

***SERGEANT
W. J. L. SULLIVAN***



***TWELVE YEARS
IN THE SADDLE FOR
LAW AND ORDER
ON THE FRONTIERS
OF TEXAS***

Sergeant W. J. L. Sullivan

Twelve Years in the Saddle for Law and Order on the Frontiers of Texas

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Liam Alcott

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Prefatory

In offering this book to the public, I have not undertaken to present a history of my life. I do not consider my life of enough importance to warrant making a book about it. What I have undertaken to do is to tell some of the exciting experiences that have fallen to the lot of that noble band, the Texas Ranger force, of which I had the honor to be a member for twelve years. I had the leading part, it is true, in the incidents related, but the reader will see that I was not the whole show, there were others. I have prefixed some brief notes concerning my ancestry, and some incidents of my youth, and have followed with true accounts, written in my own plain way, of the principal events of my career as a sergeant of the Rangers.

I have introduced plates herein, made from photographs, showing the faces of some of the most noted criminals in the annals of Texas; also photo illustrations of some of my dear comrades—all of them, in fact, that I could procure for this edition of my book. In a future edition, I will probably, be able to add the likenesses of others.

For valuable assistance in the preparation of these pages, I am indebted to numerous friends, who I will not enumerate by name, but whose kindness will ever be remembered by me. I solicit their continued help, and will appreciate suggestions that may be made by these and other friends and patriotic Texans in general, for use in a contemplated future edition of this work.

With a respectful bow to my audience—the public—and a plea for their indulgence instead of their exacting criticism,

I am,Very cordially, The Author

W. J. L. Sullivan

My Ancestry

My father, Tom Sullivan, was born and raised at No. 99 Broome Street, New York City, where he engaged in business as a master mechanic. My grandfather, John Sullivan, was born in Ireland. He and my grandmother moved to New York City and settled on Broome Street, where my father, who was an only child, was born. My grandfather was a Mason by order and also by occupation. Just before my father's death my grandfather wrote him that he was coming to him to bring him fifteen hundred dollars that he had collected from the rents of my father's property, which was in the City of New York. He started out with the money, as he said he would, and has never been heard of up to seven years ago, when a bankbook of his was found in a savings bank in New York.

My father went to Perry County, Alabama, and met and married my mother, Summer McFarlen, and they moved to Winston County, Mississippi, where my father engaged in farming until his death.

I A Runaway

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I was born in Winston County, Mississippi, on the 10th day of July, in 1851. My father had died seventy-nine days before my birth, leaving my mother with three other children besides me. Later on my mother married a Mr. Presley, of Leek County, and two children were born to them. My stepfather moved with us to Bradley County, Arkansas, where my mother died when I was but eight years of age.

My stepfather married again. That left me, as it proved to be, in a bad predicament. I had no father nor mother, and my stepfather, after my mother's death, had married another woman. My only sister also married, and soon after that my brother, Tom, died, which left my other brother, Jim, and me to take care of ourselves as best we could. Our troubles had only begun, however, for in 1861 the Civil War broke out, and my stepfather, Mr. Presley, and my brother-in-law went to the front, where both were killed, fighting for the cause of the Confederacy[1]. When Presley went to the war he left Jim and me with his father-in-law, a Mr. Jeams. It was a cruel fate for us to meet. "Old man Jeams," as he was commonly called, was very hard on Jim and me. A merciless tyrant, with no feeling or principle, he beat us many times until we were so stunned and stupefied that we could not realize whether we were dead or alive. It is a terrible thing for poor, little, innocent children to fall into the tight, greedy clutches of such a man as this.

Jeans was known all over that section of the country as a hard character, and the soldiers stationed in that vicinity learned how brutal he was to my brother and me and paid him a visit one night, about two o'clock, to adjust matters with him with the aid of a new rope, which one of the men carried for convenience on the horn of his saddle. There were about twenty-five in the party, and they called Jeams out to the gate for an interview. One man in the squad, a Mr. Bloxom, had a greater grudge than the others against Jeams; for the latter had stolen a fine milk cow from Bloxom's widowed daughter, of which fact Bloxom had informed the others of the party. After getting Jeams out of the house, they asked him where the two little boys were, who lived with him. Jeams answered that they were in bed. They then told him to rouse us and bring us to the gate, which he promptly did. They asked us if we were living with "old man Jonathan Jeams." We told them that we were. Then they asked us if our stepfather and brother-in-law were not fighting in the war. We answered that they were. The soldiers then asked us if it was not true that Jeams beat and abused us a great deal[1q]. They immediately followed that question up with other inquiries as to the manner in which we were generally mistreated by our stepfather's father-in-law. Brother Jim was afraid to tell them the truth, for fear his guardian would make it all the harder for him in the future, so he denied that he was mistreated, and said that Jeams was good to us.

I spoke up when Jim got through and told the soldiers that my brother was afraid to tell the truth, that Jeams whipped and abused us all the time, and that occasionally he would beat us nearly to death. Jim contradicted the things that I told them, but the soldiers said that if his story had corroborated mine, they would break Jeams neck right

there with their rope. This talk, however, frightened Jim all the more, and when they asked him again if “Old Jeams” wasn’t making slaves of us, he vigorously denied it. They asked Jim if Jeams had stolen the cow that belonged to Bloxom’s daughter, but Jim got further from the truth than ever, and denied that too.

I knew that Jeams had stolen the cow and killed her for beef, and I told the soldiers that; but the statements that Jim and I had made were conflicting, and the soldiers would not hang him.

They still believed Jeams to be guilty, however, and lectured him about an hour and a half before they let him go to bed. They told him they would watch him after that, and see that he conducted himself properly as long as he lived in that community. Jim and I went back to bed, but could sleep no more the rest of the night for thinking over this exciting episode.

If Jim had not been so frightened, and had borne me out in my statements, the soldiers would have hung Jeams, and from that hour we would have been entirely and forever free from that heartless tyrant; but, as it was, we lay in our bed the remainder of that eventful night, debating, in whispers, as to whether the soldiers visit, since it resulted as it did, would make our life more pleasant or more miserable. Since Jeams had heard what I had to say to the soldiers, and since he was permitted to live on guard over me, I decided that he was going to make things even more disagreeable for me, if possible, than ever before; so I told my brother that I was going to make my escape the next day if I got a chance.

I knew that the sooner I got off the better, so at twelve o’clock I bade my brother goodbye, climbed over the fence behind the barn, and hit the trail like a deer. I ran as swiftly as my legs could carry me, and jumped over logs and

bushes to save the time it would take to go around them. A few times I looked back just long enough to see if I was being pursued; then I would run faster than ever on my way to Mr. Bloxom, the man whose daughter's cow was stolen by Jeams. I enjoyed the prospects of getting out of Jeams reach. If I had not run away from him, he would have made a "shipwreck" of me for telling the soldiers about his lawlessness. Soon I, myself, was to be with those soldiers, and to have their protection, and I was glad.

When I reached Bloxom's home he saluted me, and told me that I had done right, and asked me where my brother was. I told him that he was still in Jeams hands. Bloxom then took occasion to remark that Jeams would have been a dead man, if my brother's story had not conflicted with the statements which I had made the night before. I asked Mr. Bloxom if he thought I could stay with the soldiers. He assured me that I could, and got his son, Tom, to saddle his horse and take me over to Carter's regiment. I rode behind Toni, and we reached the soldiers' camp some time after dark.

Jeams guessed that I had gone to Bloxom's and put my brother on a mule and sent him over there in search of me. Bloxom advised him to join me and stay with the army. Jim told him that he couldn't do that, as he had the "old man's" mule, and that he had to go back on that account. Bloxom sent the mule back to Jeams by a soldier, and some one conducted Jim to the regiment where I had gone, he reaching camp an hour or two after I did. Jim was afraid to run away, but felt mightily relieved when the soldiers took us with them and gave us their protection.

II

Better Days

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Never shall I forget the night that brother and I reached the soldiers' camp, when we first joined Carter's regiment. Everything seemed very different from what we were used to, but we felt easier and more comfortable. We were not afraid that we would be jerked up at any moment and cuffed about and abused, as was Jeams' manner of treating us. The soldiers felt sorry for Jim and me and treated us as kindly as they could. Colonel Giddings had charge of this regiment, and knowing the plight we were in told us that we could stay with his men as long as we wished. We were too young to fight, but we began to feel as if we were real soldiers. Once, while we were with the regiment, the soldiers captured, somewhere on the Arkansas River, four hundred mules, one hundred and twenty-five or thirty wagons, and several Yankees. At another place, we captured about three hundred beeves[2].

We had been with the regiment about fifteen months, when three of the soldiers, Trave Burton, Bill Henley and Leonard Burns, got furloughs to go home. This was about two months before the close of the war. The three men asked Brother Jim and me to go home with them. We accepted their kind invitation, and with them left the army. For a little while I lived with Leonard Burns, and James stayed with Trave Burton. Later on, however, we got together, and both of us lived with Mr. and Mrs. Bill Henley,

with whom we stayed for a number of years, not leaving them until we were about grown.

Mr. and Mrs. Henley were like father and mother to James and me. I never knew before what it was to be in such a good home. It seemed a paradise to me, who had been left an orphan boy, unprotected, and at the mercy of rough, careless, unfeeling people, and I could well appreciate my new surroundings. It is sad for little children to be left without a father and mother to take care of them, and when poor, little orphans endure what James and I had to bear, they should be very thankful when they are placed in a good home, as we were. God pity the orphan children of this world, and may He bless the kind-hearted people who take them in and raise them to become useful men and women.

Mr. and Mrs. Henley always taught and encouraged us to be honest and industrious, and to have a proper regard for the law. Through respect for their memory, and because I owed it to myself and to my own father and mother who died in my infancy, I always lived up to those teachings. Since I have served the people of Texas as a Ranger and dealt with numerous criminals, I have learned through personal observation, the wisdom of the teachings of those good old people. The world is full of tragedies, and, having been a state officer for over twelve years, I have witnessed many of them myself. Many criminals have brought shame, misery and trouble upon themselves, their families and their friends, because they started out in their youth with no respect for the laws of God and man. In the following chapters I shall tell you the tragic story of dozens of criminals who wound up their careers in the penitentiary or, in a few instances, at the rope's end.

In some cases the men had no parents, while children, to care for them, nor any one else to teach them how to

become honest, upright and useful. In other cases, however, they were men who had parents, but, while young and “smart,” had disregarded the teachings of their elders, and, later on, had flagrantly violated the laws of their country, until they were finally locked within the four walls of a penitentiary, their liberty gone, and themselves disgraced and despised. They are left in dark, lonely cells to brood day and night over their unhappy fate, and to realize the folly of their former misbehavior.

I have encountered many men who appeared, at first sight, to be good, but who were really tough characters, and who, unfortunately possessed much influence for evil over their companions. Thus, young people should be very careful with whom they associate. I have, also, seen men in good circumstances disobey the law for some material acquisition, and lose whatever they had thereby gained; together with all they ever possessed before, trying to stave off the prosecution; and they were fortunate, even at that, if they are not finally sent to the penitentiary. With these impressive lessons before me, and because I ever wanted to do my duty and be honest, thereby gaining my own self-respect, I always tried to do what I thought was right, and I respected and obeyed the laws of my country. Once or twice, when I was young, I laid wagers with money, and several times I drank whiskey; but I soon saw the folly in these, the only vicious habits that I ever started, and nipped them in the bud. For twelve years my business took me into the worst saloons, gambling dens, and low dives in Texas, but I always managed to keep from falling into the habits of the people whom I encountered in these places.

I am getting old now, and, as people usually do in their declining years, I spend many of my idle hours in meditation, thinking ever of the incidents of my past life;

and, while thus reviewing my record as an officer and an honest citizen, I am rewarded with the only genuine happiness and satisfaction that man can experience while, with tottering footsteps, he is nearing the gateway through which he passes into the unknown world beyond.

III

An Indian Raid

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In 1871 I joined a party of cattlemen who were on their way to Ellsworth, Kansas, to which place they were driving three thousand head of cattle, which belonged to Tom Pullman and a Mr. Matthews. These two gentlemen owned three more herds of beeves, with about three thousand head to a herd.

We were traveling on the Tom Chism Trail, which led to Smoky River. This was in the early days, before there were any railroads to amount to anything in Texas, and cattle had to be driven all the way to Kansas across country.

The Tom Chism Trail was always lined all the way from Texas to Kansas. It was a great sight to see so many cattle driven on this trail, all bound for the same market. One could look forward or backward and not be able to see the end of the long string of cattle.

I was just a young man then, and went along to help drive this herd of cattle to market. I enjoyed the trip very much, as the scenery was beautiful and camping out was delightful for us cowboys.

The grass all along the route was as fine as it could be, and kept the cattle reasonably fat, considering the long journey, and when they reached their destination it would only take a few days rest to get them in perfect condition.

Those were great days in Texas, when money was plentiful and wages good. We received splendid pay for driving cattle and the work was most enjoyable. Game was

plentiful all the way from Texas to Kansas. The country was full of elk, buffalo, antelope and deer, and we always had plenty of venison to eat, after our appetites were sharpened from a day's riding in the saddle.

We had our cattle bedded near the Canadian River one rainy night, and Tom Murphy of Austin, and I were guarding them. At twelve o'clock that night about fifteen Indians made a sudden raid on the cattle and stampeded them. The cattle and horses were very much frightened and scattered in every direction. All the cowboys came to our rescue.

The first dash the Indians made they cut off about seventy-five cattle from the herd. The other cattle then ran about two miles and a half in a circle before they "broke the mill."

I was on my saddle when the Indians made the raid, but I was nodding. My horse, however, instantly realized the situation and made a spring forward, throwing me behind the saddle before I roused myself sufficiently to know what the trouble was. It happened, however, that I succeeded in grabbing the horn of my saddle, and I finally managed to regain my proper position.

It was impossible to control the cattle, as the Indians had so badly frightened them. All of them got away from us that night except fifty head, and it took us two weeks to gather them all up, as they scattered for miles over the country. When we got them rounded up we took them on to Kansas without further trouble and sold them.

The Indians captured in their raid on our herd about one hundred head of cattle in all, and I imagine they had quite a feast.

IV

A Thief

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While I was in Quanah, in 1896, helping to hold court in the George Isaacs ease, four hundred beef steers were brought into town one day from the Spur ranch. Eighteen cowboys came in with the cattle, and before they left town one of them stole a suit of clothes and a gold watch from a Mr. Greathouse, a merchant of Quanah. Bob Dawson came to me while I was in court helping to guard Isaacs and told me that he wanted me to assist them in running down the thief. I told him that I would, so we got our horses and started out after the cowboys.

We followed them fifteen miles to a place where they had stopped for dinner, and we arrested them and told them that we wanted to search the whole outfit for the clothes and watch.

They said, “all right,” and we made the search and found the stolen articles; so we took the boss out and told him that he had better advise the guilty party to “own up,” or we would have to take the whole bunch back to town. He failed to get a confession from any of them, so we arrested the whole bunch, boss and all, and escorted them to Quanah.

In the party there was one man, who weighed about 260 pounds, who kept edging around me, trying to get hold of my six-shooter, but I stood him off, and we made him hitch up the wagon and take the others back to Quanah. They had a hundred head of cow ponies, and they took them back with them. When we marched into Quanah with the men

and ponies, everybody yelled out, "Yonder comes Coxey's army."

About dark one of the men, by the name of Sloane, plead guilty. His brother had begged him to confess, which he did. He was lodged in the Quanah jail, and was charged with stealing enough property to land him in the penitentiary, but the state made it a finable offense, and his companions paid it out and they left together for their ranch, a happy set of cowboys.

V

Ben Hughes

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While trying to capture Ben Hughes, who was wanted for train robbery in the Indian Territory, the officers had a fierce battle with him, during which Deputy Sheriff Whitehead, who was a Cherokee Indian, was killed. Hughes was tried for this, but was acquitted, as the killing occurred at night and no one saw him shoot Whitehead, and it could not be proven that he was responsible for the officer's death.

I carried Ben Hughes' wife from the Union depot in Fort Worth to the Windsor Hotel, with instructions from Grude Britton, who was sergeant at that time, to make a thorough search for money. Mrs. Windsor, the proprietress of the hotel, assisted me in making the search on Mrs. Hughes' person for the money which we thought her husband had gotten and turned over to her. I got Mrs. Windsor to help me in searching the woman, because I felt a delicacy in making a search on the person of a lady. I had the respect for her that any gentleman should have for a lady, even if I was searching her for stolen money. I only found about twelve or fifteen dollars on her, and she said that was her own money; so I let her keep it. Mrs. Hughes looked to be about twenty-five years of age.

Sam Farmer and Sergeant J. M. Britton took Hughes to Dallas and placed him in jail, and Mrs. Hughes left that evening for Palo Pinto County.

VI

A Buffalo Hunt

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E. N. Waldrup, Bob Gunn and I left Logan's Gap, Comanche County, February 1877, for Tom Green County on a big buffalo hunt, intending to make Jim Criner's ranch our headquarters. Criner was a brother-in-law of Bob Gunn.

After reaching Tom Green County, I saw about a mile ahead of me a bunch of buffalo, and remarked to one of the boys that I was going to rope one of them. I dismounted, tightened my saddle girths, and mounted again and made for the bunch of buffalo. They were traveling east. The morning was very cold, as the wind was blowing from the east. As soon as they discovered me they started in a run for their life. There were about one hundred and fifty in the bunch. I ran on to a three-year old bull, threw my lariat, but it failed to catch, as I was throwing against the wind, which was very high. The second throw I put him into my loop. The high, fast bucking and pulling came off then and there. Birch, my horse, was not thoroughly trained and didn't like the scent of buffalo at all. I had a hard time controlling him with this raging, rearing beast tied to the horn of my saddle, as this was about the first bunch of buffalo Birch had ever seen, and the only one he had ever been tied to. Birch and I were like the man that bought the elephant—didn't hardly know what to do with him. I made two runs around the buffalo and got his legs tangled in my lariat. I then made a straight run on him, "busting" him against the ground. When he got up he discovered our horses and wagons and

took the outfit for his brother bunch of buffalo. He then made a run for horses and wagon, and when we got to the wagon I decided to take him to Jim Criner's ranch, which was about ten or twelve miles distant, and neck him to a steer. I tied him to the hind axle of the wagon, and he led as docile as any horse for about three hundred yards, and all at once he took a notion to stop, and the horses pulling the wagon took a notion to stop also. We started the horses up again, and they kept pulling until they led him over, at the same time jerking his right shoulder out of place. I had him to kill then, and lost my buffalo. This was a grand old hunt, and proved very profitable to us. The buffalo in that country were as thick as cattle and went from three to ten thousand in a bunch. There were also thousands of antelope, and wild turkeys were so thick that they would hardly get out of one's way.

VII

A Stolen Herd

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I was employed in 1877 by Bill Yoakum, a cattleman to help him drive a herd of three hundred cattle from his place in Comanche County to Clear Fork, on the Brazos River. While in his service, Yoakum told me that he and Jim Gregg, who was Yoakum's partner for several years, had stolen these cattle and burnt their brands out and put on another brand. He told me that he had stolen the cattle out of Tarrant, Johnson, Collins and other counties, and that he never took over five head out of the same range. He also said that he had made it a rule to steal only from men who were not able to prosecute him heavily if he was caught.

One day Yoakum asked me to join him, saying that we would make a fortune stealing cattle, but I told him that I would let him know about it later on.

Near Yoakum's place lived a Mrs. Holt, a widow, who had bought a milk cow from Yoakum, paying him a good price for it. Yoakum laughingly remarked to me one day that he had stolen the cow which he had sold to Mrs. Holt from her range and that she didn't know the difference.

I said to myself, "You two dirty thieves" (meaning Yoakum and his partner, Gregg), "if I can catch you I certainly will do so." After that I kept my eyes open and watched Yoakum very closely. Whenever I managed to get off to myself, I walked around the herd and took down the brands of these three hundred cattle that had been stolen from different parties throughout the state.

After procuring sufficient evidence to show that they had stolen the cattle, I went to Brackenridge and informed the sheriff of these facts, and he and I went to the office of the justice of the peace, where I swore out warrants for the arrest of Yoakum and Gregg.

The sheriff sent his deputy, Frank Freeman, with me to make the arrest, and we reached the herd late in the evening. Gregg was with the herd, grazing cattle in a mesquite flat, when we found him, and we arrested him first. Turning my head toward the wagon, I saw Mrs. Yoakum standing on the wagon tongue motioning her husband to run, which he did. Freeman and I immediately placed Gregg in the charge of other officers who had come along, and set out in pursuit of Yoakum. Yoakum was riding a fast saddle mule, but was caught by Freeman and I, and we brought him back to where the other men were.

While the deputy sheriff was reading the warrant to Yoakum, the latter, being angered at me, suddenly made a play for his six-shooter[31] to kill me, but I was too quick for him and blocked his game. Several men who watched us arrest Yoakum and Gregg were in sympathy with them, and claimed that Yoakum did not try to draw a gun on me. The deputy sheriff, being busy reading the warrant, did not see Yoakum's movements, so he could not say whether I was right or wrong in attacking Yoakum. Old Man Wilson (W. R.) seemed to be the "worst stuck" on Yoakum, and I thought for quite a while that I would have him to kill, but he eventually quieted down.

I ate no supper that night, nor breakfast the next morning, and drank nothing but a little water out of a creek. The following morning we started back to Brackenridge, taking our two prisoners to jail. Mrs. Yoakum accompanied us to town.

17 A regional railroad serving Texas and the Southern Plains in the late 19th century (formally the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway); it carried passengers and freight between Fort Worth and points toward Colorado and later became part of larger rail networks.

18 A bitless form of horse headgear using a rope or braided noseband (bosal) to guide and control a horse, commonly used in Western riding and working with horses in the 19th-century American West.

19 A mark, stamp, or notation made by a merchant on goods to indicate ownership or purchase cost; nineteenth-century storekeepers often used such marks to identify and recover stolen merchandise.

20 A sudden, strong cold front on the southern Plains that brings a rapid temperature drop, high winds, and often snow or sleet; the term was commonly used in late-19th-century Texas weather descriptions.

21 A U.S. Army post established in 1869 in what is now Oklahoma (near present-day Lawton) that served as a regional military garrison and center for operations and interactions with Plains Indian tribes in the late 19th century.

22 A 19th-century colloquial name for parts of the Texas frontier associated with the Comanche and frontier ranching; exact boundaries varied by time and author but it generally referred to areas of northern Texas during the late 1800s.

23 In late 19th-century American usage a “hack” was a horse-drawn carriage or wagon—often a hired cab or light vehicle used for local transport—rather than a motor vehicle.

24 A 19th-century U.S. jurisdiction principally in the area of present-day Oklahoma that was set aside for Native American tribes; it remained distinct until Oklahoma became a state in 1907.

25 Refers to a scheduled professional prizefight in 1896 involving boxer Bob Fitzsimmons and an opponent surnamed Maher; Texas officials (including Governor Culberson) ordered law-enforcement to prevent the bout from taking place in Texas, and the match was ultimately staged across the U.S.–Mexico border.

26 El Reno is a town now in central Oklahoma; in the 1890s it lay in the U.S. 'Indian Territory' — land set aside for Native American tribes and governed as a federal territory until Oklahoma achieved statehood in 1907.

27 A local legal case mentioned earlier in the book for which the author served as a witness; the chapter does not give further details, and the specific incident cannot be identified here without consulting the preceding chapter or contemporary records.

28 A named ford or riverside campsite on the Colorado River used by the author’s party; the chapter places it about twenty miles from San Saba, but the precise modern