



**Baz L. Outlaw:
From Shining Star to Tarnished Star**
By Chuck L. Parsons

An Extract Originally Published in the Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine

©2017. Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX,
All Rights Reserved.

Funded in part by a grant from the Texas Ranger Association
Foundation. Originally Published in the *Texas Ranger Dispatch*.

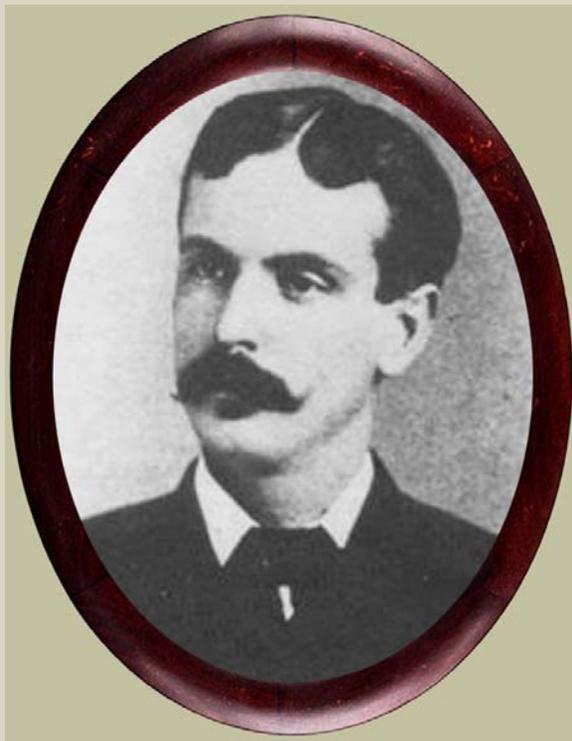


by Chuck Parsons

Texas Ranger Frank L. Jones, captain of Company D, Frontier Battalion, was killed in action on June 30, 1893, going up against members of the notorious Bosque Gang that terrorized the area around Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. The day after, the following unsigned item appeared in the *El Paso Daily Times*:

The rangers . . . represent the finest body of its kind. Every man of this force is a native Texan, a magnificent specimen of man hood, educated and a thorough gentleman. They are modest and fearless, and with a judgment born of the best experience, and unequaled as officers, and thoroughly feared by the border bandits. These men exhibited in a modest way, the sincere love and appreciation they bore for their late commander, and were more than willing at any moment to go [to] the Mexican thieves' stronghold and fight for the body of their leader. . . .¹

There are questionable statements in this paragraph of praise to the men of Company D, and a few downright errors are expressed, but certainly the writer believed in the high quality of men in that group. The company was definitely not made up of native Texans. Most noticeable was the man who replaced Captain Jones, John R. Hughes, who was a native of Illinois. Another, Baz Lamar "Bass" Outlaw, came from Georgia. Both may have been "modest and fearless" at times, but there were moments when Baz Outlaw was anything but humble; in fact, he could be the antithesis of a representative of the "finest body of its kind."



From
Shining Star
to Tarnished Star

a brief look at the life of

BAZ L. OUTLAW

¹ *El Paso Daily Times*, July 1, 1893.



Nobody appreciates a mean drunk, and Outlaw was often just that. Nevertheless, he was also a valuable Ranger—sometimes a shining star of Company D, sometimes a tarnished one.

Attempting to learn about Baz Outlaw's early life is immediately beset with problems. Seemingly, there is no record to show his actual birth date. His name first appears on the 1860 Lowndes County, Georgia, census as a four-year-old boy with the unusual name of Bazzill. His parents are listed as physician and farmer Meshach N. Outlaw, age 39, and his wife Mary A., 27. Their post office is Clyattville, a mere seven miles southeast of Valdosta where John Henry "Doc" Holliday was living during the Civil War and only a few miles from the Georgia-Florida border. The doctor, whose full name was Meshach Napoleon Bonaparte Outlaw, was certainly among the well-to-do of the county, as his real estate is assessed at \$4,900, and he gives the value of his personal estate as \$25,820! The siblings in this 1860 census are ten-year-old Young M. Outlaw; sister Mary E., also shown as four-years-old; three-year-old Maryan (Mary Anne?), and the yearling daughter Emma.²

We know nothing of the family in the Civil War except that they survived. In 1870, they relocated to Echols County, Georgia. This census shows there had been a drastic change in the Outlaw family, no doubt from having been on the losing side of the war. Dr. Outlaw is now listed as a dry goods merchant, his real estate is diminished to \$1,500, and his personal estate is now a mere \$10,000. Apparently, his new principal occupation is a merchant, although he may have continued his practice of medicine as well. The oldest child, Young, is now identified as Yeoman M. and is working as a clerk in his father's mercantile. The census enumerator was not familiar with unusual names, and he identifies the sixteen-year-old Baz as Baselle and lists him as attending school. There are now more children in the household: Morgan, Emma, Edwin, Perlisane (Pearl Ann?), Sallie, Ella, and one-year-old daughter Lelula. The record indicates all the children were born in Georgia, as was mother Mary. Dr. Outlaw was born in Alabama.³

Changes in the Outlaw family took place during the following decade. On the 1880 census, they reside in Henderson County, Tennessee, and M.N.B. Outlaw once again gives his occupation as physician. Children Young, Mary E., and Baz no longer live at home; Morgan works as a "wagon wright;" Eddie B. clerks in a store; and the other children are at home. The family has also increased with the arrivals of Robert L. and James C. If the record is accurate, Dr. and Mrs. Outlaw gave eleven children to the world, she by the age of thirty-eight.

Another move placed the Outlaw family in Clay County, Arkansas. There again, Dr. Outlaw practiced medicine along with his two sons, Edwin B. and Morgan, both now physicians. At their deaths, Dr. M.N.B. and his wife were buried in Mary's Chapel Cemetery near Rector in Clay County. M.N.B. Outlaw was born May 28, 1820, and died on December 22, 1895. His widow, born in 1841, joined her husband in 1916.⁴

2 Lowndes County, Georgia Census, 1860.

3 Echols County, Georgia Census, 1870.

4 Family information is from the research of the late James A. Browning. File in author's possession. In Mary Chapel's Cemetery are the marked graves of five members of the Outlaw family: Dr. M. N. B. and his wife Mary E.; Dr. Edwin B. Outlaw (1860-1897); Ella Outlaw, who died June 21, 1952; and Dr. Morgan Outlaw.



When Baz Outlaw left home is unknown, but by 1880 he was in Kimble County, Texas, far removed from other family members. The census taker found him living with one William Estes, a twenty-five-year old freighter and a native of Missouri. As his name is listed above that of Outlaw, William was considered the head of household. Outlaw is shown to be twenty-three and his occupation is given as farmer.⁵ The year 1880 was only three years after Major John B. Jones of the Frontier Battalion made his cleanup of Kimble County, arresting every man who could not give a good accounting of his business. Why Outlaw ended up there is purely speculative. Possibly the choice was just that Kimble County is located more or less in a straight line from his birthplace. Maybe he simply decided he was “gone to Texas” and followed Horace Greely’s advice to go west.

However, Baz found being a farmer unsatisfying. Five years later he was in Toyah, a small town in central Reeves County, Texas, some 250 or more miles from the Kimble County seat of Junction. Again we have no indication as to why he left Kimble County and chose Toyah, a town that might have justifiably been celebrating the arrival of the railroad, which ended its tracks there in 1881. In addition to a hastily built depot, there was also a hotel, a post office, saloons, and restaurants. A school building was not built until 1894, although some of Toyah’s children may have received a minimal education at their mothers’ knees.⁶

Having given up farming, Baz now found a much more exciting livelihood. On August 11, 1885, he enlisted in Company E of the Frontier Battalion, captained by J.T. Gillespie. At that time, Company E consisted of one captain, one lieutenant, one sergeant, one corporal, and twelve privates. Outlaw’s descriptive list, which took the place of a pocket-size tintype, provides a crude physical description of the bearer and shows he was twenty-six years of age, stood five foot ten inches tall, and had dark hair and a light complexion. Instead of listing his previous occupation as a farmer, Baz now gives it as a cowboy.

Whereas a regular paycheck was virtually unknown to the farmer of the nineteenth century, a Ranger drew a standard salary. There was also the potential for a great deal more excitement chasing fugitives from justice or simply arresting a disorderly drunk. If Baz was not already in tune with the sudden violence of life on the frontier, the opportunity to learn about it came quickly. By sheer chance on the night of August 18, 1885, Outlaw was not chosen to be one of the three men sent out to arrest a drunken sheriff, J.T. Morris, in Toyah. Captain Gillespie’s monthly return describes what happened:

Sergt Cartwright and three men left camp for the purpose of arresting J.T. Morris Sheriff Reeves Co. said Morris being Drunk & rudly [*sic*, rudely] displaying his six shooter to the greate [*sic*] annoyance and danger of every one that came in his presence[.] Sergt Cartwright proceeded to the favorite Saloon with 3 men where they found Morris and demanded his Surrender when upon Morris fired at Sergt Cartwright, missing him [and shooting] then at T.P. Nigh (of Rangers) instantly killing Nigh. When Sergt Cartwright & the other two men returned the fire on Morris Killing him (Morris). Scout then returned to camp & surrendered themselves (L.F. Cartwright W.S. Hughes & De Jarnette) To Capt Gillespie to await an examination[.]

5 Kimble County, Texas Census, 1880.

6 Julia Cauble Smith. “Toyah, Texas” in *The New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 6, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 541.



Private Outlaw was perhaps fortunate he was not on this scout as it resulted in death to one Ranger and the disorderly sheriff. He did not remain with Captain Gillespie long, for on October 5, 1885, he was discharged per General Order No. 27 from the adjutant general's office. However, he enlisted again on December 14. What Outlaw did during his brief time away from the Ranger service is unknown. His name next appears in the monthly returns in January 1886, when the company was stationed in Presidio County. On January 29, Outlaw and one other man left camp to go to Sheffield and Pruitt's Ranch in order to locate a man named Strawberry, who was wanted in Presidio County for horse stealing; apparently he was not located. Many a scout after a wanted man failed.

A desperate encounter took place in late summer. On August 4, Private Outlaw and Private J.M. Mize left camp in pursuit of Jim Davenport, who was wanted in Presidio County for the killing of a man named William Hereford. Four days later, they were at Gillett's camp and remained there resting horses and themselves until the following night. About midnight, a man rode into camp and asked for water. Recognizing the man as Davenport, Outlaw arose from his bedroll and demanded his surrender. Instead, Davenport raised his Winchester. Outlaw and Mize both fired on him, which brought about return fire from Davenport. These men were not dead shots, but the result was that all three men were wounded. Outlaw suffered a slight injury over one eye and in one hip, and Mize was slightly wounded in the shoulder. It being nighttime no doubt explains why there were no fatal shots, but the darkness also helped Davenport escape. The wounds of both men, although not necessarily life-threatening, forced them to return to camp and give up the chase for Davenport, at least for that night.

A telegram was sent to Sergeant Cartwright informing him of the situation. On August 10, he met the two Rangers at Nevill's Ranch, and the party returned to Gillett's camp. They conducted an investigation of sorts, forensic science not being their forte back then. They then followed a trail to Brough's camp at Agua Fria, and after watching that place for three days, concluded Davenport had gone to Mexico or else his friends had provided a hiding place. By August 19, they were back in camp. No doubt Ranger life was not what Private Mize wanted, for on September 12, he deserted.

Outlaw and two other men were sent to Presidio Del Norte on October 30 to assist the civil authorities in preserving order during an election. Their presence was sufficient to keep the peace and to prevent any illegal voting. They were back in camp by November 5, and Captain Gillespie wrote in his monthly return that everything had "passed off Quietly."

On December 3, Private Outlaw and Private M. B. Chastain left camp to go to Murphyville (now Alpine), again to keep the peace during an election, and again everything remained quiet. Outlaw's name was not mentioned in the January return, but in February 1887, Sergeant W.F. Sheffield and he were in Toyah keeping the peace. They succeeded in their mission and returned to camp on February 3. Outlaw would not remain long with Captain Gillespie, as he was transferred to Company D, captained by Frank L. Jones, on April 15.

Up to this point, Outlaw's record was clear. Apparently he followed orders, gave no problems to anyone, and was a good solid Ranger.⁷ He stayed with Captain Jones until May 16, 1889, when he resigned to join forces with two other fighting Rangers, John Walter Durbin and John Reynolds

7 Ranger Service Record of B. L. Outlaw.



Hughes. They acted as guards in the silver mine operated by John O'Grady down in the Fronteriza Mine in the state of Coahuila, Mexico. The trio of tough, honest, and dependable men (the only requirements to be a guard for O'Grady) each earned \$60 per month, double their Ranger pay. They had been informed that the new line of work would be more dangerous than the Ranger work they had been doing, but these three former Company D Rangers had no trouble with thieves. Guarding ore shipments from the mines to Barroteran proved to be uneventful; they never had to fire a shot. Durbin later wrote of his experience working with Outlaw, describing him as the worst and most dangerous man he ever knew and saying that he "never knew what fear was."⁸

The only recorded difficulty Outlaw, Durbin, and Hughes experienced was when Outlaw had to defend himself from a Mexican south of the Rio Grande. The Mexican had threatened him with a knife, a situation frequently seen on the frontier when two men disagreed over cards, money, or a woman. When Outlaw killed the man, Hughes and Durbin feared that a mob might rise up, but fortunately the victim was an unpopular character and no trouble followed. One historian wrote that the deceased "was a bad man and deserved what he got," and the people were grateful to Outlaw for getting rid of him.⁹ After this killing, according to historian Bill O'Neal, Hughes and Durbin subdued Outlaw, who was drunk at the time of the shooting. They "put him on a horse, and the three Texans galloped to the Rio Grande and the safety of the United States."¹⁰

Was this the first man Baz Outlaw killed? It may have been the second, as the possibility exists that the real reason Outlaw left the comfort of his home in Georgia was because he had murdered someone. There were suggestions that it was a family member, but no documentation has been located to verify this.¹¹

Outlaw left the mines in late August and was back in Texas by September 1, 1889, when he rejoined Company D with the rank of private, now earning \$90 per quarter. He had to have possessed some leadership ability, as by the spring of 1890 Captain Jones promoted him to the rank of 1st Sergeant of Company D. The captain must have had faith in this fighting man.¹²

As a sergeant, Outlaw had more responsibilities than as a private. He now was called on to lead scouts rather than follow them, and his name appears more often in the records. In September, he and three others were in Fort Stockton to keep the peace during district court. On this scout, Outlaw disarmed the county sheriff, who was intoxicated and threatening to kill a man. Outlaw also arrested a man who had been wanted for murder since 1883 and placed him in jail at Alpine. Other arrests were also made, indicating that Sergeant Outlaw was doing his job, in general.¹³

However, on September 30, 1892, Outlaw was discharged, perhaps due to his alcoholic abuse. The man had a drinking problem, and no doubt his superiors had overlooked it at times because

8 Robert W. Stephens. *Walter Durbin: Texas Ranger and Sheriff*. (Clarendon, Texas, 1970), 77-78.

9 Phillip J. Rasch. "Bass Outlaw: Myth and Man," *Real West* (July 1979), 13.

10 Bill O'Neal. "The Latest on Bass Outlaw," *Real West* (August 1982), 41.

11 Leon Claire Metz. *John Selman, Texas Gunfighter* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1966), 146.

12 Ranger Service Record of B.L. Outlaw.

13 Monthly Returns of Company D, 1890-1892.



he was such a good man to have in a fight. But the abuse could no longer be ignored, and Outlaw was out of the Rangers.

During the next period of his violent life, Baz Outlaw served as a deputy United States marshal, working under Richard C. Ware. On February 6, 1893, he applied for a commission as a Special Ranger, perhaps attempting to recover whatever prestige he formerly had as a Ranger. The commission did not provide a regular paycheck, but Outlaw was legally permitted to wear a gun. He wrote on his application that he was thirty-three years old, stood five feet nine inches tall, had blue eyes, and was light complexioned. He also stated he was born in Lee County, Georgia. To the question of his ever being convicted of a crime, Outlaw wrote *no*, and his response for being “sober and temperate in your habits” was *yes*. Judge W.W. Turney, A.S. Gage, and Captain Jones vouched for his good character in order to allow him to receive the commission as a Special Ranger, signing a document that was sworn before Brewster County Judge Wigfall Van Sickle on February 10. Knowing Outlaw’s record, it is puzzling that they did.

Baz Outlaw is best known for how he met his death in El Paso, but he had experienced numerous gun battles before his demise. Searching for information about him in many Texas newspapers of his day reveals only a few items. One appeared in the *Austin Daily Statesman*, one of the leading newspapers of Texas. In May of 1893, reports of the robbery of a Texas and Pacific train at Kent reached Valentine, Texas, where Deputy Marshal Outlaw was stationed. On May 20, he and John Gillespie (not his former Ranger captain) went to Marfa and arrested a man named George Johnson, who was suspected of being the robber. Johnson had aroused suspicion during the previous few days as he had been “spending money quite freely.” Outlaw and Gillespie arrested and searched him. In the sweatband of the suspect’s hat, they found brand new ten- and twenty-dollar bills, and it was assumed these were part of the stolen money from the robbery. Johnson had “left Valentine some weeks ago with a lot of cattle, bought a ticket and went to El Paso, doubled back, passed Valentine and got off at Marfa Friday night.”¹⁴ That is all that the newspaper reported, unfortunately.

In spite of Outlaw’s one terrible weakness for alcohol, he was respected for his courage, his commitment to duty, and his faithfulness to a friend. Another Ranger of Company D, Alonzo Van Oden, attests to that in his personal journal, claiming Outlaw was among his very best friends. John R. Hughes, promoted to the captaincy after the death of Frank L. Jones, knew Outlaw very well as a Special Ranger assigned to Company D and as a friend.

In spite of all his good qualities, Outlaw was the catalyst of a tragedy that took place in El Paso on April 5, 1894, while he was both a deputy U.S. marshal and a Special Ranger attached to Captain John R. Hughes’s Company D. The event began innocently enough and involved three men who have since gained considerable recognition in the annals of outlaws and lawmen: Baz Outlaw; Joe McKidric, in El Paso attending court to give testimony in a smuggling case; and John M. Selman Sr. At the time, Selman was an El Paso constable but a man accustomed to frontier violence, having spent some years as a fugitive from justice and then a lawman.

14 *Austin Daily Statesman*, Monday, May 22, 1893. This is a special report from San Antonio dated May 21.



As the incident unfolded, Outlaw had spent some time in Tillie Howard's house of ill repute washing away the dust from his long ride down from Alpine. By and by, one of the girls "took him in hand," which occupied about a half hour. By then, he was "half under" but not yet in an ugly mood. Outlaw left Tillie's place, headed up the street, and stopped in various places to have more drinks. At some point he met Walter James "Frank" Collinson, an old buffalo hunter who had worked in the area of Fort Griffin, where John Selman had ironically been a deputy for the Shackelford County sheriff. Collinson and Outlaw were well acquainted, and because of their friendship, Outlaw began to complain to Collinson that his boss, Marshal Richard C. Ware, had not been treating him justly. He claimed that Ware had not been giving him his fair share of papers to serve, and this was significant because each warrant or court document served resulted in a fee.

Outlaw and Collinson then met Ernest Bridges. By now, the other two men wanted to get Outlaw off the street and back to his room. Outlaw was agreeable, but first he wanted to go see a certain girl back at Tillie Howard's place. When they arrived there, they met Constable John Selman Sr. in the parlor. As the men began conversing, Outlaw apparently forgot about seeing that certain girl—or she may have simply been occupied. This gave Outlaw time to kill, and he wandered into the back hall that led outside. Soon there was the sound of a shot being fired. John Selman joked about it, saying, "Bass has dropped his gun." Tillie Howard, fearing trouble, grabbed her police whistle and blew it, alerting every policeman within hearing distance that there was trouble at her brothel.

Joe McKidric, who by chance had been excused temporarily from the grand jury business but instructed not to leave the immediate area, heard the shot and ran to investigate. He observed Outlaw with a smoking pistol in his hand and innocently asked, "Bass, why did you shoot?" Apparently Baz misunderstood the intent of his question. Instead of simply answering he belligerently responded, "You want some, too?" and shot Joe McKidric in the head and then in the back as he collapsed.

By now, Constable Selman was no longer in a joking mood and ran to investigate the shots. With his pistol at the ready, he hurried to the scene where McKidric lay dying. Outlaw saw Selman coming and fired at him from a distance of only a few feet. He missed, although the gunfire was so close to Selman it burnt his face and temporarily blinded him. In spite of his impaired vision, Selman fired at Outlaw, hitting him in the body just above the heart. Outlaw retreated, still firing his weapon. His errant shots miraculously hit Selman twice in the right leg. Selman, with his years of gunplay experience behind him, did the only thing he could under the circumstances: he shot back where he believed the target was. His bullet managed to hit Outlaw, entering close to the heart again.

At that point, the gunfight was over. The wounded Outlaw walked up Utah Street, leaving Selman with his hands over his eyes and struggling to stay up on his feet. Within a block, he met Ranger Private Francis M. "Frank" McMahan of Company D, who ordered Outlaw to surrender to him. With the fight all shot out of him, Outlaw gave up his pistol and begged McMahan to protect him from any mob that may have started to form. No crowd materialized, and McMahan and an unidentified Mexican managed to get the dying Outlaw to the Barnum Show Saloon, where he was placed on a prostitute's bed in the back room. Outlaw kept crying over and over, "Oh God, help!" and repeatedly asking, "Where are my friends?" He died within a few hours with his boots on—and technically under arrest.



Selman had been severely wounded, but his son John Selman Jr. was capable of taking care of him and did so, especially at night when the old gunfighter was nearly blind from the powder burns suffered in the fight with Outlaw. However, he was a tough man. On the night of August 19 of the following year, he shot and killed John Wesley Hardin, once considered the most dangerous gunman in Texas. By then, after sixteen years in Huntsville prison, he was little more than an alcoholic ex-convict.

Alonzo Van Oden, a Ranger of Company D, summed up the death of Outlaw in his journal. As Oden presented his friend, the character B.L. Outlaw was worthy of a Shakespearean tragedy:

Bass Outlaw is dead. Bass, my friend is gone. Before he died he shot and killed Joe McKidrick. Maybe all of us knew something like this would come to Bass—Bass, who was so brave and kind, who could laugh louder, ride longer, and cuss harder than the rest of us, and who could be more sympathetic, more tender, more patient than all of us when necessary. Bass had one weakness, that—at last—proved to be stronger than all his virtues. Bass couldn't leave liquor alone, and when Bass was drunk, Bass was a maniac; none of us could handle him; none of us could reason with him, we just stayed with him until he sobered up.

After the gunfight, Captain John Hughes telegraphed his superior, Adjutant General W.H. Mabry in Austin, "Joe McKidrick [*sic*], a member of Company D, was killed tonight while attempting to arrest B. L. Outlaw. Outlaw is dead also." Outlaw was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in El Paso on April 6, 1894. Hughes probably made the arrangements to bury Outlaw, and he also had McKidrick's remains shipped to Austin, where the young man was buried in Oakwood Cemetery.¹⁵ The headstone at McKidrick's grave is the original one, small but dignified. Outlaw did not have a stone at first, but within recent years a marker was installed. It reads:



B.L. Outlaw

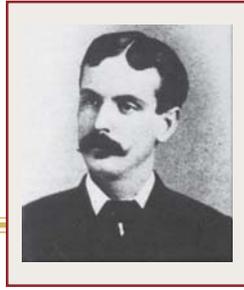
1854 1894

1st Sgt. Co. D F.B.

State forces

Dep. U.S. Marshal

¹⁵ The details of the death of Outlaw are from several sources, mainly Captain Hughes's report and the journal entry of Alonzo Van Oden. See also the various sources for further reading.



From Shining Star to Tarnished Star
a brief look at the life of
BAZ L. OUTLAW

For Further Reading

- Alexander, Bob. *Winchester Warriors: Texas Rangers of Company D, 1874-1901*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2009.
- DeArment, Robert K. *George Scarborough: The Life and Death of a Lawman on the Closing Frontier*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.
- Metz, Leon Claire. *The Encyclopedia of Lawmen, Outlaws, and Gunfighters*. Subject entries. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2003.
- Metz, Leon Claire. *John Wesley Hardin: Dark Angel of Texas*. El Paso, Texas: Mangan Books, 1996.
- Metz, Leon Claire. *John Selman: Texas Gunfighter*. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1966.
- Marohn, Richard C. *The Last Gunfighter: John Wesley Hardin*. College Station, Texas: Creative Publishing Company, 1995.
- Stephens, Robert W. *Texas Ranger Sketches*. Privately printed, 1972.
- Wilkins, Frederick. *The Law Comes to Texas: The Texas Rangers, 1870-1901*. Austin: State House Press, 1999.