

## FORGOTTEN BEANVILLE

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By R. Franklin Hall

Among the names of all the colorful men whose deeds made the dramatic history of the State of Texas, none excites more interest than that of Roy Bean, later known as Justice of the Peace at Langtry. The life history and character of Bean are more familiar to the average Texan than are the epoch-making actions of such history makers as Houston, Milam, Travis, Bowie, Fannin, Crockett, Hays and others of similar fame and achievement.

Roy Bean lived 38 of his 78 years on earth in Texas. Seventeen of these, which is not generally known, were spent in San Antonio. It must not be inferred, however, that he was unknown while residing in the city. As a matter of fact a considerable part of his uniqueness became common knowledge here long before he left to open the saloon on the Southern Pacific and acquire fame and notoriety as the long arm of the "Law West of the Pecos."

Bean told his friends in San Antonio that he was born in Canada, in 1825. Later, he said, he was engaged in driving slaves of another party from Kentucky to New Orleans. The negroes could be purchased at such a low figure in the Bluegrass State that when placed on the auction block in New Orleans they returned a nice profit for the traders in this transaction. He then followed the gold rush to California, in 1850, and while there killed a Mexican in a duel. For this Bean was hanged by the friends of the dead man, but was cut down and helped to escape by one of his own Mexican friends. He then went to Santa Fe and in 1864, came to San Antonio and was employed as a teamster by his brother, George, who was in the freighting business in the Alamo City.

His brother died shortly after this and Roy took over as much of the business as he could handle with his three teams and wagons. For while he ran a freighting outfit over the trail to Chihuahua City, Mexico. One of these trips Bean had the misfortune to kill Mexican in a brawl at a dance in that city, and never dared go back again. He then went to trading, livestock and just anything in general.

On October 27, 1866, he married the 16 year old daughter, Virginia, of Leandro Chavez, a large land owner, who lived in the old Chavez homestead on the old Corpus Christi Road, almost a mile south of what then was the town. Bean took up his residence with his father-in-law, and the city directory for 1878 shows

that Roy Bean, ranchman, again lived at the same place. His first child was born in the Chavez homestead. Long before this, though, Bean had established a sort of general merchandize trading yard near the present junction of South Flores and Mitchell streets. Records show too, that he lived, at various time in that same locality. It seems that when old Roy found a vacant house that suited his requirements he probably moved in, and remained till forced to evacuate, or until he found another better adapted to his needs.

He made a sort of an agreement with George Holmgreen & Sons, iron works, corner Montana and Santa Clara streets to deliver enough wood to keep their furnaces going. As all the land in the vicinity of the city belonged to people who were rather jealous of their wood rights. Ben experienced some difficulty in filling his contract. At this point Roy displayed his progressiveness. On the San Pedro and Alazan creeks, southwest of San Antonio, Mexican wood cutters had built up a rather lucrative business burning charcoal from the liveoak cut from lands along the creeks. Being far out in the country, they were seldom visited by the land owners and no checkup was ever made to see that they stayed on the territory they had leased.

Bean discovered this state of the charcoal industry in the chaparral and promptly interested himself on the side of the law and order. Periodically, just seldom enough not to discourage the Mexicans engaged in the work, he visited them with an ox-wagon, confiscated the cut wood and delivered it to Holmgreen & Sons. When this source of supply got low old Roy cut some of it for himself. This business was too slow for the progressive spirit of Roy Bean and he decided to operate a dairy. Some time previously he had purchase two lots opposite the west end of Mitchell Street, on South Flores, at that time the Corpus Christi Road, and on one of them erected a small box shanty. To the north and west of his building he enclosed an acre or so of ground and went out to hunt dairy cows.

He found a farmer in Atascosa County who was willing to trade 30 good milk cows for Bean's shanty and the two lots. The deal was made, with the understanding that Ben was first to try out the cows in order to ascertain their milk-giving qualities. With the animals penned in his yard Roy undertook to make a profit in the dairy business while feeding his milk cows next to nothing. As they yielded less and less milk Bean decided they should get less and less feed. In fact, as winter was coming on and no corn or hay had been produced in the country, due to a severe drought, he quit feeding them altogether, and most of them died. The owner, coming in to claim his house and lots, was astounded when Bean told him the deal was not completed, that he had only taken the cows on trial and as they proved to be worthless as milkers, the trade was off. The contract like all agreements in Texas at the time, was a verbal one. The cow-owner,

after consulting an attorney, abandoned his claim to Bean's property.

As stated, Bean did considerable livestock trading. He had a standing offer of \$5 to any boy who would bring to his corral a stray horse, mule or a fat cow. With money rather scarce around, San Antonio it can be seen that such a course would inevitably result in divesting his terrain of all loose animals not under the watchful eye of their owners. Many times the stock so impounded would be claimed and, over Bean's protest, be driven home. Most of the time, however, after a reasonable wait, it would be sold. Branded animals he had no use for.

Long before Bean moved out on the Corpus Christi Road there was a settlement there. Before the Civil War the Mexican families of Terrazas, Saens, Salazar, Galbans, and others had built houses and shacks in the vicinity. Cowboys riding in from the ranches on the Atascosa, called the place Dogtown, from the limitless number of poor canines sleeping in front of the doorways. After, T. T. Teal moved to the locality, with Tom E. Conner, who opened a general merchandize store just south of the present Mitchell Street and South Flores. Conner also operated a farm of some 12 acres across the San Antonio on the east, while Teal ran a blacksmith shop. By the end of the 1880s, "Beanville," as it came to be known, had a population of 25 to 30 families. T. E. Conner was elected alderman of the First Ward, which included Beanville, in 1885. Conner is listed in the directory of 1878 as a grocer and lightning rod agent. Teal had been alderman before him. In that same directory Ward 1 is described as having 47 public streets, three public squares, 186 building blocks, and 106 buildings and shacks.

Bean, with the Frenchman Grandjean, opened a small saloon on the south bank of the Medina at the Garza Crossing in the late 1880's. It failed to pay, however, and he sold out to Grandjean and opened one of his own in his house at the end of at present Mitchell Street. This place was on the west side of Flores Street, almost directly opposite the end of Mitchell, and joining the old Breslin house, which is still standing, on the north. The shack was torn down several years ago to make way for improvements.

At times Bean would find business dull. During many such times he would take his adopted son, John, hitch a horse to his one-horse hack, go to the outskirts of Beanville and killed a fat cow. After cutting the animal up into beef he would deliver it from door to door among the poor families of the settlement. The cattle belonged to people of San Antonio, but Roy would say: "No use for poor people to starve as long as rich people have fat cows running on Beanville pastures." On one particular occasion he killed a fat yearling on the land belonging to a certain wealthy citizen of San Antonio and proceeded to cook part of the

slain animal on the spot. The owner happened by and Bean invited him to partake of dinner with the outfit. This the man did, calling attention to the fact that Bean was then on the citizen's ranch. Nearby was the hide of the yearling, staked with the hair up, the brand in plain view. The owner never indicated that he noticed it. He stated afterward that he felt that Bean had some trick up his sleeve and he was afraid to call his hand.

Roy Bean had five children by Virginia Chavez, three boys and two girls. Besides these he reared the adopted boy, John, and two girls, Katharina and Isabel, daughters of an Irish father and one of the Chavez's relatives. This father went to Mexico and was never heard of again. The two adopted girls are now dead. His wife having divorced him old Roy decided in 1881, to go out west and grow with the country. Accordingly, the following years he loaded all his possessions in wagons, left his daughter, Sulema and Lala, in care of Simon Fest, Jr., and started for the Pecos.

Bean first established his saloon in a tent at Vinegaroon, the end of rails on the Southern Pacific. After a short time he removed to Sanderson and finally to the west bank of the Pecos later to become Langtry. Here Simon Fest Jr., put up a saloon for Bean which was shortly to become famous through its unique signs, "Roy Bean, Justice of the Peace. The Law West of the Pecos." On Jan. 12, 1883, the two ends of the Southern Pacific were connected near his place of business and the settlement named Langtry, in honor of a contractor on the road who bore that name and not for Lily Langtry as commonly reported. Bean's saloon was doing a fine liquor trade.

With the passing of the railroad camps, however, his business fell away to nothing and old Roy looked about for other ways to augment his meager income. He was not long in finding it. Roy Bean was elected justice of the peace in 1885, a position he held till December 1895, when he was defeated by the Mexican element. He was re-elected however, in 1900, and held the office till 1902, when he relinquished it voluntarily to his close friend, W. H. Dodd. Dodd served 17 years and held inquest over the bodies of a score or more men, all of whom had either been shot or stabbed to death. Langtry was a tough town.

As soon as Bean established himself in his saloon at Langtry his daughters went to live with him. They became beautiful women and married railroad men. Sam Bean was stabbed to death in a saloon in Del Rio, and Roy Bean, Jr., died several years before his father, who died at Langtry, March 19, 1903. John, Bean's adopted son, still lives and operates a sheep ranch near Dryden, Texas. Bean's wife, Virginia Chavez, married the second time Emanuel Charles of San Antonio. She died Nov. 29, 1932. The two daughters live in New Orleans.

Roy Bean was a real character. His fame is not confined to Texas alone. In 1904 passengers on the Southern Pacific were told, when about to pass Langtry, that the place was famous due to the unique rulings of a certain justice of the peace named Bean, who owned a saloon in the village. This was only a year after Bean's death and shows that he had acquired considerable notoriety even then. The tales told of his rulings and decisions at the bar in Langtry are too voluminous to more than mention here. Perhaps one though will illustrate his court procedure to those who have not had the privilege of reading his history as set down in newspapers and in at least one book.

Bean's saloon was used for the double purpose of dispensing drinks and holding court. This court usually took the form of an inquest, but sometimes he really heard evidence and decided serious cases. We have record that Bean, more than once, sentenced offenders to death by hanging. And they were hanged! His rulings have been quoted in some of the important courts of the country. Roy Bean ruled the land west of the Pecos with an iron hand.

On one occasion when the Southern Pacific passenger train stopped at the tank for water a negro porter got off and came into Bean's saloon for a drink. It was served him. Bean then pocketed the \$10 gold piece the negro gave him, walked out from behind his bar and took a seat at one of the tables in the room. In a few moments the train signaled to start. The porter asked for his change. Old Bean shouted, "Silence in the court." In a few moments the negro asked again for the money. Bean replied, "You are fined \$9.75 for disturbance. If you say a word I'll lock you up." The porter dashed for his train. This is characteristic of the stories told on Bean. This particular one is true.

Bean was 40 years old when he came to San Antonio. He was about five feet 10 inches tall, and weighed 190 pounds. He wore a beard to keep covered the bad scar on his throat made by the rope when he was hanged in California. He kept his hair and beard neatly trimmed, and was of a serious disposition, but possessed a natural wit and humor. He was a big-hearted man and always gave a ready ear to the needy. He helped make Texas. Nobody else has filled his shoes. Maybe nobody wants to, but we will have to admit that he would hate to lose the reputation he so ably established as the "Law West of the Pecos.

"There has been only one Roy Bean"