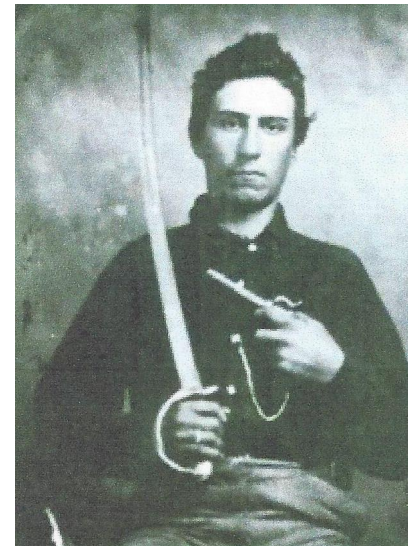


John Wilson Vermillion

In 1957, Pat Jahns wrote a book entitled *The Frontier World of Doc Holiday, Faro Dealer From Dallas to Deadwood*. In her works she identified that “Texas Jack” Vermillion, a member of Wyatt Earp’s Vendetta Riders, was John Wilson Vermillion from Virginia. Jahns gave no references for her conclusions and the error was not corrected until recently. Peter Brand and his excellent team of researchers proved conclusively that Texas Jack was not John Wilson Vermillion but was instead John Oberland Vermillion from Ohio.

Peter’s team was given access to an antique trunk *that* had belonged to John W. and his second wife, Nancy. The trunk contained clothing, mementos dating back to 1876, and correspondence that did not appear to have been read since Nancy died in 1932. The correspondence was only mail that had been received by John, but it would show where he had lived from 1876 through 1883 and that he could not have been Texas Jack. John Wilson Vermillion was born in 1842, in Russell County, Virginia, to William and Nancy Owen Vermillion. He was the second child and first son of a total of twelve children. By 1860 the family had relocated to Hancock County, Tennessee, and Mary, the oldest child, had died. Two other children died as infants. In Tennessee, the family would live next door to the Horton family. Elbert Horton would become his best friend and Margaret would one day become his wife.

John and Elbert were nineteen years old when the Civil war began and they enlisted together as privates on August 12, 1861, in Knoxville, Tennessee. They became members of Company D, 5th Battalion of the Tennessee Cavalry (aka McClellan’s Battalion). Records show that John (**Photo at right**) was present for duty from August ’61 to February of ’62 and received \$56 for the use of his horse. Elbert was shown as absent for sickness from November of ’61 to February ’62. The battalion was in Tennessee and Kentucky and saw limited action. In May of ’62 the 5th and 4th battalions merged to become Ashby’s 2nd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment. Elbert was promoted to Corporal. They were now much more active in the battles and participated in Cumberland Gap, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga and Atlanta. Elbert was wounded, taken prisoner, paroled and while at home married Carrie W. Anderson on March 24, 1864. He was honorably discharged on April 24, 1865. Records show that on March 24, 1864, John was at home recovering from a wound. There is no record as to the extent of the wound or if he returned to battle before the end of the war.



John returned to Tennessee after the war and on September 6, 1865, he and Margaret were married. Both of the newly wedded couples left Tennessee shortly after their marriages. Elbert and Carrie moved to Missouri and then to Arkansas. John and Margaret’s movements from 1865 through 1875 are not documented. A grandson’s recollections are that they spent some years in Indiana and had two children who died as infants.

One of the letters in the trunk was from Elbert dated September 28, 1876, and it reported that he had recently received a letter from John and Margaret and they were in Webb City, Missouri.

Webb City was a brand new boom town platted in 1875 after lead was discovered in the area. Like all boom towns of the era it was wild and somewhat lawless. On January 18, 1887 the town suffered what would become known as the Webb City Riot or The Blunt Raid. After the arrest of a miner two days before, a gang of miners rode into Webb City, did a lot of drinking and decided to avenge their friend by terrorizing the town. One of the raiders entered a home, harassed a young girl and struck a young boy with his pistol. Another raider by the name of John Blount pulled the man out of the house. By now the city marshal had formed a posse to confront the raiders who jumped on their horses and fled town. John Blount just happened to be the same fellow who would end up in Tombstone known as "Turkey Creek" Jack Johnson and a member of Wyatt Earp's Vendetta posse.

The marshal's posse gave chase and caught up with Blount. He refused to surrender and began to fire at the posse. Blount was wounded by a shotgun blast but was able to wheel his horse about and escaped. The raiders regrouped and reloaded and about 4:00 in the afternoon returned for one more attempt on the town. Two citizens were shot and seriously wounded, several others received minor wounds and several head of livestock were killed. When the raiders were out of ammunition they rode away again without any injuries. They loaded up wagons and left the county without being arrested.

At the election of 1879, John Wilson Vermillion was elected city marshal and served for one year. Most of his arrests were for routine offense such as drunkenness, fighting, riding too fast and disturbing the peace. He was called upon frequently to help law officers from other areas to arrest someone or to be on the lookout for somebody. He was not reelected to a second term. He then joined the local police force and served as a constable for one year.

On June 6, 1880, Margaret passed away. The reason is unknown, but it might have been because Webb City had suffered severe winters in 1877-1878 and 1878-1879 and because of the lack of proper medical facilities many citizens died of pneumonia.

At the time of Margaret's death, the 1880 census in Silver City, New Mexico, was registering the presence of J. O. "Texas Jack" Vermillion. You just can't be in two places at the same time.

In 1881, John headed south and visited with Elbert and Carrie in Springdale, Arkansas. His stay was brief as he was on his way to Texas where he settled in Cedar Hill in Dallas County. He worked for a railroad crew cutting lumber.

On June 22, 1881, a fire destroyed a large portion of Tombstone, Arizona. There was a letter in John's trunk from his brother addressed to him in Cedar City, Texas, dated June 22, 1881. He could hardly have been patrolling the streets of Tombstone.

Vermillion family correspondence shows that John Wilson Vermillion had returned home prior to October 19, 1881, and visited his brother in Tennessee, then went back to Russell County, Virginia, his birthplace. John lived with his brother Archer on Cinch Mountain and in early 1882, he received a job offer from a local lumber company. He could hardly have been registering to vote as John O. Vermillion in Tombstone on December 21, 1881.

In late 1882 or early 1883, John met 25-year-old Nancy "Nannie" Fleenor, daughter of one of the wealthiest farmers in the area. They were married on October 7, 1883, and lived in Mendota, Washington County, Virginia. John would be able to own and operate farms in the area, and supplement his income with seasonal jobs at the lumber mill. John

and Nannie would have two children, Minnie Bell and Opie Martin. It was Minnie's granddaughter that would own and make available the old trunk that belonged to John and Nannie.

John lived the rest of his life as a pillar of the Mendota community. He died on his farm on January 7, 1911. In his obituary he was described as "one of the best citizens here and will be sadly missed." He was survived by his wife Nannie and Minnie Bell and Opie Martin. Nannie would follow him in 1932. They are buried together in the Mendota Cemetery.



**John and Nannie's Tombstone in Mendota Cemetery
Photo courtesy of Daniel Hardoby**

At last it has been determined that John Wilson Vermillion was a law abiding citizen, former law man in the old west and was definitely not the scoundrel Texas Jack Vermillion who had committed a range of crimes across the western United States. Now he can truly rest in peace.

Source: *Duty Bound: The Story of John Wilson Vermillion: & The Mystery of Tombstone's "Texas Jack"* as it appears in an Appendix to the book *Wyatt Earp's Posse Rider: The Story of Texas Jack Vermillion* by Peter Brand and also appears in the Wild West History Association's August 2010 *Journal*.