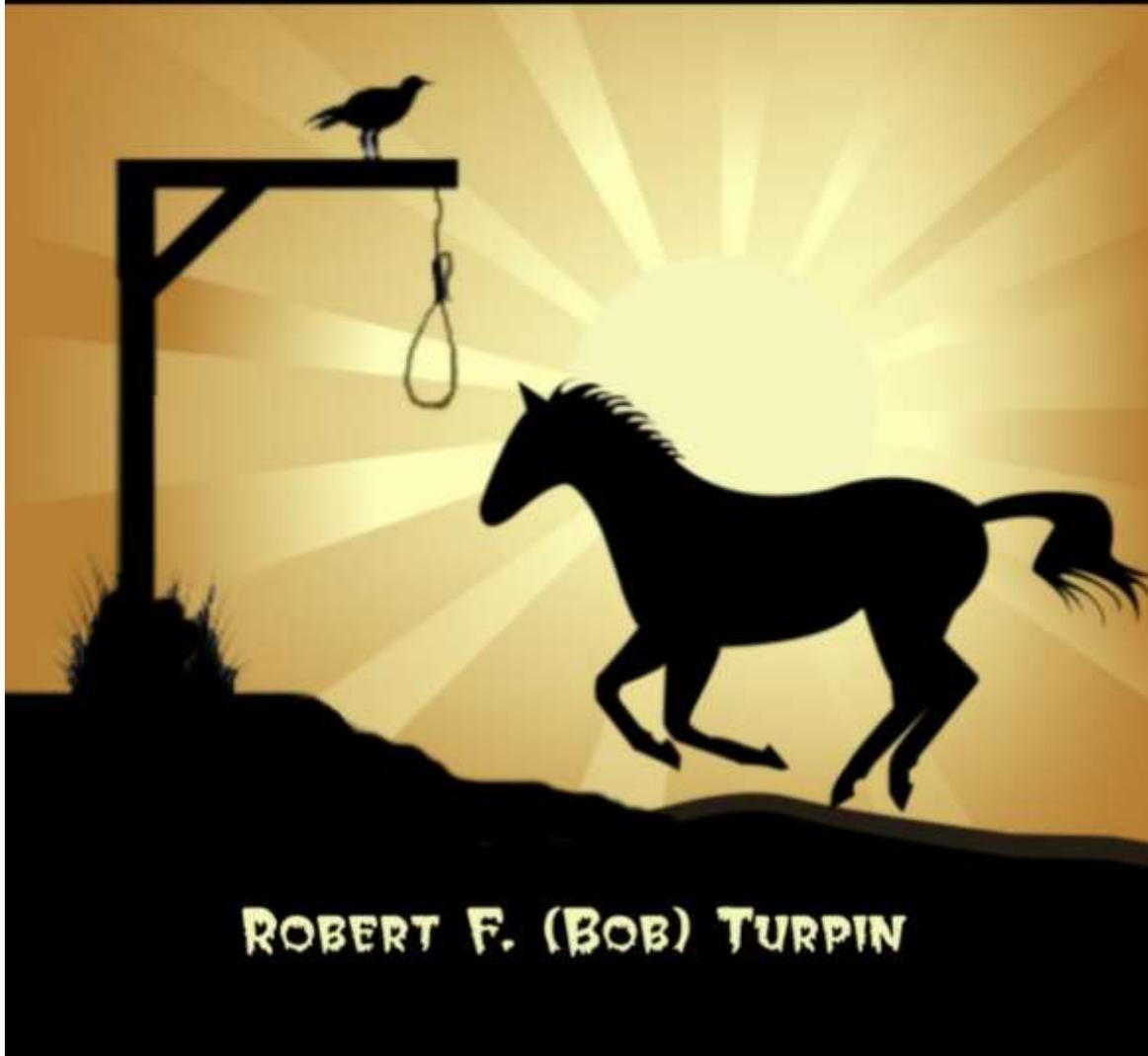


# WESTERN GHOST STORIES

Haunted Gallows and Spirit Horse



ROBERT F. (BOB) TURPIN

# Western Ghost Stories

## Haunted Gallows and Spirit Horse

### Copyright

© 2013 by Bob Turpin  
All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be copied or reproduced  
in any form without permission in writing  
from the publisher, except by a reviewer  
who may quote brief passages  
for review purposes.

### Dedication

To the folks who like to read  
about the Old West.

## Haunted Gallows, San Bois Mountains

On December 28, 1891, the body of a man was found by travelers on a lonely stretch of road not far from Robber's Cave in Wilburton, Oklahoma. Robber's cave was known as a hunter's shelter and hangout for outlaws wanted by the law.

The body that the travelers found was nude, in a severe state of decomposition, and the cause of death was quite clear. The dead man had been shot in the back of his head with a shotgun.

When word of the gruesome murder reached Fort Smith, Arkansas, forty miles away, deputy marshals were sent to investigate the death. The officers found no clue at the scene to indicate who the killer was. Few settlers lived in the area to supply any information at all. The lawmen took the body to Fort Smith to await further developments.

The murdered man's description was circulated throughout the territory. Several days later two men came from a nearby settlement to view the body. In spite of the horrible deteriorating condition of the body, they were sure it was George Bickford. A name wasn't much to go on but it would help.

Marshal Jacob Yoes assigned several of his deputies to the case. They were to backtrack Bickford's earlier trail to learn all they could about his whereabouts leading up to his murder – who his friends and family were, and if anyone was seen with him shortly before his untimely death.

They found a man who said Bickford had been seen with Lewis Holder. Holder had a rundown homestead near Fort Smith on the Poteau River. Bickford had been seen at Holder's place several times. Holder, a middle aged fellow, spent much of his time over in Indian territory looking for a lost Spanish gold or silver mine. The mine supposedly dated back to the early 1700's.

Now and then Holder would find someone to finance his expeditions. He claimed to be on the verge of uncovering a lost gold mine. The marshals decided Holder could have gotten Bickford interested enough in the mine to accompany him to the territory. They talked to a number of people before they found a fellow who told them that Bickford had mentioned to him a trip he was taking to the territory. He said he and Holder were going on a hunting trip. The man said he had his doubts for there was little fur-bearing game in the San Bois Mountains. Not enough to make it worth their while.

The marshals agreed that it was probably the mine they were going to look for. They further decided that maybe Holder actually found something he did not want to share with Bickford.

The search for Lewis Holder began. He was located in the swamplands along the Poteau River Bottoms. With him was a good team of horses and a sound wagon. Later two witnesses declared the horses and wagon belonged to George Bickford before Holder showed up with them. Holder was arrested for the murder and taken to Fort Smith. Soon after that, Marshal Yoes informed his deputies they needed more evidence for the grand jury to indict Holder for murder. Three of his finest men went back into the San Bois Mountains to search for more evidence. They traveled Bickford's back trail once more. They talked with several more people and learned that two men traveling in a wagon were seen passing through several tiny settlements in the mountains. At this point the lawmen lost the trail completely. Close to giving up, they stopped at a general store some twenty miles from where Bickford's body was found.

The deputies were talking to the store owner about the case and a Choctaw Indian named Three-Persons was listening. The Indian moved closer as the talk continued. Shortly he interrupted the men to say he knew the two and knew what they were discussing. He went on to describe them and the team and wagon they were driving. He had met the two men in the mountains when he was looking for some stray stock.

Bickford and Holder were camped on the trail just short of entering the San Bois Mountains. The two were friendly and invited him to eat with them and he did. Four weeks later Three-Persons was on his way to Panther (now McCurtain) when he saw the two men once more. They were camped in almost the exact spot he had found them before.

In this meeting Three-Persons said the two men acted differently than they did the first time he met them. They appeared to be upset and angry about something and didn't want him around. After awhile he decided to move on. He did not get the impression they were mad at him but with each other. As he rode away he overheard them almost shouting at each other.

"We will hide the damn gold and settle things later." Holder was saying in an angry voice.

"I supplied the damn wagon, team, food and shotgun. This earns me eighty percent," Bickford replied.

Both men were standing face- to-face, ready to fight. "The deal was a fifty-fifty split and by damn that's the way it will be," Holder stated flatly.

The two realized I was close enough to hear them," Three-Persons said. "They stopped the argument and stood glaring at me as I rode away."

When Three-Persons first heard about a body being found along the trail, he thought nothing about it for dead men were discovered on the road quite often, especially around Robber's Cave. Outlaws had a falling out among themselves and someone ended up dead.