

## **Commodore Perry Owens**

Owens was born in Tennessee on September 10, 1853. This date happened to be the 40th anniversary of Commodore Perry's victory over the British on Lake Erie during the War of 1812. Well, here we go again, as my hero Ronald Reagan once said. That is one of those errors that is repeated over and over again. I guess many of our writers accept that date and figure it is the reason for his name. Wrong and wrong. He was born on an east Tennessee farm on July 29, 1852, and he was named after his father who was named after the famous Naval hero. Very little is known about him prior to his years in Arizona. It is believed the family moved to Indiana for a while. In the 1870s he was a cowboy in Texas before migrating to New Mexico and then to Arizona.

He was said to be an excellent shot and sometimes carried a .45-60 Sharps sighted to shoot accurately at one mile. It was two shootings that earned Owens his fame. The first was when he shot and killed two Indians that were part of a renegade band trying to stampede and steal his horse herd. One of the dead Indians was the son of a Navajo chief. A warrant for Owens arrest was issued and he was taken before a Federal District Court judge in Albuquerque. The judge immediately dropped the charges because the incident did not happen on Federal land, so there was no jurisdiction. When Owens was taken to the court in Holbrook, he was immediately cleared of the charges. His fame from this shooting led to him being elected, in November of 1886, as the Apache County Sheriff.



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He took office on January 1, 1887, and the second of his famous shootings took place on September 4<sup>th</sup> of that year. On that Sunday afternoon, Owen rode into Holbrook with an arrest warrant for Andy Cooper for the crime of murder. His real name was Andy Blevins and he had adopted the alias because of his previous illegal activities. In Holbrook he had been bragging about two killings he had done in the Pleasant Valley War.

On his way into town he stopped at Brown and Kinder's livery stable. He was met there by Sam Brown who put up his horse. Owens cleaned his pistol and picked up his Winchester, making sure it was loaded and walked out. On his way out he asked Justice of the Peace D.G. Harvey where Cooper lived. Harvey replied, "Just beyond the adobe house and this side of the blacksmith shop."

Around 4:00 p.m., he went up to the home of Andy's widowed mother, Eva Blevins, who had recently lost a husband and a son in that same war. Andy Blevins came to one of the two front doors of the home with a six-gun in his hand. They both fired at about the same time. Andy's bullet missed, but Owen's firing from his Winchester from the hip sent a bullet through killing Andy. Andy's brother John fired from the other front door and he also missed Owens, but killed Andy's horse out in the street. Still firing from his hip, Owens sent a bullet through John's right shoulder.

Mose Roberts, a Blevins brother-in-law, had been sitting in the kitchen. He grabbed his pistol and made a dash for a window. As he dove through the window, Owens dropped him with one shot and wheeled to meet another threat. The youngest Blevins boy, fifteen year old Sam Houston Blevins, had grabbed up Andy's revolver and ran out the front door. With his mother trying to pull him back into the house, Owens sent a bullet through his heart. In just a matter of few seconds, Owens had killed three people and seriously wounded one. It is said he only fired 5 times; the other shot was possibly at John who was only wounded. It is one of the most famous gunfights in western history. The house is still standing in Holbrook today

John recovered and became a deputy sheriff, but not under Owens. Andy, Sam Houston, and Mose are buried together in the Holbrook Cemetery, in the southwest corner, just to the left of the first south facing entrance to the cemetery, near the brick wall.

Owens served only the one term as Apache County sheriff and then went to work for the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad and later for Wells Fargo. When Apache County was split up and Navajo county formed, Owens was the first sheriff of the new county. Around 1900 he went into business at Seligman, Arizona, probably owning a saloon. On



May 10, 1919, he died in Seligman and his body was taken to Flagstaff and buried in Citizens Cemetery, Tract J, Block A, Lot 13, Space 2.



**Commodore Perry Owens with short hair**

Source: Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters, by Bill O'Neal;  
Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography, Volume II, G-O, by Dan L. Trapp