

THE COX FAMILY AS INDIAN FIGHTERS

(Les' note: We have never identified William's parents, but DNA connects them to us)

While traveling in the Dry Frio Canyon in 1897, seeking information of the frontier days, the writer was told by several parties of an interesting frontier incident which took place in the Nueces Canyon and that Mrs. Serrilda (sic) Whistler was likely the only person that was accessible that could give an accurate and detailed account of the affair; she was in the battle and, and although a small girl at the time had a good memory, etc. The writer sought an interview, and obtained in substance the following facts:

Mrs. Whistle was the daughter of Mr. William Cox, and was born in Fannin County in 1851 four miles from Bohnam. In 1861 her father's family moved to Brackett, and in 1865 to the West prong of the Nueces River. No one lived there at the time, and the country was wild and lonely indeed. Of this new settlement, besides William Cox and family, was his son Henry and his family, and John Bingham and his family. They all lived in tents near each other, and two months passed away before any signs of Indians were seen. Henry Cox's tent was about fifty yards from his father's and John Bingham's a short distance on the other side, the old man being between the two. As is usual on the frontier during a long period of quiet and peace, the settlers became careless, and when the Indians did come were poorly prepared to receive them.

On the eventful morning in question Henry Cox was at his father's tent, and his family were at their own, fifty yards away. No close watch was being kept, and the Indians came over the hills and into the valley near the camps before any one discovered them. They were twenty-five in number, and all on foot. Mrs. Bingham was the first to see them, and exclaimed, "Lord, God! Look at the Indians!" At this time they were about 100 yards from the tent of the elder Cox. He heard the announcement of Indians by Mrs. Bingham, and at once seized his old flintlock rifle and went out to make a fight and defend his family as best he could. Another mistake, however, had been made by the old man. He had fired his gun at a turkey that morning, and had neglected to reload it. Standing, however, in full view of the approaching and now yelling savages, he began hastily to load, but was hit by an arrow in the knee before he could do so, and was badly wounded. Reaching down he pulled it out, but the spike remained in the bone. Henry now came to his father's assistance, but without his gun, it being in his tent. The old man coolly finished loading his gun, and together they charged. A shot from the old rifle wounded one Indian badly, and he ran into a mott of timber close by. At the first discovery of the Indians the elder Cox had shouted for all of them to concentrate at his tent. A little 4-year-old girl of Henry Cox made a run to get to her grandfather's tent, but was caught by the Indians, who were retreating from the old man and Henry, and going into the mott of timber. John Bingham and his wife attempted to reach the tent, and were both shot and wounded by bullets, or a bullet

properly, as the same ball wounded both in the legs, but they succeeded in reaching their destination. The Indians now began to plunder the tent of Henry Cox, and got his gun. His wife before this time had made her escape with one of her children to the old man's tent, and it was while making this run the Indians got the little girl. One younger child was left sitting under a wagon. Our readers must remember that all of this transpired very quickly and under great excitement, Indians swarming all around, yelling, shooting, and bullets whizzing. Old man Cox had retreated back to his tent, but seeing Henry's little 2-year-old child under the wagon, make a run and rescued it. Bingham had no gun, the Indians had Henry's and the old man had to fight alone. The brave old man was equal to the occasion. He would ram one ball home as fast as he would fire, hitting an Indian every shot. He killed one just as the Indian was coming out of Henry's tent with his arms full of things. The Indians certainly did not know the almost unarmed condition of the white men, as they could have made a charge en masse and overpowered them at once. They dreaded the ominous crack of the old rifle, and were soon all out of sight in the bottom, but still within rifle shot. The chief had a whistle, which he would sound when wanting his men to come closer. Old man Cox wanted to kill him, and watched his chance to do so, believing that his fall would put an end to the battle and the balance would take their departure. He had him located by the sound of his whistle. He was behind a tree in the bush, but very close to camp. His warriors seemed to be further back, and he wanted them to come up and charge. Finally he turned to give a blast and exposed part of his body. At that instant the rifle cracked from the tent, and he fell dead in his tracks. This shot also sealed the fate of the little captive girl. She was at once put to death in retaliation for the slain chief. She was killed with a lance, and her screams could be heard as the cruel blade entered her body.

It was about 10 o'clock when the chief was killed, and soon after the Indians took their departure in silence, keeping up the river in the timber, hid from view. Before this they were yelling and keeping a continual noise. When they went to leave the valley they came into view going up a mountain, and the white men watched them until they disappeared. The old man and his son now went into the mott where the Indians were, having fears for the safety of the child, but not seeing anything of her concluded the Indians had carried her off captive. They saw the trail where the chief had been dragged, and followed it until his body was found in a waterhole, which they pulled out and scalped, and then came back, but on the way found the dead body of the little girl. In the evening the sad burial took place, and the survivors made preparations for flight. During all of this time told man Cox was limping around with the spike still in his knee. The Indians had taken all their horses, and nothing was left but one yoke of oxen to convey these three families away. Next morning, however, the start was made for Brackett, the wounded and small children in the wagon and the balance on foot. After a great many hardships they succeeded in arriving at the fort. Three of the Indians shot in this battle died on the retreat, and were soon afterwards found.

At the time of this fight Mrs. Whistler was 14 years of age, and remembers all of the incidents distinctly. Her family has had a great deal of trouble on the frontier. She had one sister, brother-in-law, and their three children all killed by Indians near Brackett, and a brother 13 years old killed by them on the Eagle Pass road. He was alone at the time, and no particulars can be given. The others were moving in a wagon when assailed and massacred.

Mrs. Whistler has been married twice. Her first husband was Ben Maples. He was killed in a difficulty, and she married Mr. Ross Whistler, her present husband. They live in Dry Frio Canyon, near her cousin, Capt. Joshua Cox.

Capt. Joshua Cox is a nephew of the old man William Cox, who made such a game and successful fight with the Indians. He is an old settler and Indian fighter himself. When the fight above described took place he was on Elm Creek, seven miles east of Fort Clark. They all come (sic) together from Fannin County, and he had his first experience with Indians on Elm Creek in 1864. While out on a horse-hunt nine Indians charged him and Nilus (sic) Cantrell. Seven of the Indians ran round a thicket and two charged straight towards them. At nine yards distant (sic) Cox and Cantrell both fired, and each hit his Indian. They wheeled, and the white men pursued them until they ran over a bank and disappeared. The other seven ran back the way they came as soon as the guns fired. One of the wounded Indians was shot through the body, which shot also broke his left arm. He took a shirt off which he had on, and tying it tightly around his body rode his horse six miles to a water hole, and dismounting there tied his horse to a tree, and lay down by it and died. On the seventh day his body and the nearly starved horse were found. The horse belonged to William Pafford. The Indian has seven pairs of moccasins and a flintlock rifle. The head and shoulders of another Indian were found by the cowboys in the Anachtchi mountains, and this was supposed to be the other one shot on that occasion. His horse was also found, and had a short piece of rope around his neck. Cantrell shot the Indian who died at the waterhole.

In 1867 Mr. Cox had another fight with the Indians twenty-six miles from Uvalde, on the Nueces River. His father, Nathan Cox, Tom Bingham, Zood Pulliam, and himself had the fight. Pulliam and a Mexican were herding cattle when attacked by the Indians, and retreated to the ranch of Captain Cox, about one and a half miles away. During the retreat, however, the Mexican was overtaken and killed. When the reinforcements went back the Mexican was still alive, but lanced in seven places, and did not long survive. The Indians were overtaken while crossing the Nueces River. They had a number of horses, and were trying to cross them by pushing them backward off a bluff into the water. Capt. Josh. Cox shot at two Indians close together, and one of them fell into the river, but swam across to the other side badly wounded, and it was supposed he died. The other men who were in the rear did not fire for fear of hitting Captain Cox, who was between them and the Indians. All were

in a trail one behind the other when they came upon the Indians, who scattered when Cox fired and crossed the river rapidly. Only three head of the horses were recovered.

Another fight took place on the Chaparoso Creek, there miles from Pete Bowles' ranch. The men in this fight were Josh Cox, Archie Cox, Hugh Cox, Henry Cox, Irvin Cox, Dave Cook, and William Carter. The Indians, twenty-five in number, were in an open prairie and could be easily counted. There were twelve on horseback and thirteen on foot. The mounted ones were first seen and charged by the whites and fired on. Those on foot were concealed in the grass near by, and then rose up and commenced yelling and shooting. The fight lasted nearly an hour, and in that time the Indians were beaten back a mile to the brush, and it ended there. The horse rode by Captain Cox was wounded. His first shot broke an Indian's thigh, who was riding a paint horse. He left the fight, and his broken leg could be seen flopping as he galloped off. Two Indians were killed on the ground. The last shot fired by Hugh Cox hit an Indian in the back, but he hung to his horse and was supposed to be lashed on. The white men were armed with Spencers, six-shooters, and Winchesters, some having one kind and some another, but mostly six-shooters. Irvin Cox had no arms of any kind, and there were only three guns in the crowd, and the men who had these did most of the shooting. The Indians avoided a close fight, and the revolvers were mostly saved for that. They ran repeatedly and shot wild. The white men fired many shots with the repeating guns and many Indians were hit. Out of the twelve on horseback only five were left in the last charge. Mexicans from Mexico said these were Kickapoos, and that more than half of them were killed and wounded. They crossed the Rio Grande and went into Mexico after the fight.

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