

## Introduction

### Prelude to a Nightmare

**F**our years of Civil War engendered animosities, hatreds, and resentments that lingered and often erupted into violent encounters even decades after the end of the war. Southerners who made the commitment to remain loyal to the Union found themselves persecuted and perceived as outcasts, while their beliefs were denigrated and dismissed as treason to the homeland. Most returning Confederate veterans found it difficult to accept the results of the late war and the South's capitulation. Whether they owned slaves or not, many resented the intrusion of new ideals that Reconstruction Congresses imposed and new laws that attempted to bring about equality between whites and blacks.

Across the former Confederacy, Unionists and those who supported secession or fought for the South in the conflict clashed in open warfare after the peace at Appomattox. These imbroglios, in fact, had begun while war still raged and became increasingly more hateful and murderous with the end of hostilities. The emotions had a long gestation period, involved the very foundations of the Southern culture, and could not be easily disregarded or dethroned. This warfare was probably inevitable due to the deep-seated ideals felt and experienced by the opposing forces. It could not have been otherwise. Honor and duty played a major role during the bloody years of Reconstruction, and a host of individuals were caught up in this drama. Reconstruction really amounted to a Second Civil War, one that pitted whites who had supported Confederacy against loyal white Union men, the freedmen, and the Northern forces who occupied Texas. It was a guerrilla war that the ex-Confederates were determined to win at any cost.

What has been termed the Lee-Peacock Feud was an important chapter in the South's Second Civil War. It played itself out in the Corners of Northeast Texas, the area where Grayson, Fannin, Hunt, and Collin counties converge. It was a struggle wherein Unionists led by Lewis Peacock and former Confederates led by Bob Lee had at each other until blood ran in the streets. Because he refused to accept the results of the late war, the Southern loyalist Lee became a Ku Klux Klansman and an outlaw raider and took the fight to the Southern Unionists, Yankee soldiers, and the newly freed slaves. More than 200 white and black men and women may have been killed in the struggle while hundreds more may have died because of an indirect link to the fight. Events of the feud have been told and

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retold in countless newspapers, by local and regional historians, and by lay writers who accepted Confederate myths about the Reconstruction era or the South's Second Civil War. Thus, most writers have viewed the Lee-Peacock fight as a simple, clear story of good versus evil. But most accounts have stood history on its head, to say the least, by denigrating the freedpeople and loyal white Unionists of any stripe—North or South—and by practically deifying the Ku Klux Klan, other terrorist groups using different names, and assorted outlaw raiders like Bob Lee, a cut-throat who called the Corners home. Lee was a man who tormented and killed so many people that he became known as “The Man Eater.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Reconstruction myths, Northern carpetbaggers, traitorous Southern scalawags, and the ignorant freedmen of Dixie united to inflict barbarous political, economic, and social rule on the noble, white, honor-driven Southern patriots who had fought a war for the justifiable reason of upholding honor and the states' rights political philosophy. Perhaps without realizing it, writers who continued to advance old myths were still following the now discredited Dunning School of Reconstruction historiography that glorified the South and the Lost Cause and vilified the North, including everything associated with that region. Dunningites idolized ex-Confederate Democrats and condemned scalawag and carpetbagger Republicans. Dunning's followers also exalted the Ku Klux Klan, other terrorist groups, and outlaw gangs while degrading the Loyal Union League—and men like Lewis Peacock, the most prominent Unionist in the Corners.<sup>2</sup>

But a major problem exists. The Dunningites of yesteryear wrote about a past that never was. Many modern scholars know that the traditional view of Reconstruction is a myth. Many of today's scholars know that, for example, few carpetbaggers came to Texas, and most who did were young white women that the American Missionary Association recruited to teach the newly freed African Americans. Most agree that the Republicans were not really devils in human form. Instead most Republicans were sincere Union men, like E. J. Davis, who were loyal to the Union before, during, and after the war. Nor was there “Negro domination.” At most, the black voting bloc was the swing vote that helped Republicans come to power. Throughout Reconstruction, the great majority of officeholders were white. Even among revisionists one question still needs to be answered, however: Did violence and intimidation play a major role in the Democrats' drive to redeem Texas in the 1870s? How important were groups like the Ku Klux Klan and former Confederates who became social bandits because they could not accept the Civil War's outcome and the freeing of former slaves? Today's serious researchers do not glorify the Klan and former Confederates who became outlaw raiders, but scholars disagree on questions regarding the overwhelming importance of the violence.<sup>3</sup>

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Revisionists' views about Reconstruction in Texas since the 1960s and 1970s have been slow to reach the public. Often, when general readers encounter books that advance new interpretations, they tend to reject these volumes out-of-hand because such interpretations do not conform to the myths that they have embraced all their lives—myths amounting to spurious stories that were passed down from generation to generation. Perhaps this book will help reverse the trend and capture the attention of the reader.

Within the context of recent scholarship, it might well be that the Lee-Peacock Feud should not be presented as a feud at all. “Feud” implies that a struggle existed between families or individuals for familial or individual reasons or personal grudges wherein ideas about right or wrong become lost as one family battles and retaliates against another. Instead, the Lee-Peacock disturbance is the saga of white Southerners who were Unionist before, during, and after the Civil War, and a story about the persecution that they faced during Reconstruction.

In East-Northeastern Texas, early in the Reconstruction era, criminal guerilla bands, whose members were mostly ex-Confederates, coalesced to challenge the verdict of the Civil War or to use the verdict for their own ends. Some joined societies like the Ku Klux Klan. Others became raiders who were intent on punishing or killing freed blacks, white Unionists, and occupying federal forces. Such groups killed discriminately; they seldom went after former Confederates unless those ex-Rebels had developed Unionist leanings after the conflict. Some violent groups had much support in the Lone Star State. In that, the former Rebels in Texas were like many people across the wider South. Many of Dixie's white citizens believed that they had not really been defeated; rather, they had been “overwhelmed” by superior numbers. They would not accept Yankee rule after the close of the conflict. Bob Lee of the Corners was one such Southerner, and he soon became the bane of Unionist Lewis Peacock's existence. Lee fits the definitions of both outlaw and Confederate. He believed in the Lost Cause, a belief that led him into his horrific life of crime.