



Lee Herring and the Surveyors' Fight

Texas artist, Lee Herring, recently made a generous donation to the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum of a painting depicting the Surveyors' Fight in 1838. The Texas Commission on the Arts named Lee Herring the Texas State Two-Dimensional Artist for 2007. Herring has been featured in numerous art, education and consumer publications. After a successful stint as an illustrator, he devoted himself full-time in 1975 to producing epic paintings of the American West, Texas history and the traditional western scenes for which he has become so well known. As is evident in his work, Herring is committed to historical accuracy. He travels to the places he depicts and researches every component. Herring's paintings are starkly realistic, yet highly individual, traditional subjects molded by the artist's interpretation. *Mr. Spikes and the Surveyors' Fight* is currently on exhibit in Taub Hall.



In the fall of 1838, a party of 23 surveyors and Rangers were working in what is now Navarro County. They had frequent encounters with hunting parties and bands of local Indians who seemed resentful of their work but for the most part left them alone. On the morning of October 8, a group of Kickapoo Indians told the Texans that they might be attacked by other Indians later, but the surveyors ignored the warning. After the Texans had finished their breakfast and moved into a large field to resume their surveying, they were attacked by a party of around 300 Indians of the Tawakoni, Waco, Caddo, Ioni, and Kickapoo tribes. The Indians had taken positions in all of the surrounding tree lines, so the Texans retreated to a spot where two ravines joined in the middle of the field under a lone cottonwood tree.

The ravines gave the Texans some cover, but the Indians held the nearby woods and were able to shoot into their positions with a hail of bullets and arrows. Captain Neil was badly wounded early in the fighting and passed command to Captain Euclid Cox. Many of the Texans' horses were killed at the outset, and the steady fire from the Indians inflicted growing casualties on the men in the ravines. Cox boldly climbed out of the ditch and killed about ten of the attackers before he too was mortally wounded. The Indians, cheered by the sight of Cox's fall, charged the ravines and were barely driven away by heavy return fire.

At this point a new group of about 50 Indians rode onto the battlefield. Seeing the fight, they reigned in some distance away and began to call to the beleaguered Texans, shouting, "Come to Kickapoos, Kickapoos good Indian!" The surveyors were skeptical, but one of their number was an 82-year-old man, today known only as Mr. Spikes. Spikes volunteered to ride out to the newcomers and see if they were truly friendly. Mr. Spikes mounted one of the remaining horses and rode onto the field, gesturing friendship to the mounted Kickapoos. Before he had gone more than a few yards, they opened fire and killed him.

The Surveyors' Fight was a bloody setback for the Texans. Of the 23 men in the survey party, only seven survived, all of them wounded. Captain Neil died in the night. They evaded their attackers, sometimes on hands and knees, for days until they were able to make their way back to their base at Parker's Fort in what would become Limestone County.

- Article by Shelly Crittendon, Collections Manager, September 2017