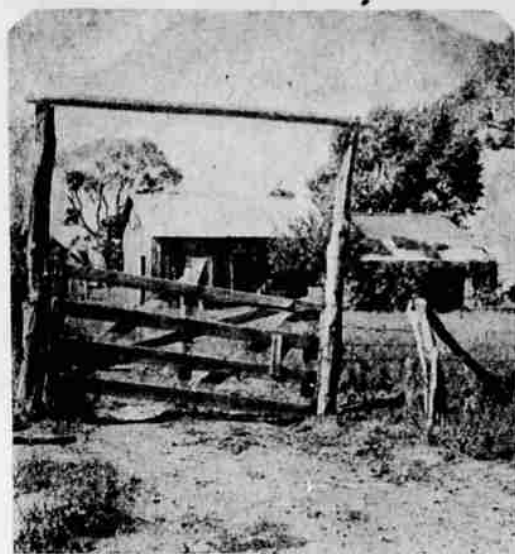


Shot In the Dark Heralds Strange Death Feud



The Old Blevins Home as It Looks Today in Pleasant Valley. Hamp Blevins Was a Graham Partisan, and the First White Man to Die in the Fatal Feud.

Tragic Arizona War Starts With Bullet Fired Into Coffee Pot Of Old Indian Herder

Editor's Note: This is the true story of the most dramatic feud in the history of Western America. The second, and concluding installment, will appear next week.

By Oren Arnold

Part 1

MOST people say that big Tom Graham fired that first shot, which was the beginning of hostilities in the bloodiest family feud in all the stirring history of Western America.

More likely it was one of Tom's younger brothers, an impulsive dare-devil sort of youngster who was too quick on the trigger anyway. Tom was a mature man, a cattle rancher who did not love fighting for its own sake. Oh, he was fearless enough—big and powerful, with a black mustache and black eyes that gave him a fierce countenance. But he was more direct; he wouldn't have given that sinister first-shot warning. Warnings were ever rare in this Pleasant or "Vengeance" Valley.

The shot came in darkness. It hit not a man, but a man's camp-fire; hit "plunk-aplash" right in his coffee pot and splattered boiling coffee all over the embers. The camper was an Indian, a trustworthy fellow who had made the mistake of herding sheep below the "deadline." His mistake cost him his life later.

The whole feud originated largely in arguments over grazing land, about the year 1887. Tom Graham and other cattle ranchers had herds of cattle in that isolated but fertile spot in Arizona known as Pleasant Valley. It was bounded on the north by a hundred-mile cliff-like formation called Mogollon Rim, or just The Rim. To the north of it, a number of sheep raisers were developing their flocks also, and they looked with yearning eyes at the luscious grass and abundant water in the Valley below. They decided to take their flocks down.

Cattlemen despised sheep raisers, harbored a traditional contempt for them. Moreover, the Pleasant Valley ranchers wanted a monopoly on their fine grass (really no more than the sheep men's, since it was all public land at the time) so they issued blunt warnings: "You can't bring yore dangd sheep below The Rim, and ef you do, hit's war!"

AND war it was. A terrible, vindictive war between two families and their respective friends which lasted a decade or more, which was so desperate that it ended only when one last man was left alive!

The memories of it still rankle in the breasts of persons living in Pleasant Valley, and occasional reverberations of it, in the form of social spats and personal difficulties, are heard there to this day. One or two of the original fighters are still living, and each has his coterie of friends.

But of the two main families, the Gramhams and the Tewksburys, only one is known to be alive. He is Ed Tewksbury, said to live a sort of hermit life in the hills around the mining town of Globe. Few people ever see him, and they say that he only glares fiercely when the feud is mentioned to him.

The shot in the coffee pot was a warning by a cattleman, Graham, or his henchman, to the herder who tended a flock of sheep owned by the Daggs Brothers, first to defy the cattle-men's edict and come below The Rim. Their herder was driven away, and later found murdered, and their sheep were scattered so they could not be recovered.

The Daggs boys were so angry that they hired men to guard their next herd, which they stubbornly decided to bring down. The guards they hired were members of the Tewksbury family, who were half Indian and half white, hardened frontiersmen, skilled shots, afraid of nothing under the sun.

The Tewksburys had been cattlemen, strangely. They had even been nominally friendly to Tom Graham, leader of his family clan, due to their fighting against a common enemy, the Apache Indians. But of late the Tewksburys had "done poorly" with their cows, financially, and so were willing to earn money at any sort of job. If they had any pride about working for sheep men, the swallowed it. They had several mem-

Determined Graham Supporters Waited in Ambush for Approach of Daring Sheep Herders.

bers of their immediate family, and somehow they had or acquired a lot of friends.

THEIR acceptance of the task of guarding sheep was tantamount to a declaration of war, and the Gramhams took up the challenge as warned. Thereafter it was shoot and shoot to kill, ambush and trickery at all times, until, in the end, nearly 100 persons had been killed and some "new standards in violence" had been set.

A Graham partisan named Blevins, an elderly man, was the first white man to die. His grave is still pointed out to the occasional visitor who penetrates the wild and isolated forest trails of the region. I went there a short time ago with an American Army lieutenant and photographed the grave. Blevins just disappeared, then was found dead. Tewksburys were known to have killed him.

At once four Gramhams and four members of the "Hash Knife" outfit, a band of cowboys working with the Gramhams, started a search for the murderers. In a posse they rode all morning, and at noon they were hungry.

They did a normal thing—what every other hungry traveler in the west does. They turned in at the first mountain home they saw and asked for food. This happened to be the home of a family named Middleton, and nobody as yet suspected them of being on either side of the cattle-sheep war.

The eight men rode up to the door, but saw no one at first. One of them called out.

"Hallo!"

A woman stuck her head out the door.

"What is it?" she demanded, rudely.

"Kin we have a mite to eat, ma'am? We're hungry."

"Naw, I can't give you tramps no vittles!" she answered spitefully and slammed the door shut again.

THIS was unheard of in a region where hospitality was a law, but nothing could be done about it. The horsemen slowly turned to ride away.

As they did so, a volley of rifle shots came from the cabin.

Several men were wounded, and two of them, named John Payne and Hamp Blevins, instantly fell to the ground dead. George Tucker, a third, stuck to his horse but died a few minutes later, even as he clung to his saddle, galloping away with his five friends. These five sent an answering volley of pistol shots into the cabin, but never waited to see what harm they did.

Jim and Ed Tewksbury were accused of having been the leaders of the feud-men in that cabin who fired from ambush and the Gramhams forthwith organized a band to hunt them down. News of the tragedy excited everybody in the countryside, for everybody now knew that there could be no stopping the family war, as some had hoped to do. A few sane persons had clung to the hope that the preacher who often came into that region, Rev. Hammar Pool, would prevail upon the factions to settle their differences without firearms, but he was helpless against these vindictive men. They would listen to no sort of compromise.

"It rapidly got so it wasn't safe to travel about the valley," says Rev. Pool, who is still living. "Both the Gramhams and the Tewksburys quit their work and loaded their belts with ammunition and guns, and then started out to kill."

"If they met somebody they didn't know, they were likely to jump to the conclusion that he was an enemy, and shoot. A man on the trail at night was very likely to get shot from behind, just on suspicion."

"When I went anywhere about the valley, I made it a point to ride along a singin' at the top of my voice. I liked to sing anyhow. And I knowed everybody would recognize me by my voice even if they couldn't see me clear, and do me no harm."

Other men were not so fortunate in being recognized as harmless non-combatants. G. L.



Vindictive "Vengeance" Valley Clash Between Graham and Tewksbury Clans Leaves Only One Man Alive To Tell Tale That Still Rankles In Settlers' Memories

Dawson, a freight wagon driver, was coming into Pleasant Valley with a load of merchandise, holding his horses' reins. Suddenly some rough men jumped from the underbrush by the roadside and accosted him.

"Whar you think you goin'?" their spokesman demanded.

"Why—why—" he stammered, so taken aback was he, "I—I'm a headin' in towards th' Valley!"

"Not none you ain't! You're turnin' around and goin' back!"

Dawson stared at the men in amazement.

"See here, air you men crazy?" he demanded.

"Ain't this a public trail? I been here before. I'm a tendin' to my own bizness. I don't want none of yore fightin' and carryin' on!"

Only four men were visible to him, but the answer to his protest was a shot from another, somewhere in the bushes. As Dawson stood up in his wagon, holding his reins, the shot struck his hip.

The report also startled his horses. They jumped, simultaneously, and reared up, then came down in a wild run.

Their first lunge brought hooves squarely onto one of the warriors, and in a moment the man had been downed and run over by the wagon itself. It all happened in a second or two. Dawson shouted, "Whoa! Whoa!" and tugged at the reins, but his animals were so scared that they pulled the wagon even faster. It was on a downhill incline at that point, and moved easily.

THE men behind all opened fire with their rifles and Dawson fell, mortally wounded. He crumpled in his own wagon. The runaway horses carried it and him for some miles, until other dwellers in that region finally discovered him. To them Dawson gasped out his story. Nobody ever knew whether the men who attacked him were Tewksburys or Gramhams, for each side accused the other. Dawson said he thought they were Tewksburys.

An old prospector named Track Wilson had another experience in point. He encountered the Gramhams forces one afternoon.

"Me and a friend rode up to the edge of that country," said Wilson, "to see if we could get us a deer. We had heard nothing about the war, then. No newspapers and phones and such in them days, and we'd been in the hills anyhow."

"Well sir, we was just getting to good deer and turkey grounds when, unexpected like, three men stepped outen a clump of junipers and asked who we was. We told 'em. They eyed us closely, and recommended we turn around and go on back home."

"My friend and me sort of got mad about it, so we circled a little and went on like we had been going. About two mile down the trail, however, some more tough-looking fellers stepped out, holding rifles, and asked us ag'in who we was."

"But they didn't recommend. They ordered us, flat footed, to turn around and head for Phoenix and not stop until we got there or we never would get there!"

"We turned our horses about that time, and before we had walked them more than a hundred yards, a shot from behind knocked my hat plumb off me! That settled it! We didn't walk our horses no more until we was plumb tuckered

out and they was too, from running. I ain't been back there since, either!"

WILSON and his friend were more fortunate than Dawson had been. Nobody will ever know just how many innocent persons were slain in that shameful feud, in just such manner.

An eccentric middle-aged fellow, who lived alone in one of the wooded canyons thereabouts, did not show up at the village store for some months. Nobody noticed his absence for a long time, because he was a recluse anyway, without relatives in the region. But a woman happened by his place one day and called to him.

She was amazed to see a pack of frightened animals dart out the door past her and scurry away. She said she thought they were wolves, but they might have been coyotes, that peculiar, dog-like, sneaking breed common in western United States.

There wasn't much left of the man. But an examination of the body and premises indicated that he had been murdered. He was known to be a Graham sympathizer and so blame instantly went to the opposing clan, right or wrong.

One day, by chance, William Graham, younger brother to Tom (and probably he who put that bullet in the Indian's coffee pot) met a Tewksbury sympathizer in the rock store in Pleasant Valley. William's judgment, as I have indicated, was not as good as it might be, although probably normal for a teen-age lad. At any rate he made the mistake of snarling some insult at the other man, who was about 40 years of age.

"Was you addressin' them remarks at me, sir?" the Tewksbury man whose name was Zachary, demanded.

Young Graham sneered at him and said nothing. He appeared to be a little doubtful, now, of his own affrontery and good sense.

"Hev you got a gun on you?" the older man demanded.

The boy still said nothing. But onlookers said that he was unarmed.

"Then here, one of you men hold my pistola," Zachary requested. "I am going to spank a baby!"

The foolish lad was thoroughly frightened by this time, so he did just what any normal lad might be expected to do. He ran.

He darted out the door and down the dirt road. Zachary was right behind him. The race was neck and neck for a little while, that is, it was almost a tie. Some old time say that Zachary did manage to slap young William on the cheek, but that's a detail which no longer matters. Somewhere down the road William had friends, and they were armed if he wasn't. They opened fire—Zachary toppled in a cloud of dust and died there.

THAT same village store figured prominently in several episodes of the Pleasant Valley war. Its rock walls still show scratches and scars where bullets struck them. It is a picturesque old structure, with a well and hand-pulley in front. It is still used as a store-house. But it hasn't the interest held by the crumpled remains of an old one-room log cabin in the vicinity.

In and around that cabin, to my notion, occurred the most dramatic single episode of the



Upper: Jesus Leonardo Mendoza y Lillantino, a Participant in Pleasant Valley War. Lower: Lieutenant Peter Ware at Grave of Hamp Blevins, Killed by Tewksbury Feudists and Buried on Isolated Trail, Marked Only by Ring of Rocks.

whole Graham-Tewksbury feud—not the bloodiest or most costly in lives lost, not the most horrible, but the most dramatic.

Charlie Duchet was a Graham supporter, and engaged from time to time in the active fighting. He also was a rather young man, and he incurred the personal enmity of a Tewksbury partisan, a half-breed Mexican, a romantic sort of fellow whose name seems to have been forgotten.

These two were ever and eternally boasting of their personal prowess. Each was an expert with pistol or knife, and each knew it. Each despised the other, and bragged loudly of what would happen when they met. But they were careful never to meet!

Matters came to a head one calm Sunday morning. A crowd of rough men, gathered to sit and whittle and chew tobacco and swap tales, heard one of these "young roosters" bragging. They were tired of it.

"Go get that Mexican!" a leader of the gang commanded some men. "Let's settle this dangd argyment!"

Duchet and his rival were brought together, and carried to the cabin, a one-room affair made of logs. Every piece of furniture was taken out. The few cracks in the walls were chinked, so that when the door was closed the inside was utter darkness.

Then Duchet and the Mexican were stripped nude, each given a sharp Bowie knife, and locked within!

Nobody told them what to do. Nobody had to. They were just warned that only one would ever be allowed to come out!

The crowd calmly squatted outside and waited. Various and sundry rumblings were heard from within at times, but the audience was not excited. Eventually a rap on the door was heard and somebody called.

Duchet crawled out, bleeding and cut badly. The crowd buried the other man, then quietly went on home to lunch. Such was the laconic manner of this strange duel in the Pleasant Valley feud.

It was soon after this event that a Tewksbury partisan named J. D. Houck shot and killed William Graham, big Tom's young brother.

It seemed to be general knowledge that William "had it coming to him" due to his activities in the clan warfare, but he had been tolerated because of his youth theretofore. But a boy of 16 years or so can wield a rifle in as deadly a manner as a grown man, if he has a mind to.

The death of William, however, did more to infuriate the leader, Tom, than all the other ambushings and murders and killings had done. Tom became a devil of anger, a vengeful and dangerous man. He set about at once to organize his family and his friends to make one last clean-up of the Tewksburys, getting revenge and ending the feud.

Graham took the fight right into the enemy camp, so to speak. Quietly in the night, his men surrounded the very home ranchhouses of the Tewksburys. Most of the men, and some women, were sleeping in one big cabin. It is still standing, only slightly different from what it was in the 1880's.

Soon after dawn, John Tewksbury and a friend of his named Jacobs came out of the house and walked a hundred yards or so up a slope toward some hog pens. With no warning at all the Gramhams opened fire on them, and both men fell dead.

When the battle first started, news of it had been rushed the intervening hundred miles or so to Prescott, nearest town of any size. Deputy Sheriff Meadows came with a strong posse and surprised the Gramhams, forcing them to retire with their slaughter only half done.

Stopping this one battle was about all the sheriff's posse did do, however. They arrested a few men, but could find no positive evidence against anybody, and so eventually the officers went back home.

But in less than a year the Pleasant Valley war ("Pleasant" was a queer misnomer indeed!) broke out with renewed fury, and before it ended this new phase saw some of the most exciting, bloodiest battles of all.

(To be continued.)