

# The San Francisco Vigilantes

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some of the very lawless element we were after found comfort in the seeming protection of the Law and Order Party. Governor Johnson was urged to suppress our committee, and the governor appointed William Tecumseh Sherman, then a member of the banking firm of Page, Bacon & Company, on leave from the United States army, to head the state militia. Sherman found only a small "army" to command—seventy-five men, to be exact—as nearly all the militia had sworn allegiance to the Vigilance Committee.

President Coleman appointed an executive committee as follows:

William T. Coleman, president; Thos. J. L. Smiley, vice president; G. D. L. Farwell, 2d vice president; Isaac Blukome, secretary; Charles Ludlow, assistant secretary; Jules David, treasurer; William Meyer, assistant treasurer; Charles Doane, grand marshal; M. J. Burke, chief of police. Arrington, Wm., Britton, J. W., Bassano, L., Case, Chas. L., Dempster, C. J., Arrington, N. O., Burns, A. M., Brown, A. S., Cray, O. B., Downs, James, Dellesert, E., Flint, E. P., Griesar, Emil, Gorham, E., Hutchings, U. P., Jessup, B. M., Monroe, J. P., Osgood, G. K., Rogers, W. H., Tilling-hast, W. H., Thompson, W. T., Ward, George R., Emery, G. S., Fish, G. H., Goddard, E. B., Gillespie, C. D., Hale, H. M., Labott, H. J., Nutting, Calvin, Page, F. W., Reynolds, W. T., Thompson, S. T., Truett, Myers F.

I was a member of the sub-committee which visited General Sherman who received us very pleasantly and assured us that he would resign the governor's commission before he would place himself in opposition to the committee. In passing, I may say that I met General Sherman in Washington in 1867, when he was second in command, under General Grant, of the armies of the United States. Instantly he recalled me, saying: "Hello, Flint. How's that committee in San Francisco?"

The executive committee of the Vig-

ilance Committee demanded of the sheriff the surrender of Casey, which was refused. On Sunday morning, the military companies were ordered to be under arms in their various armories throughout the city, and at about 10 o'clock they marched to the county jail, surrounding it with a complete cordon, and keeping the crowd a block away. A cannon was planted opposite the jail entrance, the sheriff was called upon to surrender Casey, and again he refused. After some parleying he was given five minutes in which to decide and I am told that he informed Casey of the situation and the prisoner advised the sheriff that it would be unwise further to resist. Just as the time limit was about to expire, the sheriff threw open the doors and permitted Marshal Doane, President Coleman and one other to enter and bring out the prisoner, who was placed in a carriage and taken to Fort Gunny Bags. Cora, the murderer of Richardson, was surrendered on the same day and taken by the committee guard to be incarcerated in the same building with Casey. Thus we were spared the necessity of battering down the jail door with the field-piece that had been trained upon it.

The members of the executive committee were so well known by the community at large that there was no hesitation about endorsing and accepting its personnel, and the confidence of the people increased daily as the committee's responsibilities became great-

er. The first trial was that of Cora. He was summoned before the executive committee and one of our number was appointed to defend him. He was allowed the right to testify, summon witnesses, or produce any evidence that would avail him. But we did not permit quibbling. There was not time for the technicality which so often saves the guilty criminal, and especially in those days when the enforcement of the law was farcical. A very speedy verdict of guilty was rendered

in the case of Cora, and the death penalty inflicted. On the 26th of May Mr. King died, and the same day the trial of Casey was begun. I cannot say very much about the trial, for the reason that there is little to be said. I recall that it was conducted in a dignified manner by the committee, and every one of us was deeply sensible of the grave responsibility that rested upon us. We felt that we were restoring law to the land of our adoption, although apparently we were defying the constituted authorities. There is no necessity for me to attempt to justify our acts, for we all felt that the vindication of justice was our greatest duty, and we did it unflinchingly. Casey was given a fair trial. The proceedings were conducted with the solemnity of a court-martial, and the verdict of guilty was rendered on the morning of the 22d, the day appointed for the funeral of King his victim.

The funeral services of the murdered man were held in the Catholic church, in Stockton street, in the presence of a large concourse of people. Preparations were under way to hang Cora and Casey in the afternoon of the same day. A priest was with them for several hours, preparing them for the end. A force of two thousand armed vigilantes filled the street in front of Fort Gunny Bags. Members of the Executive Committee were engaged with the details of the solemn duty they had to perform. Planks were laid through the main committee room on the second floor of the headquarters, the ends projecting through two windows on Sacramento street. The condemned men, hands tied behind them, attired in white robes and wearing white caps, were led forward on the planks to the open windows where two ropes with nooses hung from beams swung out over the windows, and the ends of the planks had been fixed with hinges so they would drop when a weight was placed on them. For a moment Cora and Casey took a last look at the sky above, and the waiting multitude in the street below; then the caps were drawn over their faces, the nooses were adjusted, their legs strapped, and they were led forward. In a moment their bodies were hanging outside the windows, and the thousands who had marched in the funeral cortege looked up in awed silence.

The executions were especially trying upon the members of the executive committee, who were stationed on either side of the planks as the men were taken out. I remember, for my own part, I did not desire to be such a close witness, but President Coleman said: "It is the duty of every member to keep his post to the last."

The safety and security of all California depended upon our realization of stern duty, and it was gratifying that the actions of the committee had a most salutary effect on evil-doers, many of whom fled from the city. Those who dared remain were watched, and some of the more notorious ones were arrested by the committee. There were Charley Duane, Milly Mulligan, Bill Carr, Wooley Kearney, and several others. These men were tried and sentenced to banishment, and on a certain night, when a steamer was ready to depart for Panama, a strong guard was seen taking them to the dock. Most of them were glad to escape, though they cursed the committee and threatened vengeance if any of us went to New York. Civil suits for damages were begun there against Mr. Coleman but never came to trial.

About this time Governor Johnson issued a proclamation calling on the committee to disband, which we refused to do, but replied, justifying our actions on the ground of public welfare, and pointing out that we had the full approval of a vast majority of the people of the city as well as of the state.

About the middle of June excitement had subsided, business was being resumed and members were returning to their regular vocations, when David S. Terry, chief justice of the supreme court of California, came from Sacramento and issued a writ commanding the Vigilance Committee to bring before him Billy Mulligan, a prisoner. The writ was refused and returned to Judge Terry. Coincidentally, the committee learned that one Maloney, who was wanted was at the office of R. P. Ashe, naval officer of the port, and Sterling Hopkins, one of the police, was sent to arrest him. He found him in company of Ashe and Judge Terry. An altercation ensued, Judge Terry drawing a pistol which Hopkins seized whereupon Terry whipped out a bowie knife and stabbed Hopkins in the neck. Hopkins was taken to a hospital for treatment and Terry and Ashe retreated to the armory of the San Francisco Blues, headquarters of the Law and Order Party. The Vigilance bell rang out an ominous summons to arms, and the armory was surrounded quickly and a demand made for the surrender of Ashe and Terry. Finally Ashe agreed they would surrender if guaranteed safety while in the hands of the committee. Before the capitulation, however, our committee was prepared to act drastically, having drawn up several cannon in front of the armory.

There was intense excitement over the arrest of the chief justice of the supreme court, and lest there be a clash of arms between our committee and members of the Law and Order Party, the armories of that organization were raided and stacks of arms and ammunition were captured, besides several hundred "prisoners of war." These, however, were liberated the following morning. Judge Terry remained the "guest" of the Vigilance Committee for six exciting weeks, while it was uncertain what the outcome would be of the wound he in-

flicted upon Officer Hopkins. At the end of that time, greatly to the relief of the committee, Hopkins had so far recovered that Judge Terry was released, but he was urged by the committee to resign his exalted position.

It is useless to speculate now on what course the committee would have taken with regard to Judge Terry had Hopkins' wound resulted fatally, but it is hardly probable that there would have been any deviation from the purpose of the committee to see that the laws were enforced against all offenders, regardless of station.

In July we thought our work was done, but a murder committed by a man named Hetherington, who killed Dr. Randall, a well-known citizen, in an altercation, forced us to act. He was convicted and sentenced to be hanged, in company with another man, named Brace. These men were executed July 24th in an open lot at the northeast corner of Sacramento and Davis streets in full view of an immense crowd.

Thus ended the disagreeable work of the committee, and we began preparing for adjournment. The date fixed was August 18th, and the committee decided upon a grand parade, after which the membership would disband and surrender control of the city to the officials, whose ordinary routine of duties had not been interrupted. It was truly a gala day, all business being suspended and the streets were lined with happy people. By 10 a. m. the military companies began assembling in Third street, where they were to be reviewed by President Coleman and the members of the executive committee, mounted. After the review the companies fell in line behind the committee, and the parade, numbering five thousand men under arms, marched through all the principal streets. Men applauded and cheered, while women waved handkerchiefs and threw flowers at the marchers. Late in the afternoon the marchers returned to headquarters, stacked arms and dispersed to their homes, proud of the new peace they had brought to the community we all loved.

I can attest those were trying times, but those of us who were in the thick of the struggle can look back with the full realization that our duty was not done in vain, for we gave to San Francisco new life, new hope and a happiness she had not known from the moment restless hordes began to settle in her midst.

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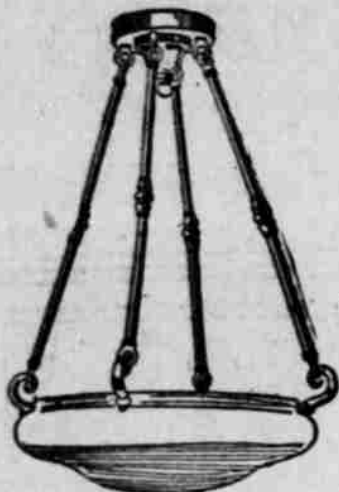


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