

## MASSACRE AT WILLOW SPRINGS

By Barry B. Thompson

One of the greatest unsolved mysteries in West Texas first came to the public's attention in 1901, with the discovery of forty wagons between Kermit and Monahans, Texas, at a place called Willow Springs. Two men from Monahans discovered the remnants of the wagon train arranged in a V formation and apparently undisturbed since the hour of the mysterious calamity that befell them. In checking the mystery it was determined that such a train left Tucson, Arizona, for Missouri in the spring of 1874 and had not been seen or heard from since. If this was the same party the disaster occurred in late 1875 or early 1876 depending upon the travel pace set by the leaders of the train. For decades the question has been asked, "Who were they and what were they doing in the desolation that was then West Texas?"

Legend has stymied efforts to learn the composition and purposes of the train. One legend states that the train was composed of Dutch emigrants who were carrying three million dollars in gold bullion or ingots. The legend further states that whoever attacked the train had little use for gold and left it with the wagons to sink into the sand. As a result of this legend many amateur treasure hunters have searched for the gold ever since the discovery of the site. It seems logical that if the gold existed it would be found by men using mine detectors. This has also proved futile as not one trace of the gold has been found. Adherents to this theory contend the gold was found and sold without detection. This seems highly improbable as the United States Treasury is the only legal purchaser of gold in America and a transaction of this amount of gold would have received a great deal of publicity.

The gold was supposedly cast in twenty-pound ingots. For the gold to be worth three million dollars there would be 477 of these ingots weighing a total of 9,542 pounds. Objects of this weight do not disappear into thin air. To carry this much gold at least nine wagons would be required. Logically it then stands to reason that the perpetrators of the massacre would not have nine wagons to carry away the spoils as the wagons were burned. Therefore without concrete evidence to the contrary this theory must be discarded as an imaginative figment of overactive minds. After discarding the most widely accepted theory then what is left? To understand the answer to this question an insight into this area of West Texas in 1875 is necessary.

Texas in 1875, was in the throes of recovering from the Civil War.





