

# COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS – FEB. 1887

*"Bloody of All County Seat Fights."*

Feb. 27, 1887.

As the western portion of the state of Kansas was being settled, many fights occurred between small towns each vying to be named the county seat. Wichita County was no different. The Lenti/Commodore County Seat Fight was considered the "Bloody of All County Seat Fights." On February 27, 1887, a shoot out occurred on the main street in the town of Comodoro. When the smoke cleared, three men lay dead in the street, with two more dying later. Newspapers from New York to San Francisco covered "the cowboy war" on their front pages. Many notorious gunfighters and lawmen walked the very ground of this small western Kansas town. In March of 1888, Lentz was determined the permanent county seat of Wichita County; business houses moved from Comodoro to Lentz and in time Comodoro became a ghost town.



Luke Sisco was a famous gambler from Texas who became well-known for his role in playing the "Dodge City War" in Kansas in the 1880's. From published newspaper reports, Luke was a regular gambler, quite known as a perfector of cards. He showed familiarity with card dealing in his appearance, and always took pains to look as neat as possible." (Miller 397). Luke was known to associate with the west of坐men and media leading role in social events.



Photographed before the Wichita Bank in Comodoro are standing left to right: Luke Sisco, Wyo. Corp., the next three men are unidentified, Tom Holliday, Pat Masterson, Bill Highman, Red Loomis, Jim Masterson, Pat and Mike Sugane.



As a lawman in Dodge, Wyand Tom was paid two hundred and fifty dollars a month, plus a fee of two dollars and five cents for each case. He and his deputies arrested three hundred persons a month. He earned his name by lawmen said that Tom was assistant marshall from May 12, 1875 to September 8, 1878.



Pat Masterson was a native of Dodge, after finding out that he had tuberculosis, he moved out West, because there was drier air which would prolong his life by a few months. His "Wyand" and "Sisco" were the most famous participants. Most probably it was because of the associations. He didn't care than anything, as he was dying anyway. He participated in over 100 gunfights and was never shot once.



On the morning of October 15, 1887, Bill Highman, Edith's newspaper desk-pick up boy, was perched over these words: "there are those who argue that trapping is the bane of a world of ours. I oppose these gentry who argue that we had the best system of man-gate in the station and the past man-gate in the west, nothing can be better for both. Meekness, you'll have for me like a man who's been stung by a scorpion. That would be the last word in meekness. He died at a year earlier this year.



Bill Highman's death was preceded by the killing of Cornell Oldham in Kansas City by Marshal Cornell, whereas Gil Brummett on November 1, 1882, Highman was acting in a saloon when a shot was fired outside by a drunken policeman, by the name of Wiley Lynn, who had clashed with Highman on several occasions, and as Highman led Wiley Lynn toward the path, the drunk pulled out a small revolver and shot Highman, who died 15 minutes later. Bill Highman's death after pre-telling the good guys from the bad guys, and he didn't last a day.



Jim Masterson was a man who never went back on a friend, and never forgot an obligation. He never preferred to keep up the conventional social amenities but yet there was a certain quality which could absolutely never make break a bone, and who would bring down a kind act now or on the gallows after all the world had given him its cold shoulder, and when there was no one else in the personal regard, to one who walk the conventional political and life as no less honorable in their obligations as their fellow men as he was.

**PAT MASTERSON, A LEUTIAN'S IDEA OF HIM**  
Famous man The Wichita County Bank  
Lentz, digged to New York, built  
Commodore Wichita County, Kansas  
Tuesday, February 25, 1887.

On Tuesday the citizens of this (Wichita) county will deliberate the poll whether the county seat will remain here in the course of Comodoro. The fight seems of the hottest that was ever waged in the West. It began long ago, and was started apparently in favor of Comodoro, but since then the people of Comodoro have rallied and with the unanimous consent of the citizens they desire to carry the day. Wichita County is some distance from Dodge City, but it is so far north that the Comodoroites look to the power which will enable them to overcome the difficulties created from their position. Jim Masterson has become something of a figure in frontier politics. The fact that he and his crew are to be involved by the people of Comodoro has caused much excitement here and every body is preparing for the worst. No man in this place is without his gun, and even the farmers provide with rifles and revolvers if possible. They are armed to the teeth and if the battle should be fought in the village which has made him celebrated in Dodge City.



In the fall of 1887 Pat Sugane was elected sheriff of Fred County. His under-sheriff remained his son-in-law, Michael Sugane, and Mike had two children. The newspaper reported stories of these three brothers, Sugane, the unscrupulous of persons, etc. by Sugane. Farmer was born aged twelve in the state of Sheriff Sugane with a white handled pistol in his belt.



## History of the Historic Lawmen and Gunfighters

Below & Jones (printed on the right side of the page) is one of the photographs. Captain Jones died in 1888, his wife, Mrs. Jones, survived him until 1916. When Theodora Jones died, Captain Jones' personal effects, including his revolver, were sold at auction. The proceeds of the auction were used to build the Wichita County Historical Society's building, which is now the Wichita County Museum.



**THE COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS,**  
**CORONADO AND LEoti PEOPLE ARMED**  
**JULY 1885.**  
**Denver, Col., March 3.—A. Wallace (Kan.)**

Denver, Col., March 3.—A. Wallace (Kan.) Special to the News say: In the situation in the Coronado-Leoti war remain unchanged. Both towns are surrounded by a strong cordon of armed men, who permit no one to pass. The men in both towns sleep with their guns, and after admiring the stranger finds a Winchester at every turn. They stand in doorway, and merchants bring their goods to wait on customers. Men patrol the streets all day and night. The country surrounding is as excited as the towns and about equally divided. Coronado sympathizers are for the most part in town, with their arms and ammunition, and a Coronado man said today that within an hour 500 men could be recruited in the town, ready to defend it with their lives. At Leoti the cry is for revenge. The citizens are as excited as they were on the day following the shooting, and they are unanimous in their determination to avenge Coronado at the first opportunity. This will probably be offered on Thursday next, when the county election occurs. Indeed and after the shooting Sunday some men from Leoti came to Wallace and secured all the guns and ammunition—so they could get out representatives from Coronado paid a similar visit to Garden City, so that both towns are well supplied with ammunition for the war which every man believes will occur before the thing is settled.

The population of Leoti, which has been recruited by the county committee, is looked to for the first move, and the Coronadoans will act the defensive. Each town has plans, but they are in too chaotic a state for a logic or forecast of the probable result. Since Sunday there have been no hostile actions beyond alarmless firing of guns in Leoti. Whisky and beer are freely imbibed, and those will be at the bottom of further trouble, should there be any. County Sheriff John Edwards, who is a Leoti man, has not made an attempt to arrest anybody, as he knows that such an effort would cost him his life. He has 12 warrants, but unless the State authorities lend the assistance of a couple of companies of militia they will never be served, and even then the Coronado men may find a man will never be taken alive. It was reported at the Hotel Vendome in Coronado,



Charlie Confer and Bill Raynes, ring-leaders of the Leoti crowd, went over to Coronado on Sunday morning and drank considerable beer and whisky. Confer, who was a desperado of the worst type, and who is the fourth member of a family to die with his boots on, proposed to return with

**Excerpt from *Of The Kansas Cowboys, 1867-1888***

According to Bill's widow, Mrs. Joe Blighman, who wrote his biography in 1949, he is called by one of the factors in the Wichita County court to swear to grand jury polls at once of the several county seat location actions. Possibly this was the election of March 1888, for Blighman was absent from Dodge city at that time and three months later was holding forth in Turner City, Wichita County. This small western Kansas burg was located between Leoti and Coro-

nado, the county seat for the county seat. So close were Leoti and Coronado that Farmer City was barely able to squeeze in between them, and even so was accustomed of quoting a portion of the Coronado law rate. Little love was spared among these towns; in fact blood had been spilled just the winter prior to Bill's visit. Possibly the intense feeling of the times had something to do with the action which occurred at Farmer City on July 4, 1888. On that day Bill Blighman's 54<sup>th</sup> birthday, the ex-Dodge City marshal shot and killed Ed Prober

**The Coronado Star, March 10, 1887**

Pat Corrindo of Dodge City and Sheriff of Ford county, has purchased the west half of block 5 for a residence, and lot 9 and 10 in block 28 on north Main street. Mr. Stigmar says that we have the finest residence and one of the best built houses in the part of the city, and he has implicit faith in Coronado as the future county seat of Wichita County, and will erect a dwelling house at an early date and will move his family to Coronado as soon as he can settle up his official business. The STAR extends a hearty welcome.

**The Coronado Star, October 13, 1887**

Mrs. (Pat) Stigmar presented her husband with a fine daughter (Johanna) Friday.

**FRAUD AND INTIMIDATION**

**Excerpt from The Wichita Standard, Coronado, Dec. 23,**  
 Last went to Topeka without a hundred names on her petition for county seat. Coronado had a petition containing over seventeen hundred names, adding for the same. Leoti backed up her petition with four hundred and fifty-one votes, while Coronado shows up with two hundred and eighty-five and thus begins crying fraud.

Where is the fraud? Who made the statement that they were bound to win if they had to pay fifty dollars a head for votes, and that was their only hope? Coronado.

Who got a Leoti voter drunk and left him on the prairie to prevent his voting for Leoti on the second day of the canvass? Coronado.

Who reported their town had a majority of votes when they were behind, to impress confidence in their friends? Coronado.

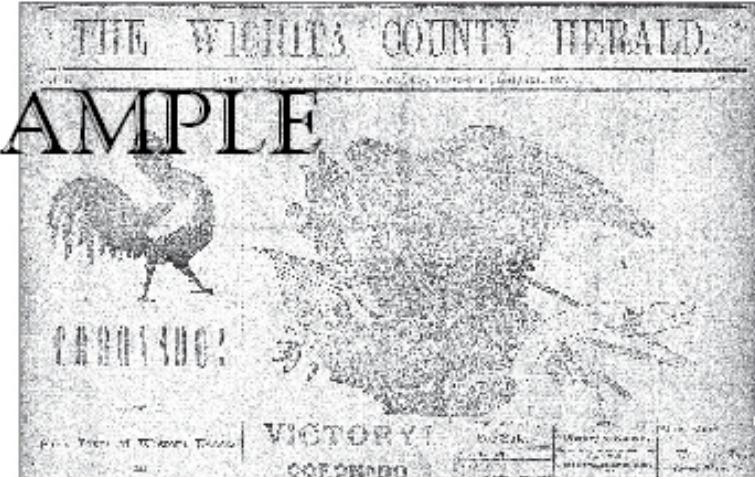
Who imported a lot of men from outside the county and attempted to vote them in the interest of their town? Coronado.

Now lets see about the "intimidation" business.

Who first went to the polls armed with Winchester? Coronado.

Who responded a "bad man" from Dodge City to aid them? Coronado. Who had in a lot of men with them, with the threat, if not fully, that they could have their votes or their opponents beat? Coronado.

Who employed a U. S. Marshall (?) to watch the polls, regardless of authority? Coronado.



The Wichita Herald, Coronado, March 10, 1887 special edition celebrating victory in the county seat election. (Historia)

that consumed. He and Raynes returned to Leoti, got the horses, and with five companions, only three of whom were armed, returned in wagon and buggy. They visited a drug store where a side in bar, and made him get up. Confer demanded him to dance, and fired his gun at that set to make him obey. The drug-store offered to treat if Confer would lower his gun, and the offer was accepted. The man then went into the street, and, according to the story began firing indiscriminately. Confer died of one of the shots. A Coronado man named Jackson happened to get in Confer's way and was struck on the head with the butt of Confer's gun. The Looni brothers interceded and requested the Leoti men to stop abusing citizens. For a reply Confer turned on Bob Looni and struck at him, performing an old planter's trick, hitting Bob Looni on the head and shooting John Looni in the leg at the same time. John was standing back of Bob and as Confer fired he sprang forward and clinched with him. The Looni cried, according to the story of the Coronado men, then began firing at two citizens who were running up the street. A dozen Coronado men, who had gathered in the zone, then opened fire, and Confer seemed to be a target for them all. The firing only lasted a moment, and when the smoke cleared away it was seen that Raynes, Confer, and Watson, who were on the pavement, had fallen to the ground dead. The other men were in the wagon, and James Dunning and Johnson were severely wounded. A. N. Boney, the seventh man of the Leoti crowd, escaped through injury. The statement that the bodies of the dead men are permitted to lie in

This fight will be longer or on the contrary, but it was a necessity after Confer and his men committed the crime. It was liberty fighting itself. In frontier settlements, it was a continual killing down toughs: Leavenworth, New York, Dodge, Wadsworth and other towns in Indiana have passed through this ordeal.

The Wichita Herald, Coronado, Mar. 3

Leoti. There were 14 bullets in Confer's body, and Raynes was wounded in 11 places. Every one of Raynes' wounds would have been fatal, but the two Looni boys were only slightly wounded. Johnson, it is thought would die, but Johnson and Dunning will recover. Johnson, who is in the least injured, says he and his companions went to Coronado at the invitation of some friends. They were having a little fun in the street and probably fired a few shots, but harmmed on one. He acknowledged that some of the crowd had been drinking, but denied that any were drunk. He alleged that the bodies of his dead companions were permitted to lie in the street until

12:30 P.M.

The Wichita County Herald (Coronado), March 10, 1887

To The Press.  
 You have published a false account about the shooting here are our by-passes from Leoti who did not receive it. *Neither its eyes nor ears* and non-interested parties' account.

On Thursday the 17th ultimo, the voters of the east side of the county left the polling precincts to avoid bloodshed when a few rough characters threatened their lives. They came to Coronado and registered that name, occupation, age and residence, fulfilling all the requirements of the law, proposing to carry the matter to the supreme court, where it could be proven that those men enacted under the instructions of a certain prominent man in Leoti. But last Sunday morning while the citizens of that place were at church service part came over from Leoti and inquired "where are the people?" The streets were very madly and scarcely a human being could be seen. They returned to Leoti and recruited their force with men and a case of beer and returned. They were Charles Confer, William Rains, Frank Janning, Johnson, (A. N.) Sherry, George Watson, and Emmett Denning. They were very much under the influence of whisky, and proceeded to make everybody drink with them they met.

They were partly mad and, not satisfied with such proceedings, they ordered a general just in front the east to dance. They then proceeded to "do up the town" by commencing to knock down several citizens with pistol. E. S. Lilly and Louis Jordan were the first victims. Johnson and Confer commanded it, saying "they were here to make the people fight and round up the town."

Charles and Ezra (Bob) Looni were standing near by and Confer struck Charles in the nose, shooting him as he dealt the second blow with his revolver, shattering his leg bone just above the knee joint. Charles clinched with Confer and threw him to the ground, holding his pistol arm in such position that he could not shoot him; his brother Ezra or Mr. Nicola, in the meantime Rains had fired at Nicola. Then the firing commenced from the wagon, and a general engagement ensued, which resulted in the killing of Confer and Rains, and the wounding of Johnson, Denning, Watson, Beeny, Jensen, from Leoti. Ezra Looni was shot twice in the leg by persons in the wagon, while Charles was at the right arm of Rains, yet with a broken leg and a wounded arm he held the "terror of the west" down till he was removed. Charles was unarmed. Rains attempted to run but faced about and fired till he was shot dead.

Beeny escaped to Leoti with the wagon, shot through the spine. Frank Johnson ran after the firing, he learned that he had five wounds in his body.

He is the son of R. E. Jenness, a prominent citizen of Leoti. Watson was shot in the mouth, body, arm, and hand, and has since died.

John was shot in the leg, but he had not discharged his revolver. Emmett Denning was shot through the thigh. He was a very ne'er-do-well young man, everyone expressing sympathy for him. He was unarmed.

Confer and Rains bodies were put on the back porch. Johnson and Denning were removed to Wright's drug store, and Watson to the Matlock building. Looni was removed to the Alamo House. Dr. McCain and Chouteau relieved the suffering of the wounded as much as possible, and both men and women did everything in their power to comfort them.

Two of the injured ones were very penitent for coming here with dangerous men, and loudly denounced Jenness and Confer for commanding the fight. — Last week's Herald.

Monday Adjutant-General Campbell and Col. Richardson accompanied

a set of beings as represented to Governor Martin by that noble (?) Christian (?) Man (?) the president of the Leoti company. We are positive the governor by this time knows who brought Confer in the country and how he was to drive off the citizens from the polls with his pistol, to "round up" Coronado, and of the \$750 he was to receive for his bad job.

The citizens of the adjutant-general that they were ready to put down that name if he would remain and guarantee protection against the tough reported to Leoti. Tuesday morning when it was known that Leoti men had surrounded Coronado and entrenched themselves in rifle pits during the night, the director of Col. Richardson that they would again hold their fire if Leoti's men were not unarmed. He immediately drove half mile south to a pit and ordered Watson and Wade, who were in the pit to leave. Later in the day Watson was served on fifteen citizens here, who willingly surrendered after the adjutant-general promised to accompany them. They went to Coronado.

Five of them were not near the scene of action when the shooting took place to personal knowledge.

The final result of this shooting will result in the conviction of the son of the president of the Leoti town company, as he is the sole survivor of the originators of the trouble.



Civilians of the town of Leoti.

**THE COWBOY WAR IN KANSAS**

February 1887?

At the western portion of the state of Kansas war being settled.

many fights occurred between small towns each trying to be named the county seat. Wichita County seems different.

The Leoti Coronado County Seat Fight.

was continued the "Bleeding of Texas" IV.

Photographed before the Wichita County Bank in Coronado are (standing) left: Luke Short, Wyatt Earp, Sundance, Jim, Doc Holliday, Pat Marion, Bill Tilghman, Red Looni, Jim

Materson, Pat and Mike Sughrue.