

Coker Cemetery History #24 – November 2010

by Bob Battaglia

The following newspaper article on **Jeff D. Smith** was printed on March 8, 1940. He died 6 weeks later, on 21 April 1940. He was buried at Coker Cemetery. He married **Julia Harriet Reed** Nov. 16, 1892 in Bandera TX. After marriage he lived in Sabinal for a while and then moved to San Antonio.

His parents were **Henry Marion Smith** and "**Fannie**" **Short**. Henry became a captain in the Texas Rangers in 1893. He then moved to San Antonio and had a gun shop with a partner named Jacob Linn. He is buried at Camp Stanley (Bullis TX).

Jeff had a brother, **Clint**, who was also captured by the Indians; which is covered in the newspaper article. Clint married **Dixie Alamo Lynch**, Aug 9, 1889 at the Gilliam Ranch on the Medina River. Clint died Sept. 9, 1932 and is buried in Rocksprings TX. His wife, Dixie, sent my dad a letter in 1940. She stated the book written by Clint and Jeff was out of print and suggested he contact Jeff in San Antonio. She also stated that Jeff was in process of writing a new book, but that he had died before it was printed. There is some confusion here because she states in her Jan 1940 letter to my dad that Jeff had died. She states "it was a more interesting book than the first". Her last line of the letter indicates she was not in touch with the Coker Community, it states, "You spoke about **Cokers**, they are all dead now." Not a happy feeling!

I invite the descendants of Jeff to dig up the notes that he used to prepare the new book which didn't get published. We can get it recorded on the Coker Cemetery Website.

I would like to thank **Carlene & Tom Smith**, in Jourdanton TX for gathering some of this information. What follows is the article in the 1940 San Antonio Light Newspaper. See picture of Jeff's gravesite with a historical marker at end of this article. This marker was placed there July 23, 1994.

GERONIMO NICE INDIAN*KIDNAPPED 3/2/1869***Kind to Paleface Boy****Jefferson D. Smith
Once Captive Of Apaches**

Geronimo—bloody Apache chief whose raids are chronicled in a film bearing his name and opening Friday at the Texas theater—may have been a name calculated to strike terror into the hearts of most early westerners.

But to Jefferson D. Smith, 1101 San Francisco street, the name recalls only memories of a “nice” Indian who was kind to a small, friendless white boy held by a not-too-kindly tribe.

It was 71 years ago last week that a band of Comanches crept down a gentle slope in Bexar county and seized 5-year-old Jeff Smith while he was herding sheep on his father’s ranch. Stifling his cries, they captured his brother, Clint, four years older, and sped away.

FORGETS ENGLISH

For the next six years the nomadic travel of the Indian tribes—with their wars and their hunts and their firelit [fire lit] ceremonials—was all the life he knew. He forgot

the English language and the civilized ways of his parents and became, to the core, an Indian.

Three years after his capture, the Comanches traded Jeff to the Apaches for a horse, and Jeff met the only really close friend he found among the savages—Geronimo, the brutal killer of scores of frontiersmen and their families.



JEFF D. SMITH RECALLS FRIENDSHIP OF CHIEF
Note scar on left side of face; Indian brand.

It was to this savage chieftain that Jeff turned when life became too hard, and it was from him that he received justice and advice.

As he learned to hunt for game with bow and arrow, the white child was harassed frequently by a larger Indian boy who stole his arrows. For losing the missiles Jeff was punished harshly by the squaws in whose care he was placed.

GOES TO GERONIMO

Timidly he took his problem to Geronimo.

“If he bothers you again,” said Geronimo, “shoot him. I’ll see that you’re not harmed for it.”

When the Indian boy made his next foray, Jeff sent him yipping for camp with a neatly-spotted arrow. The chief made good his promise.

But even with the chief for a sponsor, life was no weiner [wiener] roast. While he was still quite small his squaw-mother frequently tossed him into icy rivers, simply for the pure sport of it.

And the first buffalo he ever saw was one to whose back he was tied for a merry romp. He was rescued after the buffalo had worn himself out.

All this—though painful at the time—has had its good effect, Smith feels. He attributes his longevity and present hardy condition to the rigors of Indian ways.

All in all, he was not treated much worse than were the Indians’ own children, and presently he forgot that he was not actually one of them. Especially did this become true after Clint, a reminder of home, was separated from him in one of the periodic migrations.

He was well-fed by his captors, except for one trek during 1870 when the tribe ran out of food in New Mexico and traveled hungry for days.

Being older, Clint—who is now dead—was permitted to accompany the Indians on raiding parties.

FOUND BY TROOPS

The nearest Jeff came to real adventure was in the New Mexico battle in which he was rescued from the Indians by federal troops. In that encounter, led by General McKinsie, he was assigned the job of guarding the horses, and his own horse was shot from under him.

When the tribe scattered, Jeff hid in a cave, but was found by the troops and returned to his now-forgotten parents at Dripping Springs.

Having forgotten them, he regarded them simply as new masters. His real name had slipped from memory and Catchowitchee—or Horsetail—was the only term of address to which he answered.

More than 60 years have passed since then—years in which Smith served as a trail driver and did many other things—but one tangible record of his Indian captivity remains with him.

He still carries the brand of ownership placed there by the tribes on each cheek.

Historic marker placed on Geronimo kin grave

By Patricia V. Barrios
Express-News Staff Writer

A Texas Historical Commission plaque marking the gravesite of Geronimo's foster son was unveiled Saturday at Coker Cemetery.

The grave of Jefferson Davis Smith, who was adopted by Apache chief Geronimo after he and his brother Clint were kidnapped by Lipan and Comanche Indians, was bestowed with a commemorative plaque.

The memorial was unveiled by two of Smith's descendants, Oda Irene Kelley, Smith's daughter, and Tom Smith, his grandson.

Tom Smith's wife, Carlene, and Robert Benavides, chairman of the Bexar County Historical Commission markers committee, also assisted at the unveiling.

"It was a very emotional experience for me," Carlene Smith said. "My husband and I had been working on this for four years and this was the culmination of that. I was very proud of what we had done."

Smith said she and her husband applied for the marker four years ago after Kelley suggested a memorial be placed at her father's gravesite.

Smith said a 250-word paper requesting the marker resulted in state approval for the plaque. But authorities demanded further research.

The family's investigation determined that Smith and his brother were raised by Geronimo for seven years after the famous chief purchased them from Comanches.

The boys were kidnapped by Mexican bandits, who returned



PHOTO BY DOUG SEHRES

Unveiling the historical marker Saturday on the grave of Jefferson Davis Smith, foster son of Geronimo, are (left to right): Oda Smith Kelley, Smith's daughter; Robert Benavides of the Bexar County Historical Society; and grandson Tom Smith and wife Carlene.

them to their natural father in exchange for a \$2,000 award.

About 150 people attended the

dedication, including seven of Smith's nine grandchildren and their families.

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