



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

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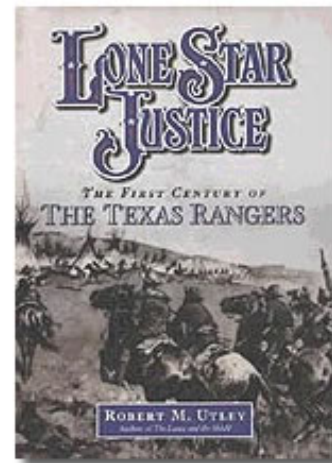
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Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers



by Robert M. Utley

Oxford University Press, New York. xiv + 370 pages. 42 photographs and 11 maps. \$30.00. Hard cover only. ISBN 0-19-512742-0.

Writing a history of the Texas Rangers, an organization now in its third century of existence, presents a tremendous challenge. Although the subject matter is limited geographically to the state's borders, there are so many strong characters, fascinating incidents, and behind-the-scenes work done by quartermasters and secretaries that it presents a very formidable task to attempt a comprehensive account.

Walter Prescott Webb's single-volume history remains the standard work for many. More recently, Frederick Wilkins presented a four-volume work, and Charles M. Robinson III also attempted the task with a one-volume history. Ranger buffs may have their favorite authors, but everyone should read *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers*. Utley does a superior job covering Ranger history through the "four great captains" and entering the 20th century, the end of the Old West.

Although Utley does not attempt to prove conclusively the origins of the Texas Rangers as we know them, he does present what is perhaps more important: the beginnings of the Ranger tradition. This began with volunteer fighting men who were brave and reckless enough to tackle Indians and Mexican marauders in the early days of Texas. Utley argues that the term "Texas Ranger" encompasses two different types of men.

Until 1874, Rangers were citizen soldiers, organizing on occasion when they were called on to track or fight Indians or Mexicans. Various terms were used to describe these men: mounted volunteers, mounted riflemen, even minutemen. "Regardless of formal designation . . . they adhered to a pattern of character, organization, and operation that defined a tradition rather than an institution." [1]

In 1874, the Texas legislature established the Frontier Battalion. This was intended to be a force superior to the minutemen. It was to be a permanent or semipermanent military force, no longer merely "citizen soldiers." Initially, its role was to fight Indians, but more and more, the concern was to establish the law throughout Texas. The responsibilities were varied: settle family feuds in the established counties, protect courts, and enforce the laws throughout the state. Gradually, the term *Ranger* meant lawman rather than Indian fighter.

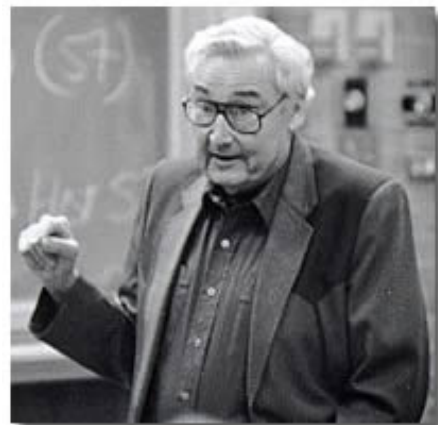
Utley examines this changing tradition thoroughly, yet without being ponderous. He moves swiftly from incident to incident, from captain to captain, from county to county. Utley knows his subject, having spent weeks reading the bales of documents preserved in the Texas State Archives.

Because the scope of this work is so vast, the history consists of a series of condensed actions. L.H. McNelly and Lee Hall experienced enough adventures in South Texas to justify their own biographies, yet Utley ably discusses their contributions in a single chapter. Likewise, Major John B. Jones deserves a volume, but this master administrator is covered in ten pages. Included therein is the Kimble County roundup, the Horrell-Higgins feud of Lampasas County, and the Ranger war against Sam Bass. The Red River War and the Mason County War are confined to another chapter.

Although some may argue that certain incidents of Texas Ranger history should have received much more attention, Utley does provide an extensive bibliography for those who hunger for additional information. The numerous notes explain sources, and the fifteen pages of bibliography should keep the avid reader content for years to come.

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Robert M. Utley needs no introduction to people who appreciate great narrative history or to those who have an interest in history in general. His resume includes such recent works as *A Life Wild and Perilous: Mountain Men and the Paths to the Pacific*; *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*; *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*; and *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier*.



Besides writing in a style that encourages additional reading, Utley's strength in this work lies in his ability to gather a huge amount of material on the subject and assimilate it into an easily understandable narrative. In brief, this first volume is a masterpiece. Hopefully the second volume is at the press!

-- Chuck Parsons

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