

## **James Warren Stott, James Lane Scott and Billy Wilson**

The three young men buried here are some of the most tragic victims of the Pleasant Valley War, also known as the Graham-Tewksbury Feud and as the Tonto Basin War. The three unlikely victims are James Warren Stott of Massachusetts, James Lane Scott III of Texas and Billy Wilson. They were hung on August 11; the headstones are wrong.

Stott, born on September 13, 1863, came from an influential family in North Billerica Massachusetts. His father was the manager of the Talbot woolen mills, and the family lived directly across the street from Thomas Talbot, twice the governor of Massachusetts.

Scott, born in 1961, in Anderson, Grimes County, Texas, was also from an influential family. His paternal grandfather was one of the sixty-one members of the Texas Constitutional Convention in 1845. His maternal grandfather was Dr. Benjamin Goodrich, an 1878 graduate of medical school in Baltimore. Dr. Goodrich was a signer of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence for the state of Texas. Dr. Goodrich's brother died at the Alamo. Scott's brother was a distinguished soldier in the Spanish-American war and married to the daughter of the lieutenant governor. Scott was a good friend of Stott and happened to have spent the night at the Stott ranch.

Where Billy Wilson was born and came from is unknown and, in fact, there is some confusion as to whether he is really Billy Wilson or Jeff Wilson. Some people called him Jeff, but he was known by most as Billy. Some people thought him to be an itinerant prospector from Durango, Colorado who was going to Globe, Arizona to seek his fortune. Others believed him to be a former sidekick of Billy the Kid in New Mexico. At the time of the hanging he was working as a cowboy for the famed Hashknife outfit in Arizona. Whatever his true identity, in a time when cowboys changed names with their socks, Billy Wilson also happened to spend a fateful night with Stott.

Stott always dreamed of being a cowboy and living in the West. His father did not concur with those dreams, but he provided James, at the age of 19, with the resources to go west and become a ranch owner. After a brief time in Texas gaining experience as a ranch hand, he moved to Pleasant Valley and bought a ranch.

Members of the Tewksbury faction claimed that Stott was a horse thief and in the early morning of August 11, 1888, deputy Sheriff J. D. Houck showed up at the ranch and claimed to have left an arrest warrant for Stott, but had left it at his home in a coat pocket. The warrant has never been found. Scott's arrest was probably due to a previous encounter with Houck where Scott had forced to back down

in an argument and this was Houck's chance for revenge. Wilson was almost assuredly just a victim of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Being sure he was innocent of the alleged crime, Stott cooked breakfast for the posse and then agreed to accompany Houck to town. A fourth man was also at the ranch that day. Motte Clymer, a tubercular, had won the sympathy of Stott and was invited to stay a spell and agreed to do odd jobs as repayment. He was a witness to the abduction.

Along the Way, Houck turned the three young men over to a "masked vigilante gang" which was actually a group of citizens known as the Committee of Fifty. It has been said that Scott and Wilson begged for mercy when the noose was placed around their neck as they sat upon their horses. There was no mercy in this hard boiled group and a man behind each horse slapped the horse and left the two dangling from the limb of a large ponderosa pine. There was some evidence that Stott suffered a different fate. Several grooves in the limb from which he hung seemed to indicate that in an effort to get him to confess, he may have been hoisted up several times and then lowered before he finally died.

They were left hanging there and while it is believed that some might have seen the bodies, it was three days before the bodies were discovered by Sam Brown, a deputy sheriff, Alfred Franklin Banta, famed Arizona pioneer and two other people. They buried the three men near the spot where they were hanging. When the markers were placed on the graves the wrong dates were carved into the headstones.

Leland J Hanchett, Jr., author of the book *The Crooked Trail to Holbrook*, tells that Stott was wearing his father's gold ring when he was hanged and Sam Brown told that he was buried with it on his hand. In the 1940s, Fred Turley, a dude ranch owner from Airipine and his foreman dug up the bodies, possibly to impress the guest. The foreman, with or without Turley's knowledge, kept the ring and had it sized for his bride as a wedding ring. They divorced and she threw the ring in a jewel box for several years and kept it as a souvenir. When Hanchett learned of the ring he tried to buy it and return it to the Stott family. At first she agreed, but her family advised her that she might be able to get more money for it and that Hanchett was just trying to make a profit.

The graves are located in the Sitgreaves National Forest about 1 mile from Black Canyon Road and down a trail called Hangman Trail. On Black Canyon Road it is at Auto Stop Number 7 and you must walk the mile down the trail. The GPS location is N34.30567 W 110.73333.

Sources: *A Little War of our Own*, by Dan Dederer; *Arizona's Graham-Tewksbury Feud*, by Leland J Hanchett, Jr.; and *Pleasant Valley War*, by Jinx Pyle.



