

Rube Timmons: Horse Thief

From 1895 to 1897, reminiscences of an early citizen of Dallas and Clark counties were published intermittently in Arkadelphia's *Southern Standard* newspaper. Signing himself "Pioneer" or "Old Pioneer," the writer is not identified. Pioneer's writings include a reminiscence about a Clark County crime, and that story is among those found in the Clark County Historical Association's book, "Wanted: Crooks, Scoundrels, Notorious Characters and Other Legendary Figures in Clark County, Arkansas."

Back in the 1800s, horse stealing ranked as a heinous crime, but some managed to escape the consequences, at least for a while. According to "Pioneer," the first horse he knew to be stolen in the area was by a man named Rube Timmons from the farm of Andrew Briggs, six miles east of Arkadelphia, on the road to Tulip. Later the farm was known as the Jesse Harris homestead. This is how he told the story:

A man by the name of George Washington, with his young wife, from Virginia, were looking at the country on horseback. They each rode a fine horse. Now Rube Timmons followed them for two days, and on this night, January 1849, Washington and his wife put up at Andrew Briggs'. Their horses were stabled and saddles hung in the gallery of the dwelling. A large bulldog lay near the saddles. Timmons, however, slipped the saddles from near the dog, saddled up the horses, and started north via Hot Springs.

Next morning Briggs collected a few good men and started in pursuit of the thief. Think of it—three pioneers with flintlock rifles, and an old Virginia dude with a pair of derringers! Andrew Briggs, James YBlood [Youngblood] and Mad Hoodenpile pursued and captured the thief fifty miles north of Hot Springs and brought him back.

Timmons belonged to John A. Murrell's clan, and had his horse's shoes marked, so he was easily tracked. He led two horses and made fast time. Briggs with his posse traveled but a few miles behind him for a day and half a night.

A few Murrellites collected at the place of arrest and demanded Timmons' release but Briggs' men with their flintlocks soon cleared the place. They tied Timmons on his own horse and brought him back in haste. At Hot Springs another effort was made to rescue him by a J.P. Briggs told him that a flintlock rifle was mightier than his court, and they brought their prisoner on and placed him in jail in Princeton. The jail being weak, Timmons made his escape, and we never heard of him again.

Timmons had served a term of four years in the Tennessee state prison, and many of his old neighbors from Madison County, Tennessee, had quite a handshaking after they convinced him that his name was Rube Timmons instead of Tom Smith.

I will explain. John A. Murrell was a celebrated robber, and his family was raised in Madison County, Tennessee. I was well acquainted with his wife and daughters. I saw Mrs. Murrell a few years ago and talked with her about her husband. She said the book, "The Life of John A. Murrell" was a false book, and was written for money. Murrell was a good neighbor, and one of the most charitable men in the country.

He was convicted of stealing from a man by the name of Hendrix in 1835, and sent to state prison for a term of two years. I have heard that he was a very successful

preacher. It was said that he would get up a big revival and have all the unconverted crying for mercy, while his clan would be around stealing horses. Murrell was considered one of the shrewdest men in the country, and when one of the clan exposed the league, some of the highest standing men in the country were found on the record.

Now this Rube Timmons was one of Murrell's clan, and the last we ever knew of him was when he escaped from the Dallas County jail, but as all bad men end bad, we know how his end was, or will be. The men who captured him have long since made their report before the "Great White Throne"--lived useful lives, and died in honor: James YBlood died near Arkadelphia in 1861; Mad Hoodenpile was killed in the Civil War; Andrew Briggs died near Arkadelphia in 1861.