

## The True Story of Clay Allison and Wyatt Earp Dodge City, KS

Chalkley McArtor Beeson was co-owner of the Long Branch saloon in Dodge, city councilman, two-time sheriff of Ford County, and four-time state legislator representing Ford County in Topeka. He was described by one newspaper as "a quiet, almost noiseless man of medium size." His hometown newspaper once described Beeson as the "man of the hour." Indeed, the city of Dodge named a street after him many years ago. Here are the pertinent portions of that interview.

*"Topeka, Jan. 17. (Special.) ... Chalk Beeson is dean of the outfit. He migrated to the Western plains with the buffalo.... 'The noted Clay Allison with his gang of untamed cowboys came to Dodge one day to start some trouble,' continued Beeson. 'They soon found it. Erp [sic] was marshal [assistant marshal] at the time. He notified the boys to be on guard. I saw that a clash was coming.'*

*'Dick McNulty and myself held a brief conference. Something had to be done, and done quickly to prevent a wholesale killing. We took our lives in our hands and went to Allison and his gang and told them, as friends, that they had better not start anything. We argued with them while the lines were forming for a general battle. They finally yielded and handed us their guns, which we kept until they got ready to leave town. After giving up their guns they were in no danger. No one there would be so mean as to jump on to them when they were unarmed. That was against the rules of civilized warfare as construed in Dodge.'*

The only mention by Beeson of Wyatt Earp is that he "notified the boys to be on guard." Notice also, that Dick McNulty is responsible for disarming Allison - Siringo said the same thing.

Much weight must be given to the account of Chalk Beeson. Mr. Beeson's integrity has, to my knowledge, never been seriously questioned. He was in Dodge on September 19, 1878.

These three participants--Earp, Siringo, and Beeson--all tell of Clay Allison coming to Dodge City hunting trouble. The reason for Allison's trip could very well be the one put forth by Texan Pink Simms; the mistreatment of the cowboys in general and the shooting of George Hoy.

From these three accounts, perhaps a likely scenario can be put together. While the Texan Siringo wrote of the cowardice of the officers, Dodge City partisan Beeson takes a different stance. A case can be made for the following reconstruction of events.

It would seem that Charles Siringo hit Dodge on September 19, 1878, where he heard the reports of Indian depredations south of Dodge from Cape Willingham. There he met an indignant Clay Allison, backed by his "untamed cowboys". Allison was intent upon getting to the bottom of the George Hoy killing while forcing the Dodge City police to ease up on his friends. Likely the mob went from saloon to saloon, maintaining their courage with whisky at each stop. As the anger increased, so did the fury of the protestations with all its accompanying shooting and shouting until it became a "disgraceful row" by early afternoon.

Knowing that 25 rowdy cowboys backed Allison, Wyatt Earp and policeman Jim Masterson (Bat's brother) began to assemble their forces. In the meantime, Dick McNulty and Chalk Beeson intervened on behalf of the town, convincing Allison and his "gang of untamed cowboys" to give up their guns. The gang then dispersed. Two participants verify this action on the part of McNulty.

While the gang was being talked out of their guns, the officers still had not confronted Allison and his friends. This inaction would have seemed like cowardice to Clay Allison and his gang, dereliction of duty to the townspeople. Therefore, we have the *Globe* of the 21st adding, "it is said the officers failed to appear. These occurrences are the subjects of much comment on the conduct of the officers."

There seems to be no evidence that any kind of showdown occurred between Wyatt Earp and Clay Allison per the *Examiner* interview. Neither Beeson nor Siringo mention anything about it. In addition, there is evidence that Robert Wright and Bat Masterson could not be involved. They were both out of town during the Dull Knife raid.

Evidence for a "conversation" between Allison and Earp is sparse. A likely scenario for this meeting is the one put forth by Pink Simms. "I also heard that later Allison alone found Wyatt Earp seated in the lookout's chair at a faro game and he told him in no uncertain terms what he thought of the way some of the cowboys were being treated." We have in this a highly believable proposition. Allison had no fear of being gunned down. As Beeson so eloquently put it, "[n]o one there would be so mean as to jump on to them when they were unarmed. That was against the rules of civilized warfare as construed in Dodge.

Mr. Beeson's story seems to enforce the one told by Charles Siringo. It is clear that for whatever reason, Wyatt Earp backed by Bat Masterson did not quell the disturbance. That honor must go to Dick McNulty and Chalk Beeson.

## Additional Sources:

"Clay Allison, Portrait of a Shootist," by Chuck Parsons.

WPA Federal Writers Project. (Interview with Ida Mayer indicating her father met Siringo in Dodge in late summer 1878.)

Telephone conversation with Robert K. DeArment Jan 13, 2000.

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