

The Carroll-Cox Shootout & Assassinations

by Timothy Dean Hudson

Brothers James R. and Albert A. Carroll settled in the Cecil Community north of Marion in the 1870s and began farming. Their father, John Carroll, Sr., died on 23 June 1863 while serving in the Confederate force that defended Vicksburg. This left the boys fatherless and in difficult financial circumstances.

The Carroll brothers both married in the 1880s and had families. In addition to farming, Albert A. Carroll made bricks. In 1892, he sold bricks to local resident Thomas Jefferson Roark, but Roark never paid for them. Carroll eventually sued Roark for \$23.20 for the bricks. On 2 January 1893, Justice of the Peace Love held a hearing in Marion over the suit, and the testimony presented at the hearing proved inflammatory. After the hearing ended, a heated argument occurred between witnesses William H. Brasher and Oscar Cox. The pair exchanged hot words and nearly became involved in a serious affray, resulting in Brasher uplifting his axe towards Cox, who brandished two drawn pistols.

As Brasher had no sidearm, his friends pulled him away. Moments later, tempers flared in a continuation of the quarrel, with the Cox brothers, George Wade, Oscar D., and Lee, R. A. Alexander, and Thomas Jefferson Roark on one side, and the Carroll brothers, James R. and Albert A., on the other. All of the young men had armed themselves with pistols, suddenly, there on the streets of sleepy Marion, Louisiana, a full-blown fusillade erupted. During the next thirty seconds, the men fired at least thirty shots, making it resemble a regular pitched battle.

As the firing ceased, witnesses saw that Albert A. Carroll had suffered bullet wounds to the head and body. Wounded and bleeding profusely, Carroll made his way into Thomas' store, where he expired in a few months. Witnesses reported that the melee had resulted in mortal wounds to three other participants. James R. Carroll suffered bullet wounds to the head, chest, and hips, while a bullet had penetrated through the center of Lee Cox's neck. A bullet passed through Oscar Cox's bowels just above the hip, and he had received a serious wound to his arm. Alexander suffered a flesh wound to his leg, and only George Wade Cox, the local constable, escaped unhurt.

All those involved in the gun battle held prominent positions in the community, working as farmers who locals viewed as *"highly esteemed for their hither useful lives."* The violence led to criticisms of the common practice of openly carrying sidearms, with the parish newspaper complaining that,

Thus a petty dispute and carrying murderous weapons has resulted in the death of several citizens, made wives husbandless and children fatherless, and plunged a whole community in grief and overshadowed it with the pall of an awful horror.

The three men initially reported as mortally wounded in the Cox-Carroll shootout all recovered, and on February 14th, a grand jury indicted the Cox brothers, Alexander, and Roark with manslaughter, shooting with intent to kill, inflicting a wound, carrying concealed weapons, and disturbing the peace. The grand jury indicted Jim Carroll with carrying a concealed weapon. Bond on the manslaughter charges were set at \$1000 each. George Wade Cox and Alexander promptly surrendered to the sheriff for arrest, and on the 18th, their lawyers filed for a reduction in their bond, which was granted. Oscar and Lee Cox went into hiding after the shootout, but a few days after their indictments, they rode to Farmerville and surrendered to Sheriff Daniel.

On April 10th, Oscar Cox and Jim Carroll met at the courthouse in Farmerville to appear in the District Court. Both men pled guilty to carrying a concealed weapon, for which the Court fined them \$15 and costs, or forty days in the parish jail. The Court did not consider the manslaughter charges for the killing of Albert A. Carroll until August 8th, when all five men entered a plea of not guilty to all charges and requested a joint jury trial on each charge. The trial began two days later, but due to difficulty seating an impartial jury, the sheriff had to send deputies across the countryside to collect potential jurors. With a jury finally seated, opening arguments began on August 12th, with James R. Carroll serving as the State's principal witness against those charged with his brother's death. After arguments and deliberation, the jury found Oscar and Lee Cox and Roark not guilty of manslaughter but found Wade Cox and Alexander *"guilty & recommend them to the mercy of the court."*

On August 16th, Wade Cox's attorney moved for a new trial, and the Court heard arguments on his motion on the 22nd. On August 23rd, the Court overruled the motion for a new trial. On the 25th, the Court sentenced Cox and Alexander to the State Penitentiary at Baton Rouge at hard labor for fifteen months, plus a fine of \$10 plus costs. The Court ordered the men kept in Farmerville until the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled on their appeal. On the charges of disturbing the peace on a public street and highway, the Court dismissed the charge against Lee Cox, and the other men all changed their pleas to guilty on both charges, receiving fines of \$10 each. On October 12th, the Court dropped charges against Oscar and Lee Cox and Roark for inflicting wounds.

A few days after the Court sentenced him to the penitentiary on August 25th, Constable George Wade Cox escaped from the Farmerville jail and remained on the loose. In late September, Jim Carroll made a trip by wagon to Monroe, presumably to sell produce. He returned from Monroe

on Saturday, the 30th. As he neared his home near Marion, the young black boy who had accompanied him lay asleep in the back of the wagon as Jim drove the horses. The road to his home passed through the farm of R. M. Alexander. As Carroll drove through the Alexander farm, he approached an old corn crib on the side of the road. As the wagon passed, an assassin sprung from his hiding place in the corn crib and fired a full load of buckshot directly into Carroll's face and neck, killing him instantly.

Authorities found a pocketknife and riding whip in the crib and managed to track the murderer for over a mile before losing the trail. Farmerville's *"The Gazette"* reported that *"great excitement and indignation prevails in the Marion neighborhood"* following the continued violence that had left two brothers dead, their wives now widows, and six young Carroll children fatherless. Although evidence proved lacking, local residents believed that Jim Carroll's assassination resulted from his testimony that convicted Wade Cox and R. A. Alexander.

When the Union Parish District Court held its next session in April 1894, it considered the final case resulting from the Marion shootout. The Court found all three Cox brothers, Alexander, and Roark guilty of assault with a dangerous weapon. Meanwhile, even though he was a married man with two young children who had served as constable until the shootout, Wade Cox remained on the lam. Despite numerous searches by the sheriff and his deputies, he managed to elude them, yet he was believed to have remained near his family in Marion.

It appeared that Wade's brother, Oscar, helped to keep him safely in hiding. Although Oscar was acquitted of killing Albert Carroll, the fight and subsequent trial created bitter feelings between Oscar and several of Carroll's friends. During the period after the trial, Oscar Cox continued to act *"in such a manner as to estrange some of his friends and make enemies of others."* A few days after Christmas 1894, someone set fire to Oscar's gin house, destroying the building and three bales of cotton, both serious financial losses. Although the precise cause of the fire remained unclear, Oscar's enemies appear to have sent him a warning.

Four months later, Wade Cox finally tired of hiding out from the law, and on Wednesday, 1 May 1895, he rode into Farmerville and surrendered to the sheriff. Rather than risk another jailbreak, Deputy Sheriff Aylmer Flenniken immediately took Cox from Farmerville to the State Penitentiary in Baton Rouge.

That fall, on Tuesday evening, 27 August 1895, Oscar Cox rode horseback along the road from Marion to his home. Cox was well-armed, carrying a Winchester rifle and a large Colt revolver. Suddenly, a group of assassins sprang from ambush and opened fire with their shotguns,

pummeling Cox with multiple loads of buckshot at close range. One load shattered his left arm, another penetrated his back, and others penetrated his chest, face, and skull, killing him instantly.

Marion citizens heard the report of the shotguns, and upon investigation, town officials found three blinds near the road where the murderers hid, waiting for Cox to pass along the road. Justice of the Peace C. A. Love impaneled a jury to hold an inquest. They studied the tracks around the blinds and interviewed witnesses, but they found no evidence to identify the culprits. The jury rendered a verdict that "*parties unknown*" had killed Cox.

Officials never charged anyone for the murders of Jim Carroll and Oscar Cox. Most locals believed that Oscar Cox had assassinated Jim Carroll, and so in retribution, Carroll's friends assassinated Oscar Cox.

Wade Cox served one year in the State Penitentiary. Upon his May 1896 release, he returned to Marion, where his wife, two children, and mother awaited him on their farm. In February 1899, Cox's lawyer applied to the Board of Pardons for a full pardon and restoration of his citizenship, which was granted. He thereafter lived a quiet life on his farm near Marion with his wife and two children.

After his acquittal, Thomas J. Roark farmed in the Marion area for the rest of his life. Lee Cox disappeared after Oscar's death, as did R. A. Alexander. Meanwhile, the six orphans of brothers Albert A. and James R. Carroll all grew up and raised their families nearby.

