



Grave marker of Jim Taylor, killed with Arnold and Hendricks in 1875. Note crossed rifles at the top of the stone. *Courtesy Robert W. Shook.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bloody 1875

“A party of five men entered Ryan’s saloon and killed Reuben Brown ... a member of the Sutton party. His body was riddled with balls. ... Marshal Brown was the man who arrested Taylor for the murder of Sutton.”

—*New York Times*, NOVEMBER 19, 1875

In spite of McNelly’s good work in DeWitt County, he received criticism from some, and surprisingly from Sen. B. J. Pridgen. The senator had written to Governor Coke asking for Rangers to protect him and his family. The governor turned the note over to McNelly who responded on March 3, 1875, reminding the senator that there had been a guard at his house “continuous since last Aug. (1874) and of such strength as your family asked for.” McNelly indicated the guard would remain there and felt satisfied the senator’s family would be safe. In the same letter he indicated his surprise—but not anger—in learning of the senator’s letter published in the *Pittsburg Dispatch* newspaper claiming that “parties had sought protection in my camp” but had not received it, and indicating that McNelly had been “very remiss” in performing his duty. McNelly pointed out that Pridgen certainly knew that charge was false and expected it to be corrected in the same newspaper.¹

In spite of unwarranted criticism, McNelly felt confident about the situation in DeWitt County. His continuous Ranger

patrols had obviously proved effective in reducing the violence between the two feuding groups, mainly because of his presence. Obtaining funds from the legislature to keep the company in the field had never been easy, and during the early months of 1875 the possibility of McNelly's company being drastically reduced in numbers or disbanded altogether was ever present. On March 4 McNelly wrote and complained to Adjutant General Steele that it was becoming more and more difficult for Clinton merchants to accept warrants for the company's necessary supplies due to uncertainty about how long the company would remain in DeWitt County. But he was able to conclude his letter with an optimistic "All quiet."²

Steele responded and ordered McNelly to buy only what was absolutely necessary for immediate use. If no appropriation came from the legislature to keep the company in the field, it would have to be disbanded. On the seventeenth the order arrived: he was to return the company to where it was first organized (Washington County) and muster out the men. But before this was done another order arrived: the legislature had at the last minute allocated sufficient funds to keep the company intact. But now it was ordered to go elsewhere: he could not remain in the feud country. On Good Friday, raiders from south of the Rio Grande had attacked the little community of Nuecestown, only a few miles from Corpus Christi. Nueces County residents then formed into mobs, intending to protect their lives and property at any cost. Due to the increasing troubles on the Rio Grande border and McNelly's effectiveness in DeWitt County, the Washington County militia company was sent to the border. South Texas ranchers could rejoice at McNelly's arrival, but what would happen in DeWitt County in his absence?

Feudist Bill Taylor still was in custody in the Galveston County jail, waiting for yet another chance to gain his freedom through a verdict of not guilty or even to escape. As the Galveston jail was one of the more secure jails in the state, his chances for escape were slim indeed. John Wesley Hardin, who had broken his

brother-in-law out of the Gonzales jail, was unable to do so, as he had left Texas. But on the other hand, perhaps Taylor felt he could beat this charge. After all, previous court cases had been in his favor: he had been charged with carrying a pistol several times, but that amounted to nothing of great import. He had stood trial twice for theft of a steer and found not guilty.³ Perhaps with good attorneys he could stand trial on this charge and be found not guilty as well. After all, Sutton and Slaughter were both armed, so a good case could be made for “self defense.” But at his first trial for the killing of Sutton, he was found guilty. The verdict resulted in a sentence of ten years in the penitentiary. He still had to stand trial for the killing of Slaughter, so instead of going to Huntsville prison he was returned to the secure jail in Galveston.⁴

While Bill Taylor was confined behind the bars of Galveston jail, other legal events were taking place within the city itself. Twenty-two prisoners and thirty witnesses from DeWitt County and the surrounding area arrived for the trial of men “styled as kuklux.” They were charged with “depriving the citizens of that section of country from the peaceful enjoyment of their rights and liberties.” More specifically, they were charged with the murder of Senator Pridgen’s former slave, Abram Bryant. This was a remarkable action: the killing of a former slave, in a formerly Rebel state, arousing such indignation leading to such a charge, that the rights and liberties of good citizens had been disturbed. No doubt the genesis of this action came from Senator Pridgen. The brutal murder of his servant became an excuse for him to combat his enemies (Sutton followers) in a court room setting, rather than attempting to destroy them through ambush or gunfight. Legal action was easier to control. Those charged had no connection to the Ku Klux Klan; the *News* was merely utilizing such terminology for publicity.

Galveston’s *News* explained that the “movement” that resulted in their arrest and appearance “had its birth in the enmity long existing between the Sutton and Taylor-Pridgen parties.”

A summary of the feud, amounting to a very brief feud history, followed in the columns of the *News*, which placed its origins back in the fall of 1868 when Charley Taylor “stole a number of cattle” from the widow Thomas. It was then that William Sutton “determined to avenge her wrongs” and pursued Taylor, with the result being the death of Taylor in Bastrop. Back in Clinton, Bill Sutton and Buck Taylor confronted each other, the gunfight ending with the death of Taylor and Dick Chisholm. The newspaper described other events including the killing of Major Thompson, the killing of Hays Taylor, and the killing of the Kelly brothers by Sutton, Meador, and White. The Kellys had “fired into a circus a few miles south of Cuero.” This killing, still according to the *News* reporter, “gave a new phase to the whole affair” and resulted in continued defiance of the law, threats, and attempts at assassination between members of the two parties. The Sutton party and the Taylor-Pridgen party were the two contending forces. With the wounding of Sutton, the killing of Helm, Cox, and Christman, and the killing of Wiley Pridgen the last day of 1873, a compromise was agreed upon. But then William Sutton was killed.

What the *News* did not report in this early but brief history of the feud was that those named in the indictment had wanted to kill Bolivar J. Pridgen. Not finding where Pridgen was, they allegedly captured a former Pridgen slave, Abram Bryant, and murdered him when he would not reveal where the senator was. The twenty-two indicted as Ku Klux, men all allied with the Sutton side, were identified as Joseph Sitterle, Addison Kilgore, John J. Meador, W. C. Wallace, Joseph DeMoss, Buck Powers, John Powers, Peter Tumlinson, W. W. Peavy, Zan Peavy, Andrew Jordan, William Cox, Andrew Newman, W. P. Meador, William Pettit, Gus Tumlinson, Addison Patterson, Charley Lips, James Mason, Jeff White, J. W. Ferguson, and John Tumlinson. The *News* not only identified the men but also indicated where they resided.⁵

Returned to Indianola for trial, Bill Taylor no doubt pondered what he would do if found guilty of the murder of Slaughter. If he somehow escaped confinement it would be wise to leave the state. John Wesley Hardin had left Texas, and apparently few people even knew where he was. No one came to break Taylor out, but he was fortunate, as on September 15, 1875, during his trial, a hurricane struck the city of Indianola, then the most important port along the Gulf. As water continued to rise, Calhoun County Sheriff Fred L. Busch became concerned for the prisoners' safety, finally bringing them to the court house, to be guarded by deputies. However, as the storm continued, and the threatening waters endangered everyone's lives, the concerns for guarding the prisoners diminished. Both Taylor and another prisoner, Joe Blackburn, on trial for stage robbery and murder, their chains off, became heroes and saved numerous men and women from drowning. When the storm subsided two days later on the seventeenth, the two disarmed Sheriff Busch, took his horse, and escaped riding double. A mile from town they met freedman Guy Michot and took his horse, giving him ten dollars for the steed. Taylor told Michot to tell the sheriff they appreciated his kindnesses and that the horses and weapons would be returned, which they were.⁶

Another version of Taylor's good fortune relates how District Attorney William H. Crain himself took three prisoners from their cell, as the jailor refused to release them, fearing they would escape. Crain and the prisoners headed for the court house, but the wind blew Crain's hat off. Bill Taylor, in appreciation for some favor, gave his own to the attorney, saying, as he laughed: "Bill Crain will never prosecute me."⁷ Yet another version, less plausible, has Crain himself falling into the treacherous waters and Taylor saving his life.⁸ Another account, provided by John Fitzhenry, a policeman of many years experience, wrote that Taylor was released from jail, "and, with courage characteristic of these men, ... dashed to the rescue of the drowning and saved

dozens of lives.”⁹ Some hundred people were on the court house hill when the waters began to subside. Although no one can say with certainty how many people Bill Taylor and Joe Blackburn rescued, apparently a good number were in fact saved by the former prisoners. Fugitive Bill Taylor’s prophecy at least came true as Crain never prosecuted him again.

After galloping away from Indianola and the people he had saved, fugitive Taylor chose to even the score with Rube Brown for the inconvenience of his arrest and incarceration. In some manner he sent word to Brown that he was marked for death, although when or how is unknown. Victor M. Rose considered Reuben H. Brown the head of the anti-Taylor party after the death of Sutton. He does not say why he determined Brown was the leader rather than Capt. Joe Tumlinson; possibly Tumlinson’s health had prevented him from taking the leadership reins. Some writers have considered the feud itself more of a continuing conflict between the Taylors and the Tumlinsons, preferring to call it the “Taylor-Tumlinson Feud” rather than the more common term, “Taylor-Sutton Feud” or “Sutton-Taylor Feud.”¹⁰ Given that Rose was contemporary to the violence and knew many of the actual feudists, we will accept his determination that Reuben H. Brown was now the leader of the faction warring against the Taylors. Did Taylor make any attempt to kill Brown that was not recorded? Probably.

The Taylors did catch up with the former Cuero city marshal early on the morning of Thursday, November 18, 1875. Of course reports of the killing were not all in agreement, but what was agreed upon was that Brown was in one of the saloons of Cuero, either the Merchant’s Exchange or A. G. Ryan’s Saloon, dealing monte or simply playing cards, when five men entered the saloon, leveled their guns at him and blasted away. Brown was riddled with balls, an expected result with five men shooting at him. Their aim was good enough to ensure the death of Brown, but a black man—Thomas Freeman—and another were both seriously wounded.

Confusion reigned supreme in that saloon. Brown was a bloody corpse; Thomas Freeman was dying. He too would be a corpse within a few hours. The third shooting victim apparently survived his wounds. No one immediately came forth to identify the shootists, if they were even recognized. Probably the confusion was so great and the gun-smoke so thick that no one could say for sure who was involved. A report datelined Indianola stated that Brown was sitting at a table playing cards when a man walked in, “took a drink at the bar, took a look at Brown and walked out, when immediately five persons came in and commenced firing at Brown. They then dragged him outside and shot him again.”¹¹ By this time the feud was becoming a national topic. Dispatches from Galveston reached New Orleans where they were telegraphed to New York, describing the killing as a “terrible tragedy” at Cuero. The *New York Times* stated that Freeman received two shots and was instantly killed while another was wounded in the face. Surprisingly no more than Freeman and the other unidentified man were wounded in the shooting, as “the saloon was crowded with men, both black and white.”¹² The I.O.O.F. DeWitt Lodge of Cuero took charge of Brown’s funeral. His remains were interred in the family cemetery some seven miles south of Clinton.¹³

Who were the assassins? In spite of the contemporary reports that five men were responsible for the shooting, Jack Hays Day wrote that only three men entered the saloon where Brown was dealing monte for a group of blacks. Day, who may have been aware of the action or even present, if not one of the assassins, indicated that most likely it was Jim Taylor who led the affray, as he had asked that he alone “be permitted to do the shooting when only one of the [Sutton] gang was to be killed.” Day recalled his request as “Keep the dogs off and I’ll do the rest.”¹⁴ Certainly Jim Taylor was one of the assassins; Bill Taylor was probably another, who after all had spent a year in jail thanks to Rube Brown, and he had warned Brown he would kill him. Two other men whose names now appear in the

feud chronicles may have been shooting as well: A. R. Hendricks, whose origins are unknown, and Mason “Winchester Smith” Arnold, formerly of Lavaca County. The trio of Jim Taylor, A. R. Hendricks, and Mason Arnold had not acted together before, as far as known, but these three were to die together, and a later report, describing their deaths, indicated that “rumor” had it that it was Mason Arnold who had fired the first shot at the former city marshal.¹⁵

Mason Arnold was from Lavaca County, born circa 1848, the son of William and Ellen Arnold.¹⁶ Like many other young Southern men, he had his own difficulties with Reconstruction government that may have been the reason he joined the Taylor party in DeWitt County. Arnold was accused of stabbing one H. M. Steinberger in Giddings, Lee County, on February 15, 1873, giving him a serious but not fatal wound.¹⁷ Six weeks later Pvt. A. L. Roy of the State Police was on his trail, but doubted if he would catch up with him as Arnold was believed to be on the cattle trail to Kansas.¹⁸ Private Roy may have had to give up the hunt as the police force was disbanded on April 22 of that year.

Hendricks remains a mystery figure in the history of the feud. He had served in the Confederate Army, having enlisted on August 14, 1862, at Greenville, Texas, in Company A, 2nd Texas Infantry, for the duration of the war. Taken prisoner, he was paroled on July 7, 1863, at Vicksburg. He did not return to his unit and was considered a deserter.¹⁹ Following war’s end his actions remain unknown for nearly a decade. He probably was in the Travis-Lee-Washington counties area when the call came for men to join the Ranger company, as on July 25, 1874, he enlisted with the rank of sergeant in McNelly’s Washington County Volunteer Militia Company. On March 31, 1875, he was honorably discharged from McNelly’s command, apparently having done nothing to warrant any special mention in McNelly’s reports. During his eight months of Ranger service, Hendricks had to have learned about the various victims of the feud’s violence. With such knowledge it would be unusual if he



Mason "Winchester Smith" Arnold, killed with Jim Taylor and A. R. Hendricks in 1875. *Courtesy Mary Ann Thornton.*

did not develop some opinions and feelings about the violence in general and the participants in particular, and may have actually met and developed a friendship with some. It is known that some Rangers were stationed in the homes of various feudists, thus it is probable that Hendricks may have lost his ability to remain neutral in dealing with those involved in the feud. What is certain is that he met and married one of the widows of the feud. On September 23, 1875, six months after his discharge, former McNelly Ranger A. R. Hendricks married Elizabeth Jane

Kelly, the widow of William B. Kelly, who had been killed back in August of 1870 with his brother Henry by a posse under the command of William E. Sutton. The nuptials took place in Fayette County.²⁰ Born Elizabeth Jane Day in 1836, she had first married Joseph W. Bennett who died mysteriously on July 9, 1862.²¹ Her second husband, George W. Rivers, a musician in Company D, 5th Texas Cavalry, disappeared sometime after parole from a Union hospital.²² She then married William B. Kelly but marital bliss eluded her when William was killed with his brother by members of the Helm-Sutton party.

If Taylor, Hendricks, and Arnold as well as others were involved in the killing of R. H. Brown, they did not have long to enjoy their “victory.” With cousin Bill Taylor on the run and John Wesley Hardin hiding out in Florida with a reward of \$4,000 for his arrest and confinement, Jim Taylor was now perhaps the most wanted man in Texas. As family members were well known by the authorities, he had few places to hide. That is perhaps why he believed with the right attorney he could possibly stand trial and come clear, and he contacted T. T. Teel, a very successful defense attorney. According to Jack Hays Day, Judge Teel, “one of the best criminal lawyers in the state of that day,” had offered to defend Taylor free of charge. Teel had an impressive record in the court rooms; no doubt Jim Taylor believed Teel could clear his name.²³

Jim Taylor, with Arnold and Hendricks and perhaps two or three others, appeared openly in town on the twenty-sixth of December, 1875. If Taylor met with Attorney T. T. Teel, the contemporary sources did not mention it. Others were well aware of their presence, however, and someone began the rumor that they intended to burn the court house down to destroy any papers that could be used against them. The men stabled their horses in Martin V. King’s livery and were seen on the streets, well-armed, but apparently at ease.

What Jim Taylor was not aware of was the fact that his enemies were at work planning to capture or kill him, if not for the

reward then at least for vengeance. Richard B. “Dick” Hudson, a strong supporter of the Suttons, acting as deputy under Sheriff Weisiger, gathered a half-dozen friends and prepared for war. The next day, the twenty-seventh, on the streets of Clinton the battle commenced: Taylor, Hendricks, Arnold, and two others—possibly Tom King, son of blacksmith Martin V. King, and “Hun” Tuggle or Ed Davis—against the Hudson posse. No one can determine which group fired the first shots, but Jim Taylor and his group were badly outnumbered. Realizing their situation, the group attempted to get to their horses in the King livery stable, but too late discovered it was locked, leaving them with no means to escape other than on foot. They had been betrayed.

The battle lasted but a few minutes. Running from the locked livery stable into a grove of trees Jim Taylor and perhaps Arnold and Hendricks received life-threatening wounds. Christopher Taylor “Kit” Hunter gave good aim with his Winchester, his shot breaking Taylor’s arm. Hunter lost his hat from a shot fired by Taylor. Once wounded, and surrounded by enemies, Taylor, Hendricks, and Arnold could expect no mercy. Hudson and his party would finish them off quickly. Another shot from Kit Hunter did end the life of Jim Taylor. The bodies of Jim, the head of the Taylor party, Mason “Winchester Smith” Arnold, and A. R. Hendricks were gathered up and turned over to their friends and family for burial.

Various accounts written by contemporaries of the feud have recorded their version of the significant gun battle which ought to have ended the shooting phase of the Sutton-Taylor Feud. As to be expected, those sympathetic to the Taylors provide a version quite different from those sympathetic to the Suttons. Jack Hays Day, who believed Taylor was in Clinton that day to meet with Attorney Teel, wrote of the betrayal of Jim Taylor by Martin King. Taylor believed King was a friend and unsuspecting any treachery “was led into ambush by this Judas, about half a mile from King’s house.” Caught “unaware in a grove of

big trees, Jim was shot to the ground. Mortally wounded he tried to fight back, but his assailants dodged behind the tree trunks, and he didn't have a chance." Before receiving the death wound he was shot in the right arm and both legs. Taylor and Arnold were both killed, and Hendricks wounded as well. On the road back to King's house someone finished off the wounded Hendricks. Day identifies one other of Taylor's party as Hun Tuggle, who, now in Jim Taylor's hour of need, chose to stay with Martin King and his life was spared. Relatives came and removed their bodies and buried them in the "old Taylor cemetery on the Guadalupe River."²⁴

Lewis S. Delony, long-time DeWitt County resident and sympathetic to the Suttons, gave a different version of why Jim Taylor and several associates were in Clinton that day, in opposition to Day's statement that Jim Taylor believed Teel could clear his name.²⁵ According to Delony, who was raised in DeWitt County during the time of the feud, Jim Taylor, "with about forty armed men" rode into Clinton and "took possession of the town," making their headquarters at John Wofford's store diagonally across the street from the store where Delony clerked. Martin V. King owned a blacksmith shop and livery stable, and that is where the Taylor group placed their horses.²⁶ Delony points out that King's son Tom and an adopted son, Ed Davis, "were both with the Taylor gang, at that time." Sheriff Weisiger, fearing that the Taylors intended to burn the court house down to destroy any indictments against them, managed to gather a group of dependable citizens to arm themselves. Those guarding the court house, as Delony identified them, were Captain William Friend, a lawyer; Sterling F. Grimes, district attorney; Judge Henry Clay Pleasants, district judge; Sam C. Lackey, a lawyer; John and Jim Wofford, whose store the Taylors had taken possession of; Judge Kilgore, a druggist; Jim and Clate Summers and several others as well as himself.

Delony claims that they guarded the court house all day, but does not explain what the Taylors were doing during this

period. Supposedly Sheriff Weisiger sent a black man to Cuero to ask “Captain” Hudson to gather a posse and bring help at once to Clinton. According to Delony, the Taylors “captured the negro, and took him across the bridge and hung him to a tree.” Without hearing from Hudson, Sheriff Weisiger sent another young man, Charles Page, whose father had been killed by the Taylors, to carry another note to Hudson asking for help. Page did make it through the lines.²⁷ Impatient at the delays, Weisiger then went to Martin King, owner of the livery stable, and made a deal with him that if he would lock up the horses of the Taylors, then when the posse came they would not fire on his two sons: Tom King and Ed Davis. The deal was made.²⁸

The posse, which probably intended to shoot to kill rather than actually arrest the trio, was composed mainly of feud veterans. As identified by Delony, the posse consisted of Dick Hudson, Curly Wallace, Bill Meador, Kit Hunter, Buck McCrabb, John McCrabb, Frank Cox, Bill Cox, Jake Ryan, and brothers Joe and Ed Sitterle. Hudson was the man in charge, who explained to him (Delony) that if the Taylors showed fight then King and Davis were not to be shot as King’s father had agreed to lock up their horses. As Delony and Hudson finalized their plan, the Taylors were “running down the street, toward the livery stable, where their horses were.” Then the posse dismounted and started running after them. Delony explains that Taylor, Hendricks, Arnold, King, and Davis all ran through an orchard and then entered an old log house. All five ran into it, but then ran out immediately, no reason given. As Jim Taylor exited the house, Christopher T. “Kit” Hunter raised his Winchester. Taylor dropped down on one knee and took aim at Hunter; both men fired at the same time. Hunter staggered and his hat flew off with a bullet hole in it. Hunter’s aim was better, as his shot hit Taylor’s right arm, breaking it, causing him to drop his Winchester. He picked it up with his other hand. Within moments Taylor, Hendricks and Arnold all had

received multiple wounds, and they were dead on the field. This is the dramatic description of the gunfight on the streets of Clinton between Taylor, Hendricks, Arnold, and the posse under the leadership of Dick Hudson, as recorded by Lewis Delony.²⁹

Delony's account of Jim Taylor having with him a gang of forty men is not believable, and his account is the only one that provides that number. Most likely there were but five men: Taylor, Hendricks, Arnold, King, and Davis. Possibly Hun Tuggle was present as well but apparently took no part in the fight.

An account that first appeared in the *Cuero Star* provides additional details, although unfortunately portions of the copy are missing. It began with the curious statement, "for the first time in the history of the unfortunate Taylor-Sutton feud," followed by the details of a "regular fight" between the two parties. Perhaps because there was no ambush, it was in open daylight with the two groups shooting at each other, "face to face," this report did not receive further coverage. The facts as near as could be determined were that Jim Taylor and "several of his party" were in Clinton. This fact was "very singular indeed," according to the paper, which said that Clintonites wondered what object Taylor had "by thus exposing himself to the public." About 5:00 p.m. ten members of the Sutton party arrived and inquired as to Taylor's whereabouts. When told he was at King's, they started in that direction. Jim Taylor was disabled early in the fight and he "fell back with his force" which consisted of two men, i.e., Hendricks and Arnold. They fell back to a cluster of live oaks in the Odom field where "they rallied once more and fired volley after volley towards the Sutton party." With a flare for the dramatic the reporter added that the Sutton party charged and "in a brief time their antagonists ... remained dead on the field. ..." ³⁰

A report from one identified as a "reliable source" provides perhaps a more objective report of the triple killing. It was sent to the *Galveston Daily News* and appeared in their January 1, 1876, issue, and was reprinted in the *San Antonio Daily Express* of January 7, with minor changes. Reliable Source's last

comment—“The writer hopes this affair will be the last of the kind arising out of these old feuds”—appeared in the *News* but was omitted by the *Express*. It is printed here in full so as to contrast a report made days if not hours after the smoke had cleared, with the recollections of Delony and Jack Hays Day, recalled more than a half century later.

Since Sunday night [December 26] Jim Taylor, with two or three men, have been in and about Clinton, walking through the streets with two six-shooters on each; and, as our sheriff was at home and remained there, no arrest was made. The party had, in conversation with Martin King, sent Dick Hudson word that they would come and kill him unless he left the county within 24 hours.

Dick could not exactly see the point, and together with six or seven of the Sutton boys, went to Clinton Monday, Dec. 27th, to offer his services to the Sheriff. As they reached there and dismounted, the Taylors (five men) at once got their guns, and commenced firing and retreating through a field, the Sutton party after them, and after hard running and much shooting, Jim Taylor, Winchester Smith [Mace Arnold], (the man who is now recognized as having given Rup [*sic*, Rube] Brown the first shot when he was killed,) and Hendricks (one of Capt. McNelly's command, who married into the Taylor family) were killed. Mark [*sic*] King and young Toggles [*sic*, Tuggle] threw up their hands and surrendered, and were, therefore, not hurt.³¹

By being the man “who married into the Taylor family,” A. R. Hendricks added one more sorrow in the life of his widow. Elizabeth Jane Day, now faced with the task of burying her fourth husband, certainly realized how dearly the feud had cost her.³²

An additional account which deserves mention is that of Daniel Fore Chisholm. In spite of the errors, his account is somewhat similar to the contemporary accounts, although the conversation he added certainly was not recorded by anyone at the time. Not surprisingly he makes the Sutton party out to be “ruthless assassins” who, after the shooting stopped, “rode in a wide circle around Jim Taylor and Mace Arnold, until they were sure they were both dead. Then they rode up to them and one of the gang used a double-barreled shot-gun loaded with buckshot and shot one side of Mace Arnold’s face and head off.” Just as strange, Chisholm, “remembered” that Hendricks was still alive and asked Bill Meador if he could go see his wife for the last time. Meador volunteered the use of his own horse. But before Hendricks got very far, “the rest of the gang” met him. Dick Hudson asked of the group who would “finish Hendricks off” and Kit Hunter volunteered. He “put his gun against Hendricks’ ear, and pulled the trigger.” Chisholm states that the other two members of the Taylor party who escaped were Mart King and Hun Tuggle, with no mention of Davis.³³

The posse that ended the lives of Taylor, Arnold, and Hendricks did face challenges as the Grand Jury brought charges against them. Indictments were found against each in the death of the three men. The Grand Jury met on April 3, 1876, and “upon their oaths” found that R. B. Hudson, J. F. McCrabb, William Cox, Jeff White, Henry White, A. Chamblin,³⁴ W. C. Wallace, John Meador, William Meador, and Christopher Taylor Hunter “with force and arms, unlawfully, feloniously and with their express malice aforethought ... with certain guns and pistols ... did discharge and shoot off ... leaden bullets ... of which [mortal wounds] they died.” Jim Taylor’s mortal wound was from a bullet “of the depth of four inches and of the breadth of half an inch” on the right side of his head. The mortal wounds of Arnold and Hendricks were no doubt similar. Witnesses called were J. J. Cooke, W. R. Friend, W. V. King, J. R. Hamilton, J. A. Wimbish, John Wofford, William Williamson, R. T. Kleberg,



View of the Taylor-Bennett Cemetery, south of Cuero. From left: replacement board marking grave of Mason Arnold, since replaced with granite stone; original marker for James C. Taylor; tall stone marks the grave of feud victim Pitkin B. Taylor and his wife Susan. Author's Collection.

S. C. Lackey, A. L. Lowrance, H. Tuggle, Eno. Speer, James Blair, and J. T. Gillett.³⁵

Apparently the charges against several of these men were dismissed, as on the twenty-eighth of June 1877 only Hudson, Daniel J. White,³⁶ Henry J. White,³⁷ Hunter,³⁸ and Wallace stood trial in Cuero. Examining witnesses and hearing arguments of counsel occupied two days. The jury needed not more than ten minutes before returning with a verdict of not guilty. The same men, under indictment for the killing of Arnold and Hendricks, did not need to go to trial as the district attorney removed the indictment from the docket.³⁹ In sum, the men who were charged with the triple killing suffered no penalty for their deed. The fact that R. B. Hudson was a deputy sheriff no doubt gave them all the legal authority they needed for their actions.