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KILLING BELLE STARR

A Past Life Journey into the Old West



By A.C.Christlieb

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Author's Note

Killing Belle Starr is a work of fiction. It is about an oil painter looking for women of the Old West, reading Glenn Shirley's *Belle Starr and her Times: The Literature, the Facts and the Legends* and then falling irretrievably into the mystery surrounding the unsolved crime of her death. He becomes so obsessed with finding her killer, he travels to Oklahoma in search of clues that have long since disappeared since her murder and suddenly, he is overwhelmed by the thought that his being there is more than a search for Belle's killer. It's a search for his own past life in the area that was once Indian Territory before Oklahoma became a state. In the sweltering heat of Porum, he finds himself in an altered state of mind and struggles to find answers before being overcome with exhaustion and returning to California. Years later, Aaron returns to the scene of the crime. This time he is guided by the spirit of his deceased wife to find the answers.

I have endeavored to research the principal characters who lived in the Indian Territory and interacted with Belle Starr in the course of her life journey. So, while they do exist, historically, and Aaron believes that his channeled recollections are authentic, nothing they say or he says can be substantiated, with the exception of direct quotes from author, Glenn Shirley. Although I have sublimated what each character might have said to Aaron about their own life altering personal experiences, the reader is asked to accept the extant influence of past life regression or psychic phenomena I have imparted to Aaron from the blithe spirit of his deceased wife, Clara Mae. This is also true in all references and quotes from Peter Mathieson's great work, *Killing Mr. Watson*, Random House Inc., New York 1990- a work I have drawn heavily upon in my re-creation of the mystery surrounding Edgar Watson's collision with Belle Starr in the Indian Territory.

Killing Belle Starr honors the historical references researched by Glenn Shirley and documented in his *Belle Starr and Her Times: The Literature, the Facts and the Legends*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1982.

A.C. Christlieb

Preface

My best explanation for this yet another book about Belle Starr is that I have confirmed Glenn Shirley's vindication of her and she deserves to be treated with more respect than a face on a wanted poster in the Autry Museum. Belle Starr was pioneer woman of the South thrust into public notoriety by pulp fiction writers who labeled her the Bandit Queen for her association with ex-Confederates. Her historical relevance spans four of the most violent decades in American history. She and her parents were driven from Carthage, Missouri by Union militia after the Border Wars became the Civil War, then exiled to Scyene, Texas for the duration. She walked a tight rope between defending returning veterans against unfair discrimination and following federal law and Indian law while managing tribal land in the Indian Territory. Ironically, she was murdered for trying to protect tribal land from the encroachment of a suspected criminal after she had convinced the Choctaw authorities that she no longer associated with criminals. She died the same year the territory became the Oklahoma Territory and Indian land was opened up to homesteaders and land developers on the road to statehood. Belle Starr was proud of her heritage, loyal to her family and always downplayed efforts to make her a legend in her own time. Her name needs to be treated with the respect she deserves as a true Oklahoma woman pioneer.

I ask that her remains be disinterred from private property and that the state find a way to lay her remains to rest in the Starr family cemetery where she at last belongs.

A.C. Christlieb



myra Maybelle Shirley

Chapter 1: Voices from the Indian Territory

The lone rider was lost in thought, munching on a wedge of sour corn bread when the boom of a 12-gauge knocked her from her saddle - a load of buckshot hitting her in the back and neck. She tried to lift herself from the puddle of an earlier morning rain, but the crack of a second barrel boring into her shoulder and face, ended her struggle. Her horse reared up raced toward the river and dashed across the Canadian. In the mud, lay the infamous "lady bandit of the Old West, Belle Starr - the life slowly oozing out of her - while startled neighbors scrambled to learn who fired shots that shattered the peace of a lazy summer afternoon in the Choctaw Nation.

Her body was found face down in the mud by a neighbor who heard the shots.

"My name is Milo Hoyt. Belle was a good neighbor to us. She was always kind to my family and the tenant farmers on my place. We was on the south side of the Canadian in the Choctaw Nation. You had to take the ferry to her place cross the river. My son, Ard, was visiting the Nation the day she was shot when he noticed the ferry was unattended. He urged his horse across and swam the river to the south side. He saw Belle's horse run right by him into the river. So he follows the direction the horse came from and finds Belle laying on her side, face down across the road about a half-mile from the ferry."

"My name is Rosie Lee; mom always called me "Pearl." Mother's horse came home with the saddle on . . . about six o'clock in evening. Swam the river. I went to river, crossed over & met Milo Hoyt. He told me about Belle lying (in) road. I got behind him on his horse & he took me to Alf Whites and from there I went to body alone."

It was almost dark when I got to her. She was not quite dead. She never spoke. She was lying on her side & face, kind of across the road. Her whip was in her hand. She was shot in back with buckshot & left side of face & arm with fine shot. The buckshot came out on right side of her neck . . . there were three buckshots in her back close together. She had left home on Saturday morning with her husband Jim Starr."

Martha (Mrs, Alf White) remembered seeing "Belle & Starr pass up the road on Saturday. On Sunday about 5 o'clock heard the report of two guns or two reports. I was inside the house doors were open. When I heard shooting I went to door...in a few minutes seen horse with sidesaddle running up the road to the ferry."

Alf White was visiting at the Benjamin Statham place:

"When I came home about sundown my wife told about a horse passing with a sidesaddle on him. Directly Milo Hoyt came up & told us about Belle being killed. I and Mr. Pierson went down with Pearl to where her mother was and in a little while got a wagon & took (body) up to my house."

Benjamin heard two gunshots that evening:

"about half an hour by sun. Then about dark, Charles Acton & Mr. White came to my house & told me Belle being dead & I went up there & helped take her up & put her in wagon & take her up to Mr. White's."

Charles Acton lived on Belle Starr's place. When he....."heard she was killed. I got a horse & went to were she was. Found her in road & helped Miss Pearl to lift her up and out of the mud. I then went after a wagon & took her to M., White's house. She was shot with a shotgun, with buckshot & small shot."

And so it was established that neighbors heard two gunshots and went to investigate. They found Belle's body and brought it back to Mr. White's house where it was cared for until her husband could be notified that she had been shot. They sent a telegram to him at Ft. Smith. The scene of her death was trampled over many times by concerned friends, searching for clues to the cause of her murder. Some concluded that footsteps at the scene led to Mr. Watson's house, but her son, Eddie, could not be certain.

" I got Jim Cates to show me where she was killed. I found where tracks had come into field & came up to fence on their toes & stood right by fence corner on inside of field. She fell about 30 feet from there & these tracks had got over fence & went up close to her & then they left there and went right opposite through the woods. Tracks kept winding around, looked like they were trying to keep on leaves for almost 200 yards. I then lost track it was about a number seven."

It was enough evidence for Jim July, Belle's common law Cherokee husband, to immediately conclude that Edgar Watson, whose cabin was no more than 150 yards from the scene of her death, had killed his wife.

Belle's body was "anointed with turpentine and oil of cinnamon, dressed in her best riding habit and placed in a pine-board coffin lined with black shrouding trimmed in white lace." Her arms were crossed, with one hand grasping the handle of her favorite revolver. Her funeral was held in front of her cedar cabin overlooking Youngers' Bend and the Canadian River Valley. Fulfilling an ancient custom, whites and Indians in single file, passed by her open casket, dropping in a piece of corn bread. The lid was nailed shut and the coffin lowered into the grave.

Jim July turned, raised his Winchester and confronted Edgar Watson: "You murdered my wife!" Fearing death, Watson shoved John Cates between himself and the gun. Cooler heads prevailed when Cates said, "Throw up your hands and don't get us both killed," and Watson surrendered.

Protesting his innocence, Watson was watched over by Ben Statham, Jack Rowe and Mrs. Watson at the Starr home overnight until Jim July and Eddie Reed and Mr. Rowe took him to Fort Smith. Watson appeared before a U.S. Commissioner and was formally charged with the crime. Eddie Reed and Pearl, Milo Hoyt, Alf White, Jackson Rowe, Charles Acton, Benjamin Statham, Joseph Tate and others were endorsed as federal witnesses. The Commissioner authorized Jim July to serve subpoenas. Watson was offered bail, but was jailed after failing to comply.

Mrs. Watson hired a prominent lawyer to defend her husband. There he stood, Jim July, a Cherokee outlaw, deposed as an attorney, responsible for subpoenas, and calling on witnesses he believed would convict the accused killer of Belle Starr. They had size seven shoe prints, proximity of the accused's cabin to the murder scene and they had a shotgun belonging to the accused whose shot pattern matched the pattern in the body of the deceased.

At the hearing, they could produce no witness to the murder; no proof that Mr. Watson had fired the weapon they thought killed Mrs. Starr and no proof that his footprints were the footprints of the killer. Watson's attorney argued against the accusation and the charges were dismissed for lack of evidence. So, Watson was acquitted and in the words of Glenn Shirley, *"No further effort was made by anyone to apprehend the killer of Belle Starr."*

Disgusted with the outcome, Jim July jumped bail on the horse-stealing charge he originally

answered (at Belle's urging) at Fort Smith, the day before she was killed and fled the territory.

One hundred years later, a young man, reading the quoted testimony of the witnesses reported in Glenn Shirley's, *Belle Starr: Her life and Times – the Facts, The Literature and The Legends*, Chapter 18, PP 236-245, felt a tap on the shoulder and a voice from nowhere that asked:

Who killed Belle Starr?

Aaron Childress

The oil painting on my easel is a portrait of a woman in her late thirties taken from a tint type reproduced in a book I found in the San Diego Library. I am working in the tip-out of a single wide mobile home in a trailer park just south of Escondido.

The reproduction is from an Ozalid copy made at the library on an ancient machine, grinding out very scuzzy copies at a dime a copy.

I chose Belle Starr for the obvious reason that she stood so far apart from all the rest that she could not be avoided except by Bob Boze Bell in *Wild West Magazine*, whose sketches of lady gamblers, saloon gals, soiled doves and cigar smoking lounge lizards, did not include Belle Starr.

Truly, it is a very dark painting, unflattering and probably more true to the quality of the tint type than the face of the original Belle Starr when she posed for it, but one can see the determination to overcome obstacles and many great personal tragedies. I believe I more than imagined what she was thinking and feeling at the time she posed for the tint typist, but no one would believe I was hearing her voice as she spoke:

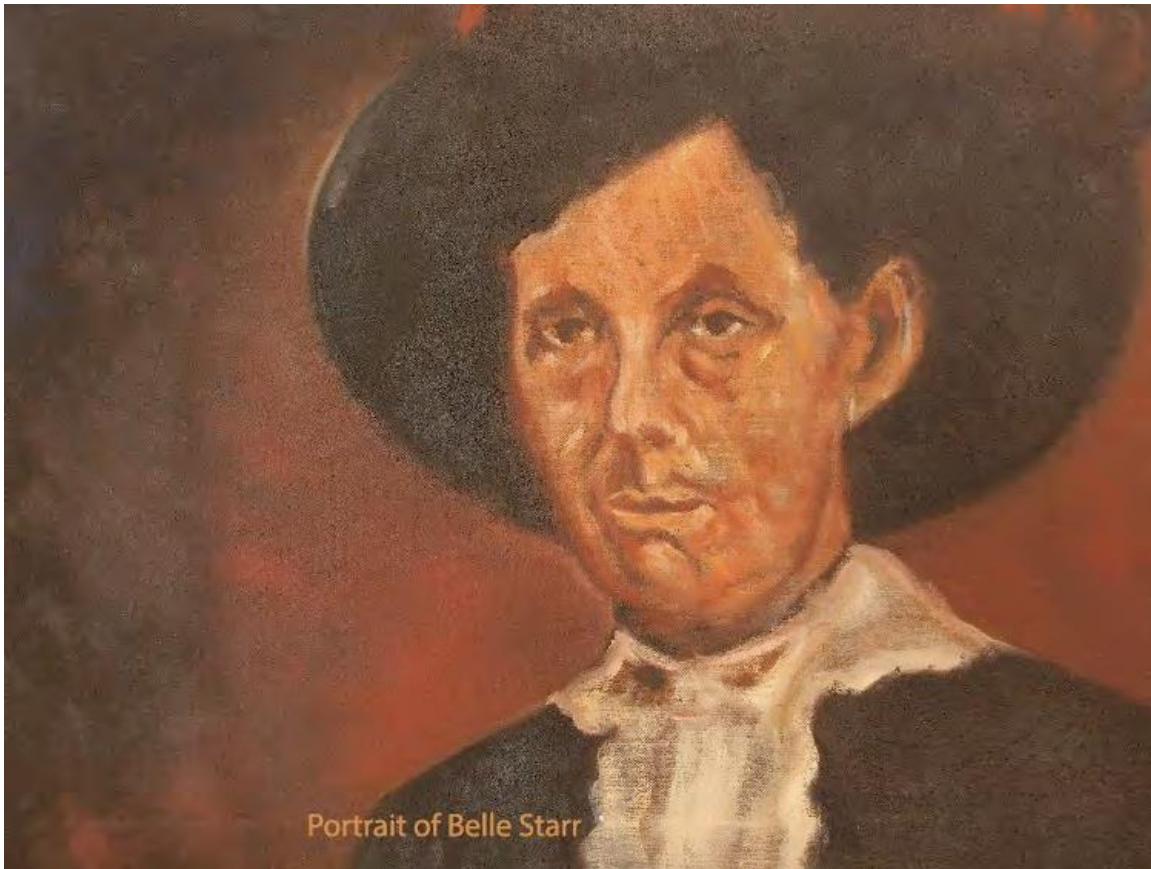
Belle Starr

"Here I am at 39, looking at the face in the mirror looking back at me. It seems I can see every bad year of my life in all my little wrinkles and tough skin. I need those new face creams they make back east I see in the catalogs. I was so young when Jimmy and me got married and he was so handsome in his rebel uniform. The yarn about a preacher marrying us on horseback with the Youngers and other ex-rebels from the pride of the south at our side was a complete lie. We were married in a church with family attending.

And while we're on the subject, it were no special privilege to read up on my laughable biographers and their dime novels. They had me married to Cole Younger, giving birth to his illegitimate daughter and making me out to be some floozie and whoring myself out to ex-Confederates and outlaws.

I can never forgive the Yankees for killing my brother, burning my father's ranch and forcing us to move to Texas. All my loyalty was to the South and the proud men who defended her honor.

I happen to be in the company of men who have taken revenge for the injustices of Yankees against them and their family members. They were patriots of the Confederacy and now they are being made to pay the price for defending it until the day they die.



I suppose I should not have been so quick to lose my temper, but it usually served me well in tight situations, except for my children. I guess I drove them away from me. I wanted so much for them to have a better life than I had. I was torn between rebelling against the Union and trying to be respectable in my community. I hated to see old Tom Starr go to prison for such a petty charge as whiskey peddling. He was a hero to his people during the war and he always stood by us in the territory. He was my second father-in-law and my best friend. Those deputies were playing both sides of the fence. I know old Judge Parker was getting on and sickly. He trusted them so much, maybe too much. Of course I was a friend to the James's and the Youngers. We fought the Yankees and the State of Missouri made them all fugitives for life. Thank God for Texas.

You bet I wanted to hold onto my land. How was I supposed to make a living without tenant farmers? All my husbands were killed and my lovers were on the run, most of the time and all my close friends had problems of their own to deal with. I was smart enough and I held a grudge long enough to make the Yankees pay for what they did to my family, but I wasn't going about it like Jesse and Cole. I knew enough about the law and a few smart lawyers to get my boys out of trouble. I was aiming for some respectability before Mr. Watson came to town, but I never let respectability get in the way of opportunity. I regret taking it out on my kids. I should have lost my temper for the right reasons and more often against the people who really needed it. The truth is some of what they wrote about me is true and some of it was made up for a good story.

I laughed a lot in reading some of the lies they wrote about me. I guess I don't mind being

buried on my own property, but I sure as hell don't like seeing people pay a dollar to see my grave. I'll just bet I've got a few great-grandkids around. I hope to God they're legitimate."

Aaron

When I say I imagined what Belle Starr might be thinking and feeling I meant to say that I thought I heard her say it. I know that sounds a little odd, but what you need to know is that for some time now that I have been alone in the mobile home Clara Mae and I used to share, I have felt her spiritual presence many times. You also need to know that I do not find this in any way unusual or disturbing because Clara Mae and I were always in tune with each other while she was alive and we had explored the possibility of past lives together on many occasions. Everything I learned about portrait painting I learned from Clara Mae from the day we met until the day she died.

We were introduced by another artist friend who took me to Clara's studio on 4th Street in Long Beach she shared with a partner she referred to as Red Sonya. These two pot smoking ladies were very special artists with unique psychic abilities they managed to develop on their own over the years they shared and ran the gallery.

Red Sonya was an accomplished Taro Card reader and Clara Mae was both a kinetic psychic and a trans-medium. So, I was introduced to pot for the first time in my life and I was thrust into the world of the occult at a time when both activities were very much frowned on by society as a whole and by local authorities in particular. We used to joke about the "pot sensing helicopters" that flew over all the time. They called the 4th Street Gallery "Gilgamesh" and in spite of certain extra- curricular activities, the gallery was a legitimate business from where Clara and Red Sonya painted oil on canvas portraits for street clients and prepared their van for coordinated art shows in Southern California Shopping centers. It was a very exciting time for artists and craft people who traveled to those shows every week and made a living from their work; but, as I am writing about it now, that seems like so many years ago.

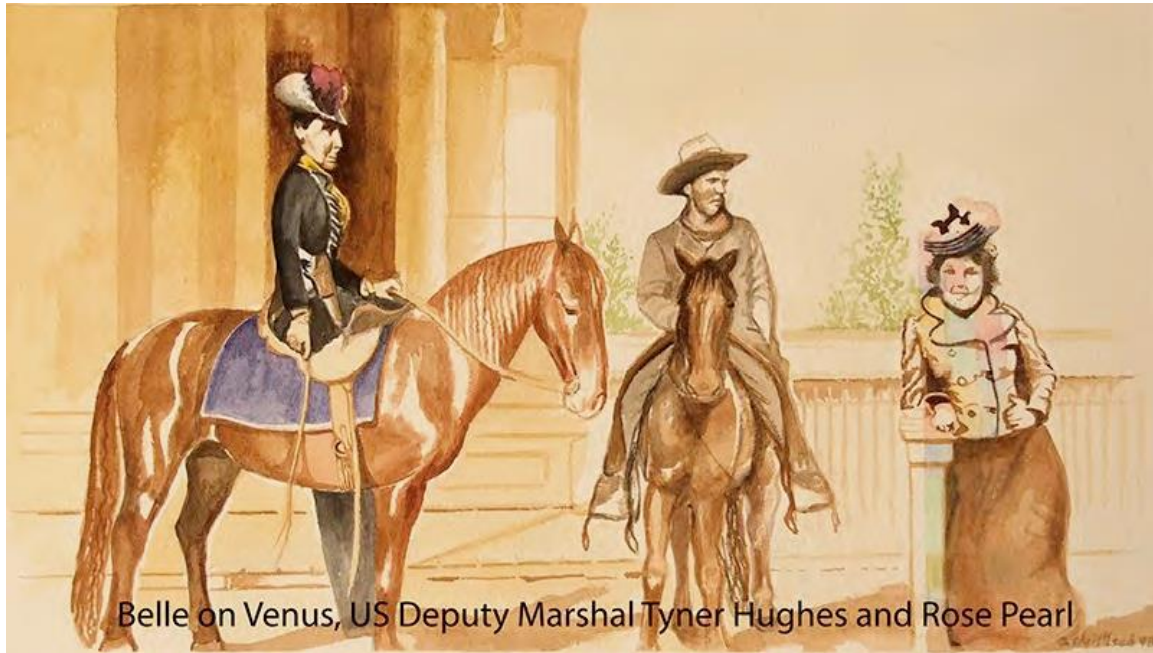
So, who killed Belle Starr?

Myra Maybelle Shirley, Aka Belle Reed and Finally, Belle Starr

Myra Shirley was born in Carthage, Missouri in 1848 two years after the U.S. intervened in the blood feud that threatened the Cherokee Nation. She was six when congress enacted the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and nine when it enacted the Dred Scott Decision of 1857 – another concession to the South before reverend Stowe armed Kansas abolitionists and John Brown killed innocents. Myra's parents, John and Eliza Shirley, were Missourians who owned property, slaves and a wayside inn on a major travel route in Carthage. But it was a time long past Andrew Jackson's autocracy – his threats to impose marshal law against South Carolina for attempting to nullify federal law, his closing of the Bank of the United States, his promise to move all the Indian tribes west of the Mississippi. After Jackson the office was filled with weak, opaque leaders unable to neither appease the Southern Republican thirst for the expansion of slavery nor dissuade them from secession from the Union because they feared losing it.

Carthage was caught in the crossfire of retreating Union militia and a rebel force burned everything to the ground. Myra's brother, Bud, had joined the local band of Missouri bushwackers and was shot fleeing a trap by Union Troopers who had surrounded a country house where he was seeking refuge.

Distraught over the death of his son and discouraged by the loss of his business, John Shirley, finding his hotel and livery stable in ashes, sold all his property, loaded the wagons and moved the family to Scyene, Texas. Who knew Jefferson's and John Quincy Adams' worst fears for the Republic would be so fatally realized?



Myra's marriage to childhood sweetheart and ex-Quantrill raider, James C. Reed in 1866 began her life-long association with ex-Confederates and Cherokee outlaw, Tom Starr and his clan.

Following a similar path as ex- guerilla fighters, Jesse James and Cole Younger, James Reed returned to civilian life but soon tired of farm work. On the run for murdering two rival gang members who mistakenly ambushed his brother, Scott Reed, James fled with Myra and their one-year old daughter, Rosie Lee, to Los Angeles to avoid arrest. Myra gave birth to a second child in 1871, James Edwin Reed, while James was working in a Los Angeles gambling casino, but found herself and children traveling back to Scyene, Texas by stagecoach after federal authorities discovered a warrant for James' arrest, causing him to quickly leave California on horseback for Texas.

Aaron

Was I imagining I heard this or did James C. Reed actually say this?

James C. Reed

"Jesse and I were cut from the same cloth. Our families were Missourian. We believed in the cause of the South and we were born to fight. We learned to ride and shoot before we learned to read or write. All of us had stories of someone in the family who was shot by Union troops, so we were out for revenge. You had to be good to ride with Quantrill and those boys. We were fearless sons of bitches and thought nothing of killing and looting for the cause. We put a lot of Yankees in the ground before that war was done and a few of them afterwards for good measure. I saw

Belle on visits to the Shirley home before the war and we were sort of sweet on each other for a long time. Belle was so with the cause of the South that after her brother was killed, and her family was forced to move to Texas, she wanted to take revenge. I knew I had to marry her as soon as I could. After the war I tried farming with my brothers near the Shirleys in Texas, but it did not work out. I preferred horse racing and hanging out with my gang. I went on a few raids with Jesse and Cole, but I wasn't with him on the Russelville job and for sure not with him at Northfield.

Tom Starr was a good friend to us and helped us to hide from Northern scouts. After the war, Tom's people warned us off Judge Parker's deputies whenever we ran stolen ponies through the territory to Texas across the river and on to Mexico. Tom was one hell of a bootlegger and sold enough whiskey to outfit an army. Truth be told, I was on the run so much from the law, Tom and his clan had to clear a path for me just to visit Belle and the kids. I was on the scout for killing two gang members who shot my brother and the law was after me for doing them a favor. Anyway, right or wrong, I was, as they said.

Wanted for Murder

I was a terrible husband to Belle and a worse father to my son and daughter. I thought nothin' of draggin' my family across the country to escape the law. I passed some bad money down in California and had to hightail it back to Texas to escape a posse and leave the family behind. When I was running with Jesse, he had a network of kinfolk to give him alibis for whatever job he did, but I never had that. Seemed to have a higher purpose, as if it was God calling him to set right the book of justice, but in the end it didn't really matter, we were both betrayed by close friends and we were both shot and killed for the reward money on our heads."

Jesse James

"I knew James Reed. He was a good rider with Quantrill and we visited the Shirley's farm down in Scyene, Texas, after the Yankees in Joplin burned out her father. He tried farming after the war, but he was like Frank, too restless to milk cows and grow wheat.

He helped Cole and Frank on a stagecoach job in San Antonio, but the papers said Cal Carter and Jack Rogers helped him. I have no idea where they got that idea. I was told Art McCoy and Jim Greenwood had helped Jim Reed. Anyway, 'made no difference. They went after Jim Reed.

Back in Missouri, my kinfolk would always back me up if I needed an alibi. It helped me on a lot of jobs we pulled and we had to return to the homestead or go our separate ways.

After the Drake Convention the only chance we had for making an honest living was the Amnesty Act of 1870, but it failed to pass and our fate was sealed.

My mission was to make the Yankees pay for killing my Pa and the Pinkertons for what they did to my mom. From that point on, I followed a personal code of honor that revered ex-confederates and Southerners, some of whom thought the South would rise again and expressed it every once in a while in print. I robbed banks and trains and the U.S. Treasury and payrolls and an unscrupulous lender who tried to foreclose on a widow and her children. I lived by the Bible and stole from the rich like Robin Hood."

Permanently on the run and committed to a perpetual life of crime, James Reed and cohorts robbed and tortured Watt Grayson in what Glenn Shirley described in his book as "The Grayson

Gold Robbery of 1873. Watt Grayson was a former judge of the Creek Supreme Court who had amassed a fortune in gold coin, allegedly by way of the Creek treasury. Pulp fiction writers believed Belle aided and abetted her husband in the robbery, which she later denied in a sworn statement as follows:

“He told me he meant to have it... and (I swear) that my said husband was killed near Paris Lamar County in this state on or about the 6th day of August A.D. 1874 while resisting an attempt made to arrest him on charge of robbing the United States Mail.

That the amount taken from Grayson, I know of no part that could be recovered, my said husband having spent or disposed of all that he had and having left me in a destitute condition.”

Befriended by an undercover lawman leading him to believe they both could profit from a robbery in Arkansas, Reed fell victim to a trap set by Deputy Marshal, John T. Morris in Paris, Texas and was shot trying to escape. Morris then collected the reward for his capture. James C. Reed would have been the 6th most wanted at the time of his death.

Rumors of Reed’s infidelity reached Belle prior to his involvement in the Austin-San Antonio stage robbery in 1874, further distancing him from the secret meetings with her in Indian Territory.

Belle was fiercely loyal to “Jimmy” but deeply hurt by his blatant and publicized disrespect for her in seducing Rosa McCommas, granddaughter of a minister in the Campbellite Church of Dallas.

James C. Reed

“I was desperate and tried to act like I wasn’t. I made a deal with a distant relative I didn’t like and didn’t trust. I cheated on Belle with the McCommas girl and she found out, so I was a man lookin’ for a place to hide. She deserved better and there was no time to make it up to her. Somewhere on the trail I lost the sense of things. Grayson was an old Creek thief. I lost no sleep taking his gold, but by the time I saw myself going in circles it was too late.”

John T. Morris

“My name is John T. Morris. I came up with the deceased yesterday about 10 o’clock at Henry Russell’s about 20 miles northwest of Paris, in this county – was well acquainted with the deceased – we staid all night at Russell’s. This morning we started for Arkansas together, traveled on until dinnertime, when I proposed to stop and get dinner. We stopped at Mr. S.M. Harvey’s house for dinner. When dinner was ready we went out into the dining room and sat down to the table. I got done eating before Reed and went back into the main room, and explained to Harvey, Reed’s character and asked him to assist in his arrest, which he agreed to do. Mr. Harvey and I went out to the horses took the pistols off of Reed’s and my horse. We went to the dining room where Reed was still eating. I said to Reed, “Jim, throw up your hands”. He said he would do so, but ran under the table, and raised up with the table and ran towards the door with the table in advance. I shot two holes through the table. After he dropped the table I shot him in the right side. He ran his hand in his pocket to draw a cylinder as I thought. I shot him four times and hit him twice, once a scalping shot in the head and once in the right side.

Deceased left his pistol on his saddle at my suggestion. He had an extra cylinder, which he carried in his pocket. After he got out of the house, he ran up to me and grabbed me— my pistol refusing to fire—and as he rushed against me, I fell and he fell too. I then called upon Mr. Harvey to assist me in his arrest, which he did and we thus secured him. He has acknowledged to me often that he was one of the San Antonio stage robbers.

He showed me his two purses, which contained, by his count, forty-nine twenty dollar gold pieces, remarking that was what he had made since he saw me. He came to my house to see his wife who was visiting my house. It was at that time that the policeman was shot by mistake, an account that was published at the time.

The deceased deposited with Henry Russell all his money except three twenty dollar gold pieces, which I now have in my possession.

Russell is an old acquaintance of Reed's and Reed had been staying with him since last Thursday.

I live four and one-half miles south of McKinney, Collin county, Texas, and am duly authorized by Maj. T.F. Purnell, United States Marshal, and also William Merritt, Sheriff of Collin county, to make the arrest. The way I found out his whereabouts was through a letter he wrote to his wife and myself, and sent by Russell, which delivered to her and then came to my home with the letter to me. I came back with Russell to his home where we found Reed. His wife did not accompany us-- she played sick--she is not his real wife, however.

Signed Jno T. Morris"

Aaron

Once again, Belle's thoughts found my pen:

Belle

"After Jimmy was killed by that deputy down in Paris, we tried to find out from the sheriff where his body was buried so we could bring him back to Missouri for a proper burial. They told us he had been taken in a buckboard from Paris to McKinney and had been buried in a Potter's Grave somewhere between, but we couldn't find the cemetery and returned home without him. They wrote all sorts of nonsense about my going to Texas and bringing him back. All I can say is we tried. I'll make no excuse for spending time with Bruce Younger. I don't care what anyone says. A woman needs love in her life, but he cheated on me and I let him go."

Author Shirley confirms one-time relationship between Belle and the cousin of Cole Younger in what he terms "The Mystery Years" after Reed's death and before her marriage to Sam Starr. Bruce Younger was a gambler and frequently seen companion of Belle when the two were in Galena, Kansas (circa 1878). Her tryst with him, which took place nearly four years after the death of James C. Reed, had been wildly distorted by Fox writers with the assertion that her lover was Cole Younger, a misconception refuted by Cole Younger in his autobiography.

With the marriage to her second husband, Sam Starr in 1880, Myra Maybelle or Belle Reed officially became known as Belle Starr and the daughter-in-law of notorious Cherokee political dissident, ex-confederate and outlaw, Tom Starr. By right of his three quarter Indian heritage, Sam Starr could possess but not own communal native land of his choosing. He had the right to make and own improvements to the land as long as he lived and he could pass on those

improvements to his heir if he died. Belle was now an inter married white, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and a ward of the U.S. government.

Belle assumed the role of a land manager and rented out parcels to tenant farmers to support her lifestyle and raised her teenage children. Sam became the father Eddie never knew, but taught him a few bad habits, he would regret later in life. Sam and Belle built a cabin next to a natural spring in a secluded rocky knoll approachable through a narrow canyon on a trail sometimes only passable on horseback depending on the weather.

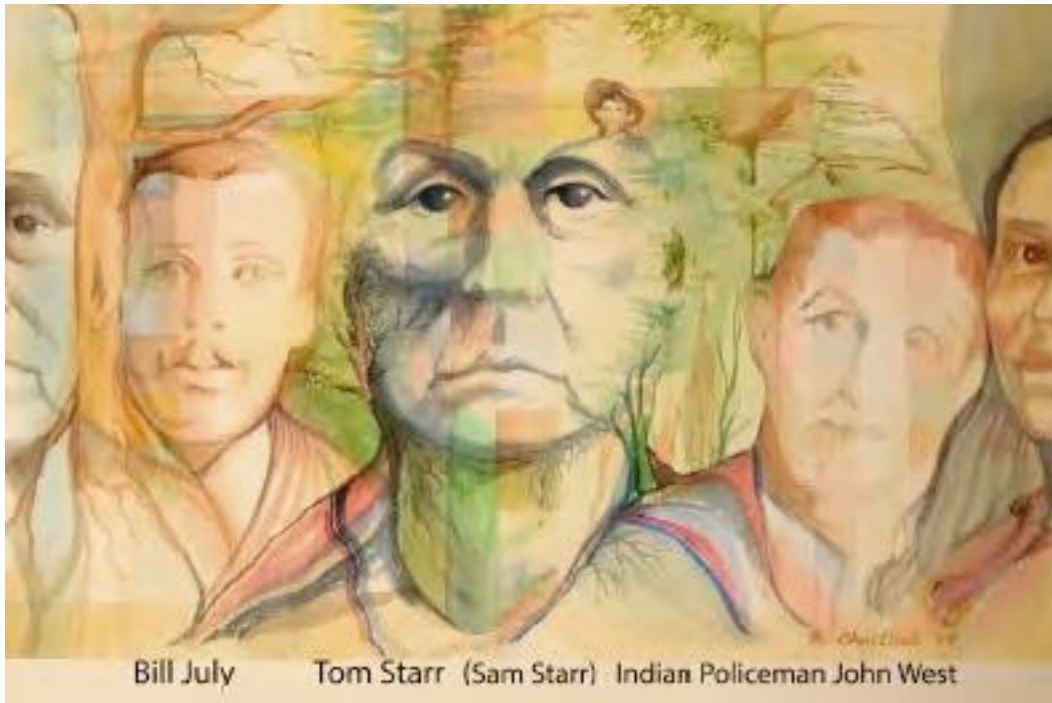
Tom Starr

“I wore the earlobes of all the men I killed on a string around my neck. I helped Stand Watie form the militia against John Ross’ men and I threatened to kill John Ross until Watie urged me to leave the man alone. Stand Watie became our leader before the truce and we protected all the Western Chiefs and their families.

After the U.S. Government stepped in, I was pardoned by The Nation and given property near the Canadian River.

I scouted for Watie during the Trans-Mississippi war, after we all joined General Pike against the blue coats. We raided Union supply trains and fed the Nation after Ross changed sides and went east. I knew Quantrill and his boys. They came through and stayed at the Shirley ranch before they got burned out and went south. I was friends with Jim Reed and Belle and Youngers and we swapped horses and whiskey after the war, They sort of hung around my ranch in the territory and me and my boys kind of looked out for them because after Jimmy took revenge on the boys who kilt his brother, he was always on the scout from the law. Cole Younger and his boys came down so much we named a bend in the river after him. We called it Youngers Bend. I would know a lot about that because I had my scrapes with the law and we had a pretty good way of looking out for each other.

After that deputy sheriff killed Jimmy down in Paris, Belle was in and out of the territory. Her father died and she wanted out of Texas. She took up with Bruce Younger and they spent some time together, but that didn’t last long and she came back wanting to settle in the territory. She took up with my son, Sam, and they was married in the Nation. Belle and Sam settled down in the territory. We was all happy she was a member of the Starr clan and I welcomed her to the family.



Sam Starr

“My father taught me everything I needed to know in the territory. He came over with the family on the Trail of Tears in '39, fought along side Stand Watie in the militia against Ross assassins and killed the men who shot my grandfather for signing the Treaty of New Echota. He Scouted for Watie and the Knights of the Golden Circle.

I was like a second father to him until Belle and I got into trouble with Andrew Crane's horse. After we got out of prison, Eddie kind of drifted in and out of the Bend. He and Belle never got along. Some say she was too strict with him.

My father was always on the scout. Our people had a family of lookouts to see who was coming in or going out of the territory at all times. I was the same way with Belle because she didn't want anyone coming into Youngers Bend without fair warning. But, I was more aggressive than my pa. I always wanted to prove something and it got me into trouble. Belle knew this and always defended me. She helped arrange bond for me on the post office holdup charge and she got Judge Parker to give me a continuance.

I was on the scout for that hold up and a U.S. Marshal and Frank West caught me in the territory and shots were fired. West shot Venus, Belle's prize mare and I faked being wounded long enough for the clan to help me escape. Belle warned me to go to trial on the charge rather than risk being caught again. She was right again, as usual, but she was mad as hell at West for killing her horse and so was I for her sake.”

In 1882 Belle and Sam were convicted of horse theft and sentenced in Judge Parker's court to a year in prison. Rose Pearl and Eddie were sent to live with relatives. News of Belle's felony conviction reached the note pads of eastern pulp fiction writers who saw a pattern of her associations with rebels, outlaws and criminals in the territory and solidified her reputation as

the “Bandit Queen” in pulp fiction that to this day, still remains on library shelves and for more than a century and still passes for authentic western history.

Glenn Shirley’s research outlines the details of how Andrew Crane’s horse came to be in the possession of the Starrs and the incredibly tedious task of sorting out the who, what, when, where and why. And I confess I cannot make heads or tails of the testimony. I only know that Belle and Sam were convicted and served time. Belle wrote an eloquent letter to Pearl, explaining why she would not be seeing her mother for the next nine months:

Pandemonium, Feb.- 1883

“My Dear Little One: It is useless to attempt to conceal my trouble from you and though you are nothing but a child I have confidence that my darling will bear with fortitude what I now write.

I shall be away from you a few months baby and have only this consolation to offer you, that never again will I be placed in such humiliating circumstances and that in the future your little tender heart shall never more ache, or a blush called to your cheek on your mother’s account. Sam and I were tried here, John West the main witness against us. We were found guilty and sentenced to nine months at the house of correction, Detroit, Michigan, for which place we start in the morning. Now Pearl there is a vast If you should write me, ma would fine out where I am and Pearl, you must never let her know. Her head is overburdened with care now and therefore you must keep this carefully guarded from her.

Destroy this letter as soon as read. As I told you before, if you wish to stay a while with your Mamma Mc., I am willing. but you must devote your time to your studies. Bye bye, sweet baby mine.”

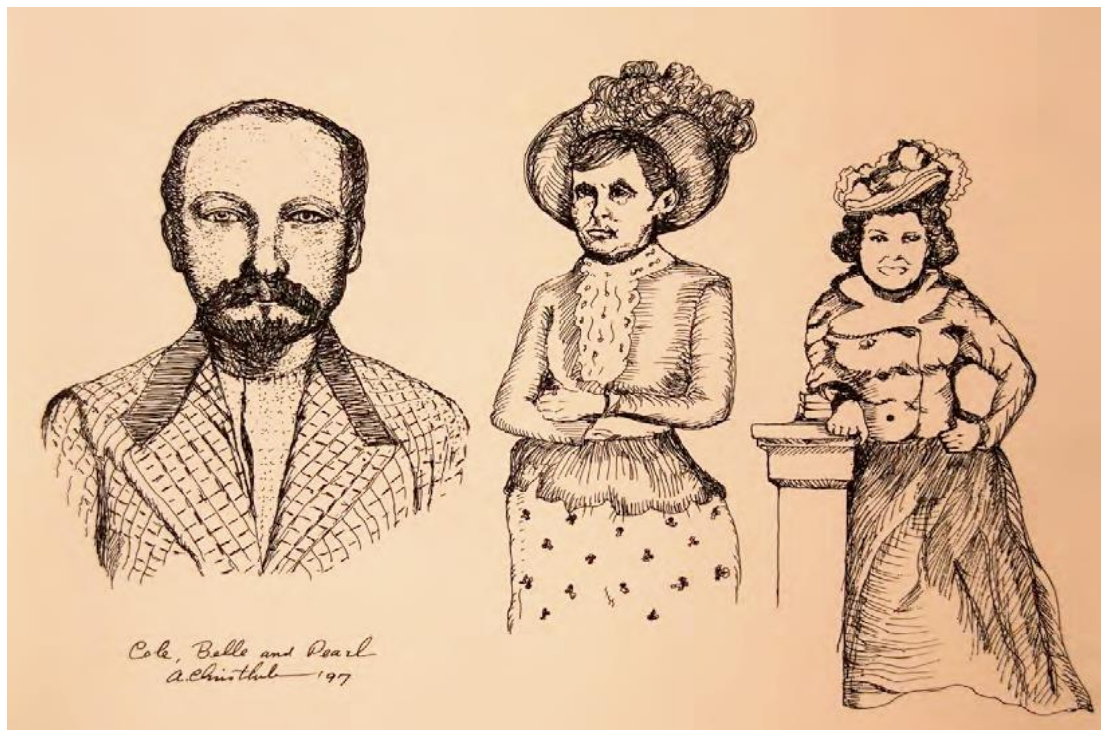
Belle Starr

Belle’s release from her two six month terms in the House of Correction at Detroit, Michigan with three months off for good behavior, began with Christmas with the Reeds in Missouri, reuniting Pearl with her mother before returning to Youngers Bend.

The chronologies of events from Belle’s release from prison (1884 to 1889) are numerous. They hold a mirror to massive changes in the fabric of the Old West in the last decade of her life.



Belle and her mother, Eliza Shirley



Chapter 2: Arkansas and Oklahoma

Who killed Belle Starr?

The violent ambush of Belle Starr two days shy of her 41st birthday on February 3, 1889, marked the culmination of four significant decades in American history and the beginning of the end of the Old West.

She was born Myra Maybelle Shirley in 1848 and raised in Jasper County, Missouri two years after the U.S. enforced a truce in the Cherokee Civil War. She was six when congress enacted the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and nine when it enacted the Dred Scott Decision of 1857 – another concession to the South before Missouri became embroiled in the border wars. She was twelve when Lincoln was elected in 1860 and she entertained guests in her father's wayside inn, a flourishing hotel, near a major travel route in Carthage, Missouri, but it was a time of major upheavals – a senator brandishing a pistol on the floor of the U.S. Senate, reverend Stowe arming Kansas abolitionists and John Brown killing innocents. It was a time when Thomas Jefferson's and John Quincy Adams' worst fears for the Republic had come home to roost – a time when southern Republicans believed that the government had no right to tell them what states should or should not be slave free.

John and Eliza Shirley had lived through age of Jackson, the 7th U.S. President, hero of the Battle of New Orleans and the Indian fighter who promised to move all tribes west of the Mississippi in his campaign speeches. The whole country had lived in the shadow of Jackson's reign. He defied the Supreme Court and Chief Justice John Marshall's ruling against the State of Georgia when he sided with the governor, authorized and engineered the removal of the Cherokees from their native homeland by way of the Treaty of New Echota (1835) and the resulting "Trail of Tears" (1838-1839). He fired his Secretary of the Treasury, shut down the Bank of the United States over the issue of runaway credit – a move that nearly bankrupted the nation and he escaped impeachment by one vote.

Jackson was the first president to prevent secession by threatening the State of South Carolina with military force if she attempted to "nullify" federal law over the imposition of tariffs.

Jackson is purported to have threatened to hang Vice President John C. Calhoun for supporting "nullification," and did replace him with Martin Van Buren on the ticket in his second term in office. Ironically, it was the weakness of succeeding presidents to avoid confrontation over the issue of slavery and the blunder of Franklin Pierce in supporting tariffs that directly impacted Southern Plantation owners who depended on foreign cotton contracts and his direct promotion of the passage of the Kansas/Nebraska Act that dumped fuel on the fire of secession.

Before the Fall of Ft. Sumter, Missouri fell into a gray area divided into three groups: Secessionists, Conditional Union, and Unconditional Union. In an effort to keep the war out of the state, Governor Claiborne Jackson sided with Unconditional Union delegates at the 1861 state convention not to secede unless the federal government tried to force the Southern states back into the Union. After the fall of Ft Sumter, Governor Jackson defied the secretary of war and called for fifty thousand volunteers to defend the state against the Union. So while the state never officially seceded the fighting came to it anyway in the form of large and small skirmishes "until the war in Jasper County turned into nothing more than a succession of bloody reprisals." Carthage was caught in the crossfire of retreating Union militia and a rebel force burned everything to the ground.

Myra's brother, Bud, had joined the local band of Missouri bushwhackers and was shot fleeing a trap by Union troopers, who had surrounded a country house where he was eating supper.

Distraught over the death of his son and discouraged by the loss of his business, his father, John Shirley, finding his hotel and livery stable in ashes, sold all his property, loaded the wagons and moved the family to Scyene, Texas.

Little Myra would live her entire adult life in the shadow of Jackson's powerful influence over Indian Territory. In 1861, the Cherokee Nation made the decision to take General Pike's offer and join Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy to fight for the South in the Trans-Mississippi sector of the Civil War. Myra's marriage to ex-Confederate Quantrill rider, James C. Reed in 1866, marked the beginning of her association with former Confederates and Cherokee Indian outlaw, Tom Starr and the Starr clan. Cole Younger and Jessie James were frequent visitors to the Starr ranch.

After Lee's surrender, Quantrill's death and Lincoln's assassination, the heavyhanded retribution against ex-confederates led by Thaddeus Stevens and the Radical Republicans, led to humiliation of ex-plantation owners by attempting to give away land to ex-slaves and then enforcing punitive national and state laws against ex-Confederate soldiers returning to civilian life for having joined the rebellion.

Unwilling to return to farm life and bent on retribution against the Union for offenses they considered "eye for an eye," the James/Younger gang set about on a path of robbing banks and trains. James C. Reed suffered from the same posttraumatic distress as his co-guerrilla riders. He tired of farming, took up gambling, horse racing and joined a gang of thieves. By the time Myra became mother to Rose Pearl, James had taken revenge for the murder of his brother, Scott, by killing one of the perpetrators and fled to Los Angeles with Myra and Rose Pearl to avoid arrest.

These ex-Quantrill guerrillas were all from good families in Missouri. The differences were that Jessie James had a vast network of family and friends still loyal to the defeated South that would provide him with alibis for nearly every job he and his gang pulled. James Reed had no alibi and became a wanted man until the end of his days.

In 1871, Myra gave birth to a second child, James Edwin, while James was working in a Los Angeles gambling casino, but found herself and the children traveling back to Scyene, Texas by stagecoach after federal authorities discovered the warrant for James arrest, causing him to quickly leave California on horseback for Texas.

The death of James Reed in 1874 in Paris, Texas, came by way of an undercover deputy who befriended him, then shot him in an escape attempt and collected the reward for his capture.

Myra was later questioned by authorities seeking to recover gold stolen by Reed in The "Grayson Gold Robbery," and was found to have been an innocent bystander after giving a sworn statement that Reed disposed of all the money.

With the marriage to her second husband, Cherokee Indian outlaw, Sam Starr, in 1880, she officially became known as Belle Starr and the daughter-in-law of Tom Starr. Her year in prison for abetting her second husband's theft of a horse in 1882 marked the beginning of her long association with the famous federal judge, Isaac P.

Parker of the Western District of Arkansas and news of her imprisonment in the court of “hanging judge” Isaac P. Parker, on the note pads of journalists and pulp fiction writers, solidified her reputation as the “*bandit queen*.” 1880 also marks the year Belle embarks on a career of land management, of sorts. Sam Starr is strong and attractive and he, by right of his three quarter Cherokee heritage, has the ability to possess but not own communal native land of his choosing.

He has the right to make and own improvements to the land as long as he lives and to pass on those improvements to his heir if he dies. “As an intermarried white, (Belle) was now a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and a ward of the U.S. government.” So Belle becomes the architect, the blue printer and developer of a vast parcel of allotment land and Sam becomes her chief operating engineer. They build a cabin next to a natural spring in a secluded, strategically chosen “*rocky knoll*,” approachable through a narrow canyon on a trail sometimes only passable on horseback, depending on the weather.

Belle is now living in close proximity to her second father-in-law, Tom Starr, political dissident, son of assassinated western chief, James Starr and now an outlaw in the Indian Territory with a vast network of sentries and forward observers warning of approaching lawmen or Indian police.

What is remarkable about her is her effort to raise teenagers, manage tenant farmers, and take enormous pains to become a socially acceptable neighbor while battling her reputation as an associate of fugitives from the law, which, from time to time, included her husband until she took time to arrange for his bail and her father-in-law, who was finally arrested and convicted of whiskey peddling.

It was at this point in her life that pulp fiction writers, having already created enormous interest in the “Bandit Queen” with their eastern readers, were compelled to embellish upon her previous exploits with even more outrageous adventures.

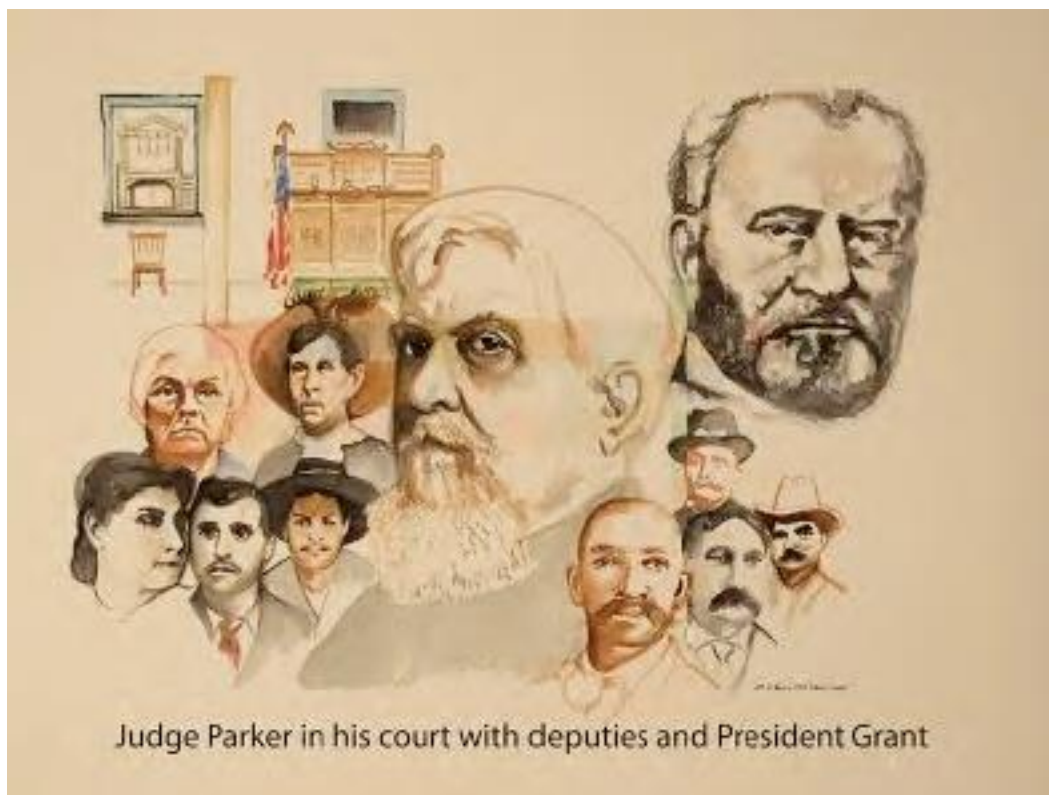
The real Belle Starr was rather formal and straitlaced. She was careful of her appearance and the clothes she wore were tailored. She would have fit in with any social circle had it not been for the criminal element that her husbands thrust upon her. She disapproved of her first husband’s lifestyle and tired of having to meet him in secret fleeing from the law. Her children hardly knew their father. Near the end of his life a dalliance with a preacher’s daughter forced a separation between he and Belle that was never mended before he was shot.

She was not impervious to the literary fiction being written about her and it made her more compulsive about attending to her children after the loss of their father.

Her marriage to her second husband, Sam Starr, ended in 1886 at a social gathering at her aunt Lucy’s in Briartown, I.T. Sam met his long time nemesis, Indian policeman, Frank West and they both shot each other through the heart. Widowed a second time and in danger of losing her right to improve on Sam’s communally held land, Belle entered into an arrangement with a Cherokee Indian named Bill July. Bill was an adopted son of old Tom Starr, who re-named him Jim July Starr. Bill July was fifteen years younger than Belle, prone to drinking and getting in trouble with the law, but their co-habitation satisfied the tribal council members that her citizenship was secure. So Jim July Starr became the unofficial third husband of Belle Starr, but her troubles with Rose Pearl and young Eddie were just beginning. July is so close in age to Eddie that the two don’t get along and real problems develop when a cousin of July wounds Eddie in a quarrel over a horse theft they are suspected of having committed. Making matters

worse, July is arrested for horse stealing and Belle is so angered by it she makes him get bail money from his kin. Compounding already difficult family matters, Belle learns that Rose Pearl is pregnant by the Indian boy she forbade Pearl to marry and becomes obsessed with either finding someone to marry Pearl or putting the baby up for adoption when Pearl comes to term.

The unsolved murder of Belle Starr was blamed on a number of suspects including her husband, her son, one of her ex-lovers, a neighbor and a homesteader whose shotgun was found to have been the murder weapon. She was a pulp fiction legend in her own time, an authentic Southern Belle who embodied all the characteristics of the fictional Scarlet O'Hara, but so much more since she was a real, flesh and blood participant in the most significant decades in American history. So Killing Belle Starr may be more than an Aaron's compulsive search for her assassin. It explores the family and friends she interacted with in a way that might have documented their own thoughts and actions in the Civil War and during the Reconstruction in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Of all the women of the Old West, Belle Starr is the only legend linked directly to the famed Judge Isaac Parker, Jesse James and Cole Younger, ex-confederates, Cherokee outlaws and the Indian Nations of the Five Civilized tribes.



Aaron

So the shots that shattered that lazy afternoon on February 3, 1889 in the Choctaw Nation roused the neighbors and knowing I was looking for answers, this is what I think they were telling me:

James Edwin Reed

"My name is James Edwin Reed. I was about three years old when my father died and mother had me shuffled between relatives in Missouri and Texas. I was nine years old when my mom

married Sam Star and settled in Indian Territory. Sam was like the father I didn't have, but when he was on "the scout" from the law and he and mom went to prison, I was back with kinfolk. I learned a lot from Sam before he died in the shootout with Frank West at aunt Lucy's. I was a teenager then and pretty ornery. Mom really didn't understand what I was goin' through. She used to whip me with a quirt when I up and sassd her and that just made me want to get away more and be wild. Mainly, I never liked mom's treatment of Rose Pearl because she never accepted Flossie into the family. I blamed her for keeping Rosie away from the Bend.

I got shot pretty bad by cousin of Bill July who thought I was going to turn him in for horse stealing. Truth is, we both took the horse, but I got second thoughts and Mose shot me while I was sleeping. Mom took care of me while I was healin' and used it as an excuse to get Rose Pearl to come back home. I swore out a writ for Mose for shooting me. When they caught him, July and Mose's parents had me to back off.

They said they would provide for my defense since the deputies found the horse in my possession. Come time for my defense, July backed out and that made me angry as hell. I pressed charges against Mose for stealing the horse. About the same time July was arrested and jailed on an old warrant for horse stealing. Judge Parker released me on my own recognizance because of my wounds. July made a new bond and was free, but I hated him for what he did. I was so disgusted with all of it I moved in with the Rowe's on the Choctaw side of the South Canadian. I never saw my mother again until the day after she was shot."

Bill July, Alias, Jim July Starr

"I was born in the territory in 1863 and I was 15 years younger than Belle when she asked me to live with her. My friends told me she needed a Cherokee to make her claim to the land she improved with Sam Starr before he got shot. I didn't care.

All I wanted was a place to hang my hat and some good whiskey. I was sort of an adopted son of Tom Starr and he used to call me Jim July Starr, so that's what Belle called me. I was only six years older than her son, Eddie, when we got together, so he and I never got along. I naturally sided with Mose Perryman when the two of 'em were arrested. Mose was my cousin, but I didn't want Belle to be upset with me more than she already was for my being arrested for stealing that black mare of McCormick's. She was mad enough to not post my bond and I had to get help from my kin. That's another reason she was mad at me. She wanted to put on airs and act like a citizen because she got a letter from that Indian agent praising her for not having outlaws around the place.



Then there was that flap with her daughter over her kid. Belle had run off the boy who wanted to marry her and she was trying to find out where the baby was to get it adopted before the whole world knew her daughter was a whore.

I just got so disgusted with all the family stuff so I hi-tailed it out and got drunk. I said a lot of things when I was drunk, mostly lies, but some neighbors thought I was serious. That always made me laugh 'cause I was just blowin' smoke.

The day before Belle got shot, she rode with me a ways to Ft. Smith, seeing to it I would answer the old charge against me for horse stealing. We sort of made up and spent the night in Whitefield. The next morning I went on to Ft. Smith and she went back to the Bend. That was the last I saw of her until they wired me and told me she had been shot. I got the wire from Ft. Smith and headed back to the Bend as soon as I could. Somebody was going to suffer for this. I got in to the bend late that night and my kin told me they had traced the footprints from the body to Edgar Watson's cabin.

He would pay for killing Belle. She was buried near her cabin with one hand on her favorite revolver. Some Choctaws and Creeks came by and the Starr clan. They all dropped pieces of corn bread in the coffin; then. Pearl and Eddie stood by while they nailed the coffin shut and started filling the grave with dirt. I raised my gun at Edgar Watson and threatened to shoot him. We took him to a neighbors place and watched over him until morning. We took him to Ft. Smith and I made a formal complaint against him and I gave evidence, but Watson hired one of them real good lawyers and convinced the Commissioner that my evidence was circumstantial. Watson was cleared in the hearing and set about to convince deputies that I had borrowed Watson's shotgun the morning of the killing. I was so disgusted with the law I

jumped my bond, took off for the territory, got drunk, got into more trouble and hid out in the Chickasaw.”

Edgar A. Watson

“I came up to Arkansas with my wife from my place around Chokoloskee Bay in Florida. I had a little trouble with some folks back there and needed a change. I figured to do some farming and sharecropping. I came to Indian Territory to find some land to lease and heard that Mrs. Starr had property I could work. My wife and I met her and she seemed real nice. I gave her a deposit on the parcel of land I was going to work, but after she began talking to my wife about what happened back in Florida, she changed her mind about letting me lease and sent me a letter offering to give my money back. I was pretty upset. I was a God fearing, church going member of the community. People respected me wherever I went. Jim July was just a renegade injun’ always in trouble with the law. I couldn’t see what she saw in him, except that he was young and he owned the land she managed by Indian law. I guess that were reason enough; still, I lost a lot of sleep thinking about being under suspicion for something I came a good long way to get away from. When Mrs. Starr informed me she was renting the property to another man, I just couldn’t let it go without letting him know he was renting from someone who harbored criminals and that it might be risky being associated with her. I was pretty upset. I was a God fearing, church going member of the community. People respected me wherever I went. Jim July was just a renegade injun’ always in trouble with the law. I couldn’t see what she saw in him, except that he was young and he owned the land she managed by Indian law. I guess that were reason enough; still, I lost a lot of sleep thinking about being under suspicion for something I came a good long way to get away from. When Mrs. Starr informed me she was renting the property to another man, I just couldn’t let it go without letting him know he was renting from someone who harbored criminals and that it might be risky being associated with her.”

Jim July and his people accused me of killing Mrs. Starr, but my wife hired a real fine attorney in Ft. Smith and we just turned the story around on that no good injun’. It wasn’t hard. Nobody was gonna’ take an injun’s word over a white man, anyway. I had a real good talk with the deputies after before I was acquitted and they believed my story about July borrowing my shotgun the day before she was shot. Hell, even old Judge Parker believed my side of the story. I was home free until my past caught up with me and me and the wife had to hi-tail it out back to Florida.”

Aaron

It was the images from those fuzzy Ozalid copies of Glenn Shirley’s Law West of Fort Smith: A History of Frontier Justice in the Indian Territory that got me going. I wanted to picture Judge Parker in his court, quoting from the bible as he sentenced men to hang for their crimes and the scaffold where six men were hanged on the same platform while vendors served beer and pies. I wanted to see the national cemetery where Judge Parker was buried and the other cemetery where they buried lawmen that met the same fate as the criminals they caught and the only way I was going to do that was to pack my bags and go there.

Clara Mae’s spirit was with me every time I approached my easel and her spirit would be with me on my trip but she was like so many older souls.

“Do what you want to do, but don’t expect me to do the same. Think what you want. Just don’t try to make me think what you think. I have a mind of my own,” she said.

Clara's spirit would not tell me who killed Belle Starr and I did not ask. I sensed that she knew there was more to my journey than solving a crime, but it was my journey and she would not interfere, and as she had not done in life, she would not do in spirit. She would go along for the ride, observe, take notes and tell me later.

On the way to Fort Smith, I met a "channeler." I told him I was doing research on the murder of Belle Starr. He immediately saw me as someone named "Jim" and told me to go to a spot on or near Belle's ranch. I was told to fashion a diving rod and search the area on foot and that I would find the spot where she was ambushed. He warned me to keep my intentions quiet and that if I ever published my findings to do it as a work of fiction because too many people would interfere if I claimed otherwise. He said Jim was on the scout and nervous - always looking over his shoulder.

I blurted out that I thought I was James C. Reed from Missouri. The channeler was always careful not to use the word "you." He had opened a door without inviting me to enter and I walked through to a past life I would never have imagined. It was like confessing to a crime I thought others had committed. Who was I? Jim Reed or Jim July? He only had general descriptions of two outlaws, one a Missouri ex- Confederate, the other a Cherokee Indian. Either way, I would now have to accept the premise that I was an outlaw married to the Bandit Queen in my previous life.

I never consciously channeled Clara Mae after her death. She would just come to me in my dreams or anytime I was painting. Her spirit was visiting all the people in her life and children, Red Sonya, her parents and Cheyenne. Only Red Sonya and Cheyenne and I would know when her spirit was near. She was never obtrusive or scary, none of that ghost story business. She understood and accepted where she was and what she was and accorded all of us the courtesy of not invading our corporeal lives or rattling us with bells and whistles from the great beyond. Clara Mae was a genuine old soul.

I was trying to not let my personal odyssey interfere with my search for Belle's killer but the two paths were parallel and became more compulsive when I suspected that my girlfriend was the reincarnation of Myra Maybelle Shirley. And then, since Clara Mae made her thoughts known I was compelled to ask: Who were you, Clara Mae Childress in our past life together in the old West?

"As long as you were painting I was there for you. When you put your brushes aside for this project I could only help you so far," her spirit said.

In life, Clara Mae would not have consciously known she was a part of this past life history. Clairvoyance did not come to her easily because she knew how to shut it off so that it would not take over her life. So, in essence I would have to uncover something and she would have to concur or demur. She kept it that way when she was alive so that our adventure together would not be overtaken by the past. It was the same now that she was pure spirit. I would have to do the work.

Fort Smith, Arkansas

The courthouse at Ft. Smith, Judge Parker's courtroom, jail and the six person gallows were all well preserved; but, one would have had to have been there for the September 6, 1875 hanging to understand why Judge Parker got his reputation as the *"bloodthirsty and heartless Hanging*

Judge.”

“It is not I who hang you, men. It is the law,” he said. And back in the courtroom, I imagined where Belle and Sam Starr would have sat while Frank West’s testimony was given convicting them of horse theft. Across the bridge and over the river, you find a block of two-story houses where Rosie Lee, aka Pearl Starr became the most famous madam of Ft Smith and not far away, an old orphanage that housed the illegitimate children born to the ladies of *“the row.”* And down the road in the old Oak Cemetery, were the names of outlaws and deputies who crossed the line and paid for it to the sorrow and lament of the Ft. Smith hangman who knew them personally and had to drop the trap. I discovered the head stone and stele for Arthur Erbach and his infant son, the house piano player/German Count and second husband of Rose Pearl, who tragically lost them both to malaria.



Judge Isaac Parker

"As God is my witness, I never wanted such misfortune to fall upon Belle Starr or her family. It pained me to have to sentence Belle to prison. I liked her. She was active in the community and loved to take part in town social events. She became the subject of eastern pulp writers because of her husband, Jim Reed and all law-breakers that came into the territory behind him. She was a loyal wife, trying to raise two children while her husband was on the run from the law. She begged me to help her son, Eddie, stay on the straight and narrow. She got into trouble when she married into the Starr clan.

First, it was Sam Starr and later Bill July Starr. Her father-in-law was old Tom Starr, the Cherokee political dissident and later outlaw, wanted by the Indian Police for crimes in the territory. He was brought to my court for whiskey peddling a year after Belle served her sentence for horse theft. Mr. Starr was over 70 years old and still a fine figure of a man, but I was told he suffered greatly, serving his time in prison.

I admired Belle more than anyone will ever know and the courage she showed in my courtroom time and time for herself and for others of her family and friends was extraordinary. She had lost two husbands due to law breaking and violence and after her death, a third husband as well. 1889 was the end of my time on the bench in Ft. Smith and it was nearly the end of my time on earth as well. I became so ill in my last year I had to rely entirely on the good intentions of my deputies to make the right decisions.

I had so few good days. I confess I was not much help in investigating her murder. I received word of Belle's death and read the transcript of the hearing before Commissioner Brizzolara. I did instruct Deputy Hughes to look into the charges Mr. July brought against Mr. Watson, but beyond the findings of the hearing, I heard nothing until Deputy Bob Hutchins came to me with new evidence that Bill July had shot Belle. This evidence exonerated Mr. Watson. The circumstances surrounding the apprehension and arrest of Jim July in the territory are still in question because Captain Mershon told me that the capias (warrant) for which July was apprehended was paid. I was left with the "death bed confession" Deputy Hutchins led me to believe July had made before he died from his wounds. I know it was easy for my deputy to believe that July's confession would have been an admission of guilt in the murder of Belle, but it was not witnessed or heard. It was not corroborated. It was not certain. I concurred on the earlier submitted evidence, but not on the later so-called confession."



Rose Pearl Reed

"Momma was awful strict and she had a temper at times. She went way out of her way to warn off that Indian boy who wanted to marry me. And when I got pregnant, all the fuss she went to trying to make me respectable to her friends.

I hated her for taking my baby away. "Flossie" was so precious to me. But I could see that mom was at loose ends after Daddy was killed and I could understand her trying to hang on to her property by marrying into the Starr clan.

I forgave her because she was our mom, Eddie and me, and she always wanted the best for us. I thought she would want to be buried on her own property, but I knew she died with the name, "Starr," and I could have asked old Tom if she could be buried in the Starr cemetery and he probably would have said yes.

I suppose I should have told Commissioner Brizzolara what Mamma told me about her suspicions and fears before she was killed, but it doesn't make any difference now. Still, I really don't think Jim July killed my mother. Those Deputy Marshals had it in for Jim July because they thought he jumped bail and he didn't.

After momma was gone I married a nice fellow, but we quarreled and it didn't work out. After the divorce I kind of drifted and that's when I took up whoring for a living. I was the best at what I did and men paid me well. I made enough to get Eddie a pardon from the President to get him out of prison for selling whiskey. I was like my mother that way. I knew a lot of real good lawyers and I could afford them. Eddie was pretty upset when I told him how I earned the money, but I told him I was not ashamed and there was only the two of us now that our mother was gone and that we had to take care of each other."

Clara Mae Childress, Aka Pearl Starr

"I was not what you would call a desperate person back in good old Ft. Smith. I took my time and made pretty good decisions for myself and for my business, and my business was running whorehouses. My firstborn was Flossie and you already know about her. My second child was Ruth from one of my very good regular customers, but he would not be named as my husband and that name was left blank in her birth certificate.

My second husband was my loving and handsome piano player at "Pearl's Place." He was a few years younger than I but it made no difference His name was Erbach and he came from a family of German Counts. I couldn't have been more thrilled to have his child. I was devastated to lose them both to malaria. He was my soul mate and I would never marry again after him.

I had a fourth child with another gentleman, Dell Andrews, whom I lived with for a while. Her name was Jeanette. When she and Ruth got old enough I put them both in a convent In Missouri.

Back in Ft. Smith days, we were doing the community a service. We paid fines for street walking, but we did a lot of self-policing to keep the business going. The men were going to go anywhere to get it. We made it safe and dependable to come to "Pearl's Place."

The police worked with us for a good long time until the city fathers got religion and kicked us out.

When I got to Bisbee, the place was a bustling Copper town. You couldn't miss the mine. It was practically in the center of the town. I called myself Rosa Reed in those days and I kept it real quiet about my life back in Ft. Smith. I threw in with a fella on a house I turned into a "Ballet Studio." I had to keep it on the QT on account of my reputation from Ft. Smith, which I was careful to keep hidden from the city fathers, well most of 'em, anyway. By then, I was too old to hook, but I had some pretty sweet girls who made a nice living and paid the mortgage on the place."

Aaron

I was married to Clara Mae Peacock who just revealed that she was Rosie Lee Reed, aka, Pearl Reed, daughter of Myra Maybelle Reed, who became Belle Starr. My Clara was the head madam who bought the big neon sign that said, "*Pearl's Place*," over the hottest "*girl hotel*" on "*the Row*" in Ft. Smith.

I had no map of the cemetery when I found Rosie Lee's second husband and infant son on a stone stele near an old oak tree. All I knew of Arthur Erbach was that he was a musician from Erbach, Germany and had been born to the family of German counts according to Glenn Shirley and was a piano player in Pearl's "*girl hotel*" whom she married in 1897. The fact that father and son died of malaria in 1898 and that Pearl never married again was very sad.

I am sure that in the history of past life recollections there must be some pretty good examples of converging and over-lapping past lives. I am now sure that Clara and I are among them. So, when I asked myself who is Count Erbach's current reincarnation, the answer came up as me. But, it couldn't have been me. I had pretty much concluded that I was James C. Reed, Belle's first husband, the dashing, bloodthirsty, ex-Confederate guerrilla raider with William Clarke Quantrill and Jesse James. Right? Or was I? Since we believed we had already shared a past life together, Clara Mae and I assumed we must have been husband and wife in a past life. It was only logical.

But, how could I be married to Belle Starr and also married to her daughter in the same century?

Clara Mae

"Who knows? And logic has nothing to do with it. You were always horny. It was one of the reasons I loved you. You made up for all the lovin' I couldn't get from my ex. And, by the way, those dreams you've been having about me leaving you. I planted them so that you would get on with your life and not think about me so much after I died. You tend to cling after it's no longer required. We had a great time, my love."

Chapter 3: A Remembrance of Things Past

Clara Mae Peacock

"I knew I had him at "hello." I was invited to meet him at a friend's house near the gallery. I saw his work on a canvas in the living room and I knew why she was so eager to impress me. This was a talent like I had read about in all the books on painting that got me started. She had him in her web and ready to suck the life out of him when he suddenly folded up his easel and loaded it into the rear of the Gilgamesh Gallery. I let him in and he was all over me. I was overwhelmed, sixteen years older and scared as hell it was just a dream. My partner, I nicknamed Red Sonya because of her flaming red hair and sometimes-volatile temperament, treated me like a sister and was always looking out for me. She tolerated his camping out in the back room for days on end while I commuted between my Long Beach home and the gallery. Some days he would just leave to go back to his parent's house in the Valley and I wouldn't hear from him. I would come back to the gallery each day to find him gone and I told Sonya I was worried. I was at home the day he show up at the gallery expecting to find me there."

Red Sonya

"She's not here."

Aaron

"Not here? "

Red Sonya

Slowly lights a cigarette. Takes a long drag and lets it out. Aaron (standing) freezes in place. Sonya paces, crosses in front of Aaron to the opposite wall and leans against it.

"You know, Aaron, Clara Mae hasn't had anyone in her life for a very long time and then she met you. She's afraid to come here now because she doesn't know what your intentions are and she's hurting. She's like a sister to me"

Aaron

(Stunned and barely audible.) *"I understand."*

Red Sonya

"You need to make it very clear to her what you want to do. If you really love her, you have to tell her you love her. Otherwise, she doesn't think you really care!" (Picks up the phone and holds it out to Aaron.)

Aaron

(Takes the phone from Sonya and dials.)

Clara Mae

"Hello?"

Aaron

"Clara, Aaron. I just want you to know that I love you and I want to be with you. Can you please come down to the gallery?"

Clara Mae

"I knew then our adventure was serious. He accepted that I was overweight and older. I accepted that he was sixteen years younger. It was sometime after our first month together that Aaron and I had read Dick Sutphen's," You were Born Again to be Together," and he mentioned wanting to visit Spain. I had been channeling the spirit of my childhood caretaker and Sonya continued reading Tarot. Aaron was making a real effort at adjusting to the lifestyle of the twin tornadoes - the nickname other artists gave us on art shows. We spent the days between the back room and lunch at Hof's Hut. Time seemed unimportant, but I couldn't miss a minute of it. More, more, more, I would always say.

I could see all of this was a big deal for Aaron. I was fascinated by his color theory and he wanted to know how I made a complete color palette from scratch and how I approached my wipe-away oil on canvas portrait technique. I realized he had never had any formal instruction.. He was almost completely self-taught. Sonya and I had studied with Frank Tauriello, so we had a pretty good basic education in oil painting before deciding to open a gallery together. We did some business in the years before meeting Aaron, but Sonya was tired of traveling to shows and hauling around A-Frame display stands. The gallery was becoming more of a social hangout than a place of business. Aaron was determined to take me to Spain and I went along with his plan. He would sell his car for the plane ticket and I would start divorce papers with my husband.

Sonya took us to San Pedro to meet with craft people who had once lived in Spain. She thought it might give us an idea of what to expect once we got there.

The night before we left for Spain, Sonya gave us a going away party. I held the front door to the gallery open while Sonya and Aaron took their clothes off and streaked 4th Street. With little or no sleep, we boarded a Lufthansa flight full of beer drinking Germans and landed in Frankfurt, jet-lagged, dog-tired and standing on the corner with all our bags waiting for a green light. We passed a Wimpy Burger and Dr. Mueller's Sex Shop, dragged our selves into the Continental Hotel and hit the bell on the Clerk's desk."

Aaron

The trip to Europe gave our love a jump-start. We made our way from Germany to Paris-Austerlitz to Madrid, then Malaga and settled in a two-story farmhouse near the main house, a block from the daily toot of a La Cucaracha car horn at the Fabrica de Coca Cola in San Julian, Spain. We came with nothing, made our own easels, stretched our own canvas, primed it with Gesso and contemplated how we might sell our work on the Nogalera in Torremolinos. We shopped for food with string bags in Malaga, barbecued on the second floor balcony and lived on 75 dollars a month we cashed at the Banco de Santander in pesetas. We rented from a German baron who owned a camel and took pride in appearing in Italian spaghetti westerns whenever they needed extras and his wife, a proper, genteel English woman who seemed to navigate the ever changing and myriad Spanish property laws and land parcels owned by foreigners in Spain. We were honeymooning before marriage in a Catholic country and Clara Mae thought it was kind of thrilling, a far cry from raising four kids and taking care of a sick husband in suburbia. It was what Red Sonya had always hoped for her "little sister".

We were California Impressionists in Spain, accorded every kind of respect from Europeans who valued art and we enjoyed a kind of idyllic life for seven months. We wanted to renew our visas in Casablanca, but had to settle for Ceuta at the tip of North Africa where we got our passports stamped and wandered through ancient market places that looked like movie sets from a Cecil B. De Mille epic.

Back in Malaga, we wandered through ancient cobble stone streets and alleyways looking for a shoe store for Clara Mae. I could not stop the ringing in my ears and Clara Mae took me aside and said, *"Tell me what you're feeling."*

The sun had gone down and it was a clear, starry night. There weren't that many people in the streets, but it was stuffy and I felt crowded. *"You're feeling what you cannot see, but it is there,"* she said. *"It's like a cackle of voices, buzzing through my head, a noise I can't stop,"* I told her.

"You'll have to learn to turn it off, my love. I had to, just to keep from going bonkers. This is what comes from being sensitive to the presence of unrequited souls, about 700 years of them," she said. She was talking about restless souls from the days of the Inquisition all the way up to the Spanish Civil War, including the Moorish invasion.

"Remember the vision we saw in the Pension in Torremolinos, the two nights he appeared in a helmet and halberd, walking his post like a good soldier?" she asked. *"Yes, I do,"* I said. *"He was probably a sentry who was killed on duty, coming back for an eternity to re do his job, because no one told him he could rest. He feared his commander would never forgive him for failing in his duty to protect the monarchy from attack,"* she said.

"But we saw him, Clara. A thousand people had rented that room and slept like babies, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, being totally unaware of the presence in the room at a certain hour every night, every week, every month, every year for hundreds of years. That poor bastard, God help him!"

Clara Mae

"I knew the honeymoon wouldn't last. We were having too good a time. Almost to the day we got back from Ceuta to renew our visas my dear daughter began making noises about my abandonment of my husband back in Long Beach. She must have missed the part about the fact that our divorce became final while we were in Spain. In her mind, it never happened, but Aaron and I knew our days in Spain were numbered because the money was running out and we had to figure out how we were going to make a living back in the states. I was in love with Aaron and I believed in his future as an important artist. I wanted him to someday have a showing in Paris, but for the now with the pressure having to uproot and return home, we needed an idea that would pay the bills. We settled on the idea of carousel horses because of

my childhood love of the Charles Looff merry-go-round at the foot of the Long Beach pier. I always loved the ride and it made me feel free and happy. I wanted to grab the brass ring again. "

Aaron

Clara Mae and I had 16 years before she died. Eight were the best years in my life and maybe hers as well. I thought about her a lot on my trip through Oklahoma and Texas. We did some nice work together on portraits of Carousel carvings. They were not supposed to be masterpieces, but our degree of dedication to authentic reproduction of great woodcarving and great woodcarvers produced something of value and a tribute to their lost art. The same could be said for Clara's oil on canvas portraits, now that she's gone. Those monochrome washes she did at countless coordinated art shows put food on the table and paid our bills. They meant much more to her clients who could have easily settled for old time photo portraits for a lot less money. But time was not on our side and the grind of set-up, brake down and travel from western state to state finally wore her down. We had to settle in a suburb of San Diego and when work from our client list diminished, I had to find a job to put food on the table.

Clara Mae Childress

"I wasn't much help to Aaron because of my back. So I relied upon him for all of our needs. I hated to leave the road. It was so much fun seeing new places and meeting so many people, but my eyes tired quickly and made it difficult to continue portraiture without Aaron's help. We had to finish a lot of faces that way.

It was harder on Aaron when I died because I knew how much he relied upon me spiritually as well as in the flesh. I had no problem leaving my body behind. It had finally reached a point of no return and I was ready to go.

I know this must be difficult for you to understand. You're not really supposed to, but if you were to suspend your disbelief for just a minute of your time you might get something out of reading this that you could relate to somewhere down your own road.

First, your mind can move a lot faster when it isn't trapped inside your skull, so when you hear the phrase, out- of -body experience, what is being referred to is a mind out- of-body experience. Second, when your mind is free from your body you go anywhere you want and faster than anyone will ever know.

Third, by the time you read this, I am somewhere else in the universe because I like to explore things. What you are reading is the thought I left behind for Aaron to finish his story. He's been working on the damn thing for 14 years and it's high time, as they say.

Fourth, I know some my family members will be petrified when they read this, but I think my boys will get it. I raised them to be inquisitive, my daughter too, to find out how things work and to make them work better. You can quote me when I say it's a lot different then they think on the other side.

Fifth, what do you think the earth experience is all about? Well, hang on to your hat because that's what it is. "

Aaron

It took me a couple of years to get over her loss, just like she thought it would. It was easier for her to leave than for me to accept her leaving because she had been at death's door before and decided to come back one more time. That is why she had less concern about propriety and more for the honest truth and why she finally gave up on carousel portraits. It wasn't because of her health as much as it was her disillusionment with the systematic dismemberment of vintage merry-go rounds and the sell-off of the woodcarvings for profit. She thought our work was being

used to promote collector bids on the most valuable and marketable carvings. And when we learned that four of our prints had been reproduced in porcelain in Taiwan without our permission, she knew we were being ripped-off by someone we sold to on one of our traveling art shows, three horses and a lion in exact three-dimensional reproductions. It had to be done because of pure resentment and jealousy and by someone who realized they had no real talent for art, but a marvelous talent for exploitation and greed. And while we were struggling to make sense of our journey, Red Sonya closed the 4th Street Gallery and moved to Laguna Beach to devote herself to that wonderful festival by the sea for artists in residence catering to art lovers everywhere- The Sawdust Festival. I attended all her yearly invitations after Clara Mae passed away.

Cheyenne Brand

"Aaron was one of my regulars at the coffee concession I ran in front of a local market in the Valley. I was a potential franchise owner so I was pretty dedicated to the routine my boss had outlined for me on a daily and weekly basis. Aaron knew I had a boyfriend, but he was persistent admirer and I kind of liked him. He was always polite and respectful and sort of took his time nurturing a mutual attraction without over stepping. It was my decision to let him in."

Aaron

She was a follower of Rajneesh and a discipline of Buddhism that urged the disciples to get it all out of their system. Their lesson plan was overindulgence, orgies and taking turns riding around in one of 27 Rolls Royces given to the guru out of love and appreciation for his meditational guidance through the labyrinth of life. But, she managed to keep a toe in the real world as well. She lived with her mother, exercised daily, and stayed true to the goal of owning her own business.

Her father was a diamond expert and introduced her to crystals, she would wire up and hang around her neck. I cut myself more than once while making love to her.

Cheyenne Brand

"I knew he was falling in love with me. He kept coming around the coffee stand more and more, waiting for me to close up and take me home. I invited him to meet the Dalai Lama in Pasadena one day and we made the trip. We were greeted by Tibetan monks in orange robes, but the Dalai was unable to attend that day. Aaron told me all about Clara Mae and their life together on the road, about her spirituality and kinetic skills. I knew then I could reach her spirit if I tried. I wanted to know more."

Clara Mae

"There was something about Cheyenne I could not at first figure out, but I knew it was not by accident that she contacted me and it wasn't only because of Aaron. I knew by the weight of her spirit that she was more demanding than asking and that caused a lot of internal dialogue. We had known each other before, in another life."

Aaron

I remember the day she told me she had missed her period and home tests had shown she was pregnant. She was distraught and worked through her coffee franchise day possessed by demons. It wasn't supposed to happen. I had been told by a doctor my semen was dead (not enough sperm per thousand to be viable), but he was wrong and I owned it now. I was going to be a father. Why wasn't she happy about it?

Cheyenne Brand

"All I could think about was the embarrassment I would cause my mother and my father and the disruption in my daily routine. How could this happen? He assured me he was impotent and now this! I had to do something. There was no way I was going to bring this child to term. I wasn't going to have a kid interrupt my plans for my future".

Aaron

It was one of the lies my first ex-wife told me. We were trying to have kids and nothing was happening. She sent me to her doctor for a sperm test and I went away thinking I could never have kids, but after Cheyenne became pregnant, I had to get another test. I did and got the shock of my life. It was a happy day and then when I learned Cheyenne wouldn't keep it, it was a sad day. It was her choice and I had to honor it. I convinced myself I still loved her and I would stand by her throughout the whole ordeal, but as she worked through recovery she became distant and a bit resentful. I could feel her drifting away. She never shared the incident with her parents, so each day became more difficult for her emotionally. She wasn't used to not sharing her day with them.

She buried herself in her work routine and tried to put it all behind her. There was no room for my proposal and I knew it was the last thing she wanted to hear, so I stifled it and let it go. A month went by. I could not get her out of my mind. That's when I decided to get in the truck and go to Oklahoma. I needed to find out what was knocking at my door.

It was an obsession with an almost diabolical urge to discover and confirm who murdered the legend, Belle Starr. Two days out, I was having some difficulty peeing, but I pressed on anyway. It got worse around Porum, but I had to get answers. I was told by a seer that my past life name was Jim or James. I found myself in Indian Territory before the Eufaula became a major dam project. I paid a dollar to visit Belle's crypt on private property, surrounded by really crappy layer of wire fencing and looked across her gravesite to find no trace of the cabin and wood structure pictured in Glenn Shirley's book. There was no carved headstone, just a pile of stones where something used to be. I was sweating, in pain and my ear was in the dirt trying to make sense of it all. I may have been hallucinating. The local sheriff who guided me to the site had left and I was really alone. I kept thinking of how much Shirley's description of Belle so closely resembled Cheyenne: Petulant, self-pitying but strongly determined to reach her goal and nothing would stand in her way; skillful, creative and at times manipulative; a true Aries, a battle queen. Why wouldn't she have been Belle Starr?

Why did it take me so long to find out that she was?

Cheyenne

"I recovered faster than Aaron thought, but I wasn't ready to pick up where we left off, so I gave him the impression it was over. In the meantime, I gave up on the coffee franchise idea and decided to open a place my own on Ventura Blvd. It was the same money I would have spent investing in the franchise, but I would call all the shots and be on my own. I had to go for it. I would use everything I had learned to make the franchise a success my own and for me. He showed up at the door a few days before I opened."

Aaron

"Hi," I said. "Hi, yourself." she said while mopping and cleaning the storefront.

"I just wanted you to know I found you in the Indian Territory. There is no question in my mind that you are the reincarnation of Belle Starr and that I was married to you in that life as your first husband, Missouri rebel and outlaw, James C. Reed."

"Huh," she uttered, furiously sweeping up in readiness for her opening the next day.

"When you channel Clara Mae, you are channeling your daughter in the past life, Rose Pearl Reed. You called her Rosie Lee. After you kidnapped her illegitimate child, Flossie, she earned her living apart from you as a whore and eventually became Pearl Starr, the most famous madam in Ft. Smith, Arkansas."

I could see her mind was on her job and her investment and the time we were not together that absorbed her every thought of how she would reach her personal goals, but I pressed on in my excitement of telling someone some one I loved of how much she meant to me.

"She always loved you and paid for the carved inscription on your headstone after you were murdered in the Choctaw Nation. It's all in Glenn Shirley's book: your past life parents, your brother you bailed out of Judge Parker's jail after he got in trouble with the law," I said.

I was sweating and exhausted. I realized I just wasn't making the impression I thought my story would make on her. After a minute, I wished her well and left.

Cheyenne

"I knew he was still hung up on me. A week later, I opened with a small sign in the front window that said: BELLE STARR'S PLACE. I knew he would get a kick out of it, but I closed the shop after a month of bills and permits and slow sales. Nothing was going to save that situation"

Note:

Red Sonya is a fictional Sword and Sorcery comic book created by writer Roy Thomas and artist Barry Windsor-Smith for Marvel Comics. Red Sonya was Robert E. Howard's character Red Sonya of Rogatino, a female swashbuckler from the 1939 story, *The Shadow of the Vulture*. *You Were Born Again to be Together*, by Dick Sutphen is a collection of stories of reincarnation recorded by past life regression through hypnosis. It is out of print, but some copies are available on line from various sources.

Chapter 4: Paris to McKinney

Aaron in Paris, Texas

The door to the Lamar County Courthouse was behind a memorial statue commissioned by the Confederate Veterans and Daughters of the Confederacy. It featured four bronze busts: President Jefferson Davis; Generals Robert E. Lee, T.J. Jackson and J.E. Johnston – permanent reminders of a dark time in our history when America was divided by two presidents, two white houses, two separate armies, and the 600,000 men who fought and died for the right to control her. But this was Texas, the home of ex-Confederates and their unashamed pride in Southern Civil War heroes and the women who cared for their sacrifice.

“I’m looking for a property owner in Lamar County around 1874, a Mr. Henry Russell. Do your records go back that far?” The clerk had no idea I should have been looking for a property of S.M. Harvey. The last house Reed stayed at before he was killed.

Later that afternoon I found myself on a stretch of road along the Red River, between Paris and McKinney. Something made me stop near a fenced corral. I leaned over the rail and two horses came over to sniff at me. I somehow had the idea that the area seemed familiar to me. I wasn’t there for more than ten minutes when a rancher and his wife pulled up in a pickup truck. *“Can I help you,”* he asked. I explained that I was doing research on Texas history and I thought I saw something on his property that reminded me about what I had read. After a long silent minute, I realized how strange my words seemed and how puzzled he was with my answer. He was tanned and bare-chested and seemed unfazed by the flies and bugs swirling around us. *“You look like you could use a cool drink, Follow me up to the trailer and we’ll talk.”*

I followed him to a dirt driveway and a corral with a nervous bay that snorted and danced around as we drove past. I parked near a long open tool shed and a good sized horse trailer. *“Wes Johnson and this is my wife, Sally,”* he said. *“Aaron, pleased to meet you,”* I replied. *“Where did you say you were from?”* he asked. I told him I was from Los Angeles and that I was researching an old Missouri Stagecoach robber by the name of Reed who was gunned down trying to escape arrest from an undercover deputy Marshall somewhere near Mr. Johnson’s property back in 1874. The more I spoke the more intently he listened to my story. I could not tell if he believed anything I was saying. They were old school Texans, polite, hospitable and seriously curious about a stranger turning up on their ranch looking at their horses. I spoke about Reed’s Belle Starr connection while Mr. Johnson nodded and lit his cigarette and Mrs. Johnson served cold lemonade with a polite smile. I can’t remember exactly but I think I went on talking until the sun went down and she served a simple dinner by the light of the trailer and a bug light. I must have been in a trance-like state to remember all the western history. Round about midnight, Mr. Johnson finally spoke more than he listened.

“I used to wrangle for John Wayne when I was working in the business. I got out of it on account of my heart. Now I do some outfitting once in a while for people who want to visit some the places you were talking about.”

“Outfitting.” I said.

“How would you like to horseback up to Robber’s Cove with me in the morning? You can bunk in the horse trailer tonight and I’ll see you bright and early, about sun up,” he said.

The horse trailer was hot and the blankets full of fleas. I was better off sleeping in my truck, but I

had not come down from the events of the day and the thought of maybe riding that nervous bay over the San Bois Mountains kept me awake pretty good. I looked for Wes at first light, fully expecting him to be rounding up the horses to get us started, but his trailer was still dark and there was no movement inside.

I walked past the nervous bay, still spooked by some unseen force that made him dance and snort anytime I came near him. I walked back to the horse trailer and sat down in the doorway watching slivers of sunlight streak across a stream beyond the fenced property. A deer stopping to drink was silhouetted against a rising sun. It was a scene that probably had not changed in 150 years.

Was this the place I died trying to escape Morris's trap?

So here I was at the top end of Texas just across the Red River, miles away from the south side of the South Canadian and the Choctaw Indian Territory where Belle was shot off her horse and I thought somehow that Wes taking me to Robbers Cove would get me a little closer, but that wasn't the reason I was in Paris, Texas. I was obsessed with where James Reed's life ended and the pauper's cemetery where he might be buried. I became more convinced that I was him in a former life because I was leaning heavily on the belief that Cheyenne was the reincarnation of Belle Starr.

It was 7:30 when Sally opened the door of the travel trailer and came outside. *"Wes slept-in this morning. Would you like some breakfast?"* she asked. *"Yes ma'am"* I replied. *"Sorry about that,"* Mr. Johnson offered as he emerged from the trailer. *"The Mrs. Reminded me that I'm still under doctor's orders to take it easy after my heart attack. How would it be if we take my truck up to Robber's Cove? We can do a visit there and then I'll take you to a Choctaw Village museum."*

Relieved not to be riding the nervous stallion, I slid into the passenger seat and we headed up to the cove. I did get the feeling a lot of horse-trading or horse stealing had taken place over the mountains from the territory to the border and beyond. Mr. Johnson led me on a personal tour of the Choctaw museum. It was enough that he was part Choctaw and had a career in wrangling horses for John Wayne. It was enough that the spirits had urged me forward and led me to believe James. C. Reed was shot somewhere near Mr. Johnson's property in 1874. And then I asked myself if that was the only reason I spent a day and a half with a complete stranger and his wife in Paris, Texas?

Would that have been enough for me to know that I died on this ranch 150 years ago?

I was trying to find the reason I was there with these people, spilling my guts out about some ex-Confederate outlaw who roamed the territory twenty years before the turn of the century. It was like a confession, as if I were apologizing for something I had done in the past I was truly ashamed of and wanted forgiveness for. My God! Was I looking into the faces of man and woman I tortured and robbed in the Watt Grayson robbery in 1873? I was surely in an altered state of mind. I was so exhausted from a sleepless night in a flea bitten horse trailer I really could not enjoy Mr. Johnson's tour of Robber's Cove or his loving tour of a Choctaw museum full of spinning wheels and looms, baskets and beads and balls of yarn. I know he thought the trip was for my enjoyment and historic interest, but I couldn't help the feeling the trip was for actually for him.

After returning to the ranch, I thanked the Johnsons for their hospitality and headed out to McKinney. I was looking for was a marker that said "Reed" in a pauper's cemetery somewhere on the road to or in McKinney. I wanted to refute the theory that Belle had made the trip to see a Lamar County sheriff for the purpose of claiming Reed's body and taking it back for burial in Missouri and I was looking for solid proof of my death in a former life and the hole I was buried in. A McKinney librarian, regurgitating the bogus history of Belle Starr's coming to McKinney to claim the body of James Reed, only illuminated the thinly recognized importance of Glenn Shirley's research and the impossible likelihood that anyone other than those who read his book will ever know the truth. She could be no help to me. I should have gone to the McKinney Courthouse to search for the whereabouts of an old potter's field, but it was Sunday and I had to find out what I could and get on to Arizona. I settled for a Fire Station and let myself in with regards from my Fire Fighter/ Paramedic nephew in California and the reason that I was researching history of the old west and they gathered around and listened to me as if I were some kind of authority.

They directed me to the old train station where one of the last skirmishes between Rebels and Union Troops occurred and an old cemetery on the edge of town that might be the one I was looking for. If I ever come back this way again I'll ask someone to unlock the gate, but I found what might have been a cemetery. It was full of weeds and the gate was too high to climb over. I have no idea whether I would have found the name of Reed. And later that night, Belle's thoughts found my pen:

Belle Starr

"After Jimmy was killed by that deputy down in Paris, we tried to find out from the sheriff where his body was buried so we could bring him back to Missouri for a proper burial. They told us he had been taken in a buckboard from Paris to McKinney and had been buried in a Potter's Grave somewhere between, but we couldn't find the cemetery and returned home without him. They wrote all sorts of nonsense about my going to Texas and bringing him back. All I can say is we tried. I'll make no excuse for spending time with Bruce Younger. I don't care what anyone says. A woman needs love in her life, but he cheated on me and I let him go."

Aaron

Author Shirley confirms one-time relationship between Belle and the cousin of Cole Younger, Bruce Younger. Bruce was a gambler and frequently seen companion of Belle when the two were in Galena, Kansas (circa 1878). Her tryst with him, which took place nearly 4 years after the death of James C. Reed, had been wildly distorted by Fox writers with the assertion that her lover was Cole Younger, a misconception refuted by Cole Younger in his autobiography.

Bisbee Arizona

I detoured to Mesquite for a day to find any history of old Scyene, Texas, the exile home of the Shirley's after they were run out of Missouri by the Civil War. I could find absolutely nothing, not even a trace of that history. So, I headed for Bisbee and Douglas, Arizona, the last known residence of Rosie Lee, aka Rose Pearl Reed.

Clara Mae Childress, Aka Pearl Starr

"I was not what you would call a desperate person back in good old Ft. Smith. I took my time and made pretty good decisions for myself and for my business, and my business was running whorehouses. My firstborn was Flossie and you already know about her. My second child was Ruth from one of my very good regular customers, but he would not be named as my husband and that name was left blank in her birth certificate. My second husband was my loving and handsome piano player at my place at Ft. Smith.

He was a few years younger than I but it made no difference. His name was Erbach and he came from a family of German Counts. I couldn't have been more thrilled to have his child. I was devastated to lose them both to malaria. He was my soul mate and I would never marry again after him. I had a fourth child with another gentleman, Dell Andrews, whom I lived with for a while. Her name was Jeanette. When she and Ruth got old enough I put them both in a convent in Missouri. Back in Ft. Smith days, we were doing the community a service. We paid fines for street walking, but we did a lot of self-policing to keep the business going. The men were going to go anywhere to get it. We made it safe and dependable to come to "Pearl's Place." The police worked with us for a good long time until the city fathers got religion and kicked us out.

When I got to Bisbee, the place was a bustling Copper town. You couldn't miss the mine. It was practically in the center of the town. I called myself Rosa Reed in those days and I kept it real quiet about my life back in Ft. Smith. I threw in with a fella on a house I turned into a "Ballet Studio." I had to keep it on the QT on account of my reputation from Ft. Smith, which I was careful to keep hidden from the city fathers, well most of 'em, anyway. By then, I was too old to hook, but I had some pretty sweet girls who made a nice living and paid the mortgage on the place."

Aaron

I was married to Clara Mae Peacock who just revealed that she was Rosie Lee Reed, aka, Pearl Reed, daughter of Myra Maybelle Reed, who became Belle Starr. My Clara was the head madam who bought the big neon sign that said, "Pearl's Place," over the hottest "girl hotel" on "the Row" in Ft. Smith. I had no map of the cemetery when I found Rosie Lee's second husband and infant son on a stone stele near an old oak tree. All I knew of Arthur Erbach was that he was a musician from Erbach, Germany and had been born to the family of German counts according to Glenn Shirley and was a piano player in Pearl's "girl hotel" whom she married in 1897. The fact that father and son died of malaria in 1898 and that Pearl never married again was significant.

I am sure that in the history of past life recollections there must be some pretty good examples of converging and over-lapping past lives. I am now sure that Clara and I are among them. So, when I asked myself who is Count Erbach's current reincarnation, the answer came up as ME! But, it couldn't have been me. I had pretty much concluded that I was James C. Reed, Belle's first husband, the dashing, bloodthirsty, ex-Confederate guerrilla raider with William Clarke Quantrill and Jesse James. Right? Or was I? Since we knew we had already shared a past life together, Clara Mae and I assumed we must have been husband and wife in a past life. It was only logical.

But, how could I be married to Belle Starr and also married to her daughter in the same century??

Clara Mae Childress

“My life with my husband before Aaron started in New Mexico where he was stationed at Los Alamos. It was always dry and hot and I never liked the heat. I am sure he was a past life connection, but not a soul mate. I never discussed this with Aaron because he never asked me and because he wasn’t that interested. Aaron knew I had four kids when we met and he accepted the fact that my marriage had all but ended except for the paperwork. So how does this all happen? How are you one thing in one life and another thing in another? At least I found Aaron in this life. Some people can go their whole lives and miss each other, end up with someone they hate or with no one at all. After raising four kids, mostly on my own, I wanted to get on with my art study. Red Sonya and I were in the same oil painting class and we went into business with the same goals. My husband was never encouraging or enthusiastic about my work. Red Sonya had essentially the same problem with her husband. We had no creative spousal support. Meeting Aaron was a breath of fresh air and for a while we were the best partners in the pursuit of art. I was in love and the future was bright.

When my health started to decline and we could no longer travel to see our clients that’s when things changed. I don’t know how any of this relates to my past life except that I remember that after Belle decided to put my daughter up for adoption, I no longer wanted to put up with her obsession with appearances. This led to my drifting into Ft. Smith and my friendship with girls who showed me how to make a “living” on my own.

I never would have thought of any of this had it not been for Aaron’s courtship of Cheyenne and his psychic call for help with the painting, but I couldn’t let it go.

So in a way I feel responsible for getting Aaron into the dilemma he now faces with his past life identity. He believes he was James C. Reed, husband of Myra Maybelle Shirley and he tracks Reed’s death at the hands of John T. Morris in August of 1874. He also has come to believe that he was Arthur Erbach, husband of Rose Pearl Reed, a.k.a. Pearl Starr whom he married in 1897.

His dilemma is in determining how he could have died in Texas, reincarnated in Germany and immigrated to Ft. Smith Arkansas to marry Pearl Starr in 23 years. In other words, how do you become the husband of your wife and the husband of your daughter in a total time frame of 58 years?

The truth is I don’t know and if you want to get into time frames, my own reincarnation from my supposed past life as Rosa Reed is even more of a dilemma. History says “Rosie Lee” was born in 1868 and died in 1925. I was born in 1925, but the only way I could have reincarnated in the same year of my past life death is if I was born after July 6, 1925.”

I believe my Clara Mae mother was so shocked and embarrassed by my unexpected birth to Mr. Peacock that she could have willfully falsified my actual birthdate. My actual birthdate was February 16, 1925 but I will always wonder. So this is where my current mother and my past life mother have a lot in common. Both were so choked up by appearances they were in denial and in that state of mind, both altered their daughter’s direction in life in really big ways. Here’s the next question: If it is true that children choose their parents and not the other way around, how did I come to choose my mother and Mr. Peacock?”

Aaron

Clara Mae believed she reincarnated the same year Rosa Reed died in Douglas, Arizona in 1925. I found the Copper town she lived in after being kicked out of Ft. Smith. She must have kept her name pretty quiet because the Bisbee County Courthouse has her co- signed with another gentleman for the purchase of a house she called “ a ballet studio.” Bisbee County Courthouse has records of a Rosa Reed who mortgaged her Bisbee property with Mr. R.B. Marouck on October 11, 1916. A second mortgage was obtained on April 10, 1925 from a Mr. James Buckmann, three months before her death in Douglas, Arizona in the old Savoy Hotel. I visited the “Ballet Studio” in Bisbee, but no one was around to answer questions so I could not see inside.

Under the name Rosa Reed, she is buried in the old Calvary Memorial Park, near the Mexican border. It reposes famous lawman, Texas John Slaughter, entombed in a massive marble monument and songwriter and Stan Jones who wrote “*Ghost Riders in the Sky*.” A simple bronze plate marks her grave. Even in death, her daughters’ sense of propriety would not permit the revelation of their mother’s real name. Rosie Lee would now be eternally known as Rosa Reed, etched in bronze. So you had Belle’s daughter bury her mother on property that somehow became a tourist attraction for visitors to the Eufaula Dam recreation area and then you had Rosie Lee’s daughters bury their mother under an assumed name in Douglas, Arizona.

So the illegitimate daughters of Rosie Lee Reed, AKA Pearl Starr, AKA, Rosa Reed, buried their mother and went on about their lives, privately telling their grandchildren about the wildest family history in the American West. And James Edwin Reed’s story is also larger than life. In 1891, Pearl ended her marriage to Will Harrison and “entered a brothel in Van Buren, Arkansas, for the purpose, she said, of obtaining money to secure Eddie’s release from prison. Within a few months she was financially able to employ attorneys Colonel Benjamin T. DuVal and William Cravens.

DuVal and Cravens succeeded in getting the ear of the president of the United States and Eddie was granted a pardon in 1893. Coming home, Eddie was distraught to find Pearl running a “boarding house” in Ft. Smith and told her he wished he had stayed in prison. After another brush with the law, according to Glenn Shirley, Eddie decided to turn his life around. “ Eddie’s prowess with a six-shooter and Winchester was well known. He offered his services and was employed by the Katy railroad between Wagoner and McAlester (Indian Territory). He was also deputized by George J. Crump, the newly appointed U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Arkansas.”

Reed married a Cherokee schoolteacher and became a lawman until his death in 1896. Two criminals he was attempting to arrest for the crime of whiskey peddling ambushed him.

So Pearl was the only survivor in the Reed family to make it into the next century. The Belle Starr legend survives well enough on its tourist attraction in Oklahoma’s Eufaula recreation area and on library shelves all over the country, but the true value of her contribution to Oklahoma’s history lies buried in the four decades of her life, the most significant years in the formation of the Republic for which these United States stand.

She and her family were the victims of the Civil War and shared the same relocation odyssey as the Indians who were removed from their homeland to Indian Territory and forced to take sides. She married an ex-Confederate guerrilla fighter who rode with Jessie James and Cole Younger who were all led by a ruthless killer (Quantrill) who would have been tried for crimes against

humanity had he not been killed in battle. So it was no wonder that Thaddeus Stevens and the Radical Republicans wanted a pound of flesh from the defeated South in general and from the ex-Confederate guerrillas in particular. The Reconstruction put Belle Starr in the middle of returning ex-Confederates with divided loyalties and private scores to settle and the Native Americans struggling to manage their lives and land as wards of the United States government.

Lincoln would never have allowed such harsh treatment of the South, had he lived. Looking at history through Belle Starr's eyes, you would have seen the frustration and despair on the faces of the men returning from a battle that never should have happened to a government that never should have let it happen. All those wonderful checks and balances created by our founding fathers having gone up in smoke at Fort Sumter. Where was the more perfect union? For four bloody years it could not be found.

So her life was a struggle for the management of land in the Indian Territory and she died only days before President Harrison opened the border to homesteaders and thereby created the Oklahoma Territory. Why should she not be thought of as much a pioneer of the state as anything else written about her?

Chapter 5: The Kindred Spirit

Aaron

I discovered her in my research of women of the West. Her name was Ella Watson, no relation to the suspected killer of Belle Starr. She was smart, courageous and bigger than life. George W. Hufsmith wrote a book about her. *The Wyoming Lynching of Cattle Kate*, High Plains Press, 1993.

She was a homesteader from Canada who came to Wyoming, married a postmaster and fell into disfavor from a local cattle baron, by the name of Albert Bothwell, who disliked her encroachment on his land. Bothwell also controlled the local paper and concocted a smear campaign against her for allegedly stealing his stray cattle and re-branding them with her own.

Bills of sale and affidavits couldn't save her from a buckboard full of drunks, including Tom Sun of the Sun Ranch who one day all decided to liquor up and drag Ella and her husband, kicking and screaming to a tall tree in the Sweetwater area of Wyoming and hang them.

History books in the San Diego Library branded her a rustler and glorified her apprehension and hanging as another act of vigilante justice on the high plains. Unfortunate witnesses to the crime, who initiated an investigation into the hanging, began to mysteriously disappear before their appearance in court and the jury was forced to acquit the accused perpetrators. No one was ever brought to justice and Albert Bothwell lived long enough to eventually go insane before he died.

Ella Watson's death in Wyoming and Belle Starr's death in the IT happened the same year the border was opened to homesteaders in the Oklahoma Territory in 1889 and not long before the homesteaders and the cattlemen went at each other in the Johnson County war in Casper, Wyoming in 1892. Both of the women, Native Americans, homesteaders and cattlemen were all victims of the unintended consequences of that wonderful catchall phrase we all learned in history class - "Manifest Destiny."

Rapid expansion of the railroads killed the big cattle drives and horseless carriages replaced horses. America moved from the farm to the big cities. The Industrial Age was born.



Clara Mae

"I'm glad Aaron remembered to talk about Cattle Kate. She wasn't as legendary as Belle Starr, but she was a formidable woman of the west and she deserved a portrait in oil. They say the hanging of Kate and her husband may have led to the Johnson County War and they're probably right. The thing to remember is that they were both killed because of the fear of losing control of the land or the resentment that someone harbored against another for having it. Heh, where have I heard that before?"

I am not that good about seeing things about past lives unless I was directly involved and I recalled it in a trance state. My strength was in kinetic awareness. I could hold an object and know something about its owner and be pretty much correct. I could not foretell my own

death, but I knew my body was failing in my last years with Aaron and I was more concerned with how he would take it and what he would do with his life after I was gone.

On the other side, I latched on to Cheyenne out of concern for Aaron, but I knew it would be next to impossible for that relationship to last. She was too much for him, but I knew he would have to learn the hard way. I wasn't going to interfere. I never interfered with my kids' lives when I was alive and I wasn't going to start from this side of the universe with Aaron. I loved him. He knew I loved him and that was enough."

Cheyenne Brand

"He came into my store on Ventura Blvd., one day. I had not seen him in some time after we sort of drifted away from each other. I still liked him and there was nothing to prevent us from getting together because we had some good times together. I learned something about myself from being with him and he got to know some things about me and about my family. I hoped he forgave me for calling off the wedding.

I was touched when he found my past life as Ms. Starr. I hoped he appreciated my sign in the window, Belle Starr's Place. I was once a follower of Raj Neesh and I took the path of Buddhism, so I was not surprised in the least when Aaron told me what he had uncovered. I believed him.

I had thought we might elope and avoid all the hoopla and then I missed my period and everything changed. I thought I was mature enough to handle it but I kind of went to pieces with the way my body was reacting and I just couldn't go through with it. It was a strange time for both of us. I really didn't want my family to know about it, so I was all over the place emotionally. I am sure I made no sense to Aaron. I really appreciated how he handled it, but I knew I would have to end the relationship when I knew he wanted kids. I was humiliated sitting in the same room with all the unwed mothers. Aaron offered another solution but I just wanted to get it over with. I gave up twins."

Aaron

It hurt worse than a deep wound not to be a father, not to have the twins and it hurt to lose Cheyenne and it hurt that Clara Mae could not really help, but as she had done so in life, Clara would do so in spirit – she would not interfere.

Clara Mae was officially born February 16, 1925, almost five months before the death of Rose Pearl Reed in Douglas, Arizona, who died on July 6, 1925. But, Clara's current mother was embarrassed by the birth, and her husband had disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Clara always believed her birthdate had somehow been altered. So if Mrs. Peacock had decided to re-marry a man with children from a former marriage and he was reluctant to accept Clara Mae into his family, this would explain why Clara Mae was shunted around to relative's homes for most of her youth. If Mrs. Peacock had somehow managed to alter Clara Mae's birth certificate it may also explain why she was not born five months earlier than February of 1925 and it would give plausible evidence of her reincarnation closer to the death of Rose Pearl Reed.

Cheyenne's reincarnation from the death of Belle Starr is harder to explain. I do not have Cheyenne's birth certificate, so I do not know her exact DOB. Worse, the timeline from Belle's death in 1889 to Cheyenne's birth is more than 50 years, so the plausibility of Belle's reincarnation as Cheyenne Brand is, as they say in legal terms, troubling. This does not completely negate the assertion that Cheyenne is the reincarnation of Belle Starr. Why?

Somewhere it is said there is no spiritual restriction on the reincarnation of souls in the universe. Physical timelines are the law of man but not the law of God or the universe.

Clara Mae

“Yeah, I said it. And don’t worry about the twins Cheyenne gave up. They can decide to reincarnate together or separately anytime they wish with and for whatever lessons they want to learn on the earth plane. I know it hurts Aaron because he could not have children with Cheyenne and this might have been his one chance in this life to be a father, but that’s just the way it is. He’ll just have to get over it. But now I am getting interested in this quest of his. Who killed my mother in the past life? If it wasn’t Jim July and it wasn’t Eddie Reed and it wasn’t that crazy old bitch who claimed she shot Belle Starr, who the hell was it?”

Don’t believe the nonsense about Belle telling me who murdered her before she died. She was already dead when I found her. I don’t know everything and I never claimed I did.

Stuff comes to me by touch. I gave up the trans-medium in this life when I left the 4th Street gallery because I never needed those kinds of answers with Aaron and it was such a relief to not put myself through that much misery again.”

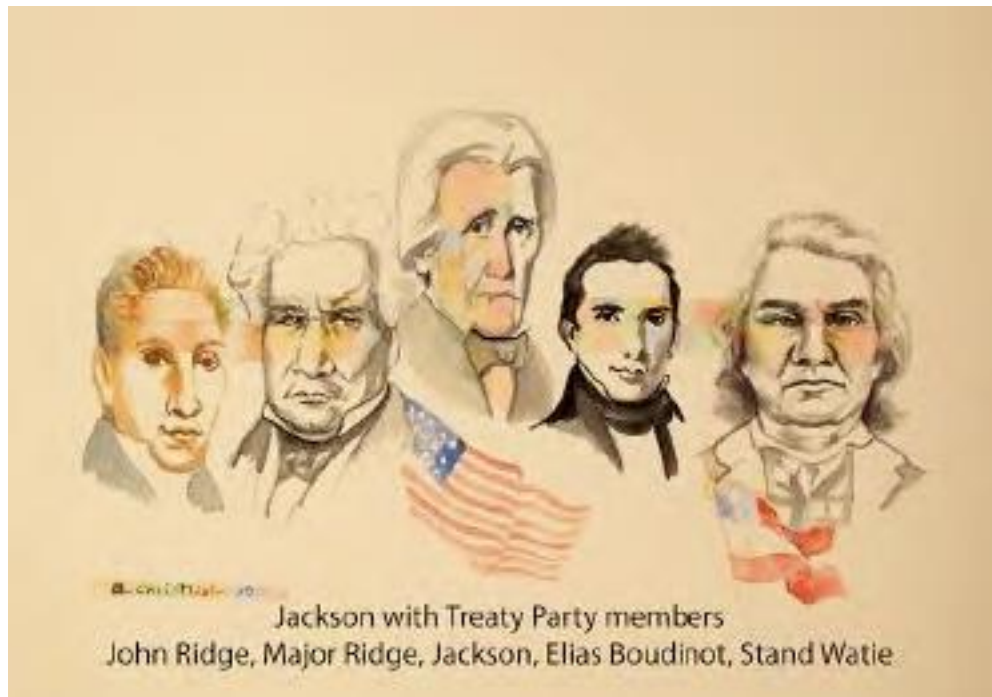
Chapter 6: The Native Americans

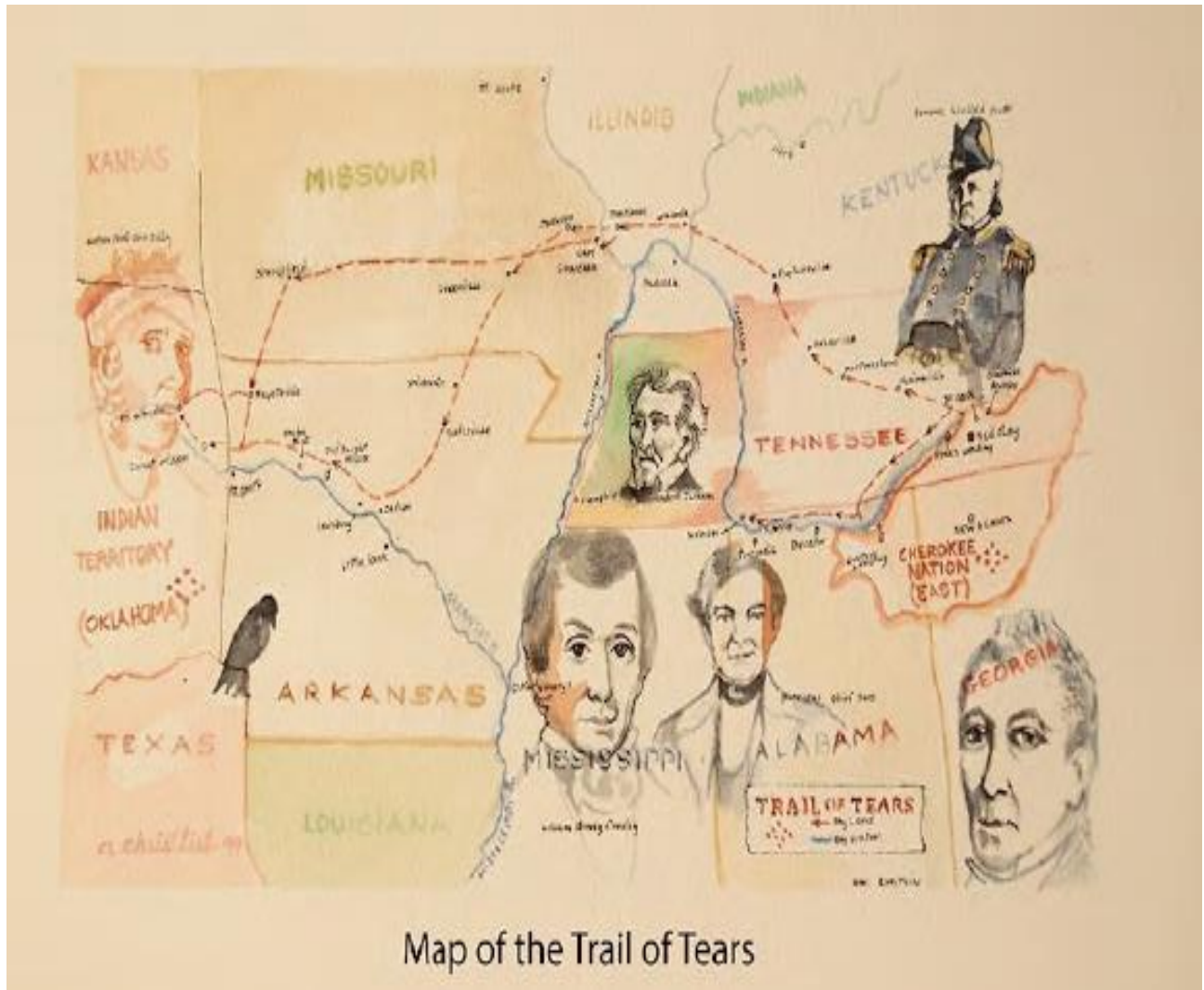
Prior to their historic removal from the Old Nation in Tennessee and Georgia, Gold was found on Indian land. Citizens, and the governor of Georgia wanted the gold and the land and the Indians to be gone. Chief Ross and the Nation won a Supreme Court decision against the State of Georgia for the right to remain in their homeland as a protectorate of the United States. Andrew Jackson defied Chief Justice John Marshall and the high court, sided with the governor and compelled the Western Cherokee Chiefs, Major Ridge and James Starr and others to split their allegiance to the Nation Party and Principal Chief, John Ross by signing The Treaty of New Echota in 1835. In the act of signing this treaty, western chiefs who formed “the Treaty Party,” had signed their own death warrants, even though they truly believed in their hearts they had done the right thing for the Cherokee Nation. But, Chief Ross had all chiefs sign a blood oath to never sell, cede or barter Indian land to the white man prior to the earlier negotiations with Jackson and the U.S. Congress.

Major Ridge had fought the Creeks in the Red Stick war with General Jackson. John Ross was Ridge’s assistant before he himself was elected to the position of Principal Chief. Ross was elected by a majority of eastern Cherokees, old settlers who were always reluctant to assimilate and accept the laws of the “great white father.” Jackson favored Ridge over Ross since Ridge was straightforward and understood the general’s power and ability to lead his troops to victory in battle. Ross was cunning. He maneuvered and schemed to secure his position with the Nation Party and then clung to the old ways of the elders to keep their support in a four-year term of office that somehow lasted a lifetime.

It was natural for President Jackson to parlay with the Treaty Party in negotiations for removal. He knew he could not negotiate with Ross. He was unconcerned with the risk the western chiefs would take in signing the treaty. He wanted removal. The treaty mandated the removal of the Cherokees from their ancestral homeland to the Indian Territory. They would be supported, outfitted and compensated for their sacrifice by the U.S. Government. They would be given ample time to prepare for the journey, but they would have to remove.

History decries the harsh conditions of their removal and tragic loss of life in the process. Chief Ross encouraged the old settlers to delay, resist, show dissatisfaction with the treaty they considered illegal. When General Winfield Scott admonished the Cherokees that their period of grace for removal to the Indian Territory had expired, troops began implementing the evacuation and transportation of families over designated ravel routes. Did the evacuation did not have to be a Trail of Tears? It should have been orderly. It should have taken place in temperate weather when roads were passable and rivers were calm. It should have been anything else than a forced march in winter through mud, dragging infants and old people to their deaths to satisfy a deadline that could have been met and accomplished many months before. But Chief Ross was determined to make it difficult. He would not change his strategy and tried to convince congress that Western chiefs had no authority to sign the treaty. His position as Principal Chief depended on his support of the old settlers of the Nation Party. Historian, Grant Foreman, paints a sympathetic portrait of John Ross in his *Five Civilized Tribes*. He sees Ross a great leader besieged by greedy statesmen, a heavy handed and stubborn President, disloyal chiefs and Indian outlaws who cause excitement and mayhem in the territory. But there is another side of the story and it is told by a Cherokee chief whose personal correspondence to his wife and his colleagues were saved and published in a book by Edward Everett Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers: Forty years of Cherokee History as told in the Correspondence of the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot Families*.





Aaron

The beloved John Ross, Principal Chief of the Eastern Cherokees and of the Nation, 1/8th blood Cherokee and all Scottish trader, knew a good deal when he saw it. His son was pretty sharp too. They made some money on the transportation of goods during the Trail of Tears. He took credit for Sequoia's Syllabary, Boudinot's newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix and John Marshall's ruling against the State of Georgia over the right of the Cherokees to remain in their homeland. He was a hero to the eastern Chiefs of the Nation who re-elected him to multiple four- year terms of office. He was forgiven for his assassination of Western Chiefs who voted with Andrew Jackson to sign The Treaty of New Echota and for fomenting an Indian uprising within the nation because of it.

Ross was given a pass by President Lincoln for siding with Jefferson Davis and joining the Confederate States of America in the Civil war, even though he abandoned his nation after capture by Union troops and spent the remainder of the war in exile.

Stand Watie was a full-blood Cherokee, and a Western Chief's son who avenged his father's death at the hands of Ross henchmen. He organized the militia that protected remaining

Western Chiefs and their families from the assassins sent by Ross to satisfy punishment for violation of the blood oath by the treaty signers. His leadership promoted him to the rank of General in the CSA. He was instrumental in covering the rebel retreat after the Battle of Pea Ridge and distinguished himself as the savior of the Nation after Ross was exiled. He is credited for sparing the life of Ross' son, captured by rebel forces, at the request of his wife and for feeding a starving Indian Nation with the spoils from Union supply trains. Watie was the last Confederate General to capitulate after Lee's surrender. After the war, at the request of his wife, he refused the office of Principal Chief of his nation and returned to farm life with his family.

Stand Watie

"I signed the Treaty of New Echota. I knew we took a blood oath to never give up ancestral land. I accepted the risk because our people had to remove, either peacefully or by force. I respected Chief Ross. He was the elected leader of our people. I disrespected his assassins who took the life of my brothers and Major Ridge after we removed to Indian Territory. I would not tolerate their vengeance against Western Nation families and we sort of had our own civil war until the government put a stop to it. I respected Chief Ross' alliance with General Pike and the Confederacy. I did my best to protect the Nation after he was captured by Union troops and exiled east. I regret burning his house down, but he switched sides after he was paroled to Philadelphia and I had to fight the Pins who aligned themselves with the North for the rest of the war.

My wife, Sarah, pleaded with me to spare Ross's son after we captured him at Tahlequah and Park Hill and I did. You know, General Maxey made me a brigadier general in 1864 and that we won some good battles in the Territory. I fed my people with those wagon trains we captured. So many were just trying to stay alive. I was the last Confederate general to capitulate after the surrender, but I never fought any battles outside the Territory. I had to go to Washington to see if we could do something to protect the Nation after we lost the war. They wanted me to become Principal Chief, but all I wanted was to go back to my plantation and rebuild my life and family."

Tom Starr

"Not long after we removed to the Territory in 1839, Ross assassins began killing Treaty Party signers. They killed my Pa and Watie's brother and tried to kill him as well. Watie organized a militia to protect families of the signers. I took revenge against their killers according to blood law. This went on for so long the government stepped in to settle the feud caused by all the excitement in the Nation. Things calmed down for a while, but not for long."

Elias Boudinot

"I was editor of the Cherokee Phoenix and I worked with a wonderful printer, Samuel Worcester. Samuel gathered the new type setting required for the printing of Sequoyah's Syllabary which is a set of written symbols that represent syllables that make words.

Sequoyah created the syllabary as a phonetic translation of Cherokee language to English in 1821 and we were the first to print it in New Echota, Georgia in 1828. The Cherokee Phoenix became the first bi-lingual newspaper in the Nation.

I was an advocate of removal because I saw no way of overcoming Georgian's lust for gold once it was discovered on our land. The more I wrote and published for making the best treaty

we could make with the U.S. Government before the Nation was forced to move, the greater the pressure from Chief Ross to cease and desist in my use of the Cherokee Phoenix to express my thoughts. I felt compelled to resign in 1832. After the President defied Justice Marshall's ruling in the case of Worcester vs. The State of Georgia, western chiefs knew there was no hope for open resistance to removal. The year before we signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, the Cherokee Phoenix ceased to exist. I lost my wife in childbirth in 1836 and the baby was stillborn."

Elias Cornelius Boudinot

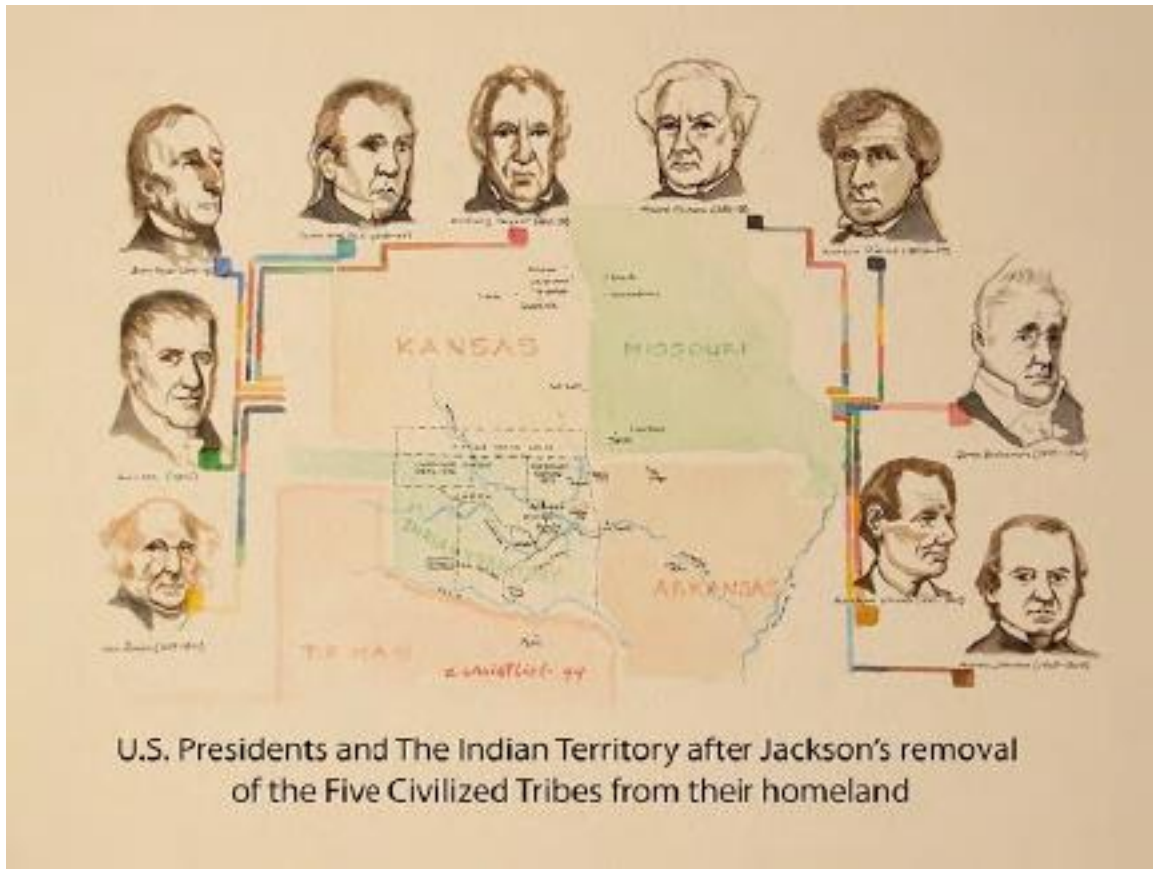
"I was four years old when Ross henchmen assassinated my father, his cousin and nearly killed my uncle, Stand Watie. Uncle Stand sent us kids back to Connecticut where my mom's folks raised us. That happened after the Trail of Tears in 1839 when we were already situated in the Indian Territory. I remember being terrified by these tall men standing on the edge of our property, their faces covered with kerchiefs and their bodies wrapped in dark robes. They would just stand there for hours watching us and doing nothing. And then they killed my father. Of course I had nightmares for so long a time.

And when I was old enough to blame Chief Ross, I opposed him at every turn. I applauded him for committing to General Pike and the Confederacy; then, once he was captured, I chided him for changing sides and admonishing the Cherokees who remained loyal to Jefferson Davis. Lincoln was not impressed either. But, also let us not be so arbitrary. Davis had a lot of stone for asking a people under the protectorate of the U.S. Government for their allegiance against it in the first instance. It should have been natural for Chief Ross to have made the right choice first. He did not and history remembers.

Stand Watie and I, on the other hand, remained loyal to the Confederacy. Stand Watie saved the Cherokees from starving to death from 1863 to the end of the war and thereby saved the Nation from total annihilation.

Now, I see they want to tear down our monuments to the fallen, take down our flag, remove our busts and statuary. They won't deny our ancestors bought and sold slaves or that the economy of the Union thrived on the sale and exportation of cotton. It was not our fault that Mr. Lincoln's "checks and balances" could not save the Union from secession. His senators and congressmen had the same opportunity to succeed, as we had to secede. Call us rebels but they all forget that for four long years we had two Americas in our America: two Presidents, two White Houses, two constitutions, two cabinets, and two armies.

After the war, Booth made things worse for us. It was an act of vengeance and stupidity. How could you not expect the radical Republicans to retaliate, especially against returning ex-Confederates? Lincoln had a plan to treat us better, but Thaddeus Stevens treated us much worse and President Johnson was powerless. So, what you had was not Reconstruction, it was deconstruction and it was aimed directly at the South, all southerners who served in the Confederacy, plantation owners, Congressmen and Senators. We said goodbye to our loved ones and everything they fought for and tried to get on with our lives.



The death of Belle Starr in 1889 was another benchmark in the dissolution of treaties between the U.S. Government and our Native Americans that began with the end of the Civil War and was punctuated by Congress formally dissolving all treaties with Native Americans in 1871. President Harrison opened the border to homesteaders putting more pressure upon tribal leaders already under strict guidelines from the bureau of Indian Affairs -created by Andrew Jackson's administration - and adding to the increasing number of encroachments from land developers, and white settlers. Indian Territory now became Oklahoma Territory.

The creation of the Dawes Act in 1893 helped dissolve Indians assimilate into American life by allowing them to sell their land to non-Native Americans. The Curtis Act of 1898 extended provisions of the Dawes Act to The Five Civilized Tribes, requiring abolition of their governments, allotments of communal lands, sale of surplus lands and dissolving tribal courts.

Native Americans in the Civil War were mainly conscripted to defend themselves in the Trans-Mississippi area of the war. Specifically, it was named the Southern Superintendency. Fighting in this area involved skirmishes on hills and valleys above or below major rivers and at times families and homes of the fighters found themselves in a battle zone and had to move to the Red River or further south to Texas.

Here are the private letters of fighters and their families preserved and published in Everett Dale and Gaston Litton's Cherokee Cavaliers:

Sara Watie (To Stand Watie On June 8, 1863)

“My Dear Half.

If you should ever catch William Ross dont have him killed. I know how bad his mother would feel but keep him till the war is over. I know they all deserve death but I do feel for his old mother and then I want them to know that you do not want to kill them just to get them out of your way. I want them to know you are not afraid of their influence. Always do as near right as you can.”

In October of 1861, Ross signed a treaty with the Confederate States of America to assume all obligations due the Cherokee from the government of the United States. This alliance was secure until an expeditionary force from the North captured Chief Ross at Park Hill, forcing Colonel Stand Watie and Colonel John Drew to fall back. Chief Ross was paroled and spent the remainder of the war in Philadelphia. The Southern Cherokee claimed Ross had abandoned the nation and elected Watie, Principal Chief. Northern Cherokees claimed the nation was still under Ross, but it was Watie who was the acting Principal Chief of the Nation.

Underscored were the main differences between Ross and Watie. They were first united by a common cause of protecting the Nation and then divided by President Jackson's ram rodding of the Treaty of New Echota, which resulted in the Trail of Tears and death of Watie's brother at the hands of Ross henchmen. Ross and Watie were reunited after the feud that threatened to destroy the Nation was settled by U.S. Government intervention; they were on the same side in the Southern Superintendency until Ross was captured and exiled. Watie would not change sides and remained loyal to the South until the end of the war. What is remarkable about the above quote from Sadie Watie is that if the shoe had been on the other foot, it is almost certain Ross would have shown no mercy. Watie, did in fact, capture William Ross and he did spare his life. The Foreman contradiction is that the Western Cherokee Chiefs were not criminals because they opposed Chief Ross or were more loyal to the cause he first agreed to support and then abandoned. They were not criminals for signing the Treaty that removed them from their homeland or retaliating against Ross for his cruel assassinations of their loved ones who deserved the benefit of a trial they never received. Western chiefs were not responsible for the portion of the Nation who were reluctant to assimilate into American culture, reluctant to educate their children and reluctant to learn the law.

The tribes siding with the Union were designated “Pins”. Pins were made up of “conservative elements associated with the full-blood organization known as Kee- Too- Wah. This was a secret society, originally formed to preserve Indian customs and traditions. The progressive mixed blood element, on the other hand, began to form chapters of The Copperhead Society, known as ‘*Knights of the Golden Circle.*’ Chapter III, A Nation in Arms from Cherokee Cavaliers, is a clear, unbiased account of the conscripted involvement of The Five Civilized Tribes into the Southern Superintendency at Ft. Smith and to the Confederate government for service among the Indians. It explains why Ross was at first adamant to remain neutral in the conflict and later compelled to join neighboring tribes and sign with General Albert Pike in a treaty of alliance with the Confederacy.

The correspondence in Cherokee Cavaliers is a sum of letters totaling more than 160 pieces between Major Ridge, his son John Ridge and Major Ridge's nephews, two brothers known respectively as Elias Boudinot and Stand Watie. One letter stands out from the rest because it outlines the nature of the conflict between the Northern and Southern entities in the Trans-Mississippi sector of the war and it specifically underscores the special relationship between General Pike and Stand Watie and a confidential strategy for survival after the failure of

Generals Van Dorn and Price to hold the western part of Arkansas and the roads running westward from Ft. Smith.”



Rose Pearl, Belle, Myra Maybelle Shirley, James C. Reed, James Edwin Reed

ALBERT PIKE TO STAND WATIE

North Fork Village

1st April 1862

Colonel,

"I think it due to you, in view of your loyalty to the cause in which we are engaged and in which all we have or are is at stake, that I should acquaint you with my intentions in regard to the defence of the Indian Country.

If the forces of Generals Van Dorn and Price had held the western part of Arkansas and controlled the roads running westward from Ft. Smith, I would have placed myself on the south side of the Canadian River and invited an attack there, because I would then have had in front of me all the roads by which the enemy could safely advance. Fort Gibson and Fort Davis became equally untenable, when our forces abandoned the position north of Boston Mountain; both, because an enemy marching from the North can turn either position, by crossing the Arkansas above or below, and Gibson, because in addition receiving an attack there, we should fight with a river on our left and one behind us, defeat would be ruin and retreat impossible.

As long as our forces held the position North of Boston Mountain no enemy could safely march from Kansas or Missouri to Fort Gibson without first defeating those forces, because if he pass southward they could cut his line of communication and leave him without a base of operations, the result of which would be his utter destruction. When those positions were abandoned, the positions at Gibson and Davis became worthless. The Canadian became the next line, behind which to withdraw our supplies. I meant then to fortify and hold the position at Scalesville south of the Canadian.

Unexpectedly, all western Arkansas is abandoned, Fort Smith invites its occupation by the enemy, and the roads in rear of the line of the Canadian are proffered to him. It is certain that he will accept the offer, occupy Fort Smith, and have it in his power to cut off from Red River and all supplies, any force on the Canadian. Hunter and Opothla Yahola may also be expected to cross the Arkansas and Canadian higher up, reach Fort Cobb or Arbuckle, and then marching eastward to interpose between us and the Red River. That or a movement from Fort Smith westward toward Boggy Depot would involve the destruction or surrender of any force on or near the Canadian. At Starr's Settlement we should be like a rat in a trap. I will therefore, placing my supplies in my rear, take position beyond the point of junction of the roads from this place and Fort Smith to Boggy Depot. There I will concentrate all the troops coming to me from Texas and Arkansas, throw up field works in front and rear and invite attack from the East, North or West. In front I will control the two only roads. In the rear I will have three lines of defense, the three Boggies. Texas will be my base of operations and I will have an uninterrupted line of communication Southward and easy access to supplies.

I will keep your Regiment and Colonel Drew's in your own Country. You will give information of the approach of the enemy, harass his flanks and rear, stampede his animals, destroy his small foraging parties, and at last if he still advances, gaining his front join me within my lines and aid in utterly defeating him there. I beg your men to bury all old animosities and remember only that all are now fighting for the honour, independence and safety of the

Confederate States and the Cherokee People. The Creek and Seminole troops I will keep in their own country, to render similar service. The Choctaw and Chickasaw troops I will have near me to aid or as occasion may offer. I will not abandon your country. You will be my advanced Guard. I shall have four Regiments of well-mounted Texas Cavalry. I will send them alternately into your country to aid in harassing any invading force. Listen to no report that I mean to abandon your country. If our forces had remained at Boston Mountain, as McCulloch always advised, the Northern Armies would have been compelled to make an inglorious retreat or incurred certain defeat by a attack on our position. I will not let the enemy gain my rear and compel our destruction or surrender. I go to that point where calling to me the Indian troops from all quarters, I urgently hope and plan destruction to any force that my dare to attack our works.

This communication is entirely confidential. I am Colonel, Colonel,

*Very Truly and Respectfully
Your friend and Servant*

*Albert Pike
Brig Genl. Comndg Dept of Ind, Div.”*

Pike was a master tactician and a true hero to the cause he was so loyal to and to the Native Americans he was sworn to protect. General Pike was a righteous defender of the truth as evidenced by his subsequent complaints against his superiors to President Davis for their blatant corruption in seizing Indian land for their own private development.

The Cherokee Treaty of 1866 abrogated the Confederate treaty of alliance of October 7, 1861; abolished slavery; proclaimed a general amnesty; and repealed confiscation laws imposed on southern Cherokees during the war and restored to these Cherokees their confiscated property.”

Chief John Ross died on August 1, 1866. The heavy burden of reconstruction fell to his successors in an effort to navigate through the concessions requiring granting right of way to railroad companies through territorial land, admitting emancipated slaves and free Negroes to citizenship in their respective tribes; ceding Neutral Land and the Cherokee Strip and erecting military posts within the Nation by the United States.

*Woodward, Grace Steel, *“The Cherokees.”* P.303. University of Oklahoma Press.



*John Ross, Chief - Cherokee Indian Nation
A. Smith '97*



Stand Watie
Cherokee feudist — Watie/Ridge faction
Confederate General — victorious in battle of Red Ridge
last general to capitulate in Civil War.
achm thul '97

Chapter 7: Political Dissidents, ex-Confederates and Outlaws

Aaron

Jesse James and his brothers and Cole Younger and his brothers, Tom Starr and his clan and James C. Reed and his family all had these things in common: they were all Confederate soldiers and they all knew Myra Maybelle Shirley and her family. The James, Youngers, Reeds and Shirley's were all Missourians whose lives and fortunes were forever changed by the Civil War. The Starrs joined Albert Pike and the South and fought beside Stand Watie in all skirmishes confined to the Trans-Mississippi area of the war - never far from the homes they defended with their lives.

Tom Starr's father, James Starr was among the western Cherokee Chiefs who sided with President Jackson against Chief Ross and broke the blood oath never to sign over land to white settlers.

Cherokee pioneers, Major Ridge, Elias Boudinot, James Starr were assassinated by Ross henchmen following the signing of the Treaty of New Echota and the removal of the Nation to Indian Territory in the Trail of Tears (1838-1839).

Western history makes no distinction between ex-Confederates as rebels who were opposed to federal laws or outlaws out to rob banks and trains and stagecoaches. History says they were former Confederates who robbed banks. History never asks "why?" This is because asking why doesn't sell popcorn!

Keeping this in mind, I have focused on the last few months of James Reed's life from the Austin-San Antonio Stage robbery to his death on August 6, 1874. And, I have underscored some biographical data from James R. Ross, author of *I Jesse James*, a book that explains a great deal more than James' prowess as a bank and train robber.

By way of personal experience, I have shown that if one were to sit in the center of the Starr cemetery on a reasonably hot summer day and relate to the names on the head stones to the history of the Cherokee people before, during and after the Civil War, one might gain a different perspective on life in the Indian Territory than told by Grant Foreman in his *The Five Civilized Tribes*.

More to the point is how all these men relate to the greatly maligned and wholly under appreciated Myra Maybelle Shirley (before she became known as Ms. Belle Starr) and sat high in the saddle through four painful decades in American history.

Returning ex- Confederate soldiers- after the assassination of Lincoln- were ostracized from every community except Texas. In Missouri they were treated like war criminals and forced into a life of poverty and shame. Humiliation of former plantation owners, confiscation of their land and heavy handed enforcement of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution were the overt work of the Radical Republicans in Congress led by the insufferable Thaddeus Stevens. Is it any wonder that Southerners would find some way to retaliate for this kind of treatment? It was never Lincoln's intention to dishonor those who gave their last true measure of devotion, on either side. Booth's conspiracy, Andrew Johnson's failure to manage the reconstruction, the Drake Convention and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan caused stubborn resistance to reconciliation and Stevens' unabashed efforts to punish the South for seceding from the Union only made it worse, not only for returning ex-Confederates, but also for freedmen in southern states who were victimized by soul crushing segregation laws for the next 100 years. The chronology of the

Austin-San Antonio Stage Robbery directly involves the seduction of Rosa McCommas by James C. Reed and the planning for the hold up involving known outlaws, Cal H. Carter, Jack Rogers and J.K. Dickens. Reed and his accomplices rented a house together in San Antonio near where the stage would be passing in Blanco, Texas. Reed still had in his possession some gold pieces from that robbery when he was killed. It is also important to note that all Reed's accomplices in both the Grayson Gold robbery and the San Antonio stage robbery were eventually apprehended. Grayson spent a good part of his last days trying to recover the loot stolen from him. He hired private detectives and eventually appealed to the US. Government for the "possibility of adjustment under Section 16 of the Act of Congress of June 30, 1834, regulating trade and intercourse with Indian tribes" His claim could not be honored before he died.

While it is true that most of the Missouri outlaws were ex-Confederates who believed in the cause of the South and returned to a hostile reception in their home state after the war, James C. Reed and the Younger brothers actually tried to make a living in farming and other enterprises before turning to the dark side. Reed tried farming with the Shirley family and worked as a saddle salesman for a time. Farming was never a problem for the Youngers; the issue with all these men was the settling of scores they could not turn the other cheek from. They had lost too many loved ones at the hands of Union troopers and someone had to pay.

Of course, it was a little different with Jesse Woodson James and Coleman Younger. They were among the very best of the Quantrill raiders and their thirst for action could not be contained by home life after the war. Jesse saw it as an act of retribution or in his own words: *"the Drake Convention forbade any Confederate from serving in a profession or a church. I felt justified in thinking the North had created me, now they would have to suffer the consequences."*

Ross, James R., *"I, Jesse James,"* P. xi, Dragon Publishing Corp., 1988. For every incident in James R. Ross's book, I Jesse James, is true as he claims in his preface, there is one incident that is called into question by Glenn Shirley's newspaper accounts cited at the time of the San Antonio robbery. As stated above, it was the Dallas Commercial newspaper that printed the names of the assailants: Cal H. Carter, Jack Rogers and J.K. Dickens as James C. Reed's accomplices in the robbery. In Ross's book, Jesse makes the claim that "Cole and Frank made the routine Texas trip by robbing a stagecoach at San Antonio with the help of Art McCoy, Jim Greenwood and Jim Reed, who was married to a pretty well known western gal by the name of Belle Starr. They told me it had been a profitable amusement."

In point of fact, neither the Dallas Commercial, nor The Waco Daily Examiner or The Austin Democratic Statesman, made any mention of Cole Younger or Frank James' involvement in the crime and James gives no credit to Reed for planning the robbery.

Aaron

Some time after I had returned from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming and after my trip to Bixby and Douglas, Arizona, a cousin and I were doing some landscape painting in Lake Malibou and a strange man in a bandana came down from his house to greet us. He said he lived with his mother in a stone house built by his father above the lake and saw us painting near his boat dock. He was sort of an unofficial tour guide of the private lake community we had wondered into and found so ancient and enchanting.

G.T. THOMASON

“I saw you from my front window and I had to come down to see who was at the boat dock. That’s Charley Sheen’s house over there and if you guys have some time, I’ll show you a cottage love nest where Clark Gable and Carole Lombard once lived. I don’t know if you are interested in Chumash history, but I do a mountain hike where we found artifacts and actual power centers where ancient tribal leaders held special meetings. If you guys want to paint I have a lot of friends on the lake that would let you use their property.”

AARON

There was in Mr. Thomason a spiritual aura that hovered over his high energy and a sense of purpose in his introducing us to his home. His mother was a delightful woman who was content to bask in the glory of her son’s accomplishments as a screenwriter and personal tour guide of Malibou Lake. I was eager to learn more about the power centers he spoke of. We had something in common. He had found a link to the ancients in his own back yard and I had found a link to my past in the old west.

*Ross, James R., “I, Jesse James,” P.153, Dragon Publishing Corp., 1988.

After a few weeks of painting landscapes near the inspirational home of James Hilton who wrote Lost Horizon and lake scenes from the homes of friends of Mr. Thomason who allowed us to use their front porches and verandas, G.T. invited us to a mountain hike that ascended from a fire break behind south facing residences up narrow trails passing through the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy. After a couple of miles of hiking we came to a clearing that G.T. said was once used by the “Tree People” he had communicated with psychically and invited us to gather in what he called a “Magic Circle.” In an ancient ritual the “Spirit Tribe” held a convocation where members who enter the circle were compelled to offer an anecdote or poem or physical offering to the “Elder Spirit,” an omnipresent entity who in ancient times provided the spiritual fabric of an aboriginal, nomadic society of coastal tribes inhabiting the Santa Monica Mountains and the Santa Barbara coastal and inland valley areas. Hikers who descend from the mountain after attending the Magic Circle, will have stone cold clarity.

Of course, I offered my anecdote to the Elder Spirit; and almost immediately, the spirit of old Tom Starr urging me to question the hidden identity of G.T. Thomason, overcame me.

Who was G.T. Thomason?

In our discussions, I learned that G.T’s family was originally from Georgia and that he had been a student of the Civil War. I learned that he had spent some time in Texas and like myself he knew something about Texas history. He even mentioned that some of his relatives were bad men hunted down by Texas Rangers and it triggered something in me that could not have been a coincidence. I channeled Deputy John T. Morris and placed G.T. Thomason as his reincarnation. Many times I had told G.T. that I was the first husband of Belle Starr in a former life, but now he would realize that in his former life he could have been the deputy who had gone under cover to apprehend James C. Reed, dead or alive and claim the reward money for his capture.

In other words G.T. Thomason could have been the man who shot me in my former life and put me in a potter’s grave.

G.T. THOMASON

"Whoa, AC! I don't know how I feel about that."

Aaron

"Don't feel anything G.T. It was the past. The past is over; it doesn't touch us. Think of it as the history we both shared and can talk about now. This instant is the important thing in time. Here, now, us. See it this way: you were doing your job and I was playing out the end of my life. I knew it would end that way. I was never going to be better than Jesse or Cole."

G.T THOMASON

"I have a script working with Tom Selleck. Can you use your pendulum to tell me if it has a chance?"

Aaron

It was a question he asked me after many months in our association. In fact, it was after he sold his Malibou Lake home and moved into a rental home in Agoura. He had gone through all of the money from the sale of the house and he and his mom had to move into a low-end trailer park somewhere in Thousand Oaks. I told him the pendulum said "yes". I had read the script and thought it to be his best work. I could see Selleck picking up the option to produce. I later learned that Selleck had paid the advance on the option, but then became involved in the Blue Bloods project. I surmised the script must have ended up in his roll top desk somewhere. After that I lost track of G.T. Years later I ran into a close friend of his and at the Veterans health center in West Los Angeles who said he would get in touch with him for me, but he never called.

Clara Mae

"Of course he didn't call back. Why would he? You scared the life out of him and all he had to think about was when you were going to come unglued and kill him. It didn't matter about all that crap about time heals all wounds."

AARON

G.T. Thomason gave Tom Selleck the finest single screenplay I had ever read. I knew that the only chance I had to get this story out would be a book. I did not want to self publish it. I wanted the book to be good enough for someone like G.T. to want to do a 12-part series and run like hell with it because nobody has the imagination to duplicate Belle Starr's real story the way Glenn Shirley researched it and when you tell it with all the history that surrounds it, only the best people are going to want to produce it. If you think this story isn't 10 times more tragic than the Viet Nam war, tell that to the 600,000 men who lost their lives fighting the Civil War. There's no "thank you for your service" for those men today and less than none for the Confederates who gave their lives for essentially the same beliefs held by our founding fathers and 12 Presidents of the United States of America: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Van Buren, Johnson, Harrison, Tyler, Polk and Taylor and Grant.

The final word on the Missouri outlaws remains with Major John Newman Edwards as quoted by John R. Ross in the last Chapter of I Jesse James:

“Not one among all the hired cowards, hard on the hunt for blood money, dared face this wonderful outlaw, one even against twenty, until he had disarmed himself and turned his back on his assassins, the first and only time in a career which has passed from the realms of an almost fabulous romance into that of history.

We called him an outlaw; and he was, but fate made him so. When the war came he was just turned fifteen. The border was all a flame with steel and fire and ambuscade and slaughter. He flung himself into a band that had a black flag for a banner and devils for riders. What he did he did and it was fearful. But it was war. It was Missouri against Kansas. It was Jim Lane and Jennison against Quantrill, Anderson and Todd. When the war closed. Jesse James had no home. Proscribed, hunted, shot, driven away from his people, a price put on his head, what else could he do with such a nature, except what he did do; he had to live. It was his country. The graves of his kindred were there. He refused to be banished from his birthright, and when he was hunted he turned savagely about and hunted his hunters. Would to God he were alive today to make a righteous butchery of a few more of them.

There was never a more cowardly and unnecessary murder committed in all America than this murder of Jesse James. It was done for money. He had been living in St. Joseph for months. The Fords were with him. He was in their toils, for they meant to betray him. He was in the heart of a large city. One word would have summoned 500, armed men for his capture or extermination. Not a single one of the attacking party needed to have been hurt. If when his house had been surrendered, he had refused to surrender, He could have been killed on the inside of it and at long range. The chances for him to escape were as one to 10,000 and not even that; but it was never intended that he be captured. It was his blood the bloody wretches were after, blood that would bring money in the official market of Missouri. And this great commonwealth leagued with a lot of self-confessed robbers, highwaymen, and prostitutes, to have one of its citizens assassinated, before it was positively known that he had ever committed a single crime worthy of death. Of course everything that can be said about the dead man to justify the manner of his killing will be said; but who is saying it? Those with the blood of Jesse James on their guilty souls. Those who conspired to murder him. Those who wanted the reward and would invent any lie or concoct any diabolical story to get it. They have succeeded, but such a cry of horror and indignation at the infernal deed is even now thundering over the land that if a single one of the miserable assassins had neither manhood, conscience, nor courage, he would go as another Judas and hang himself. But so sure a God reigns, there never was a dollar of blood money yet obtained which did not bring with it perdition. Sooner or later here comes a day of vengeance.

Some among the murderers were mere beasts of prey. These, of course, can only suffer through cold blood, hunger or thirst; but whatever they dread most, that will happen. Others, again, among the murderers are sanctimonious devils, who plead the honor of the State, the value of law and order, the splendid courage required to shoot an unarmed man in the back of the head; and these will be stripped to the skin of all their pretensions and made to shiver and freeze, splotched as they are with blood, in the pitiless storm of public contempt and condemnation. This to the leader will be worse than death. Nor is the end yet. If Jesse James had been hunted down as any other criminal, and killed when trying to escape or in resisting arrest, not a word would have been said to the contrary. He had sinned and he had suffered; but here the law itself becomes a murderer; it leagues with murderers. It borrows money to pay rewards to murderers. It is itself a murderer – the most abject, the most infamous – the most cowardly ever known to history. Therefore, these so called executors of the law are outlaws. Therefore, let Jesse James’ comrades and he has a few remaining worth all the Fords and Liddels that can be packed together between St. Louis and St. Joseph, do unto them as they

did unto him. Yes, the end is not yet nor should it be. The man put a price upon his head and hire a gang of cut-throats and highwaymen to murder him for money? Anything can be told of men. The whole land is filled with liars, robbers and assassins.

Murder is easy for \$100. Nothing is safe that is pure, or unsuspecting, or just; but it is not to be supposed that the law will become ally and a co-worker in this sort of civilization.

Jesse James has been murdered, first, because an immense priced had been set on his head and there isn't a low lived scoundrel today in Missouri who wouldn't kill his own father for money; and second because he was made the scapegoat of every train robbery, footpad, and highwayman between Iowa and Texas. Worse men a thousand times than the dead man have been hired to do this thing. The very character of the instruments chosen, show the infamous nature of the work required. The hand that slew him had to be a traitor's! Missouri, with 117 sheriffs, as brave and as efficient on the average as any men on earth; Missouri, with watchful and vigilant marshals in every one of her principal towns and cities; Missouri, with every screw, and cog, and crank, and lever, and wheel of the administrative machinery in perfect working order; boasting of law, order, progress, and development, had yet to surrender all these in the face of a single man – a hunted, lied-upon, proscribed, and outlawed man, trapped and located in the midst of 35,000 people, and ally with some five or six cut throats and prostitutes that the majesty of the law might be vindicated, and the good name of the State reeks today with a double orgy; that of lust and that of murder. What the men failed to do the women accomplished. Tear the two bears from the flag of Missouri. Put thereon in place of them, as more appropriate, a thief blowing out the brains of an unarmed victim; and a brazen harlot, naked to the waist and splashed to brows in blood."

Major John Neuman Edwards (1839-1889)

He was Confederate General Joseph O. Shelby's Adjutant during the civil war and a newsman afterwards. He was a staunch defender of the James boys and all returning, ex- Confederate soldiers who were ostracized by the Drake Convention in the state of Missouri after the war. He is the most eloquent single voice of protest against local Missouri government and believed the South would rise again.

*Ross, James R, I, Jesse James," Epilog, P. 273-276, Dragon Publishing Corp., 1988.

Chapter 8: The Long Goodbye

Aaron

I started this search not long after Clara Mae had died. I was younger and naive and chasing a ghost into the labyrinth of a tangled history, clouded by misinformation, deception and legends of the Old West that remain on bookshelves librarians will never remove. Even the lies are sacred. I have only added to the list of outrage by suggesting, believing, justifying my inner conviction that I and the characters I have channeled had a past life in the four decades of Belle Starr's life.

My only hope is that it will at least be entertaining enough to have a spark of truth or something resembling truth in some other corner of the universe or that you can suspend disbelief long enough to find some level of understanding of what I put myself through. The historical references are easily fact checked. The Glenn Shirley research for his "standard reference" on the life of Belle Starr will remain unchallenged. All the rest falls in some kind of gray area of the mind that can either be debunked or taken as an odyssey of faith.

Clara Mae

"Belle knew what she was doing and she did more with what she had than the people around her and a lot more than the people making and enforcing the laws she had to work around to get things done. And so did I.

I hated every minute of it and so did Eddie, but she taught us well and in the end we loved her for it. Don't believe that crap about her forcing me into prostitution because she took my child. That was my decision. That was my past life.

When I rolled into this one, it took me twenty years to figure out why I came back and what I had to do while I was here. If it hadn't been for Red Sonya I would still be thrashing around wondering. I only wish I could have had more time with Aaron and could have given him kids. He would have been a great father.

I'll tell you what really pisses me off. Look what we had to live through and overcome just to survive back then. And if you think that should not make any difference, let me tell you what difference the truth makes in a life or death situation."

Aaron

The founding fathers opted to disregard the issue of slavery because they all owned slaves. So the process by which American Indians became assimilated into the dominant culture of America after the revolution also meant learning American law in a Democracy. It also meant that to be successfully assimilated Indians in America, they would follow Jefferson's admonition to the chiefs, which they did or to be more humorous," they had to endeavor to persevere," to quote Chief Dan George.

Clara Mae

"So, successful, agrarian trained, God fearing, church going, assimilated Native Americans, also owned slaves. Okay, okay, so I learned that from Aaron, in all his research, but it did impact me in my past life, about one hundred years before he was born and about twenty-five years before I died as Rose Pearl Reed and came back as Clara Mae Peacock. Knowing that, look what my past-life mother had to go through."

Aaron

Failure of the United States to protect its borders from attack by the anti-slavery movement; and the failure of Congress to prevent either the Border Wars, the attack on Fort Sumter or the Civil War and the loss of 600,000 lives. Belle Starr and her family—Rose Pearl and Eddie—endured the excommunication of their northern neighbors from their home in Missouri to Scyene (Now Mesquite), Texas, and spent the better part of their lives swallowing the bitter pill of reconstruction doled out to returning ex-Confederates in Missouri, in Arkansas and the Indian Territory after the war.

Clara Mae

“You mean the Deconstruction. Talk about living under somebody’s thumb, we went through four years of war, damn near lost everyone we knew and then wound up shoveling it - trying to find any semblance of a life again.

I thought I came back too soon but Aaron and I weren’t meant to meet again until after I had had my kids and they were all grown up. I have no idea why I chose my current mother to reincarnate. She was so ashamed of me being born out of wedlock, she left me with aunts and uncles for most of my youth. She practically arranged my marriage. In this way she was more like Belle Starr than Aaron’s girlfriend and more likely to have been my past-life mother than Cheyenne in her past life. I wasn’t one of those doting, do-everything mothers. I raised my kids to do for themselves early and often. I didn’t fight that hard for my “Flossie” ‘because my mother was so headstrong determined to protect her reputation and mine. She could not have known I was thinking about opening a brothel as soon as I could find the startup money. I finally learned where mother had stuffed her two years before I died, but it didn’t matter since all my girls had found me in Bisbee a long time before and wanted to take good care of me.

I felt Aaron was the reincarnation of Erbach, but he was struggling with the idea that he had married my mother as James Reed. I could not confirm or deny because I was still having a problem figuring out what possessed me to reincarnate so soon after my own death. It’s not an exact science and there’s a lot of bull going around. So many people want to believe what they are told is the truth.

I know my kids would be wondering why I am talking about Belle as my past-life mother when I have not spoken about my current life mother and how she fits into this whole scheme. I am thinking Mr. Peacock was my past-life connection and since my current mother bore me out of wedlock, I have more connection with my past-life orphaned child than with my current mother. I know you probably think this is all a load of crap and it’s true that it all started with a Ouija board and Tarot cards – not a real high bar for believability, but there you are. It’s all I got. Take it or leave it.”

Aaron (Talking Directly to Clara Mae Spirit)

"Clara, I know what I was with my own eyes in the gallery on 4th Street. You went into a trance state and assumed the identity of some other person who had entered your body and voice and began to answer questions Red Sonya had prepared before the session. I know it wasn’t an act, because I could see physical changes in you before and after the session. You were drenched in sweat and in a daze. I actually feared for your health. I know you were serious about those sessions because you and Red Sonya needed to have answers to important questions. I know the advice you were given from the entity you were in contact with was a

trusted childhood mentor who saw to your care in the absence of your mother. So, after many years of thought about this, isn't it possible that there is a correlation between your mother's care of you in this life and your past-life mother's care of you and her desire to separate your daughter from you in that life? "

Clara Mae

"Yes, my love. My birth mother in this life provided for me, but she did not love me. I never knew my father. I was tolerated by my step father, but he always favored the children from his first marriage. It was a lonely trip until I finally met you, my love."

Aaron

"Sweetheart, you know how hard it was for me to see you go. Thank you for helping me with Cheyenne. I realize now that she was more than I could handle, but without her I may never have found these past -life connections. I could never have learned about our history. I miss you every day, but I have to release you now. "

Clara Mae

"I knew I was dying the minute we got off the road, but I could never tell you and when they found cancer I just accepted that it would be over no matter what they did. I didn't want to be a burden. You already were breaking your back helping me. I knew my kids would be okay because that's the way I raised them. I was not afraid to cross over. I had done it once before and I was kinda' looking forward to the other side. I hung around to see how you were doing and to check up on Red Sonya and my kids, but that's about it."

Aaron

"Red Sonya just passed over. I miss her too. Say hello for me and give her my love. "

Clara Mae

"We're having a good time. Just remember, my love, we were born again to be together, whenever we choose. We always find each other if we choose to come back. We always choose our parents for the lessons we come back to learn and we come back never really knowing that it's a journey, not a destination."

Don't listen to young souls, all they want is to make sure you do things their way. They think the world belongs to them and we all have to follow their rules. They're never interested in what you have to say because they never listen to anyone but their own voices. They are convinced they are right and that you will never be right and if you are on the right, you must be wrong. If you don't agree with every thing they say you must be some kind of weirdo. They shun, ostracize, humiliate, dominate and drown out any sort of opposition. They are worse than people that break the law because they want to make laws to punish you for thinking there is any other way than their way. Old souls are the enemy of the new guard, the new wave. Old souls say, "Think what you wish, just don't force me to think your way." Old souls are never eager to jump on bandwagons, wave slogans or follow zealots blindly. Old souls discuss alternatives, consider all opinions, agree to disagree without getting sore. They still exist. You just don't hear from them very much. They do not want to spend their time

defending their right to have a different opinion about what they feel, think, believe or practice”.

Aaron

"You have been so patient with me. You never judged, accused or condemned me. You always listened, embraced and loved me through all of it. You were always slower to react to our obstacles and better at problem solving than I could ever be. I learned so much from you. You never blamed me for leaning on you when I seemed to be at a loss for answers. I miss you so much. I thank God I found you in this life. You've given me the strength to go on, to get the job done and I am so thankful for the privilege of learning life lessons with you."

Clara Mae

"I am free from the burden of my body, only your love made it bearable until I passed. Maybe we'll meet sooner in the next life, my love."

Chapter 9: The Killing of Belle Starr

It could be said that the legend of Belle Starr was born from the pen of a penniless free-lance writer with the National Police Gazette sent to Fort Smith, Arkansas who stumbled upon the news of her death and seized the opportunity to exploit her local reputation as a “Bandit Queen” for his editors as a means of obtaining food and lodging for the night, but in truth, he would have come late to the party. The literary exploitation of Ms. Starr was in full force while she was alive and it vexed her to no end.

Author, Glenn Shirley cites the writings of Belle’s earliest biographers and their corresponding conflicting and erroneous accounts of events and circumstances surrounding her death. Thirty-seven pages of “Notes, Comments and Variants” precede the bibliography in his, *Belle Starr and Her Times; The Literature, The Facts and the Legends*. Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Among the Fox, pulp fiction writers and noted biographers of Ms. Starr, readers will find listed the following authors and their book titles:

Aikman, Duncan. *Calamity Jane and the Lady Wildcats*. New York; Henry Holt and Company, 1927. *Bella Starr, The Bandit Queen or The Female Jesse James: A Full and Authentic History of the Dashing Female Highwayman with Copious Extracts from Her Journal, Handsomely and Profusely Illustrated*. New York: Richard K. Fox, Publishers, 1889. Croy, Homer. “*He Hanged Them High*”: An authentic account of the fanatical judge who hanged eighty-eight men. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce. 1952. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952. Drago, Henry Sinclair, *Notorious Ladies of the Frontier*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1969.

Outlaws on Horseback: The History of the Organized Bands of Bank and Train Robbers Who Terrorized the Prairie Towns of Missouri, Kansas, Indian Territory and Oklahoma for Half a Century. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1964.

Red River Valley: The Mainstream of Frontier History From the Louisiana Bayous to the Texas Panhandle. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1962. *Road Agents and Train Robbers: Half a Century of Western Banditry*. New York: Dood, Mead & Company, 1973. Harman, Samuel W: *Belle Starr, the Female Desperado*, Reprint of Chapter XXXII from *Hell on the Border*. Houston: Frontier Press of Texas. 1954. *Hell on the Border: He Hanged Eighty-Eight Men*. Fort Smith. Ark: Phoenix Publishing Company, 1898.

Horan, James D. *Desperate Women*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1952 and Paul Sann. *Pictorial History of the Wild West: A True Account of the Bad Men, Desperadoes, Rustlers and Outlaws of the Old West and the Men Who Fought Them to Establish Law and Order*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1954.

Hicks, Edwin P. *Belle Starr and Her Pearl*. Little Rock, Ark.: Pioneer Press, 1963. “*Who Killed Belle Starr?* (Article) *Expose for Men*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 1959. Mooney, Charles W. “*Belle Starr as Her Doctor Knew Her*.” (Article) *True Frontier*, No. 32. April, 1973.

“*Belle Starr’s Killer Revealed*.” *True West*, Vol. 16, No. 3, January-February 1969. Rascoe, Burton. *Belle Starr, “The Bandit Queen.”* New York: Random House, 1941.

The actual samples of the fictional history shared by these writers with their bold insistence that if you read it in print it must be true, are explained and cross- referenced in each chapter of Shirley’s book and footnoted. But each footnote is a mini-history of the same event in Belle’s life interpreted or exaggerated with dates, persons, locations and conclusions that are completely

different from one author to another and with little or no corroboration and full of massive contradictions.

In this sense, Shirley's book is a detailed road map for the true path of Belle Starr's life around the obstacles of pulp fiction, perpetrated by nearly everyone who has written about her. For Example: "*Mooney. Doctor in Belle Starr Country (228—29, 283), states that Belle "lived for over an hour" after being shot; that Dr. Jesse happened to be at Briartown visiting with Uncle Isaac Mooney, and Pearl sent a messenger to bring him post haste to her bedside at "the Starr home," where Miles Hoyt had "brought Belle in his wagon." Dr. Jesse pushed his horse relentlessly over the six miles...to Belle's home, "but Belle died" about fifteen minutes before (he) arrived.*" At that time the sobbing Pearl told the doctor, her mother "*whispered in my ear*" the name of her assassin and "*someday, I'll tell you, Jesse.*"

The testimony in *United States v. Edgar A Watson*, does not support the story, nor is Dr. Jesse Mooney's presence mentioned. Belle had been dead nearly fourteen hours when her body was removed to the Bend. Mr. Shirley compares all extant writings about Ms. Starr with official records obtained from probate and census records, the National Archives and Record Service, The Federal Archives and Records Center, Indian Archives Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society, numerous federal court cases from the U.S. Commissioner's Court and the U.S. District Court of the Western District of Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Aaron

Belle had fully developed neighborly relationships with everyone she new in the Bend and on both sides of the Canadian. The year before her death, Belle managed to estrange her daughter by giving up her illegitimate child to an orphanage without Pearl's consent and driving Eddie away by whipping him for intercepting mail from relatives that might reveal location of Pearl's daughter and for a beating he took for mistreating Belle's favorite black horse.

Here is what is known about events leading up to her death. John and Nancy Middleton were residents of the Bend and friends with Belle. John was known to be a wanted man and sought Belle's help when he was on the run and desperate. Fox writers thrust her into a love affair with Middleton when she helped him, but in truth she was just helping any of her friends who got into trouble any way she could. When John was found thrown from the mare he purchased to affect his escape from authorities, Belle's revolver was found on his saddle implicating her in the theft of a mare owned by Albert McCarty. She was arrested by Indian policeman, John West for larceny, but acquitted when it was proved that Fayette Barnett, a rancher, took the horse from a stranger and sold it to Middleton.

According to Glenn Shirley, there was no proof of a love affair between Belle and John Middleton; it was a story that was "cooked up" by Fox writers and local gossip. In February 1886, Belle was arrested for participating in the Wilse W Farrill robbery disguised as a man, but acquitted for lack of evidence because she could not be positively identified at the trial. Her husband, Sam Starr was indicted for the Blaine Post Office Burglary in June of 1885, apprehended by Frank West on September 17, 1886 during which Belle's mare, Venus was shot from under him and although wounded, he managed to escape capture and return to his brother's home to recover.

Heeding Belle's warning that it would be better turning himself in and posting bail than risk capture from Indian police, she accompanied him to the U.S. Marshal at Ft. Smith on October 7.

November 2, 1886, Tom Starr is indicted for whiskey peddling in the Territory. He pled guilty and was sentenced to one year in the Southern Illinois Penitentiary on the 1885 charge and six months and \$50.00 fine on the 1886 charge.

December 17, "Aunt Lucy" Surratt gave a Christmas dance at her home near Whitefield. Also invited is Frank West who is immediately recognized by Sam Starr and a confrontation ensues. Ironically, both men die from gunshots to the chest. Belle is widowed a second time.

In danger of losing her right to co-manage Indian land she chooses a young Cherokee outlaw who takes Sam's place as an authorized land manager. Bill July is quickly renamed Jim July Starr by Belle, who skips the customary formal marriage vows. July accepts her invitation and moves into the Bend. Eddie resents of a new stepfather, fifteen years younger than his mother.

Belle discovers that Rose Pearl is pregnant with a young Indian suitor's child, but forbids him to marry her daughter. Pearl refuses her mother's insistence on marrying someone of her choice to save the Starr reputation. Pearl leaves the Bend for parts unknown. Her baby, "Flossie" is born in April 1887 and is tended by relatives.

Jim July is arrested for stealing a horse, but Belle will not help in his bail or his defense because she has finally received a letter of commendation from the local Indian Agent for not harboring criminals.

Against his mother's wishes, Eddie pals around with Mose Perryman, a Creek Indian relative of July and the two are arrested for stealing a horse in the Creek Nation. Fearing Eddy will tell authorities it was Mose who stole the horse; Mose shoots him while he is asleep. Author Shirley has Belle pleading with Pearl to return to the Bend because Eddy is near death. Upon learning he is seriously wounded, Pearl comes back to the Bend to help Eddie recover, leaving her baby with her aunt.

Eddie vows to bring charges against Mose for attempted murder. Jim July begs Eddie to forego his complaint against Perryman and promises to defend him in court. On November 13, 1888, Eddy is arraigned on charges of horse theft. Angry with relatives of July who had reneged on their promise to defend him, Eddie renews his charge of attempted murder against Perryman.

Eddie recovers, takes Belle's *"fine black horse"* to a dance without telling her. *He brings it back and puts it away wet. She gives Eddie a whipping and he leaves the Bend to live with a neighbor "on the Choctaw side of the Canadian."*

January 1888, Edgar A. Watson and his wife come to the Bend from parts unknown. *"He was a skilled farmer looking for land to work and to raise hogs." He rented one of Milo Hoyt's tenant farms on the west side of the land leading to the river, made a good crop of corn and cotton that fall and asked to renew his lease for another year.*" Unable to obtain endorsements required under "permit law" he was directed to visit Belle Starr and ask if she would rent land for him to continue his farming. Impressed by his polite manner and his wife's refinement Bell agreed to rent him river property for cultivation.

After receiving payment, Belle learned from Watson's wife that he was a wanted man in Florida and was avoiding the authorities. Realizing the risk this would present to her newly approved position with Indian authorities, she tried refunding the money, but Watson refused. She then tried sending the money to him in a letter explaining she had rented the land to a man named Tate. Watson countered by smearing her name to the newcomer and he backed out of the

agreement with Belle, fearing that he was dealing with a criminal. Incensed by Watson's action, Belle called a meeting and warned Watson that she knew he was a wanted man in Florida and that she could make trouble for him.

My theory is the only reason Watson did not lose his temper and kill her on the spot was because he had no escape plan, no defensible alibi, no one else he could blame for the rage he must have felt that a woman could get the best of him.

So, he must have planned a fatal payback for Belle's insult. "In January 1889, he moved into one of Jackson Rowe's cabins near the corner of the Hoyt ranch."

He faded into the slow paced life of a tenant farmer who raised hogs and established a regular routine of management and benign social interaction with Belle's neighbors. He knew Belle was in the habit of visiting with them on this side of the Canadian.

Watson had to get even, but more urgently, he was determined to prevent Belle from going to the authorities as she threatened. So he did what he always did back in the Everglades when things did not look like they were going his way. He planned, schemed and coldly calculated how he would remove the threat, how he would kill Belle Starr.

Author, Peter Matthiessen gives credit for his Belle Starr references to Samuel Harman's *Hell on the Border: He Hanged Eighty-eight Men*. And so did Glenn Shirley, nearly ten years earlier than Matthiessen. All three authors conclude in Watson's probable guilt but they do not say how he planned it.

Edgar A. Watson

"I'm not sayin' I did any of these things, but if I had, this is how I would have done it. Chokoloskee Island, Lost Mans River, Chatham, they all have to be negotiated by water. This here water has snakes and gators all year round and many a man has disappeared in the mouth of a gator, never to be found.

Man gotta have a boat in the glades and a good solid built house, 'specially in hurricane season. I had a lotta folks workin' for me, po folks I give a job to cuttin' sugar cane, makin' syrup, odd jobs. Some of 'em weren't grateful enough for the work I give 'em and they'd holler and complain and make a big fuss about it. I would just give em a hard look and wait for them to say something, but they would always make some dumb ass excuse and walk away kinda sheepish.

I'm a respectable man. People look up to me. I employ half the folks in Chokoloskee Bay. It's true I had some trouble down that way, but everyone knows I pay my debts. I'm a giving man. People take kindly to me. That's what my lawyer said when they tried to put the blame on me for killing Ms. Starr. Nobody believed them. Nobody believed that no good injun' Bill July. No sir. He weren't nothin' more than a common thief. Even his own people say he threatened to kill his wife.

I told the deputy how July borrowed my shotgun the day before Ms. Starr was kilt and he believed me because I'm a respectable white man livin' in Oklahoma Territory and a man who lent a shotgun to an Injun' out of the kindness of ma' heart."

*1. Peter Matthiessen, *Killing Mister Watson*, P/143, Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. NY

"Later days, when he was drinking, Mr. Watson would brag around Key West how he took care of Belle Starr and her foreman when they come gunning for him in a narrow neck of

*woods. Hinted as how he'd took care of a few in his wild and wholly days out West, but claimed he'd never killed nobody less they meant him harm."*¹

Aaron

When Peter Matthiessen wrote *"Killing Mister Watson,"* the fictional re-creation of the life of Edgar A. "Jack" Watson, a number of actual references were used to document his life as a suspected pathological killer in the Florida Everglades. The well-defined characters in his book lived in Chatham Bend in Chokoloskee Bay and like Watson, they were real people who lived and worked in that rural, swamp community. Matthiessen's references to Belle Starr were lifted from actual news accounts and from Samuel W. Harman's, *Hell on the Border*. Houston: Frontier Press of Texas. 1954. Glenn Shirley also referred to Mr. Harman in his book. *"Belle Starr and Her Times; The Literature, The Facts and the Legends*. Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1982, eight years before Matthiessen.

This is the way Glenn Shirley characterizes Edgar A. Watson:

In January of 1888, Mr. Watson and wife come to Youngers Bend from parts unknown. He presented himself as a skilled farmer looking for land to work and raise hogs. *"He rented one of Milo Hoyt's tenant farms on the west side of the land leading to the river, made a good crop of corn and cotton that fall and asked to renew his lease for another year."* Unable to obtain endorsements required under "permit law" he was directed to visit Belle Starr and ask if she would rent land for him to continue his farming. Impressed by his polite manner and his wife's refinement, Belle agreed to rent him river property for cultivation.

After receiving payment, Belle learned from Watson's wife that he was a wanted man in Florida and was avoiding the authorities. Realizing the risk this would present to her newly approved position with Indian authorities, she tried refunding the money, but Watson refused. She then tried sending the money to him in a letter explaining she had rented the land to a man named Tate.

Watson countered by smearing her name to the newcomer and Tate backed out of the agreement with Belle, fearing that he was dealing with a criminal. Incensed by Watson's action, Belle called a meeting and warned Watson that she knew he was a wanted man in Florida and that she could make trouble for him.

When Belle told Rosie Lee what had happened she warned her mother that no good could come from her confrontation and her threat to expose him. Belle shrugged it off. She was convinced that Watson had walked away with his tail between his legs. Belle had a lot of things on her mind: putting up her daughter's child for adoption without telling her, whipping Eddie for mistreating her prize mare, managing her new, law- breaking, common law Cherokee husband and hanging on to her renewed reputation as a law abiding land manager and a certified ward of the U.S. Government.

Humiliating Edgar A. Watson wasn't the only thing that bothered Belle Starr, but it may have been the last thing on her mind while she was munching on corn bread, rounding the fence and heading for the ferry to take her back home on the north side of the Canadian.

BOOM! BOOM!

It was the work of a cold calculating killer, a cowardly ambush from a crouching figure hidden by the shadows of a setting afternoon sun. It was a familiar act by gunmen in the old west, but quite out of the ordinary among the hard working tenant farmers in Indian Territory. Gunning down a lady on horseback with a shotgun and then making sure she was dead with a second shot– that would get anyone’s attention.

Pearl Starr

“It was a kind low ache, an every-once-in-a-while sharp pain and a kind of throbbing in my head that Mr. Watson was one person with his wife and a completely different person when he was alone or with other men and I couldn’t stop worrying that he might do something to my mom. She was so headstrong and always believed she was right even when she wasn’t. I know Eddie had had enough, but I loved her in spite of all the ugly business with my dear Flossie.”

Aaron

In the last chapter of Matthiessen’s book, the men of Chatham Bay and Chokoloskee are caught in a moment of excruciating fear, self doubt and self loathing, They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Watson was responsible for at least three deaths of the persons found near his property, but they were common, God fearing farmers. They would not think of firing upon another person and yet, even with loaded weapons at their side they hesitated to confront the looming presence of E.J. Watson, “before we got it through our heads that a neighbor we had known for twenty years would shoot into the flock of us like we was turkeys.”²

He was known as E.J. The “j” was for Jack, it was said. He had married twice and had children by both wives and an illegitimate child he favored over his son. The men knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Watson was responsible for at least three deaths of the persons found near his property, but they were slow to accuse him to his face. It didn’t matter to them that he had once been accused of shooting Belle Starr and was acquitted of the crime. They only knew about the disappearance of their own loved ones, feared buried in the swamp and never to be found. And then, in this point in time after sobering up from a night of heavy drinking, threats and accusations, shouts of denials and finger pointing, Mr. Watson returned to his well built cabin, the only cabin to survive the heavy storm that devastated the region, leaving the carcasses of dead birds and debris clogging the water ways and making it nearly impossible to travel even by boat.

Waiting for him near his dock were 20-armed men and a boy. Watson knew he had come to a roadblock, but he would get out of it just like he had thousands of times before. He had been accused of the killing, but told the sheriff he would confront the real killer at his cabin and now he would have to concoct another alibi for his neighbors until the sheriff arrived.

Edgar Watson drew upon his cunning and power of intimidation and with measured steps, slowly raised his shotgun. Was this the shotgun he leveled at the lady rider on the south side of the Canadian, or was this the one he said Jim July borrowed to kill Belle Starr?

“Mr. Watson, lay that gun down.”³

Then came a thump, a cap trying to ignite wet powder and a load of buckshot rolling out of both barrels of Mr. Watson’s gun. He reached for his revolver, but it was too late. They say he lunged forward as he was shot, falling in a hail of bullets.

*"I never seen a man struck down so hard. He lay face down on the bloody ground, the broad back with no breath to swell it, not a twitch, only stray threads on the holes tore through his coat, the night wind lifting them dark red curls on his creased neck. Them threads and cups was all that ever stirred. Master Watson never gave a gargle. I never saw a man so dead in all my life"*⁴

Unable to navigate at any speed through the debris filled swamp, the sheriff arrived at the scene of a grisly half buried corpse the men had riddled with bullets and buckshot and dragged through the swamp like a rotting animal carcass. The wives and family of Mr. Watson wailed and berated the men for taking the law into their own hands without allowing the sheriff to bring Mr. Watson in for questioning. In the end, after extensive, depositions, accusations and soul searching, it was determined that a more or less deputized posse had responded to a righteous threat from a man they had known all their lives who objected violently to being questioned by them about a missing worker found dead on his property. And when he attempted to shoot into them with his shotgun and the shot rolled out of the barrel from wet casings they returned fire in fear of their lives. So in his astounding conclusion to a masterful narrative, Matthiessen invokes the moral imperative of a reluctant but determined group of bumbling swamp people who were compelled to carry out vigilante justice at the point of a gun – in what was finally recorded as a deputized manhunt in the last days of the old west.

"In the light of Edgar A. Watson's many escapades, he was almost surely the man who killed iBelle Starr."⁵

"The initial account of Watson's final years is given in a Tampa, Florida, dispatch of October 28,1910; " Edgar A. Watson, outlaw and slayer of Belle Starr.... Is dead, killedby a sheriff's posse . . . Watson was a known "bad man." ... in 1886, while living in North Florida."

Thirty-seven years later in her book *The Everglades: River of Grass*, Marjory Stoneman Douglas recapped the Chokoloskee Bay events with additional highlights, named members of the posse and told how they dragged Watson's body into the water, towed it behind a boat down to Rabbit Key, and buried him in "that long oyster and mud bank which at low tide stretches out from the mangroves to a lone twisted mangrove tree at the end."⁶

The body subsequently was brought back to the mainland and reburied in a family Fort Myers Cemetery. Another account of Watson's demise appears in " Reminiscences of Charles Sherod," (Ted Smallwood) from *The Story of the Chokoloskee Bay Country*, compiled by Charlton W. Tebeau. Smallwood moved to Chokoloskee Bay in 1891; established himself on Chokoloskee Island in 1896, where he served as postmaster, and wrote down his own experiences and personal knowledge of the area before his death in 1951.

1. Peter Matthiessen, *Killing Mister Watson*, P/143, Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. NY
2. *ibid.*, P.321
3. *ibid.*, P.320
4. *ibid.*,P.323
5. Glenn Shirley, *Belle Starr And Her Times: The Literature, the Facts and the Legends*, P. 259, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1982.
6. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *The Everglades, River of Grass*, Mockingbord Books, 1986.



Bay Reeves

First African American U.S. Deputy Marshall
to hold a commission west of the Mississippi
in the service of Judge Isaac C. Parker



Crawford Holshby aka Cherokee Bill... "This is about as good a day to die as any," he said on the day of his execution on the gallows at Ft. Smith, Arkansas on St. Patrick's day, 1896

Chapter 10: Epilogue

Aaron

Years have passed since my first portrait of Belle. I no longer channel Clara Mae. Most of my questions were answered. I have only fond memories of our life together. She was my soul mate, had all my love and there's really no need to seek a companion in my later years. Cheyenne went her way and I went mine.

I still look back at my high anxiety in searching for Belle Starr's killer and all the mistakes I made in passing up and stumbling over obvious clues. It was all so laughable. That hair brained road trip to Oklahoma. Thank God nobody was around to see me in the dirt in the mistaken belief that Bill July killed his wife (Belle), or my pouring tobacco on Tom Starr's headstone, while his spirit laughed at me for being such an idiot and forgetting to put film in my camera.

I probably was in some kind of trance state when I channeled the voices from Indian Territory. I don't think they cared whether I was right or wrong. I can only hope they just wanted the opportunity to tell their stories after so many years of inaccurate or just plain no history. I'm talking about the recollections not researched and documented by Glenn Shirley, whom I have credited for his great work in nearly every chapter.

I was never comfortable believing I was Belle's first husband, ex-Confederate turned outlaw, James. C. Reed, but it did open up a side to the James-Younger gang that history will never cover and Missouri will eventually have to acknowledge. They were rebel patriots fighting for a cause that Lincoln honored at Gettysburg and Booth contaminated for the next hundred years after the war and the Drake Commission drove them out of their homes for life.

Punishing the South for seceding, attacking Fort Sumter, Booth's conspiracy, all were America's tragic attempt at self-flagellation. We have only to thank Johnson's failure to lead and Thaddeus Stevens' irresistible urge to humiliate Southern Senators, plantation owners and returning ex-Confederates for defending a way of life created by our founding fathers some of us refused to accept. I think it just makes us feel good to continue to blame them for our past mistakes. And, why do we still want to continue this process today? Let us all blame our founding fathers, yet once again. Really?

So, what use is there in discovering past lives if it creates so much grief? I will let Clara Mae answer that question. She left a few ideas about that subject before she passed.

Clara Mae

"If you think of heaven as earth, you will incarnate to heaven rather than thinking you will go to heaven when you die. I think of earth as a classroom for the living. The more you come and go, the more you realize learning lessons need to start earlier in the life cycle.

Discovering past life may be a key to understanding why you are here. If you were born again to be together, that is why you are with the person you are with. Discovering why you are with that person is one important step in past life therapy. In my day it was done on the QT because it was considered a dive into the occult. Before there were colleges of regression therapy where you could get a degree and become a practicing therapist, there was Dick Sutphen and his published data on using hypnotherapy to explore an individual's past life. He had a cult like following with glowing testimonials from attendees to his seminars and retreats.

I never took a dime for giving advice because what I was doing in the back room at Gilgamesh was strictly from the heart. I did it to help Sonya and others who thought I might be able to help. She thought guidance from Tarot cards and my psychic readings we could solve some of life's problems and for the most part, it was working; but I was channeling an entity who was an oasis for me in a painful part of my forced estrangement from my mother and I asked him for advice on my path in life.

I never realized how much I was going to have to pay for all that turning myself inside out during trans-medium sessions. My divorce was final while Aaron and I were living in Spain. I had to give up my health care. I smoked constantly and my life with Aaron was devil-may-care. Upon returning to the states we were working artists, making a living on the road with other artists and craft people on coordinated art shows in California shopping malls. The hours were long and hard but satisfying. We were paying our bills. We were doing okay until the day I told Aaron I couldn't go on anymore and we had to get off the road. I don't know why I didn't think of seeing a doctor for a check up. I guess I was having too much fun. When I finally saw a doctor, it was too late, I had uterine cancer. I would be gone in less than a year. After I had passed away I decided to float over Aaron's trailer and found him working on a portrait of Belle Starr. My spirit was overjoyed to see him working. I wanted so much to reach out and give him a big hug.

I think he felt my presence. It took me a while to see where he was going with it and then I realized he was unconsciously trying to find a connection.

I did not immediately know the extent of my own past life in the period Aaron was plunging himself into because personal history is deeply buried in the subconscious. One doesn't automatically remember all past lives when crossing over because death is a process of spiritual discovery. When I discovered myself outside of my discarded body, I was free. I could cover great distances in a flash. Alive, I discovered things about myself that separated me from everyone I knew. I was psychic, I could tell things about people by handling objects they owned, jewelry, watches, rings, etc. I could feel power spots on an Indian reservation and identify them before the chief could point them out. I knew when people were trying to contact me before they phoned or wrote. It was more a curse than a blessing because I had to mentally shut people down psychically to have any privacy for myself.

I am not trying to sell it. I don't wish it on anybody. It takes a full commitment and a willingness to live with the results you find, even if you don't like them or doubt or distrust them. I cannot vouch for everything Aaron has said or done in his odyssey, but I trust he believes he has more or less arrived at the right conclusions.

One last thing: As Aaron has reported, I am the self-alleged reincarnation of Rose Pearl Reed, alias Rosie Lee. I was the daughter of Myra Maybelle Reed, aka Pearl Starr. As reported, she was the common law wife of Bill July, a.k.a. James July Starr at the time of her death.

My mother was a child of a prominent Missouri pioneer family and well known by most folks in Carthage, Missouri. Her family was caught in the crossfire of the border wars, burned out by Union troops and forced to move to Texas for the duration of the war. I don't know how she would feel about her old cabin being hauled off, or her crypt, still above ground on private property, or her Youngers Bend School House in ruins next to a road everyone sees as they drive by it. But, I know how I feel and I don't like it!

Oklahoma, Belle Starr is more than a wanted poster. She deserves so much more from the state she gave her life to and the land she managed in the Indian Territory before it became Oklahoma. Show her some respect. Momma belongs in the Starr cemetery and you need to raise her up from her old legend to her true status as an Oklahoma pioneer!

Come on, Oklahoma!! Show us you care!!”

Aaron

I revisit the search and wonder at the times we used pay phones, libraries and gas pumps. I wonder at the times we had actual conversations at coffee houses, road maps to find locations, and asked people for directions on the street. I remember the times I made Ozalids for a dime a copy at the San Diego Public Library, a place where you could still find books by Fox pulp fiction writers on the shelves marked for western history.

So the question you are asking is: do I see the future any better then the past? Have I learned anything from Clara Mae that would make you read any further than the print on this page? I've learned that history is repeating itself. Instead of Border Wars of yore, we had the war of the border: people crossing over willy-nilly, thumbing their nose at guards and being assisted by thugs who cut holes in metal fencing or who simply walked through unfenced portions of the border.

Instead of Senators brandishing weapons on the floor of the Senate, we have representatives refusing to hear the inaugural speech of a newly elected president. Instead of honoring the office and praising the man, we choose organize resistance to any decisions or actions he takes. He closes the border, we open the city to illegals; he enforces mass deportations, we enforce judicial delays.

Instead of armed conflict, we have organized protests that challenge authority and sometimes get violent. Instead of following federal guidelines, we have resistance and refusals to comply.

The only thing different about the days and weeks before the run up to the Civil War and now is that the opposition party has not yet armed itself with weapons. What is similar is that we have a war of civil disobedience instead of a war of bullets.

So we have a direct correlation between the nullification of federal law under Andrew Jackson and the attempt at nullification of federal law under President Trump. In the years preceding the attack on Ft. Sumter a moral principal to guide the nation.was being overlooked It was based on the belief and certainty that the founders had violated the stated intention inherent in the Preamble and the Declaration of Independence and that ten of the first twelve presidents were overlooking it.

Even if the people cannot understand the intentions of their representatives they know in their heart what is right for their family. They put their trust and faith in God and hope for the best.