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John Wesley Hardin Slept Here

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John Wesley Hardin was born in Bonham, Fannin County, Texas, on May 26, 1853, the son of James G. Hardin, a frontier Methodist preacher. The proud parents christened the boy with the name John Wesley in honor of the founder of their church.

He grew up in a typical frontier lifestyle and received an average education for that era which followed the Civil War when Texas was still filled with hatred and strife. His first serious crime was committed in 1868 when he shot a black man that he said was trying to bully him.

Those were the early days of the Reconstruction period when Texas was ruled by hated Union forces and a State Police composed mostly of freed slaves. John Wesley was 15 years old at that time, and his father believed that under the circumstances, it would be impossible for his son to get a fair trial. Therefore, the young boy became a fugitive.

In the next ten years (1868-1878) he killed 27 men. According to his autobiography, Hardin killed the aforementioned man, his first, while visiting an uncle near Livingston in Polk County. He then fled a few miles north to the rural community of Loggalls Prairie where an elder brother taught school. Here he spent his time hunting wild cattle and game. A short time later his brother warned him the United States soldiers had learned of his whereabouts and were coming after him. Hardin then started hunting the soldiers. He located them in a deep creek bed, and after the ensuing gun battle two white soldiers lay dead, and one black man was dying. He

started the battle with a double-barrelled shotgun, and ended it with his cap-and-ball sixshooter.

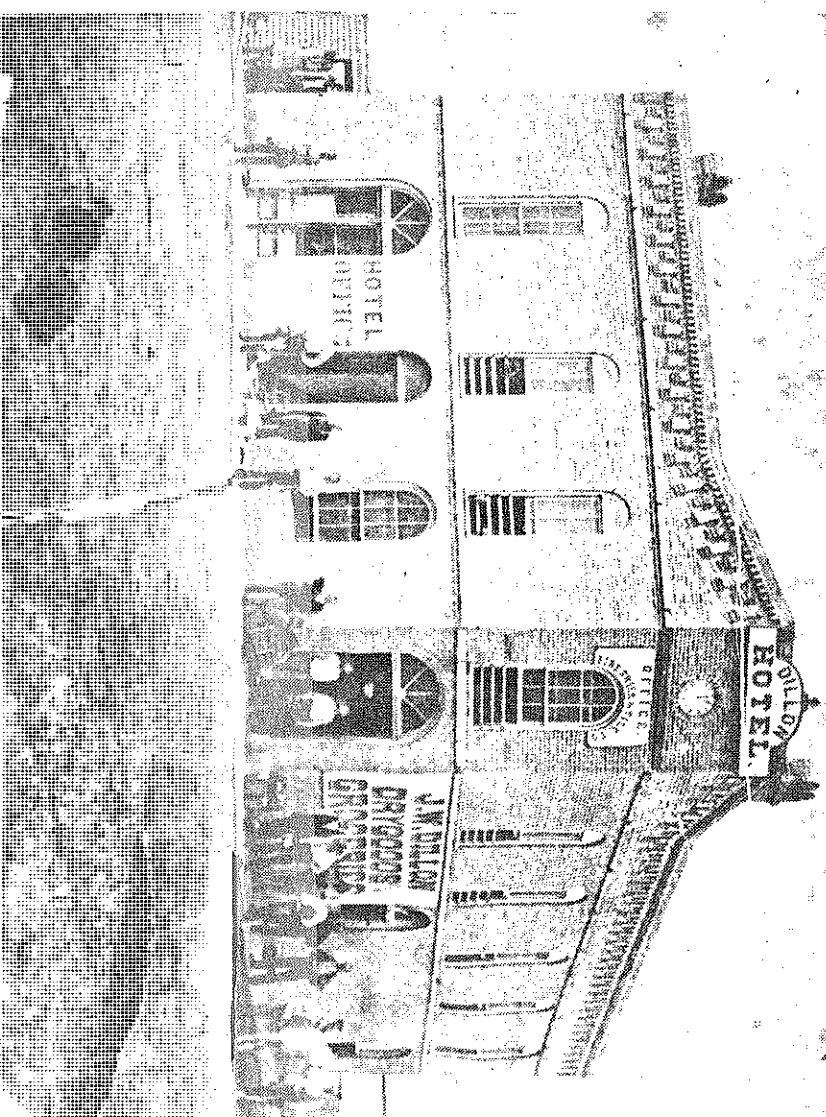
In January, 1869, he went with his father to Navarro County and taught school near Pisga for one term and then became a cowboy and drove cattle to shipping points. On cattle drives he became an expert gambler playing poker, seven-up, eucher, and betting on any kind of horse racing.

The main thing that would rouse his hatred in those days was the way Northern carpet-baggers treated old Confederate soldiers. According to his autobiography, Hardin heard of an incident in a neighboring town where disabled Confederate veterans were being harassed by a recently freed slave. Hardin then dressed himself as an old man and met him on the road to town. As the man approached him and ordered him out of the road, he stopped and began popping his whip at the disguised Hardin and began calling him vile names. As the whip finally hit Hardin, Hardin jerked off his mask and pointed his pistol straight into the man's face. Speaking slowly and with a trace of a smile on his face, Hardin told him he intended to kill him for his cruelty to old men, but that first he would give him a chance to pray and make things right with his Maker. The terrified man dropped to his knees and began praying for his life. During this time, Hardin fired his gun near the man's head and let him go. Hardin arrogantly said that the man then became a fine and respected man in the community.

In this same area, Hardin killed many men, and fled first to Horn Hill in Limestone County on his way to Brenham in Washington County. When he arrived in Horn Hill, a circus was in progress.

In Hardin's own words as taken from his autobiography:

"About 25 miles from Pisga a circus was going on at a place called Horn Hill. One of the circus men had had a row with some of the citizens, resulting in some men being shot. We knew nothing about this and upon getting to town went to a hotel to get a bed.



Dillon Hotel — Corner Narcissus and Adams Street, Kosse.

The circus people had all the beds engaged, so we could not get one. About 10 P.M. we went out to the circus campfires. It was quite cold and while we were all standing round the fire I accidentally struck the hand of a circus man who was lighting his pipe with a fagot from the fire. I begged his pardon at once and assured him it was a pure accident. He, however, just roared and bellowed and swore he would 'smash my nose.' I told him to smash and be damned, that I was a kind of a smasher myself. He said: 'You are, are you?' and struck me on the nose, and started to pull his gun. I pulled mine and fired. He fell with a .45 ball through his head."

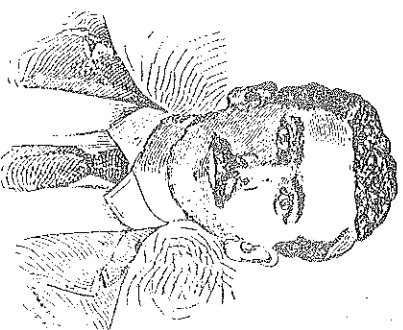
After this episode, Hardin came to Kosse. It was here that history records another infamous incident from the exploits of this notorious criminal. Quoting again from Hardin's autobiography:

"I was young then and loved every pretty girl I met, and at Kosse I met one and we got along famously together. I made an engagement to call on her that night and did so. I had not been there long when someone made a row at the

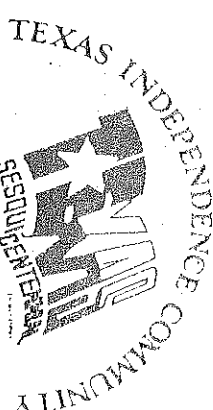
door of the house. She got scared and told me it was her sweetheart, and about this time the fellow came in and told me he would kill me if I did not give him \$100.00. I told him to go slow, and not to be in such a hurry; that I only had about \$50.00 or \$60.00 in my pocket, but if he would go with me to the stable I would give him more as I had the money in my saddle pockets. He said he would go, and I, pretending to be scared, started for the stable. He said, 'Give me what you have got first.' I told him all right, and in so doing, dropped some of it on the floor. He stooped down to pick it up and as he was straightening up I pulled my pistol and fired. The ball struck him between the eyes and he fell over, a dead robber. I stopped long enough to get back most of my money

and resumed my journey to Brenham."

He arrived there the end of January, 1870 and went to his uncle Bob Hardin's home where he farmed with him a short while. The next several years of his life were spent in a turbulent fashion, gambling and killing men. He was finally captured in July, 1877, and sentenced to the Huntsville penitentiary for 25 years. He served 17 years and was pardoned February 17, 1894. During his incarceration in the penitentiary, Hardin studied law and after his release was admitted to the bar. He went to El Paso, then a wild town, to set up his law practice but then returned to his old life of gambling and drinking and was killed August 19, 1895, in the Acme saloon by the famous lawman John Selman.



JOHN WESLEY HARDIN



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