

John Bean, Son of the "Law West of the Pecos"

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Some men cast a giant shadow, whether by heroic deeds or infamous acts. Others live in the shadow of greatness, basking in its limelight or trying to avoid the fall-out from shady morals, questionable judgment and a life misspent.

John (Toney) Bean lived in the shadow of his famous father, Phantley Roy Bean, otherwise known as Judge Roy Bean of Langtry/Vinegaroon, "Law West of the Pecos."

John was the adopted son of Roy, who fathered two sons and two daughters by his wife, Virginia Chavez Bean. He was older than Roy's natural children, and his dark complexion labeled him as Mexican by the census-takers, although there is no definitive proof of a Hispanic heritage.

Due to the Judge's "speckled" past, Roy often had to move on, just ahead of the law. Eventually he landed in San Antonio and married Miss Chavez, daughter of Leandro Chavez, well known and respected rancher.

Although Roy did not present a desirable visage in his old age, judging by the latter photos of a bearded, portly gent with a drinker's bulbous nose, it is said that in his youth he was strikingly handsome, with well-formed features and shiny black, wavy hair.

Apparently, it was enough to sweep Miss Chavez off her feet. Unfortunately, the marriage ended badly when Roy reportedly assaulted his wife and had to leave the area once again in haste, due, no doubt, to angry in-laws. His fondness for alcohol, a fatal flaw in many, probably was at the seat of the family discord.

Landing in 1882 in Vinegaroon, Texas, a railroad construction camp on the new GH&SA Railway, he set up a saloon and began to rake in the profits from a thirsty clientele. His son, John, soon followed.

John had worked for his father in the past as a drayman, hauling goods from San Antonio to Chihuahua, México. He had known a tough life, but he was a hard worker and liked to keep his mouth shut, something he probably did not learn from his father.

In an article for *Cattleman Magazine* in the 1930s, R. D. Holt relates that John went to work for the T5 outfit on Independence Creek, owned by the Hoosier Brothers, jewelers of St. Louis, Missouri. The Hoosiers were not good about paying and the foreman often had to round up cows to sell to meet payroll and buy supplies. The ranch changed hands many times, but it seems John Bean went along with the deal, for he stayed there many years.

Holt said John would often tell of the time that Indians stole horses from the T5, and he was sent on the only pony they didn't take, to try to get them back. In the process he met Lieutenant John Bullis and his men, who had confiscated the horses and was bringing them back. Even though Bullis eventually attained the rank of Brigadier General, he was forever "Lieutenant" Bullis in John's eyes.

Eventually, John went to work for Henry Pakenham, who owned property in northern Terrell County. Pakenham was a good friend of John's father, Judge Roy, so good that he built a cottage for Bean to stay in when he came on his circuit tours to hold court.

When Pakenham died in 1913, Alec Mitchell and Cecil Arvin bought his stock and leased his place as a partnership, and John was part of the deal.

The Arvins were amazed at John's mental abilities. Though he could not read or write, they could give him a verbal list of supplies (three months' worth) needed at the ranch from Sanderson and he would bring back every item, or give them the reason why he couldn't get them.

When the Mitchell-Arvin partnership dissolved, John went with Arvin to his ranch, where he remained until his death.

At the Arvins', John lived on the west side of the ranch at a place still known as the Bean place. When his eyesight gradually grew worse, he began to rely on tricks to indicate when someone had been trespassing. He would wire a gate a certain way or plant a stick or rock in a place that would be disturbed by an interloper, to help him know who had been on the property without permission.

In later years, John seldom went to town unless it was absolutely necessary. Once, he was bitten by a rattlesnake and had to go to town for treatment. It was three years before he returned to Sanderson, this time for treatment of an eye injury.

On August 24, 1938, John Bean did not show up for his daily duties. When workers went to rouse him, they found that he had passed away in his bed during the night, apparently of coronary disease. He was 80 years of age. As he spent most of his years in quiet anonymity, so he passed, quietly, in the dead of night.

Some men cast a giant shadow; others live in that shadow. John Bean cast his own shadow, not one of heroic deeds or feckless infamy, but one of honesty, hard work and diligence. In the long run, that is the best legacy to leave for your family and friends.

(For more information about Roy Bean, one good site for reference is <http://tokenguy.tripod.com/tokentales/page49.htm>. This is a saloon token collector's site, but he does a good job of researching his back stories.)



John Toney Bean, son of Judge Roy Bean
Courtesy of Alice Evans Downie



Judge Roy Bean
Courtesy of Alice Evans Downie