

John wesley hardin



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John Wesley Hardin, Texas' most notorious gunfighter, was the son of a Methodist preacher that was growing up during the Reconstruction Era. But instead of saving souls he sent them on to meet their Maker, via bullet train express. So was John Wesley Hardin a cold blooded killer or a product of the times? John Wesley Hardin, who was named after the founder of the Methodist church, was born 26th May 1853 in Bonham, Texas. He was the son of James Gibson Hardin Sr. and Mary Elizabeth [Dixson] Hardin who were married 19th May 1847. He was the second surviving son of ten children. His father James Gibson Hardin was a Methodist preacher, circuit rider, schoolteacher and lawyer. His mother Mary Elizabeth [Dixson] Hardin was the daughter of a highly respected Indian doctor and was described by John Wesley as being, " blond, highly cultured...with a charitable disposition, a model wife and helper to his father. " (Hardin) At the age of 12, he saw the Confederate soldiers returning home from the Civil War. This was also the beginning of the Reconstruction Era.

During the Reconstruction period, the South lay beaten down, the people were filled with hate and vengeance, and the Negro slaves were freed. Many of the Negroes joined the Union army as soldiers or state police. It was during this time that John Wesley developed a deep hatred of the Union and the freed Negroes. " In his mind, he had seen Abraham Lincoln burned and shot to pieces. So often he thought of him as a demon that was waging a relentless war on the South to rob her of her most sacred rights. " (Hardin) John Wesley was raised with deep religious beliefs and Christian virtues.

He had a fierce fire and brimstone religiosity, a strong code of family loyalty and an indelible sense of honor that was a part of the lives of

all Southerners, rich or poor. An old Civil War song can be said to accurately reflect the mind of a youth like John Wesley. “ Oh I’m a good ol’ rebel, now that’s just what I am, For this fair land of Freedom, I do not care a damn, I’m glad I fit against it; I only wish we’d won And I don’t want no pardon for anything I’ve done. I hates the constitution, this great Republic, too, I hates the Freedman’s Bureau and uniforms of blue,

I hates the nasty eagle with all it brags and fuss, The lyin’ thievin’ Yankees I hates them worse and worse. Three hundred thousand Yankees is still in Southern dust, We got three hundred thousand before they conquered us; They died of Southern fever and Southern steel and shot, I wish there were three million instead of what we got. I don’t want no pardon for what I was and am’ I won’t be reconstructed and I don’t care a damn. ” (Metz) In 1865 John Wesley and his family moved to Sumpter, Texas where his father established a school which he and his siblings attended.

But it was here in 1867, at the age of 14; John Wesley would have his first encounter with the law. While preparing for a test in school, a classmate named Charles Slotter and John Wesley got in a fight over some graffiti that Charles had written on the wall about a girl in their class named Sal. Charles accused John Wesley of writing it and he denied it. Charles punched John Wesley and attacked him with his pocketknife. John Wesley drew his pocketknife and stabbed him twice, once in the chest and once in the back, almost killing him.

The boys’ parents wanted John Wesley expelled from school, but after hearing the facts in the case, the trustees exonerated him and the courts

acquitted him. Charles Slotter recovered from his wounds. In November of 1868, John Wesley went to visit his uncle Barnett Hardin, who lived about 4 miles away, to watch them make sugar from the sugar cane. It was during this visit that John Wesley's life was about to change forever at the age of 15. When John Wesley arrived at his uncle's and his cousin Barnett Jones got into a playful wrestling match with a former slave named Mage.

Together, the boys beat him in the first round. It was during the second round that John Wesley accidentally scratched Mage and drew blood. This made Mage very upset and he threatened John Wesley saying, " He would kill him or die himself; that no white boy could draw his blood and live; that a bird never flew too high not to come to the ground. " (Hardin) John Wesley's uncle Barnett Hardin ordered Mage off the farm. The next morning, when he was headed for home, the Negro Mage was waiting for him on the trail with a big stick. He threatened to kill John

Wesley with it and then throw his body into the creek. He swung at him with the stick, and John Wesley pulled out his Colt . 44 pistol and told him to stop. Mage grabbed the reins of his horse, and when he wouldn't let go John Wesley shot him loose, but he kept coming back. He continued to shoot Mage every time he came at him, until the man collapsed. He went to another uncle's house and brought him back to where Mage was lying. His uncle told him to go home and tell his parents what had happened. Mage ended up dying from his wounds a few days later.

His father knew that John Wesley would not receive a fair trial, because to be tried for killing a Negro at that time, meant a certain death at the hands of a

court backed by Yankee bayonets. So John Wesley was sent to stay with his brother Joe, some 25 miles away, in Logallis Prairie. In December of 1868, some 6 weeks after the shooting and death of the Negro Mage, his brother told him that there were 3 Union soldiers asking questions about him. He took a shotgun and his Colt . 44 revolver and went to wait for them along the creek bed of Hickory Creek crossing, where he knew they would cross.

They ambushed them, killing 2 white soldiers with the shotgun and the black soldier with his revolver. So, by the winter of 1868, 15 year old John Wesley Hardin had killed 4 men and was wounded for the first time. But his killings did not stop there. By February of 1871, at the age of 17, John Wesley had killed 12 men. In March of 1871, John Wesley and his cousin Jim Clements took 1600 head of cattle and headed up the Chisholm Trail toward Abilene, Kansas. Along the trail they had a problem with some Mexican vaqueros that kept mixing their cattle with John Wesley's.

A fight broke out, which ended up with John Wesley killing 5 of the Mexicans. So within a day or two of his 18th birthday John Wesley had now killed twenty men. He arrived in Abilene Kansas around June 1, 1871. It was here in Abilene, at 18 years old, that he met Wild Bill Hickok who was the Marshall at the time. John Wesley and Wild Bill met, for the first time, in a wine room where they discussed the rules of carrying firearms in Abilene. They left the meeting as friends, and John Wesley was given a privilege that no other cowboys would get to enjoy.

He wore his guns for all to see. On August 6, 1871 he fled Kansas, for Texas after accidentally killing a man in the hotel room next door. On January 11,

1872, John Wesley returned to Gonzales, where he met Jane Bowen at his cousin Jim Clements wedding. They were married on February 29, 1872 by a Methodist minister and Justice of the Peace) Thomas F. Rainey. She was 14 years old and John Wesley was 18. In April 1872, two months after the wedding, John Wesley left for two weeks to head to the King Ranch in South Texas, 175 miles from Gonzales, to conduct business.

Upon leaving the King Ranch, Hardin remembered he had “ one of the prettiest and sweetest girls in the county as his wife. ” (Metz). He arrived home around 4 am that morning. On June 5, 1872, he left again for Louisiana to sell some horses, but while in Hemphill he got into an altercation with a local law enforcement officer, so he sold the horses there and went to his uncle Barnett’s’ in Polk County. By August of 1872, at the age of 19, Hardin had killed 29 men. John Wesley and Jane’s first child, Mary Elizabeth, was born 6th February 1873, when Jane was 15 years old.

Their second child, John Wesley Hardin Jr. , was born 3 August 1875, and their third child, Jane Martina, was born 15 July 1877. Whatever her faults or her degree of naivete, Jane Bowen Hardin was an articulate young lady that maintained a strong love and defense of her husband. On May 26th 1874, at 21 years of age, John Wesley Hardin arrived in Comanche Texas, where Browne County Deputy Sheriff Charles Webb had come with 15 men to kill him. He met Deputy Webb outside the saloon where he asked him if he had any papers for his arrest and Deputy Webb replied that he did not have any papers for his arrest.

John Wesley invited Deputy Webb to go into the saloon with him for a drink and cigar. When John Wesley turned around to go in the door, he heard someone shout, and as he turned he saw Deputy Webb go for his gun to shoot him in the back. Hardin drew and fired his gun hitting Deputy Brown in the head killing him, but not before he got a shot off that hit Wesley and wounded him. On 23rd July 1877, he was arrested for the murder of Brown County Deputy Charles Webb, three years after it happened.

John Wesley Hardin left Austin jail in September of 1877, for Comanche, Texas, which was some 160 miles away, to stand trial for murder. He was found guilty of second degree murder and was sentenced to 25 years of hard labor in the state penitentiary at Huntsville. He arrived there 5th October 1878. During his prison term, he studied law and passed the bar exam. It was also during this time that his wife Jane died, on 6th November 1892. John Wesley was released from prison 17th February 1894, and was granted a full pardon and his citizenship restored by Governor of Texas, J.

S. Hogg. After his release, he joined his children in Gonzales where he began to practice law. On 8 January 1895, he married his second wife Callie Lewis, of London Texas. She was 15 ? and he was 41. Within a week of their marriage, he sent her back to be with her parents. They never divorced nor had the marriage annulled. He moved to El Paso, Texas where he opened a law practice. John Wesley got into an argument with a local lawman named John Selman Jr. , when he arrested his girlfriend for illegally carrying a pistol. Hardin in his quiet and deadly way threatened to kill him.

Selman's father new John Wesley's reputation as a fast and lethal gunfighter, having killed over forty men. So, fearing for his sons' life, John Selman Sr, decided to take the law into his own hands and permanently stop Hardin from carrying out his threat. So, it was on 19th August 1895, in the Acme Saloon in El Paso, Texas, somewhere between 11pm and midnight that John Wesley Hardin, Texas' most notorious gunfighter in American history life came to an end, shot in the back of the head while his back was turned, by John Selman Sr, while he was rolling dice at the bar.

He never had the slightest chance to defend himself. Do I believe John Wesley Hardin was a cold blooded killer? No I don't. I believe he was a product of the times and was very self aware with a strong sense of survival. I also believe he only killed, in self defense, those that needed killing Rest in Peace John Wesley Hardin

Works Cited

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