survivors could hear Charlie moaning in agony. He lay on the floor trying to stem the flow of his life's blood. Then the survivors could hear the voices of the two murderers as they talked together about how the job was not finished. Frank Goddard and Martin Turnbull had no doubt that all of them were destined to die.

While those that still lived huddled behind the table, expecting to get hit with a fatal bullet at any minute, Rentezia whispered in the dark, "*Andale*, Hilario! Let's go! The woman has gone for the rifle." The killers left the store without firing another shot and hid in the bushes just outside the store.

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Rentezia had closed his long held grudge and paid off his two years' threat of vengeance. With Hidalgo's killing of Locke, the debt was paid with interest. Yet, they were hesitant to leave because they had not accomplished robbery, which was the second part of their evil scheme.

It was rumored that Goddard had cashed several big checks in Phoenix just days before the murder and had returned with a large amount of cash to pay his sheep shearers. The money was somewhere in the house and the total was more than the two killers could have earned in their lifetime. And once they got their hands on it, it was just a short ride to Mexico and freedom from the law.

Both men had killed before and they had no concern about taking the lives of all these people. They wanted to leave no witness behind.

No doubt the money was the enticement for Hidalgo. He had no grudge against Goddard and perhaps now he was beginning to regret as he was now outside, hiding in the bushes as they tried to plan a way to complete the task of murdering the people inside and then finding the money.

For the murderers crouching in the bushes, the time was flying by and the dreaded sunrise would soon happen. Inside the hours dragged slowly by as they awaited their end. During the night, Charles Goddard told his wife to tell the sheriff that the killer had a scar on his cheek. Shortly after, he took his last breath.

Sheriff Joe Roberts from Prescott arrived with a posse. The ladies were able to give a detailed description of the murderers. While his posse was out scouting for the killer's trail, Roberts remained at Goddard's Station to get all the details he could from any witnesses. His best luck was when he talked to a Mexican shepherder by the name of Rodriguez. The sheriff learned that Rodriguez had witnessed the killers entering the house just before the shooting. Rodriguez had been afraid to report the crime as he might become a suspect. He was able to identify the killers by name and where they came from. The sheriff immediately drew up reward posters and spread them all along the border.

Around April 1st, the sheriff received word from Bill Blankenship at Naco, a little dusty town that sits astride the border of Arizona and Mexico. The two killers were working on a railroad just inside the Mexican border. Roberts left for Naco immediately with the thought of springing a trap on the pair of killers. He knew he had to be very wary. If Rentezia and Hidalgo got even a whiff of his scent, they would soon be deep in Mexico. He hired or persuaded section hands from the railroad to induce the fugitives to cross the border on any pretext that would work.

And work it did, they walked across the border into the arms of the sheriff and his men. Goddard's widow made a hurried trip to Naco to positively identify the pair. In handcuffs and leg irons they were transported to Prescott, Arizona, where they were locked into a basement cell.

The killer duo went to court on June 2, 1903 and entered not-guilty pleas. The trial was set for June 10 for the pair that were indicted under the names John Doe and Richard Roe. They were given C. N. Hicks and Leroy Anderson as Public Defenders and Judge Sloan as presiding judge. The twelve-man jury was made up of prominent Prescott citizens, not exactly a jury of their peers, but their peers would not be allowed to serve on a jury.

The prosecutors prepared and presented their case in such a fine, detailed manner that the case was over well before expected. The seven witnesses left no reason for the jury to doubt their testimony. The two widows positively identified the killers, as did the two men. The jury came back with a verdict of murder in the first degree with death penalty affixed. Judge Sloan set a date of July 30, 1903 for the hanging. Building of the hanging scaffold on the east side of the courthouse would not begin until July 27.

The cell containing the prisoners was on the south side of the court house, looking out on Whiskey Row. The planning of the murder could very well have taken place in one of the saloons that they were looking at. They had bought their weapons in a gun shop on Whiskey Row just days before the killings.

In their final days in the jail cell the windows would be open in the warm weather. At night they could hear the people having a good time on Whiskey Row. During the day they could hear, but not see, the sawing and the hammering as the scaffold was being built.

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Father Quetu was with the pair an hour before execution. They said their last words to him, expressed their final hopes for a reprieve and made their confessions. When the time to leave the cell for the final time came they said, "God's will be done! We are sorry for our sins and hope God will receive us in Heaven."

The sheriff was required by state law to send out invitations to all hangings. Sheriff Joseph Roberts of Yavapai county sent the following invitation:

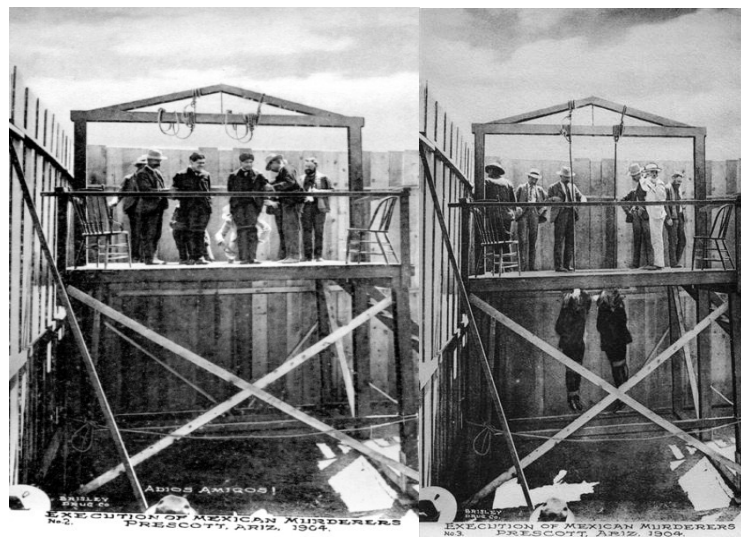
"With feelings of profound regret and sorrow, I hereby invite you to attend and witness the private and decent and humane execution of two human beings, namely Richard Roe and John Doe. Crime—Murder.

Said men will be executed on July 30, 1903, at 12 Noon. You are expected to deport yourself in a respectful manner and any flippant or unseemly language or conduct on your part will not be allowed. Conduct on anyone's part bordering on ribaldry and tending to mar the solemnity of the occasion will not be tolerated.

It was a perfect July day in Arizona that was to witness what was to be, at the time, the last legal hanging in the state. The death penalty by hanging had been outlawed but would be reinstated again. In fact, hanging and executions would be outlawed and reinstated a number of times over the coming years. The last execution by hanging would not take place until 1936.

By 11:00 am, the last of the invited witnesses were inside the board walls surrounding the scaffold. About 11:20, Father Quetu led the prisoners into the walled compound. The prisoners were escorted by Sheriff Roberts and his deputies.

The prisoners were dressed in new black suits, white shirts and black bowties with polished black shoes. Both appeared to be pale, but calm and self-possessed. After standing on the platform for a good while they knelt on the trap door with the priest and each repeated a prayer. The deputies trussed the two men up and, as they placed the black hood over their heads, Hidalgo shouted out, "Adios, amigos! Adios, everyone!" A second later Sheriff Roberts pulled the lever and the killers fell to their death. Rentezia was much lighter than Hidalgo and the fall failed to break his neck and he strangled to death. Two doctors examined the bodies and declared them dead in just less than eleven minutes.



Preparing the condemned men. The killers are hanged

Source: *True West* magazine, May-June 1958 article, *Last Hanging in Arizona*, by Walt Coburn