

Coker Cemetery History #28 – November 2012

by Bob Battaglia

Below is an article on the death of James Van Riper that ran in the San Antonio Express Newspaper on Dec 17, 1905. Van Riper married Catherine Jones in Bexar County on Jan 13, 1870. Catherine was Amos Dickens Jones' daughter.

Capt. J.M. Van Riper Dies After Operation

James M. Van Riper (detailed drawing)

Chief of Police Department of San Antonio

One of the best-known officers of this state. James Van Riper was a TX Ranger and Confederate Veteran. He had been in constabulary of southwest TX for forty years. Funeral this afternoon was under Masonic auspices. Capt. James M. Van Riper, City Marshal of San Antonio, died Saturday morning at 10 o'clock from the effects of an operation performed Friday at noon. Although the immediate cause of death was the operation performed to relieve internal trouble, for the past two months he had been ill and for the last three weeks he had been confined to his bed only leaving it on very few occasions and then to return almost immediately. During the last few weeks he had been growing constantly worse, and Friday on the advice of his physician he was removed to the Santa Rosa Infirmary for surgical treatment.

After the operation it was feared he would not survive and Saturday it became evident he could not live through this day. His family was at once gathered around the bedside. He was conscious until the last few moments, but did not seem to realize even at the last that his condition was serious. The news of his death was at once carried to Mayor Callaghan and the flag over the City Hall was lowered to half-mast.

Few men in the City were better known or more respected than Captain Van Riper. He was known far and wide as one who was honest, brave and was both in public and private life a courageous officer and a devoted citizen. During the many years he has spent in public service, beginning with his first appointment as deputy by Sheriff Knox he has been almost constantly an officer of the peace, and nothing has ever occurred to reflect in the least, upon his character or his fidelity to what he believed to be the right.

During Saturday when it became generally known that Captain Van Riper was dead, the family was in almost constant receipt of condolences from friends of the captain and his family.

Captain Van Riper is survived by his wife, two sons, Charley and Albert and a daughter Maria, all of whom reside in this City. The funeral will take place from the home on Ruiz Street this afternoon at 2 o'clock and will be under the auspices of the Alamo Masonic Lodge. The Masons will have entire charge of the ceremony. Interment will be in the Alamo Masonic Cem. The pallbearers will be: J. W. Houston, Walter Napier, R.L. Ball (?), C.A. Keller, E.B. (---?) and Sam A. Harris. Captain James Van Riper was born in Waterloo, N.Y., being 62 years old at the time of his death. At the age of two his parents immigrated to California crossing the entire continent in wagons where they settled in Stockton (CA) in 1851 (not sure, print is blurred); afterward moving to Santa Barbara, CA. Here he resided for about five years and even at this early age began shifting for himself. His first experience in work was herding sheep at 50 cents a day and

here is where he developed much of the cool courage for which he was later noted. At first, especially in that early day, there were many wild animals in the mountains, which did not hesitate to attack a herd of sheep. In defending his work, Captain Van Riper acquired his coolness and daring.

In -----? the family moved again, this time to San Antonio bringing overland a drove of horses. This trip proved a dangerous one for Indians at the time were savage and several attacks were repelled before the party arrived here.

Captain Van Riper remained on a farm near this city until the breaking out of the war between the states in 1862, when he enlisted in the confederate army, joining the 31 Regt of TX Volunteers under Capt Be----? of this city and Col. T.C. Hauppe of Dallas. Here again he showed his complete control of himself and his dauntless courage and daring. At the close of the war he united with the TX rangers and participated in a number of encounters with the Indians.

in 1876 he was appointed deputy sheriff under Sheriff Knox and has been in almost continuous service as a peace officer ever since. During the time, he has served as deputy on sheriffs McCall, Stevens and Nat Lewis; as Deputy United States Marshall under Marshall Jackson and was two years customs guard at El Paso. Two years he spent as patrolman and assistant City detective here. He was Chief Deputy Sheriff under Sheriff John P. Campbell and he acted as road (?) overseer at the expiration of Campbell's term of office until appointed City Marshall by Mayor Hicks in February 1901 to fill unexpired term of Captain Druse(?).

He then served as City Marshall under Mayor Hicks and Terrell, retiring when Mayor Campbell took charge. For the past two years he has been employed in the claim department of the San Antonio Traction Company, until June 1 last, when he was appointed head of the special police. Then on Dec. 11 he qualified as City Marshall of San Antonio again.

A story describing his bravery is told, having occurred during his career as a TX ranger. in making the capture of a particularly bad desperado, he was doing some quick work to reload his pistol. As a ranger he carried both a Winchester rifle and pistol cartridges, which at that time were made in different sizes and were not interchangeable. He had come to close quarters with man and had the drop on him when he discovered to his horror that he had made a mistake and had placed a rifle cartridge in his pistol, making the weapon of no effect. Without the tremor of a nerve, however, he carried out the bluff and captured the bandit. After having him well in hand and in irons, he showed the man the pistol and he realized in an instant that the way it was loaded, it was absolutely useless. In his chagrin, the bandit actually cried.

Afterwards Capt Van Riper took the matter up with the Winchester Arms Company, explaining that a similar occurrence was possible under even worse circumstances and he was instrumental in their manufacturing the cartridges for the two weapons alike.

If you have interesting stories or newspaper articles, send them to Bob Battaglia at:

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