

Museum News: Joe Bean - Second Sheriff of Terrell County

By C. W. (Bill) Smith

Joseph Cecil Bean, second sheriff of Terrell County, was born in Magnolia Springs, Jasper County, Texas on August 19, 1874. Magnolia Springs started life as a small settlement in the heart of the Piney Woods of East Texas, near the Louisiana state line and north of Beaumont. Originally called Pinetucky, the name was changed to reflect the creek and magnolia trees of the area when the post office was established.

Joe was the youngest of sixteen children born to James Bean and Martha Sarah Jane Garrett. His father was a farmer and a Baptist preacher, and several of his brothers entered the ministry as well. The Bean family descended from the Clan MacBean of Scotland. Their ancestor was a shoemaker who eloped with a high-born lady, causing her to be disinherited by her family. They moved to London, and then immigrated to the United States to pursue a new life, settling in South Carolina. Joe's father was born in Edgefield District, South Carolina, and his mother was born in Georgia. Her family immigrated to the U. S. on the last immigrant ship to leave Britain before the English blockade of American waters began at the start of the Revolutionary War.

Around 1900 Joe left Magnolia Springs and followed his brothers, James and John, to Ozona, Texas, where he worked in a drugstore. Apparently he was not suited to that line of work and soon moved west to Sheffield, Pecos County, Texas, to live with his sister, Sarah "Sally" Jane Bean Turner, wife of Matt Turner. Raised in the Piney Woods and exposed to the lumber industry, sawmilling and the building trade, he moved on to Sanderson around 1905 and ran a lumberyard, a lucrative business in that day when the town was still being built.

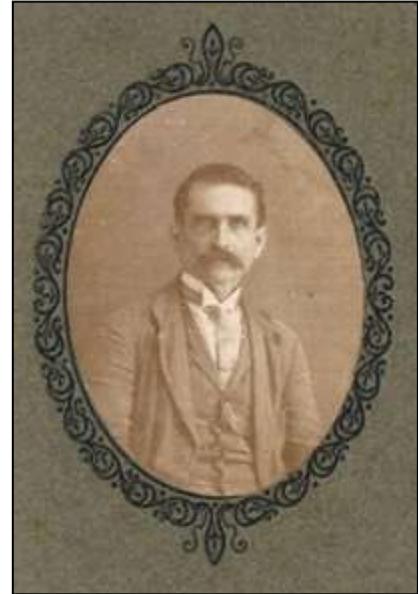
In 1906 the first Sheriff of Terrell County, George Fenley, resigned to return to his ranch enterprise. Joe had some background in law enforcement and was appointed to the sheriff's position. He was elected at the next election, but was defeated in 1910 by J. J. Allen, the third sheriff. Sanderson at the time was a wide-open, lawless society and being the law required a very tough character. Joe Bean was certainly tough enough, but apparently popularity was difficult and the next elected sheriff had taught school in Sanderson for several years and was well known and liked. Joe ran once again in the next election but was defeated once again.

Life for a single man in Sanderson was somewhat difficult, due the lack of marriageable women in town. He was a dashing young man with a big handlebar moustache and quite handsome. During his stay in Sanderson he courted several ladies but nothing worked out, so he moved to El Paso for new opportunities, both in romance and in business.

In 1911 he went back to East Texas and married a Miss Mollie Cobb, but the marriage ended in divorce several years later. No children were born to the marriage.

For the next several years he worked as a night watchman in El Paso and applied several times for a position with the police department and the sheriff's department. In 1912 he was appointed a Texas Ranger, Company A, but due to the economy of the time he was let go in 1913 due to overstaffing. "The last man hired is the first man fired."

Over the next few years he is frequently mentioned in the El Paso papers for his law work as a watchman and for his involvement in the Masonic order. He joined the Scottish Rite Temple in El Paso and was very active. In addition to his law enforcement, he also worked for a time in the oil fields. He also advertised as a building contractor in Big Bend newspapers so he kept himself busy.



No known photo of Joe Bean has been discovered. This is his brother, John Egbert Bean, who probably bears resemblance to Joe.

His record is sparse during the 1920s, but in 1930 he is listed in the census at Bay City, Texas, as a farmer. In the 1940s and growing much older, he went to live with his namesake nephew, Cecil Turner, in Alpine, Texas. Not much is known of this period.

Joe Bean passed away on April 25, 1947 in Alpine. He was 72 years old. His service was held at the Livingston Funeral Home Chapel, conducted by the Baptist pastor, the Rev. Frank Dutton, and Masonic graveside services were conducted by the local Masonic order, of which he had been a member for many years.

Joe Bean was sheriff of Terrell County at a very critical time in its history. The first three sheriffs and the passage of the Prohibition Act enabled the town to move from wild and dangerous status to a modern community, safe for its citizens and a good place to live. Without the efforts of these three law enforcement professionals, Sanderson could not have become an oasis in the desert, the place we call our home.