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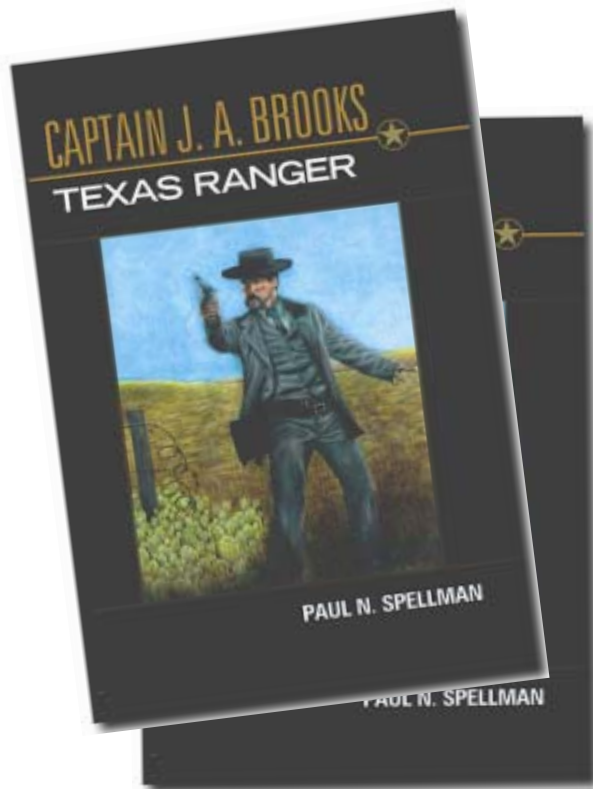


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Captain J. A. Brooks, Texas Ranger

Frances B. Vick, Series 1, vol. 4



By *Paul N. Spellman*

Denton, Texas:

University of North Texas Press, 2007

p. viii + 272 pages, 29 b/w photos, 1 map, notes,
bib., index. Cloth \$24.95.

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Book Review by Chuck Parsons

James Abijah Brooks (1855-1944) is best known for his career from Texas Ranger private to Ranger captain, which began just as the main threat of Indian raiding parties was ending. Brooks found his glamour and excitement by hunting down Anglo outlaws. During the fight with the Conner gang in East Texas, he nearly lost his life, and his wounds were a constant reminder of how close death could be for a Ranger. A lesser man might have opted for a more peaceful profession after that gun battle, but Brooks remained in the force, rising to the rank of captain. His achievements earned him the distinction of being named one of the four great Ranger captains, along with John H. Rogers, William J. McDonald, and John R. "Border Boss" Hughes.

Brooks entered the Frontier Battalion on January 15, 1883, and served until November 14, 1906. His tenure was a near record for longevity, and the huge area he covered is significant as well. He fought lawlessness in La Salle County in South Texas, the Fort Worth railroad strike in North Texas, El Paso in West Texas, and the tall pines of East Texas.



Following his resignation from the Rangers, Brooks continued to serve the Lone Star State. Although he never claimed to be or originally intended to become a politician, he ran for a seat in the state legislature in the fall of 1908 and won. When a new county was carved out of the rough brush country of South Texas, it was named Brooks County in his honor, and he served as county judge.

Dr. Paul N. Spellman has gone far beyond merely writing a first book-length biography of this important Texas figure. Whereas secondary sources could have filled the pages with exciting material, Spellman chose to delve into primary source materials. In so doing, he uncovered numerous new photographs and significant information. The Texas State Archives provided the record of Brooks's ranging days, and numerous other depositories of primary material supplied additional data. Of great importance was the cooperation of Brooks's family members. Working with Brooks's granddaughter, Spellman unraveled the life of the man through his handwritten memoirs, personal files, numerous lists, letters, personal notes, photographs, and newspaper clippings that he had preserved. Brooks's last will and testament from 1939 and the presidential pardon signed by President Cleveland in 1887 were available as well.

Spellman could have glossed over the darker aspects of Brooks's life, especially the neglect of his family and the abuse of alcohol, but he chose not to. The result is a fascinating tale of a man who made himself into a worthy citizen. Even with his weaknesses, Brooks contributed greatly to society—not for personal gain, but because of his sworn duty to the laws of the state. This book is a major contribution to Texas history.

For more information on Captain J. A. Brooks, click below for Paul N. Spellman's earlier feature article:

19th Century Shing Star:
James Abijah Brooks
in the Texas Ranger Dispatch
Issue 15, Winter 2004



Paul N. Spellman
Author of *Captain J.A. Brooks*