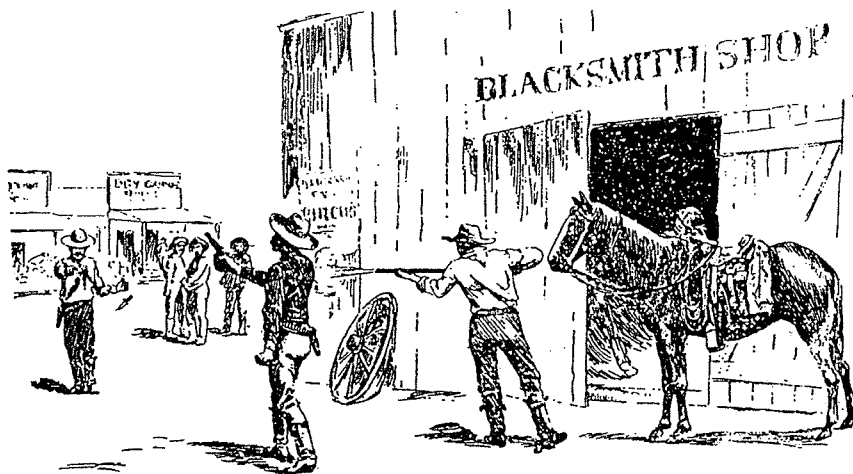


Jack Helm Meets John Wesley Hardin

by David George

Jack Helm had a knack for finding trouble wherever he went. Following a stint with the Texas State Police during the post Civil War reconstruction period, he moved on to become Sheriff of Dewitt County. Despite his past history of bad luck working on the side of the Sutton family, he continued his alignment with the Suttons in their feud with the Taylor clan. This would bring him face to face with John Wesley Hardin - the most able gunman in Texas.



This sketch by noted Texas artist R.J. Onderdonk is from Hardin's autobiography. The drawing depicts Hardin and Taylor's altercation with Helm in Albuquerque, Texas.

Jack Helm apparently worked for Abel Head ("Shanghai") Pierce as a cowboy after the Civil War. According to the *Handbook of Texas*, in June of 1869, Helm joined Capt. C.S. Bell as a special agent in attacking the "Taylor Party" in the Sutton-Taylor feud. From July to August of 1869, Helm and his band of "Regulators" marauded through Bee, San Patricio, Wilson, Dewitt, and Goliad counties essentially acting as judge, jury, and executioners. The *Galveston News* reported that they killed 21 persons in two months while only turning over 10 to legal authorities. Once Governor Davis formed the controversial State Police on July 1, 1870, Helm became one of four captains. In an August attack, Bell and Helm killed Hays Taylor and wounded Dobby Taylor. Henry and Will Kelly of the Taylor side of the feud were arrested on trumped up charges and shot. The backlash was such that Governor Davis was forced to suspend Helm in October and relieve him of his duties in December. Helm then became the Sheriff of Dewitt County, by appointment of Governor Davis, where he continued his alignment with the Suttons.

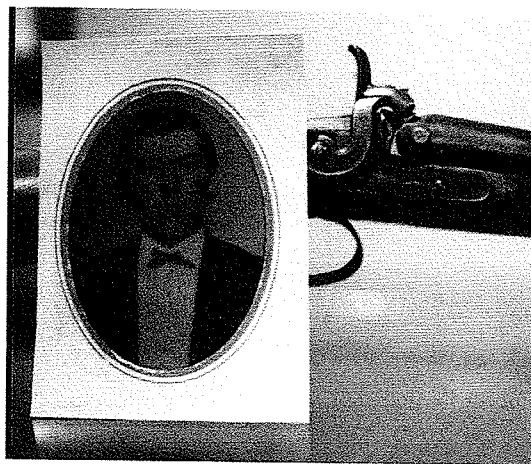
John Wesley Hardin, "Wes," was on the run from the State Police in 1871 and returned to his parent's home near Mount Calm. Although only 17, he had gunned down 13 men and the law was constantly on his trail. He was number one on the State Police list of 2870 "fugitives and criminals" and had an \$800 "dead or alive" bounty on his head. It was decided that John Wesley should go to Mexico and hide out until the State Police fervor abated.

In January 1871, John Wesley headed for the border but

stopped to stay with his Clements cousins in Gonzales for a few days. On arriving in Gonzales, Hardin found the Clements planning a cattle drive to Abilene, Kansas. If Hardin went to Kansas he would be out of the jurisdiction of the State Police. So the plans for Mexico were abandoned, and in March of 1871 Hardin and Jim Clements set out for Abilene on the Chisholm Trail with 1200 head of cattle followed by Mannen, Gip, and Joe Clements with another herd. It was the peak year of the Chisholm Trail with 161,320 head driven from just south of San Antonio to the railhead in Abilene. Before returning to Texas in July, Hardin would draw his gun many times along the way, he and the Clements would narrowly escape a run in with Marshal Wild Bill Hickok of Abilene, and each would earn a badly needed \$150 a month while on the trail. Hardin decided he liked the cattle business. While in Gonzales, he also fell in love with a woman, Jane Bowen, introduced by the Clements. Hardin decided to try and stay in the Gonzales area.

John Wesley Hardin married Jane Bowen on February 29, 1872 and in doing so became related to the Taylors by marriage. Despite this relationship and being a well-known confederate sympathizer, Hardin desired to stay out of the fight with the Suttons. The Civil War was over; Hardin had married, and

had other priorities. He was still number one on the State Police fugitive list of criminals and needed to keep a low profile. By remaining in Gonzales, Hardin became a wanted man living in the middle of Jack Helm's territory. It was only a matter of time before their two paths would cross.



John Wesley Hardin (Bob McCubbin Collection)

In April 1873, Hardin would encounter Helm while on a trip to Cuero on cattle business. Hardin confronted and challenged Helm. However, Helm attempted to befriend Hardin and suggested that they meet the following day in Cuero. At the meeting Helm foolishly suggested that Hardin join the Sutton side of the ongoing feud. Helm proposed that if Hardin would become a gun for the Suttons, all charges could be dropped and Hardin would be a free man. However tempting the offer might have been there was no way Hardin would join or trust the Suttons. He could not turn his back on his Taylor friends and relatives. There was no option. Hardin also knew that if he refused, Helm would try to kill him.

Helm gave Hardin a few days to consider his proposal. However, before the few days elapsed, Helm and about 50 men surrounded Wes' house while he was away demanding to know where he was and making threats. Jane, a new mother, was terrified but refused to reveal her husband's whereabouts. On returning home, Hardin found that the Regulators had also visited the wives and families of the Clements and the Tennille making similar demands. A few nights later a Taylor party meeting was held at a clump of trees known as Mustang Mot. Hardin announced he was joining the Taylor party because the Suttons had "stooped to abuse innocent women and children" - a violation of the code. Wes was unanimously elected head of the Taylor party and his first advice was to hunt down their enemies and "put an end to mob law." Jim Taylor and Wes Hardin set out to find Helm armed with pistols and shotguns loaded with 00 buckshot.

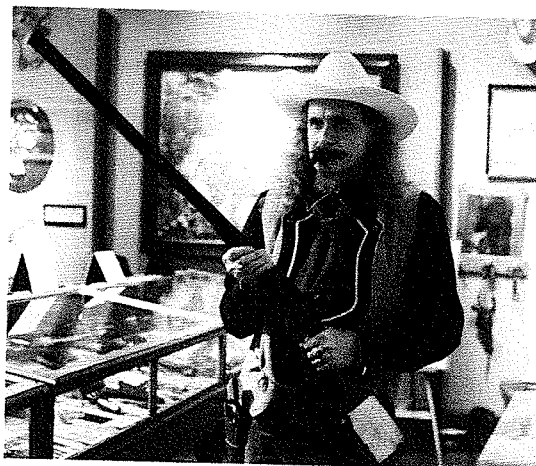
Taylor and Hardin learned that Helm was in the Albuquerque area near the Clear Fork of Sandies Creek two miles south of the junction of Gonzales, Wilson, and Guadalupe Counties. Upon arriving in town, Helm was not immediately found. Hardin's horse needed to be shod, so Taylor and Hardin waited for the blacksmith to complete the job. Suddenly, shouting was heard and Hardin saw Helm, accompanied by six others, lunging for Taylor with a long knife. Hardin cocked his shotgun and hurled a load of shot into Helm. A simple wave of his fowling piece in the direction of the others caused them to flee. Simultaneously, Taylor pulled his six-gun and shot Helm several times in the head for good measure. Hardin later wrote in his autobiography that he received letters from all over the state

congratulating him on ending Helm's reign of terror.

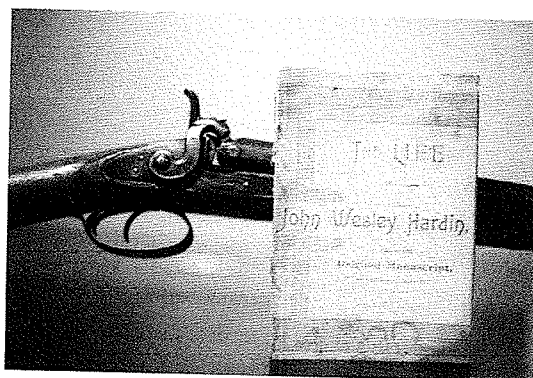
On April 22, 1873 the law authorizing the State Police was repealed. The State Police form of law enforcement having failed, Governor Davis turned to the Texas Rangers for help with unrest in DeWitt and Gonzales counties as their highest priority assignment. Hardin now would have to deal with the Rangers who would eventually follow him all the way to Florida and bring him back to Texas for trial.

The Taylor-Sutton feud continued for many years. "It is doubtful if there is another feud on record which covered so much ground, lasted so long, caused so many deaths, or left such a brand on the lives of so many people." (Sonnichsen 1951:87) The final chapter is considered to have occurred thirty years after the beginning of the feud with the final court decision in the case of Dave Augustine on December 30, 1899.

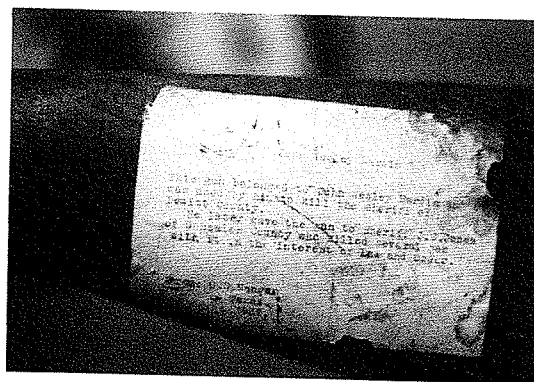
The W & C Scott and Son (William and Charles Scott) firearms factory operated at various Birmingham, England addresses until 1894. The company joined P. Webley and Son to become Webley and Scott Revolver & Arms Co. Ltd. in 1897. (Bailey) The W & C Scott label still exists today as part of Holland and Holland, London.



Texas Bob Reinhardt holding the Hardin shotgun. Different from the image portrayed by Hollywood, a typical shotgun was the firearm of choice by many gunfighters, especially in possible mob situations. The English made W & C. Scott & Son 12 ga. side-by-side used by John Wesley Hardin to kill Jack Helm, along with many other gunfighter era arms and artifacts from the Kurt House collection, are on display at the Buckhorn Saloon and Museum in San Antonio as part of *Gunfighters - Outlaws and Lawmen of the Old West*.



The Hardin shotgun together with his autobiography, *The Life of John Wesley Hardin, From the Original Manuscript, As Written By Himself*, published posthumously.



The Hardin shotgun was acquired by the Buckhorn in 1937. The W & C Scott and Son muzzle-loading percussion had a second life on the side of the law as indicated by the inscription attached to the stock. This gun belonged to John Wesley Hardin and was used by him to kill the Sheriff of Dewitt County. He later gave the gun to Sheriff J.C. Jones of Gonzales County who killed several men with it in the interest of law and order. Fr: O.D. Mangum, Victoria, Texas 1937

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