

Last Hanging in Brown County ?

By Clay Riley

As with many stories that are handed down through the generations, some details get lost, some are embellished and some are intentionally misleading. But, there is a basis of truth in all of them. Below is an image that many Brown County residents have seen over the years and has a metal tag identifying it as "The Last Brown County Hanging". I had speculated lately as if it was the execution of John Pearl that was executed in Coleman County in 1901. It was pointed out to me, and was in the article about the hanging, that a hole was cut through the roof inside the Jail and he was hung inside the building, not outside.

If not Brown or Coleman County, then where was the picture taken? In discussing this with an author, who has a book out soon about legal executions in Texas, he identified it as a hanging that had occurred in Limestone County, Texas. On May 3, 1894, a pioneer resident of Groesbeck, James Garrett McKinnon, was robbed and bludgeoned to death with a stone. A man was arrested for the death, tried and convicted. The sentence was hanging. Prior to 1903, death penalties were performed in the county seats of the respective counties. After that date, the State of Texas carried out all executions at the Huntsville Penitentiary.

On April 12, 1895, at Groesbeck, Texas, Limestone County, Richard Burleson was hanged for the crime for which he had been convicted.

So, in this case the photo was of the last hanging in a county, but it was Limestone County. Below is the photo we have here in Brown County and next to it is a sketch made from the same photo, owned by the great grandson of the murder victim.

