



Brush Men and Vigilantes: Civil War Dissent in Texas (Sam Rayburn Series on Rural Life, sponsored by Texas A&M University-Commerce)

David Pickering, Judith M. Falls

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As Charles Frazier's novel *Cold Mountain* dramatized, dissenters from the Confederacy lived in mortal danger across the South. In scattered pockets from the Carolinas to the frontier in Texas, some men clung to a belief in the Union or an unwillingness to preserve the slaveholding Confederacy, and they died at the hands of their own neighbors. *Brush Men and Vigilantes* tells the story of how dissent, fear, and economics developed into mob violence in a corner of Texas—the Sulphur Forks river valley northeast of Dallas.

Authors David Pickering and Judy Falls have combed through court records, newspapers, letters, and other primary sources and collected extended-family lore to relate the details of how vigilantes captured and killed more than a dozen men. The authors' story begins before the Civil War, as they describe the particular social and economic conditions that gave rise to tension and violence during the war. Unlike most other parts of Texas, the Sulphur Forks river valley had a significant population of Upper Southerners, some of whom spoke out against secession, objected to enlisting in the Confederate army, or associated with "Union men." For some of them, safety meant disappearing into the tangled brush thickets of the region. Routed from the thicket or gone to ground there, dissenters faced death. Betrayed by links to a well-known Union guerrilla from the Sulphur Forks area, more men of the area were captured, tried in mock courts, and hanged. Other men met their death by sniper fire or private execution, as in the case of brush man Frank Chamblee, who for years eluded his enemies by clever tricks but was finally gunned down after the war, reportedly by one of the area's most prominent men.

Anyone with an interest in the new history of the Civil War or Texas should find much to digest in this compelling book, whose authors Richard B. McCaslin congratulates for taking their place "in the ranks of Texas' literary reconstructionists."

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