



J.B. "Billy" Mathews: Biography of a Lincoln County Deputy

By Elvis E. Fleming



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Jacob B. 'Billy' Mathews performed a leading role in what is arguably the most notorious chapter in the history of the American West: New Mexico's Lincoln County War of the 1870s. In carrying out orders from some of the primary figures in the conflict, namely J.J. 'Jimmy' Dolan or Sheriff William Brady, Mathews took part in practically all of the significant events of the war.

What is known about his life before the Lincoln County War is quite meager, and much of what has been published about him is incorrect. The author seeks to rectify the inaccuracies as well as to provide new information on his life both before and after the Lincoln County War.

Mathews' primary claim to fame is that he was the sheriff's chief deputy in command of the posse that shot down John Henry Tunstall on February 18, 1878, thereby igniting the most celebrated event in Lincoln County's history. In one aspect, he is unique among all of the participants in this conflict--he survived the war and lived to die a natural death of old age.

After the Lincoln conflict, Mathews became a distinguished pioneer in the establishment of big-time cattle ranching in the Peasco Valley and farming in the Pecos Valley of Southeast New Mexico



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Editorial Review

Review

"...an interesting addition to libraries of history buffs fascinated by the Lincoln County War." -- S. Derrickson Moore, *Las Cruces Sun News*

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"I must say it has 'come a treat' since its earlier NMHR incarnation. Yucca Tree Press do a very nice book and I am sure you must be very pleased with it." -- *Frederick Nolan, author-historian*

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"One of the lesser players in the Lincoln County Follies, 'Billy' Mathews was rather more than just another hired tough. Rebellious teenager, soldier, miner, lawman, rancher, and finally Roswell postmaster, Mathews lived down his past to earn respectability and high esteem: we can only regret he never saw fit to write down his own account of some of the events in which he participated. This comprehensive and well-illustrated biography, which meticulously traces his life from his birth in Tennessee through to his early death--he was only 57--provides appropriate recognition to one of New Mexico's many forgotten pioneers." -- *book talk*

About the Author

Elvis E. Fleming has written or co-written six books on the history of Southeast New Mexico and West Texas, as well as over twenty magazine articles. Currently, he serves on the New Mexico Historical Records Advisory Board and also as the official historian for the City of Roswell. Fleming is Professor of History, Emeritus, from Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell. He and his wife Menza have been married for forty-four years and live in Roswell, New Mexico.

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