

7-1-1997

Deputy J.B. "Billy" Mathews: The Lincoln County War and Other Lives

Elvis E. Fleming

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Fleming, Elvis E.. "Deputy J.B. "Billy" Mathews: The Lincoln County War and Other Lives." *New Mexico Historical Review* 72, 3 (1997). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol72/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Deputy J.B. “Billy” Mathews: The Lincoln County War and Other Lives

ELVIS E. FLEMING

Morton returned at about 2 A. M. the next day [19 February 1878] and reported to me that he caught up with the horses about 30 miles away and that Tunstall resisted and fired at him and that he returned the fire and Tunstall was killed.¹

Deputy Sheriff J.B. “Billy” Mathews made this statement on 26 June 1878 in a sworn affidavit, describing the event that set off the celebrated Lincoln County War, and the incident with which Mathews’ own name would forever be linked in New Mexico history.

J.B. Mathews played a major role in what is perhaps the most famous episode in the history of the American West. Often carrying out instructions from one of the principals in the conflict—especially J.J. Dolan or Sheriff William Brady—Mathews participated in virtually all of the major events of the war. Afterwards, he was a notable force in the development of large-scale cattle ranching in southeastern New Mexico and for the last six years of his life, he served as Roswell’s postmaster.

Historians know little about Mathews’ life before the Lincoln County War, and some of what has been published about him is inaccurate. The objectives of this paper are to correct the misinformation and provide new knowledge about his life before and after the troubles in Lincoln County. Mathews was a native of Tennessee, not Ireland, as Joel Jacobsen states in *Such Men as Billy the Kid: The Lincoln County War Reconsidered* (1994). His father, Walter Mathews, married Antalise “Anna”

Elvis E. Fleming has been professor of history since 1969 at Eastern New Mexico University at Roswell and chair of the Liberal Arts Division since 1992. He has written two books and co-written four others on the history of southeastern New Mexico and West Texas. He is also the official historian for the city of Roswell.

Ashford in Woodbury, Tennessee, on 20 April 1842, when Walter was about twenty-one years old and Anna was about fifteen.² The Census of 1850 lists their children as Josiah, 7; John, 5; J.B., 3; and Nancy, 1. More precisely, J.B. (Jacob Basil) was born 5 May 1847 in Woodbury. Two more sons and three more daughters were born after the 1850 census. J.B.'s brothers who were known to the New Mexico branch of the family were Jim Louis and Robert Lee "Bob." There were four sisters, whose names are unknown. The family does not appear in the Tennessee Census of 1860 or 1870.

Not suprisingly, the residents of Tennessee had divided loyalties between the Confederacy and the Union during the Civil War. The Unionists were concentrated in the eastern part of the state, which Confederate forces held for most of the war. As the war spread across the middle and western parts of the state in 1862, Federal troops established control of those areas. The residents of Middle Tennessee, including the Mathews family, were sympathetic mostly to the Confederacy.

An erroneous assertion that J. B. Mathews was in the Confederate cavalry has appeared in print several times. *An Illustrated History of New Mexico* (1895) features the first published biographical sketch of Mathews and simply names his military unit without defining it as a Confederate or Union regiment. When Mathews died in 1904, both the *Roswell Daily Record* and the weekly *Roswell Record* simply repeated much of the information from the *Illustrated History*. Another weekly paper, the *Roswell Register*, specifically stated that Mathews was in the Union army. The notion that he served in the Confederate army seems to have originated with a story in a special historical edition of the *Roswell Daily Record* that ran in 1937. The article quotes "verbatim" from the *Illustrated History* but adds a subtitle that reads "In Confederate Army."³

Some of the books and articles about the Lincoln County War published since 1937 have continued to circulate this inaccurate information. For example, Maurice G. Fulton in *History of the Lincoln County War* (1968) states that "Mathews was a Tennessean and an ex-Confederate soldier." In similar fashion, Frederick Nolan, in *The Lincoln County War: A Documentary History* (1993), writes "Mathews was one of the few proponents of the troubles who had fought on the Confederate side during the Civil War."⁴

Mathews actually served in the 5th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, which was a Union outfit. The chief responsibility of the regiment was guarding Union supply lines between Nashville and various fronts to the south and southeast toward Chattanooga. The principal battle in which the 5th Tennessee cavalry was involved before Mathews enlisted was Stone's River (Murfreesboro), on 26 December 1862 to 5 January

1863. After that, the outfit fought numerous skirmishes and battles. A major Union offensive took place in the fall of 1863 when Union troops took Chattanooga, but the 5th Tennessee apparently played no direct part in that action.⁵

The whereabouts and actions of Jacob B. Mathews during the fall of 1864 are obscure. Four different documents in his military records state that he deserted the regiment. Two of those documents state that he deserted at Wartrace, a small community near Shelbyville, on 23 September, taking his horse, weapons, and ammunition. The other two documents give different dates: 18 September and 27 October.⁶ If Mathews deserted, it was nothing out of the ordinary. A report written by General Robert H. Milroy on 16 January 1865 provides an insider's view of the outfit that young Mathews had joined:

When I took command. . . in June, 1864, . . . officers and men were absent. . . without authority. In fact, I found the regiment utterly void of order and discipline. . . . The field officers seem to have no conception of their obligations and duties; have no control over their subordinates or men. . . . The regiment is about 800 strong, and the largest number. . . in camp at any time will not exceed 200. Most of the 600 absentees are unaccounted for. . . . I therefore suggest that Colonel [William B.] Stokes be ordered back to his regiment, because, without him, the regiment is a rabble and entirely worthless to the service.⁷

On 26 January 1865, the 5th Tennessee received orders to go to Fayetteville, Tennessee.⁸ According to Mathews' military records, he was "gained" on that same day at Tullahoma. The document adds: "Reported deserted by Error."⁹ This statement further complicates complete understanding of Mathews' military experience, since four documents in his records indicate that he deserted while one states that he returned.

The regiment stayed at Fayetteville until it was mustered out of service on 14 August 1865, at Pulaski, Tennessee.¹⁰ Mathews (listed as "Mathis") was present the entire time, from 26 January to 14 August. His records indicate that upon being mustered out, he was eighteen years old—the same age as listed at his enlistment twenty-two months earlier. He had not received pay since 30 June 1864. He owed \$38.86 on his clothing account, against which he had drawn \$86.77. He had never received the full amount of the bounty except the original \$25.00 and was due another \$75.00; whether he ever received that money or not is unknown.¹¹

Mathews returned to his home in McMinnville after the war, but the length of his stay there is indeterminable. His great-granddaughter, Joanne McCombs, believes his stay was short because he was not welcome any longer in his home community due to his Union service. Mathews' son, Ernest, implies that J.B. left Tennessee within months after the war ended. The *Illustrated History* states that he stayed until spring, 1867. In any case, it seems that another McMinnville man, Johnny Riley, had been to the Colorado gold fields and had returned to get married. Riley offered to furnish food if Mathews would drive one of his wagons back to Colorado for him. Mathews agreed and arrived in Gilpin County, Colorado, but stayed only two months.¹²

Further south, Elizabethtown, New Mexico was in the midst of its own gold rush in 1866. Mathews traveled there and staked two claims. He also worked for an English mining company for four or five years. He managed to save \$700 and sold his claims to the company for \$2,000, which provided a sizable stake that enabled him to seek his fortune elsewhere. McCombs maintains that Riley and Mathews were partners and received equal amounts from the sale of their claims. Riley, however, chose to stay in Elizabethtown.¹³

According to Ernest, Mathews' son, J.B. went from Elizabethtown to Fort Stanton, then to Lincoln. He worked briefly as a clerk for L. G. Murphy & Company, but did not enjoy working indoors, so he bought some cattle and drove them to the present site of Roswell in the Pecos Valley. There he met Aaron Wilburn, his future business partner. They combined their small herds in 1869.¹⁴

Mathews and Wilburn located their camp near the later site of the Chaves County courthouse. They had two wagons, two "government" tents, eight work horses, ten saddle horses, and a herd of cattle. On the south side of the Río Hondo where Roswell's East Second Street would later intersect that stream, they built a picket corral that stood for many years.

In 1872, Mathews filed a land claim three miles east of Roswell where he farmed and maintained another small herd of cattle. A beaver dam existed on the North Spring River about two miles east of Roswell; Mathews plowed a furrow from this dam to his cornfield so he could use the water to irrigate. A flood washed out the beaver dam, however, and his corn died. This incident was followed by two dry years. When Mathews attempted to file a preemption claim, he learned that his land was a school section, so he released it back to the federal government and decided to look for better opportunities elsewhere.¹⁵

Sometime in the mid-1870s, Mathews moved his small herd of cattle from the Roswell area to the Río Peñasco seventy-five miles southwest.¹⁶ He and Frank Freeman, an Alabaman of dubious reputation, together established a cow camp as "squatters" on a section (640 acres) of gov-

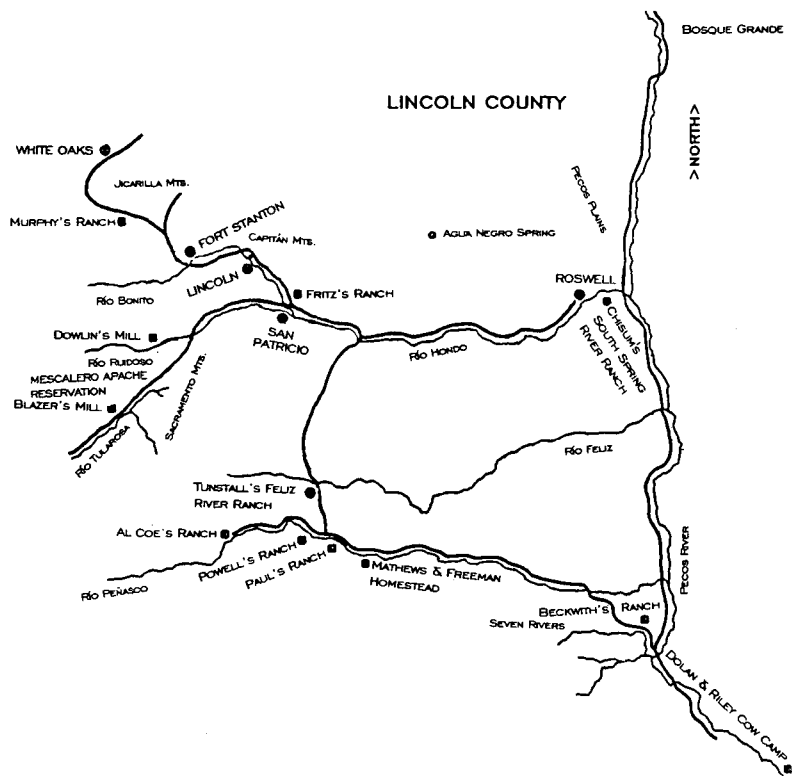
ernment land on the river near a large spring at the mouth of a canyon. The spring has since been known as "Mathews Spring" or "Head Spring" and the canyon as "Mathews Canyon." The two men built a horse corral and a lean-to for themselves. Mathews was appointed "forage agent" for the area.¹⁷

In September 1877, Mathews turned the forage agent's job over to W. W. Paul. He also sold his water rights and improvements to John Henry Tunstall for \$700 since the land itself was not his to sell.¹⁸ By this time, Mathews and Freeman had already abandoned the place. Mathews then moved to Lincoln and used the money he had acquired to buy a silent share in J.J. Dolan & Company, which had replaced L.G. Murphy & Company. He also worked as a clerk in the store. According to McCombs, Mathews kept the store's books in order and carried out tasks that Dolan assigned. This turn of events placed Mathews in an excellent position to get acquainted with the people and the affairs of Lincoln County.¹⁹

It is unnecessary to recount here the particulars of the Lincoln County War. A review of J. B. Mathews' role in that conflict, however, is appropriate. He was a key figure in the dispute, involved in numerous important events. Mathews' activities constituted a prominent portion of the story, he has always been overshadowed by the principal leaders: L.G. Murphy, Sheriff William Brady, J. J. Dolan, John Henry Tunstall, Alexander McSween, John Chisum, and Pat Garrett.²⁰

Mathews is famous primarily because he was the chief deputy in charge of the sheriff's posse that killed John Henry Tunstall on 18 February 1878, thereby triggering the war. Mathews had already helped Sheriff Brady levy an attachment against the contents of Tunstall's store in Lincoln. The sheriff then gave Mathews the responsibility of attaching Alexander McSween's cattle, which Brady believed to be pastured on Tunstall's Feliz River Ranch. On the first attempt, Tunstall's foreman, Richard Brewer, refused to let Mathews take the cattle. Mathews decided that the out-gunned posse should return to Lincoln for further instructions. The sheriff sent Mathews back a few days later with a larger posse, but Tunstall and his men had left the ranch to drive Tunstall's prize horses to Lincoln. Mathews and a few others stayed at the ranch house while a sub-posse chased Tunstall and killed him. The posse's members claimed that he had resisted arrest.

Among Tunstall's cowboys was a young man who called himself "William H. Bonney." He is known today as Billy the Kid. Bonney vowed to avenge his employer's death. The local constable deputized the Kid and others so that they could create a posse that evolved into a vigilante group known as The Regulators. The Lincoln County Grand Jury indicted Jessie Evans and several others in the spring of 1878 for killing Tunstall. The same jury also indicted Dolan and Mathews as accessories in the case.²¹



Lincoln County, 1870s. Map drawn by Author.

Another of the more important episodes of the Lincoln County War in which Mathews was a participant was the assassination of Sheriff Brady and Deputy George Hindman by the Regulators in Lincoln on 1 April 1878. On that Monday morning, Brady, Hindman, Mathews, George Peppin, and John Long were walking along the town's only street. When they arrived in front of Tunstall's store, the Regulators opened fire from the corral gate behind the store. After Brady fell, Bonney rushed out and picked up the sheriff's rifle. Mathews fired at the Kid and wounded him in the left thigh; Long also claimed credit for the shot. McCombs stated that Bonney managed to hide in an Hispanic woman's house. He escaped in disguise, wearing her dress and *rebozo*. Nolan writes that the Kid later told Susan McSween that he was actually shooting at Mathews, not the sheriff. In fact, the young gunman had tried to kill Mathews only three days before the Regulators killed the sheriff.²²

Mathews was also a participant in the 29 April ambush of the Regulators at the Fritz Ranch on the Río Bonito. Mathews, George Peppin, and Johnny Hurley, all of Lincoln, traveled to the Seven Rivers area where they joined a group of twenty local men, allegedly to help Sheriff John Copeland. They wanted to be certain that he arrested the Regulators for killing Brady, Hindman, Frank Baker, William Morton, and William McCloskey. Three of the Regulators rode into the trap. The ambushers killed Frank McNab, the leader, and mortally wounded Ab Saunders. Frank Coe surrendered. The next day, the Seven Rivers posse engaged McSween's men in an inconsequential skirmish that historian Robert M. Utley has termed the "Battle of Lincoln."²³

As these examples illustrate, Mathews was in the midst of events in the county during the days of turmoil between the Murphy-Dolan and Tunstall-McSween factions. Traditionally, historians have described the Dolan faction as the "bad guys" and the McSween party as the "good guys." More recent writers on the subject, such as Nolan and Utley, have concluded that the principal characters on both sides harbored equal amounts of unrighteousness. Most of the men involved were just ordinary citizens who got caught up in the machinations of the leaders. Nolan implies that Billy Mathews tried to make the best of the situation, as shown by his attendance along with other Dolan partisans at the church services led by the Reverend Dr. Taylor F. Ealy at McSween's house on 23 June 1878.²⁴

The climax of the Lincoln County War was the Five-Day Battle in Lincoln, on 15–19 July 1878. Sheriff George Peppin and McSween both recruited "armies" that entrenched themselves around the town in preparation for a showdown. Mathews entered the *torreon*, or "Indian tower," along with the sheriff and four other men at the start of the battle. Mathews' part in the battle and its outcome are not especially significant. On the final day, the sheriff's men burned McSween's house and killed him and several of his men. The war gradually diminished after the Lincoln battle, but lawlessness in Lincoln County actually increased over the next few months in the absence of effective law enforcement. The disorder in Lincoln increased at the end of 1878. In December, William Bonney and a group of former McSween backers rode in from Fort Sumner and captured the town. Mathews, Dolan, and Long rushed to Fort Stanton for protection against the invaders. Scant records indicate that Bonney was jailed for a short time as a result of this episode. According to Utley, one of the men—newcomer Billy Campbell—shot and killed Chapman.²⁵

As a result of Chapman's death, Governor Lew Wallace came to town to investigate. Even before his arrival in Lincoln, Wallace issued orders to Colonel Edward Hatch, the new commander of the United States Military District of New Mexico, to arrest Mathews, Jessie Evans, and Campbell for Chapman's murder. They were at the Carrizozo Ranch with Dolan at the time. Soldiers took them into custody and placed them in

the guardhouse at Fort Stanton. The military also arrested Dolan shortly afterward. Wallace believed the prison quarters at Fort Stanton were unsafe and took measures to have the men transferred to Fort Union, but he later changed his mind.²⁶

During the spring 1879 term of the Lincoln County Grand Jury, many indictments were generated, including one for Mathews as an accessory in the Chapman killing. Some of those indicted for various actions since the start of the war at first opted to plead "not guilty" and asked for a change of venue rather than accepting amnesty. About 1 May, the court granted a change of venue to Socorro county for a group that included Mathews, Peppin, and Thomas B. "Buck" Powell. Mathews and some of the others eventually, in the words of Fulton, "went to the trouble of having their offenses purged away by accepting what their lawyers, Catron and Thornton, called the 'Wallace amnesty.'"²⁷ Mathews stayed in Lincoln after the death of Chapman, "partnering Dolan for some years after the war," according to Nolan.²⁸ Mathews was not yet through, however, with Billy the Kid.

The new sheriff, Pat Garrett, captured Bonney in December 1880, and he was put on trial in April 1881 for the murder of William Brady. The district attorney moved Bonney's trial to Mesilla. Billy Mathews was the principal witness for the prosecution and he testified that Brady was ambushed, alleging premeditation, and that Bonney ran out from his hiding place, thereby alleging that he was part of a conspiracy. Mathews' testimony was enough to convict Bonney. On 13 April 1881, the judge sentenced William Bonney to be hanged a month later in Lincoln.²⁹

Seven men, five of whom were special deputies for this assignment, guarded Bonney on the long wagon trip back to Lincoln from Mesilla. Three of the five were known to be hostile toward their prisoner: Mathews; John Kinney, the king of southern New Mexico rustlers; and "Pecos Bob" Olinger, who was destined to be slain by Bonney when the latter escaped two weeks later. Kinney sat beside Bonney and Mathews and Olinger sat across from them in the wagon. The group left Mesilla on 16 April. Sheriff Garrett met the entourage at Fort Stanton five days later, took responsibility for the prisoner, and escorted the party into Lincoln.³⁰ A week later, Billy the Kid made his famous last escape on 28 April 1881. Garrett hunted the Kid down and killed him at Fort Sumner on 14 July of that same year.

As far as reliable sources indicate, Billy Mathews had nothing further to do with the factional strife in Lincoln County after he helped bring Bonney back to Lincoln.³¹ The *Illustrated History*, however, gives Mathews much credit in its account of the Lincoln County War: "The course which Mr. Mathews followed during this trying period was a most courageous and commendable one. . . . [I]t was largely through his efforts that the matter was terminated so as to preserve the interests of those who were on the side of right."³²

After the Lincoln County War, J. J. Dolan employed Mathews as range manager for Tunstall's former Feliz River Ranch. According to Lillian Bidal in her history of the Peñasco Valley, Dolan acquired the ranch through homestead filings by Mathews, Dolan, and relatives of Dolan's wife. In a letter written in 1961 that Ernestine Chesser Williams quotes in *Echoes Break the Silence* (1987), Mathews' son, Ernest, claims that his father was encouraged by Mescalero Apaches to use the "Flying H" brand to identify Dolan's cattle. If the cattle were so branded, the Mescaleros promised they would never clandestinely butcher Dolan cattle. The ranch eventually took both the brand and the name.³³

Fulton summarizes that "Mathews was not by nature a man of violence. As hostilities subsided he quickly disassociated himself from his connection with the feud." Fulton goes on to state, somewhat erroneously, that Mathews "moved to the Peñasco Valley where he engaged in the cattle business on a modest scale."³⁴ Mathews actually attempted to file a homestead claim on a quarter-section of his squatter's claim on the Peñasco, but the claim was rejected.

Mathews met his future bride through James T. and Margaret Bates, originally of Tupelo, Mississippi, who moved their family onto the Lower Peñasco in 1881. Mathews married Dora Matilda Bates, who was not yet sixteen (some twenty years his junior), on 11 July 1883. The marriage was performed by Justice of the Peace Robert Dickson and witnessed by Al and Mollie Coe. In 1884, Mathews and his father-in-law bought Thomas C. Tillotson's 160-acre homestead at Mathews Spring where Mathews and Freeman had squatted several years earlier. Mathews hired George Peppin and Carlay Bartlett of Lincoln, as well as other workers from La Luz, to build an adobe residence on the homestead for him and his new bride.³⁵

The Mathewses' first child, Edith Thornton, was born on 7 June 1884. She was named for William T. Thornton, a Santa Fe attorney who would later become territorial governor. According to Bess Dow, Edith's daughter, Edith often spent time with the Dolan family at the Flying H Ranch when she was a child. After his first wife died in 1886, Dolan secured a governess to care for his child. Little Edith was invited to take advantage of the governess' teaching—the only education she had until the family moved to Roswell.³⁶

Mathews built up his herd on the Peñasco until he had about eight hundred cattle. He accepted an appointment as postmaster of the new Lower Peñasco post office on 11 November 1884, but he turned that job over to his wife when he became involved with the CA Bar Ranch. Dora, who served from 21 January 1885 until 26 April 1886, was the youngest postmistress in New Mexico Territory.³⁷

While it is not my purpose here to detail the history of the CA Bar Ranch, Billy Mathews' association with it necessitates some attention to the subject. The Champion Cattle Company of Texas was owned primarily by Missouri investors. It was chartered in Texas and headquartered in Colorado City, Mitchell County. By 1883, its West Texas operation numbered some thirty thousand cattle. One of its brands was the CA Bar, after the initials of two of the owners. The company expanded into the Pecos Valley of New Mexico in the fall of 1884. The side operation it started in the Peñasco Valley was intended to be an insignificant extension, but it soon grew into a large ranch known by its brand, the CA Bar. Thomas "Buck" Powell and Mathews, together with Thornton, an investor in the cattle company, were responsible for getting the big ranch to locate on the Peñasco. Through a series of trades, Powell's homestead became the headquarters of the CA Bar.³⁸

The drought of 1885 created poor conditions on the Champion range in Texas, so the company decided to transfer a substantial portion of its cattle to the Peñasco, where Mathews was hired with the title of "assistant resident manager." His first major assignment was as trail boss on the cattle drive from Texas to the Peñasco. One of the drovers with the herd was twenty-three-year-old James F. Hinkle, nephew of one of the ranch's principal owners. Hinkle would later be Mathews' successor and then a future governor of New Mexico. Mathews and his crew drove the herd of eight hundred across the plains along the Texas & Pacific Railroad tracks and arrived at their destination in October 1885. Other cattle were shipped to Toyah, Texas, and then trailed to the ranch. Mathews contributed his eight hundred cattle to purchase an interest in the company.³⁹

The CA Bar was not profitable at first, so the company treasurer, H.W. Salmon, asked college-educated James Hinkle to examine the company's books. The company appointed Hinkle as bookkeeper, a responsibility he retained until 1892. In 1886, he also succeeded Dora as postmaster of Lower Peñasco and the post office was set up in his bedroom at the ranch headquarters. Later, Hinkle's job description expanded to include that of foreman of the ranch.⁴⁰

Mathews was named resident manager of the CA Bar in 1886. The company continued to expand its holdings, largely by encouraging employees to file homestead claims and trade them for shares in the company. The property of J. B. Mathews and James Bates was incorporated into the company in 1887, which gave the CA Bar the water rights to the two largest springs on the Peñasco.⁴¹

While at the CA Bar, Dora gave birth to two more children: Ernest in 1886 and Cora in 1888. Life on the ranch could prove quite exciting, such as on one occasion when some Mescalero Apaches paid an unexpected visit. Dora was washing clothes outdoors when an Apache woman came into the yard and picked up a hatchet. Mrs. Mathews got her gun and retrieved the stolen property with no problems.⁴²



J.B. "Billy" Mathews and family. L-R, standing: Ernest H. Mathews, Dora Bates, Ben Wayland (future husband of Dora's sister Eolin), Maude Bates (another of Dora's sisters), Edith Thornton. Sitting: J.B. Mathews holding daughter Cora, ca. 1890. Photo courtesy of Jesse Bates, Mayhill, New Mexico.

J.B. Mathews was very much involved in the community life of the valley, usually in the interest of the cattle company. Ranchers organized to control overcrowding of the ranges, and Mathews was appointed to a committee in 1884 to write a constitution for the District Protective Association of Precinct 9. In 1890, he was elected treasurer of the Guadalupe Valley Reservoir, Irrigating, and Manufacturing Company, the fourth incarnation of that organization. The company reorganized a year later as The Peñasco Reservoir and Irrigation Company, with Mathews as one of the directors.⁴³

The owners of the CA Bar Ranch also created a separate, New Mexico corporation in February 1891 called the Peñasco Cattle Company. Directors were George M. Casey, the company president and his son, Thomas, as well as Mathews, Hinkle, and Thornton. Mathews was elected vice president and Hinkle assumed the position of resident ranch manager.⁴⁴

In late 1892 or early 1893, the Mathews family moved into Roswell so that the children could attend school. Mathews acquired a four-bedroom house at 201 North Pennsylvania Avenue, on the northeast corner of the intersection with West Second Street. He also bought the house and lot next door.⁴⁵

Mathews intended his salary from his position at the CA Bar to be his family's principal source of income. Droughts, floods, a collapsing cattle market, and the Panic of 1893, however, interfered with those plans. The Peñasco Cattle Company fell upon a series of hard times, lawsuits, and other setbacks that eventually resulted in the dissolution of the company. To make matters worse, Mathews served as bondsman for Frank Lesnet, receiver in the new Federal Land Office in Roswell. When Lesnet disappeared in early 1893 with his accounts short by \$8,900, Mathews went bankrupt. He needed to find another source of income.⁴⁶

According to Nolan and Fulton, J.J. Hagerman's Pecos Irrigation and Improvement Company hired Mathews as manager of the company's South Spring Ranch, where they had a farm and orchard at John Chisum's old headquarters. The Mathews family moved to the Chisum place in 1893 and lived there for three years.⁴⁷ According to Ernest, Edith stayed in town with another family to attend school while he rode his horse from the ranch to school for three years.

On the Chisum farm, Mathews planted five hundred acres of alfalfa and he also experimented with sugar beets. Ernest relates how his mother had a large flock of turkeys when crews were building the railroad into Roswell in 1894. The workers took her turkeys with them when they left. The men were going to Mexico and the tariff exceeded the value of their seven horses, so they gave the horses to Ernest.⁴⁸



J.B. "Billy" Mathews, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy of Jesse Bates, Mayhill, New Mexico.

Presumably because of continuing hard times for Hagerman's financial empire, Mathews' position at the South Spring Ranch ended (probably by 1896) and the family moved back into Roswell. Mathews had also been politically active during the preceding years. He had served as a delegate to the Lincoln County Republican Convention in 1886 and in the general election of 1896, he ran for Chaves County sheriff on the Republican ticket. According to Bess Dow, this was quite an embarrassment to Mathews' wife, who was a staunch Democrat. Much to Dora's relief, Mathews lost the election 339 votes to 193.⁴⁹ Mathews was also active in civic and community affairs despite being a Republican and a Union veteran in a town that was dominated by Democrats and Confederate veterans, such as Captain Joseph C. Lea, the "Father of Roswell," and his former comrade-in-arms, Captain Jason W. James. There is no evidence, however, that the mistaken notion that Mathews was a Confederate veteran arose while he was still alive.

Mathews began to search for employment in the late 1890s, and some of his political friends helped him secure a federal job. President William McKinley appointed Mathews as Roswell's postmaster on 19 May 1898. He was re-appointed in 1902 and retained the position for the rest of his life.⁵⁰ Eventually, his daughter, Edith, worked there, as did Edith's own daughter, Bess Dow.

Mathews' other community activities included his membership in the Roswell Masonic Lodge, Number 18. Following a devastating fire in January 1893 that destroyed the Masonic Temple on Main Street, he was a major donor to the fund to build a new temple. Also during their time in Roswell, J.B. and Dora affiliated themselves with the First Christian Church and were baptized by immersion in the North Spring River. Little Edith, afraid of drowning, vowed never to be baptized herself.⁵¹

In May 1904 Mathews attended a Masonic function in Santa Fe. He came home ill with pneumonia and remained sick for about three weeks. After rallying somewhat from the pneumonia, he suffered a relapse and went into a coma for several days. He finally died on 3 June at the age of fifty-seven. Ernest and Cora remained with their mother at the family home, though Ernest stayed at the Diamond A Ranch most of the time where he worked as a cowboy. Edith was married to Robert Maddux, the Roswell city marshal, at the time.⁵²

Mathews' funeral was held at his home on 5 June 1904. Elder C.C. Hill of the First Christian Church conducted the short service. The Masons then took charge and, with a Knights Templar escort, buried him in the Masonic Circle, Southside Cemetery, under Masonic auspices. All the pallbearers were prominent men of Roswell: John W. Poe, John T. Stone, Edward A. Cahoon, Nathan Jaffa, William M. Atkinson, and Smith Lea.⁵³

The *Roswell Daily Record* was quite lavish in its praise of Mathews upon his death:

'Billy Mathews' as he was familiarly known, was one of the few men whom everybody liked. . . . [I]t is no wonder that last evening when the report spread over town that 'Billy Mathews is dead' that every heart was heavy. . . . Not because he had been a popular official, not because he had been a brave soldier in war, and a man who in the early days of the Territory had been a terror to the evil doers, but he was honored and respected for his own innate qualities. . . . No more popular man has ever lived or died in Chaves County than J.B. Mathews.⁵⁴

Mathews died without a will, so Dora was appointed administratrix of his estate. She had to pay off \$2,700 in debts, but inherited the two lots, houses, and furnishings they had owned together. The entire family left Roswell within a few years. Edith and her family moved to Texico, New Mexico. Ernest continued to work at the Diamond A until 1910 when he went to California. Cora married a man named Aubrey Smith and moved to Arizona and in 1912, Dora married Louis Moren of California.⁵⁵

J.B. Mathews had lived a life that was packed with adventure and variety: rebellious teenager who ran away to join the Union Army though his family and neighbors were mostly Confederate; adventurous young man who built a "nest egg" by staking a claim in the New Mexico gold rush; pioneer farmer and cattle rancher in southeastern New Mexico; deputy sheriff during the turmoil of the Lincoln County War; successful large-scale cattle rancher; family man with three children; and postmaster at Roswell for six years. These are the lives of Jacob Basil "Billy" Mathews.

Not only was Mathews a colorful and interesting personality who was highly respected by all who knew him, he also contributed much to making southeastern New Mexico what it is today. His descendants have been and continue to be productive citizens in business, government, education, and ranching. Present-day New Mexicans perhaps need reminders that every community owes its existence and development to those pioneers who sometimes risked everything to build a viable social structure where families could live in peace and prosperity. One such reminder, though small, is a residential street in south Roswell marked simply "Mathews St."

NOTES

1. J.B. Mathews, Deposition, "Report on the Death of John H. Tunstall," by Frank Warner Angel, file 44-4-8-3, RG 60, Records of the Department of Justice, quoted in William A. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County 1869-1881* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 252.

2. Joel Jacobsen, *Such Men as Billy the Kid: The Lincoln County War Reconsidered* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 24. Walter was known as "George" by his descendants and Anna was known as "Sally". Bess Dow, "Mathews and Maddux Families." Paper presented to the Chaves County Historical Society, 14 March 1983, Roswell, New Mexico; Joanne McCombs, author interview, 27 September 1995, Roswell, New Mexico. The taped recording of this article is available, at the archives of the Historical Center for Southeast New Mexico, Roswell, New Mexico; United States Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Population*, Cannon County, Tennessee, p. 405, household no. 756; McCombs, author interview.

3. *An Illustrated History of New Mexico* (Chicago, Illinois: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1895), 574-77; *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 June 1904 and 7 October 1937; *Roswell Record*, 10 June 1904; *Roswell Register*, 10 June 1904.

4. Maurice Garland Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1968), 49; Frederick Nolan, *The Lincoln County War: A Documentary History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 474.

5. *Tennesseans in the Civil War*, 2 vols. (Nashville, Tennessee: Civil War Centennial Commission, 1965) 1:329-30.

6. *Company Muster Roll*, July-December 1864; *Returns*, 26 January 1865, Company M, 5th Regiment Tennessee Cavalry, Jacob B. Mathis file, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

7. *Tennesseans*, 1:332-33.

8. *Ibid.*, 1:333.

9. *Returns*, 26 January 1865.

10. *Tennesseans*, 1:333.

11. *Company Muster Roll*, January-June 1865; *Company Muster-out Roll*, 14 August 1865, Company M, 5th Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, National Archives. The biography of Mathews in *An Illustrated History of New Mexico*, 575, states that he entered the army "at the very commencement of the struggle. . ." when he would have barely been fourteen years old. The biography also asserts that he fought in the battle of Murfreesboro (Stones River), but in fact, that battle took place before Mathews' enlistment.

12. *Illustrated History*, 575; McCombs, author interview; Ernest Mathews, "Early Years in the Pecos Valley," in *Reminiscences of Roswell Pioneers*, ed. James D. Shinkle (Roswell, New Mexico: privately published, 1966), 1. Bess Dow said that the man's name was Johnny Riley and that he is the one who started calling Mathews "Billy." See Dow, "Mathews and Maddux Families." The John Riley here is not to be confused with John H. Riley of Lincoln. The more accurate date for Mathews' departure from Tennessee is 1867, as it coincides with the date that gold was discovered in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico.

13. McCombs, author interview; Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 1.

14. Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 1-2.

15. Nolan gives the date as 1874. See *The Lincoln County War*, 474; Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 3.

16. Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 49, sets the date at 1873; Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 3, at 1875; and Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474, at about 1876.

17. Lillian Bidal, *Pisacah: A Place of Plenty* (El Paso, Texas: Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation, 1996), 50; Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474; Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 76. According to his son, J.B. was appointed deputy sheriff for that area of Lincoln County by Sheriff William Brady, although this is not confirmed by other sources. See Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 3.

18. Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474; Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 76; Donald Lavash states in his biography of Sheriff William Brady that it was Freeman, not Mathews, who sold the claim to Tunstall. *Sheriff William Brady: Tragic Hero of The Lincoln County War* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Sunstone Press, 1986), 62–63.

19. Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 76; Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 112, 537n33; McCombs, author interview.

20. The following account is a composite taken from several standard sources on the Lincoln County War. These include Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, Jacobsen, *Such Men as Billy the Kid*, Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County*, Robert M. Utley, *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), and John P. Wilson, *Merchants, Guns & Money: The Story of Lincoln County and Its Wars* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1987).

21. Utley, *Billy the Kid*, 76–77.

22. McCombs, author interview; Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 511, 549.

23. Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 213ff; Utley, *Billy the Kid*, 79.

24. Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 513.

25. Utley, *Billy the Kid*, 114.

26. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County*, 208–9, 213; Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 391.

27. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County*, 220–24; Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 347. Utley asserts that Mathews was not indicted in the Chapman murder. See *Billy the Kid*, 120.

28. Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474.

29. Jacobsen, *Such Men as Billy the Kid*, 230.

30. Utley, *Billy the Kid*, 176–78.

31. The Kid may have gone to the Peñasco looking for Mathews and Buck Powell after he escaped from the Lincoln County courthouse. See, for example, Utley, *Billy the Kid*, 186–87; and Ernestine Chesser Williams, "Buck Powell of the Río Peñasco," in *Treasures of History II: Chaves County Vignettes* (Roswell: Chaves County Historical Society, 1991), 26.

32. *Illustrated History*, 576.

33. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 78; Ernestine Chesser Williams, *Echoes Break the Silence: A Collection of Articles from New Mexico and Arkansas* (Roswell, New Mexico: privately published, 1987), 129, 132.

34. Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 417; Bidal, *Pisacah*, 78.

35. Ernest Mathews, "Early Years," 5; *Roswell Daily Record*, 12 October 1952; Bidal, *Pisacah*, 78; Lela Haltrip and Rufus Waltrip, *Artesia: Heart of the Pecos* (Canyon, Texas: Staked Plains Press, 1979), 157; J.B. Mathews and Dora Bates, certificate of marriage no. 10, Lincoln County Record of Marriage Certificates, Lincoln County courthouse, Carrizozo, New Mexico. Al Coe was a brother of Frank, a prominent member of the Regulators.

36. Bess Dow, author interview, 26 February 1983; McCombs, author interview; Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 413–14, 417.

37. Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 417; McCombs, author interview; *The Ruidoso News*, 9 October 1995, p. 8A.

38. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 78, 96.

39. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 99; James F. Hinkle, *Early Days of a Cowboy on the Pecos*, (Roswell: First National Bank of Roswell, n.d.), 11–12; Ernest Mathews, “Early Years,” 4–5. Though Mathews’ job title was “assistant resident manager,” none of the sources reveal the name of the resident manager.

40. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 99.

41. Ibid., 80, 96; Lillian Bidal, author correspondence, 10 April 1996.

42. Ernest Mathews, “Early Years,” 5; Dow, author interview; McCombs, author interview.

43. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 86, 87, 164–69.

44. Ibid., 169–70.

45. Ernest Mathews, “Early Years,” 5; *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 June 1904; Dora M. Mathews, Petition to the Honorable Probate Court of Chaves County, Territory of New Mexico, Chaves County Probate Records, file 110 (J.B. Mathews), Chaves County courthouse, Roswell, New Mexico.

46. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 193–96; Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474.

47. Nolan, *The Lincoln County War*, 474; Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*, 417; Ernest Mathews, “Early Years,” 6.

48. Ernest Mathews, *ibid.*

49. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 162; Chaves County Commissioners’ Proceedings, Book A, 163, Chaves County courthouse, Roswell, New Mexico; Dow, author interview.

50. Bidal, *Pisacah*, 195; *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 June 1904; Dow, author interview.

51. Temple Book of Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons, Roswell Lodge, Number 18 (Roswell, New Mexico: Roswell Lodge, Number 18, 1914); Dow, author interview. According to McCombs, Mathews’ background was Episcopalian. McCombs, author interview.

52. Dow, author interview; *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 June 1904.

53. *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 June 1904.

54. Ibid.

55. Chaves County Probate Records, file 110 (J.B. Mathews); Dow, author interview; McCombs, author interview.



**38th Annual Conference of the
Western History Association
October 14-17, 1998 Sacramento, California
Hyatt Regency**

CALL FOR PAPERS

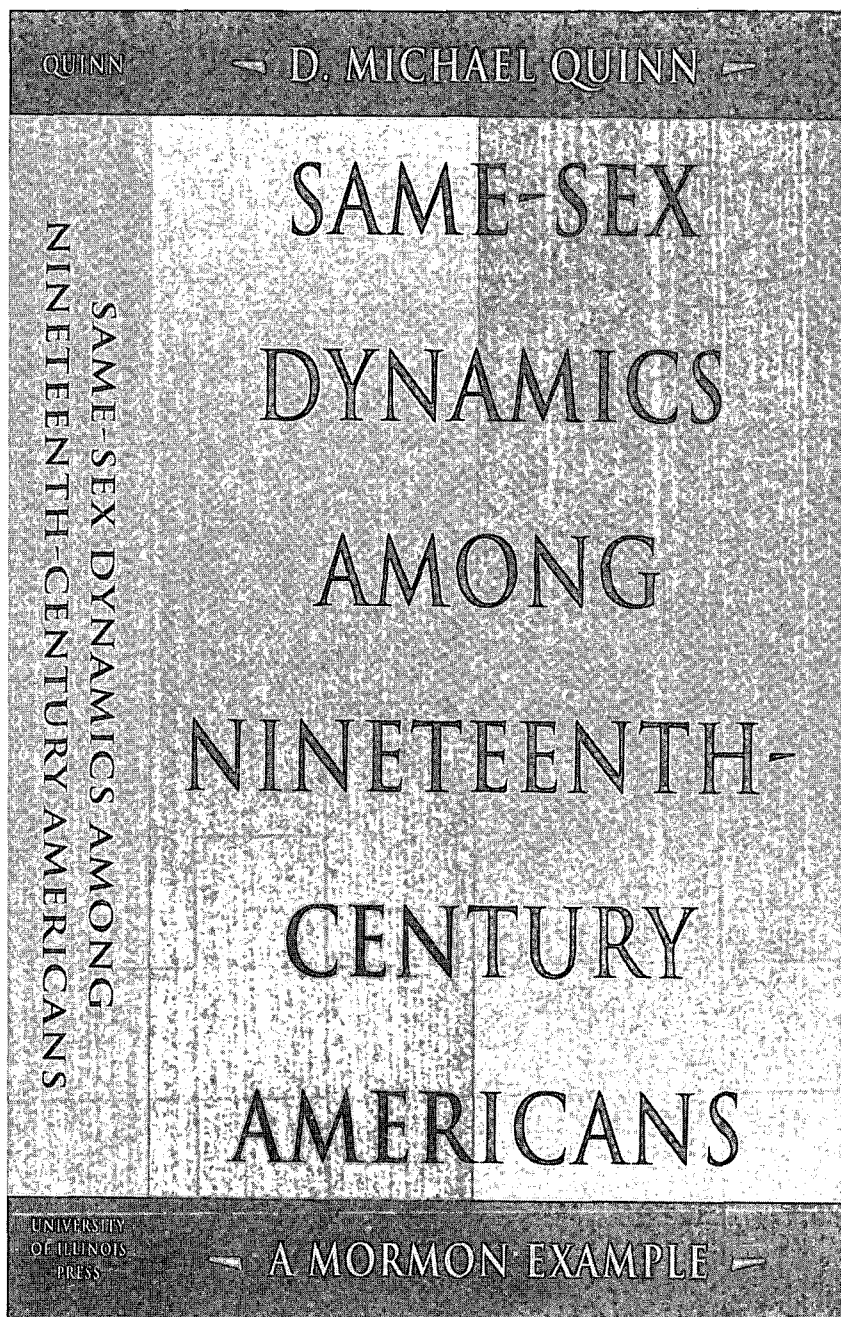
CLAIMS AND PROSPECTS: WESTERN HISTORY IN 1998

The Program Committee for the 1998 meeting of the Western History Association invites proposals for panels and papers for the 38th annual conference of the organization. The 1998 meeting in Sacramento will explore western history's claims on American historical scholarship; the meeting will also offer scholars the opportunity to consider prospects for the field and the historical discipline at the approach of the 21st century. The year 1998 marks a variety of commemorative dates, anniversaries, and remembrances: the Program Committee considers these historical moments to be worthy of wider scholarly investigation. As in past meetings, the Program Committee welcomes proposals for traditional scholarly sessions, as well as less formal and more experimental presentations that make use of film, music, and art.

We encourage submissions for entire sessions, individual papers, and roundtable discussions. We especially welcome the submission of ideas for papers and panels that mine the richness of the western past in all its multiplicity of peoples, of landscapes, of regions. The committee expects the 1998 Sacramento meeting to represent fully not only the range of historical thought, scholarship, and debate, but the compelling diversity of scholars engaged in staking and interpreting claims on the western past as well. In an effort to explore and excavate the shifting and dynamic meanings of "the West" and "western history," we welcome proposals approaching the West from myriad vistas: transnational, environmental, postwestern, and global approaches, to name a few. We encourage proposals that seek to further the discussion between older and newer frameworks, conceptions, and schools of thought. The Program Committee also welcomes ideas for innovative presentation of research findings.

The 1998 Program Committee invites the entire community of western scholars and students to come together in Sacramento to explore the prospects of a rich historical discipline. Please submit paper, panel, or other proposals in a one to two page abstract. There should be a one-page c.v., including address, phone, and e-mail, for each participant. One panelist must be designated as contact person. The Program Committee will consider that all listed individuals have agreed to participate.

All submissions should be sent by August 31 to Professor Virginia Scharff, Co-Chair, 1998 WHA Program Committee, Department of History, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87131-1181. Phone (505) 277-2451; fax (505) 277-6023.



Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example. By D. Michael Quinn. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. x + 477 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$29.95.)