

The Hanging Tree

Part IV

By Robert Hutchison

This is a continuation of our report of the triple homicides of James Warren (Jamie) Stott, James Lane Scott III and William Jefferson Wilson on August 11, 1888. For 128 years, the mystery has remained unsolved. The following is research that has been gathered and is critical in the solving of the triple murders.

The Sheriff back then was Commodore Perry Owens. During his two-year term, Owens switched bondsmen five times. According to the August 27, 1887 *Apache County Critic*, Sheriff Commodore Perry Owens was ordered to arrest Andy Cooper Blevins within ten days or be ousted. Ironically, Owens and Blevins had been cowboys who had hunted and fished together — even courted the same girl.

On September 4, 1887 (seven days after the warning), Owens, armed with his Winchester rifle and an old warrant from March 26, 1886, walked up to the Holbrook home of widow Blevins and shot her son, Andy Cooper Blevins. The bullet passed through the wooden door and then struck his unarmed friend. Blood and guts splattered over Eva Blevins and the baby she held in her arms. Owens then shot unarmed Mose Roberts (a guest in the house) in the back as he sat writing a letter. Samuel Houston Blevins, 15-years-old, had just gone inside after playing marbles in the street. Owens shot him too. The bullet that exited the boy hit and killed Andy Blevins' horse. According to Owens, the killings were justified because the men were considered to be “desperate men who were resisting arrest.” Months later, as Owens was transporting John Blevins to prison for resisting arrest, word reached him that his prisoner had been pardoned by the Governor. Owens left him in the elements, on foot, near death from gunshot wounds and exposure.

Because of Owens' reckless behavior concerning the Blevins home, Thomas Carson canceled his bond with him. Richard and Ellen Greer became new members of the Apache County Board of Supervisors, along with Henry Smith who was president of the Cattleman's Association. Other members of the board were Deputy Sheriff St. George Creaghe, along with his partner Earnest Tee of the 26 Bar Ranch...to name a few.

It was Owens, however, who became the human courier who set the date for the triple homicide of Stott, Scott and Wilson. It was to take place on Saturday, August 11, 1888, at the Aztec Spring Ranch. Owens was the only one documented that traveled from St. Johns to Tonto Basin, covering three counties during the time in question. According to the May 30, 1888 issue of the *Apache Review*, “Sheriff C.P. Owens returned Monday after an absence of over a week. He comes from the Tonto Basin country and reports that the good citizens of that locality have taken things into their own hands.” In the same issue, Owens is reported to have implicated Stott and Bargman in a Tonto Basin store robbery. When Stott read about himself in the newspaper, he wrote a letter to the editor requesting that the “scathing accusations be withdrawn,” stating that he had “never set foot in that part of the country in his life.” The *Review* printed even more scathing remarks, which were then endorsed by Sheriff Owens and Deputy Sheriff J.D. Houck.

Stott was driving a wagon to the Holbrook train station (a three-to-four-day trip) to pick up Lanotte Clymer and Alfred Ingham and to purchase supplies when he was accused of a crime — a crime that took place in Pleasant Valley. *Clymer and Ingham would later testify that they were eye witnesses to the abduction that took place at the Aztec Spring Ranch on August 11, 1888.*

Deputy Sheriff Hock then accused Stott, Scott and Wilson of wounding Jacob Lauffer in Pleasant Valley early in August. At the time, James Scott was on his way to Pleasant Valley to retrieve a horse he had loaned to Louis Neiglin when two Pleasant Valley men took Scott to the Perkins Store in Pleasant Valley and detained him, along with two teenage captives Joe Griffin and Bill Campbell, during the wounding of

Jacob Lauffer. None of the boys owned the 45.90 Winchester rifle that left behind the two cartridges discovered at the Lauffer's Ranch.

Around mid-1888, a Prescott newspaper announced that James Stott was scheduled to acquire legal title to the Aztec Spring Ranch which placed a heightened sense of urgency and panic among the 30-plus would-be perpetrators of the triple murders. They now had to make the purported crimes of their victims fit the planned punishment that was to be administered. At the time, the execution date had been set by Owens more than two months prior and everyone scheduled to participate was planning to show up as planned...led by J.D. Houck.

Note:

Blevins and his family owned and operated the Canyon Creek Ranch, located below the Mogollon Rim (approximately two and a half miles west of the hanging tree). Neighboring the Canyon Creek Ranch to the west was the 13 Rock Ranch owned by Deputy Sheriff H.A. (Hook) Larson. About two and a half miles to the east was the Black Canyon Ranch, owned by Apache County Deputy Sheriff James Dennis Houck. All these ranches were located in Yavapai/Apache County at the time that the murders took place. Farther east lay the Aztec Spring Ranch, owned by Jamie Stott. His neighbor was Apache County Sheriff Osmer D. Flake, whose father was also a neighbor. Every neighbor of the three deputies was killed without due process of the law and the rangeland and livestock were acquired by the deputies.

In September of 1888, ten men from the Tonto Basin, including Ed Tewksbury, J.D. Hock and Ike (sic) Larson, appeared before the Grand Jury. Eight months later, according to the Arizona Silver Belt, on May 25, 1889, "William McFadden and J.D. Boyle, both residents of Gila County, were arrested by the Sheriff of Apache County (newly elected St. George Creaghe) on a warrant sworn out by an F. Banta, district attorney of Apache County, charging them with the murders of Stott, Scott and Wilson. Tachey were not disarmed when arrested."

Our research shows that although Owens was never considered to have been involved in the conspiracy, he in fact set the entire tragedy in motion — but not by himself....
Check out part V (in the next issue of GYMOAZ) which will include published sources, names of alleged perpetrators and the persons actually responsible for the murders.

August 11, 2016 marked the 128th anniversary of the triple homicide of Stott, Scott and Wilson. Our horseback ride to the gravesite included Attorney Greg Hanchett (son of famed writer and author of "The Crooked Trail to Holbrook," "They Shot Billy Today" and "Black Mesa," Leland J. Hanchett, Jr.) as part of our research team. Hanchett graciously co-signed and dated 20 copies of "Black Mesa," a book written about the hanging of Jamie Stott, and personally presented them to all of those who had completed the four-hour lunch ride. Our success in solving the mystery concerning who murdered Stott, Scott and Wilson would not be possible if not for the Hanchett father/son team effort 28 years ago.

At the invitation of private investigator Dawn Wilson, Jax Attwell, host of the documentary series, "Missing in Alaska," joined our research team. He traveled from Montana to investigate the case of the triple murders. Others in attendance were Deputy Sheriff Todd Yancey, who traveled from Georgia, Jenny Caster of Get Your Mountain On AZ, Research/historian Stacey Sanchez, Aztec Ranch owner Scott Klaus and Research/historian Ruthie Yeats.

As mentioned in Part II of the Hanging Tree, an attempt was made in 1992 to arrange the return of Jamie Stott's gold ring to his family. As one of the leaders in this investigation, private investigator Dawn Wilson has accepted the challenge some 24 years later. It was Wilson who researched and discovered the person in possession of the ring at the time of the grave robberies back in 1942. Once the ring is recovered, it

will be returned to the nine-year-old great-grandniece of murder victim Jamie Stott. Her father is the grandnephew of Jamie Stott, who has possession of Stott's 5-shot revolver.

#1: Jax Atwell and Robert Hutchison

#2: From left to right: Dawn Wilson, Brad Carlyon, Robert Hutchison, Steve Williams, and Wayne Ramey

#3: Grooves in the Hanging Tree limb, 17 1/2 feet from the ground

#4: From left to right: Robert Hutchison, Greg Hanchett, and Ruthie Yeats

#5: Fred Turley centered in back