

Tombstone by Tombstone

John Henry "Rimrock Henry" Thompson

Described by many as Arizona's most colorful sheriff, John Henry Thompson was born in Bell County, Texas on December 19, 1861. He moved into the Payson, Arizona, area in the early 1880s. He homesteaded 160 acres and built a log cabin under the rim rock of the Mogollon Mountains. People gave him the name "Rimrock Henry" and it stuck for the rest of his life. This was in the bloodiest era in Arizona history with its most infamous feud, the Pleasant Valley War, beginning. The feud involved far more than just the two families. It grew to affect everyone in the Pleasant Valley area and estimates of deaths range from 30 to 70. There is no evidence that he was ever involved in the feud as was his predecessor Glenn Reynolds. The last Tewksbury killed the last Graham in 1892 in Tempe.

On January 12, 1887, Thompson married Carrie L. Nash and they moved into the town of Payson where he was appointed Postmaster. On November 2, 1889, the Gila County sheriff Glenn Reynolds and William A. "Hunkydory" Holmes were escorting the Apache Kid and seven other renegade Apaches by stage to the Yuma Territorial Prison. The Apaches managed to break free, grabbed a rifle from Holmes, then shot and killed Reynolds. Holmes died on the spot from a heart attack. The driver, Gene Middleton, was severely injured but recovered. Jerry Ryan was appointed to fill Reynolds term and he drowned within six months while attempting to save the life of a family friend. Thompson decided that he wanted the job, but needed a recommendation from someone with some importance. The only person he knew that could help was a close neighbor, John W. Wentworth. Wentworth was a miner and Thompson's cattle frequently wandered onto his land and occasionally destroyed some of the mining equipment. Wentworth was also the Justice of the Peace in Globe and his recommendation would go a long way.

Thompson called upon his step-father, O. N. Cresswell, to be a mediator with Wentworth. By the time the recommendation was needed, any ill-will had abated to the point that Wentworth made the recommendation. In June of 1890, Thompson took the oath and the family moved to Globe, the Gila County seat. Thompson began a tour of service as Gila County sheriff that lasted longer than any Arizona territorial sheriff. In November of 1890, he was elected on his own right by a vote of 388 to 324. His popularity took off and in 1892 he was reelected by a vote of 517 to 194. He handily won reelection in 1894. In 1896 he decided not to seek reelection.



Bitten with the bug of gold fever, he made a long, arduous trek to Alaska during that gold rush. He returned to Globe in 1890 and whether he actually struck it rich is unknown, but he did accumulate enough money to enter into the feed, fuel, and livery stable business.

Thompson stated that "once a politician, always a politician", ran again in November, 1900, and was elected. In 1902, the livery business was successful; he had bought half a block of town property, built a home and some rental property. His thirty odd mining claims needed some attention, so he decided again not to run. In 1906, the county built a new four-story courthouse and the elegant sheriff's office rekindled the political drive. In 1908 and 1910 he was elected for the sixth and seventh time for a total of eight terms. He resigned on January 8, 1912, at the request of the county supervisors.

Thompson and friends were drinking in the Globe Saloon a few days before Christmas, 1911. A shot was heard and the bartender, Mike Juraskovich, was shot dead. What actually happened was never determined, but a coroner's jury found that Mike was shot to death by Thompson's gun, and he and Harry Temple were bound over to a

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grand jury who indicted them. Frank Haynes was appointed to fill the remaining term as sheriff and had the responsibility to ensure Thompson made it to court. Haynes soon became Thompson's son-in-law. The jury found both men not guilty.

His spectacular career in law enforcement came to an end at age 51. By then the dean of all Arizona sheriffs had traveled farther, made more arrests and attained more convictions than any sheriff in Arizona history. He lived 20 more years and worked for the state highway department, delved into real estate, mining and cattle ranching. His wife died in 1926 and he lived alone until July 12, 1932, when he married Mrs. Allie Smith, a widow.

Of the many episodes in Thompson's career, two were of particular note. Two of Globe's prominent business men, Alfred Hillpot and Fred Kibbe, were murdered while on a hunting trip on the San Carlos Indian Reservation. The killers were two United States Army deserters, William Stewart and John B Goodwin. Tracking the killers toward Holbrook where it was expected they would jump a train, the sheriff suddenly had a brilliant hunch. He didn't think the killers would go into Holbrook where the Navajo County sheriff, like every lawman in Arizona, was on the lookout for them. Instead, he thought they would head for Adamana, Arizona, the nearest station, and the posse set a trap. Figuring they would try to board the train in the dark at the last minute, the murderers walked right into the trap and were arrested without incident. The two men carried a bag that contained the guns of the victims which were used in the killing. They were found with watches, wallets, and money belonging to the victims. They were tried one at a time in the Globe District Court and were each represented by Thomas E Flannigan. Sheriff Thompson meticulously entered every piece of evidence into the trial of the first defendant, Goodwin. Mrs. Kibbe had the heartbreaking job of identifying the owner of each item stolen from the victims. After the prosecution had presented its case, Flannigan made a bold move. Knowing his client could not stand up to cross examination, he rested his case and presented no evidence or witnesses. The jury deliberated for two and a half days and returned a verdict of guilty with life imprisonment as punishment. This was considered a victory as Goodwin could be out in 15 years. The Stewart trial went exactly the same way as Goodwin's. Flannigan made a successful appeal based on the fact that the crime was committed on the Indian reservation and was therefore under the jurisdiction of the Federal Courts where a lighter sentence was a possibility. The plan backfired to the detriment of the killers as they were found guilty, sentenced to death, hanged in Globe, and buried side-by-side in the Globe Cemetery.

At the camp where Roosevelt Dam was being built, a black man, William Baldwin, reported to Arizona Ranger Jim Holmes that two Mexicans had killed Laura Frances Morris and Aminta Ann, her four and a half year old daughter. When Holmes found the two Mexicans, they had alibis and were eliminated as suspects. That only left Baldwin as a possibility. Holmes, Al Sieber and two Apaches, Rabbit and Yesterday, followed the killer's tracks from the crime scene to the lake. They found footprint impressions in the sand that indicated the killer had thrown something into the lake. They began to toss stones into the lake and search the area of the landing. They found the murder weapon and it was identified as a knife recently sold to Baldwin. Sheriff Thompson was called to take charge of the prisoner. Just outside the camp, Thompson faced the first mob that was to try to lynch Baldwin. The mob, without real leadership and facing the sheriff's armed guards, decided it wasn't a good idea. In the city of Globe, the second mob was not so easily discouraged. Thompson turned the keys to the jail over to the mob and though they ransacked the jail and searched every office in the courthouse, Baldwin was not to be found. One of the deputies had sneaked the prisoner out and hid him in the outhouse of the First Baptist Church. After the mob dispersed, they sneaked the prisoner down to the railroad bridge and early in the morning placed him on a hand-operated car and took him to meet the train. Thompson took him to Solomonville, Arizona, (now Solomon) where he was tried, convicted and hanged. His record of never losing a prisoner would remain as long as he was in office.

Thompson and Wentworth had had a few more confrontations over the years as the sheriff had to sue the city for pay and allowances and Wentworth represented the city. On

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August 2, 1934, the legendary sheriff passed away at his home in Globe and four days later was laid to rest in the Globe Cemetery next to Carrie, his first wife. Joining them in the family plot is their son Gordon and Rimrock's sister Minnie. Wentworth was one of the many attending his funeral service and giving tribute to a worthy adversary.



Source: *Sheriff Thompson's Day* by Jess G. Hayes