

# Story of the Murder of Elder Joseph Standing

On Sunday, July 21, 1878, the following dispatch was flashed from Catoosa Springs, Ga., to Salt Lake City: "Joseph Standing was shot and killed today, near Varnell, by a mob of 10 or 12 men. Will have for home with the body at once. Natty his family." The sender of the dispatch was Elder Rudger Clawson, and the recipient the late John H. Holston. The latter knew at once that the man who had been shot was a member of the Master's cause and had been added upon, and so it proved to be, for the man who died upon that Sabbath morn fell only because he differed in belief from his assassins.

Twenty-eight years have passed since the deed was committed, but the event has by no means faded from the public mind in those parts, neither has it been forgotten in Whitfield county, Ga., where it was an atrocious one, and the fact that Joseph Standing gave his life for his religious convictions will keep his name to be forever remembered in the annals of Mormonism, and his grave in the Salt Lake City cemetery is a monument of Italian marble erected by the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, bearing appropriate inscriptions to the memory of the young martyr.

The rock of the south are for the most part brave, chivalrous and lovers of fair play. There are exceptions to the rule, however, and in the case here recited in particular wrought a deed that would cause the shivers. Two young men, unnamed and unprotected, were waylaid by them, brutally mistreated and after one of them slain, and neither of the victims had ever injured a single one of the assailants, by word, thought or deed.

**DIFFERENT INCIDENT.**  
For different was the outcome of another occurrence in the southern states, wherein two young Utahns fell into the hands of an angry mob. They were told to strip and prepare for the lynch. One of the boys, for they were mere boys, said, as he hastily removed his coat:

"Gentlemen, this affair is altogether too absurd. If you are not manly enough to meet me one at a time, come two together, or even three, and I will whip the entire pack of you. There will be no lashing until I am no longer able to defend myself, come on!"

Scarcely were the words uttered before some of the mobbers began to cheer, then a quarrel ensued between them, with the result that a portion of them, armed with their own weapons, took their part and saw to it that they departed without injury.

But there was not a "man" in the party that slew Joseph Standing, and all but took the life of Rudger Clawson. The aggression was composed of deeds in human form, and filled with hatred and a thirst for blood, they were not like to appeal and to the manly bravery and manliness of their victims.

**STORY NEVER PUBLISHED.**

The story of the assassination of Joseph Standing has never been published as told in the first person by the man who witnessed its every detail, and who himself at the time looked into the very eyes of death—Rudger Clawson. To the "News" he has given a concise statement of the tragedy, with the events leading up to it. The pictures reproduced on this page were recently taken at the spot where Elder Standing fell, and at the courthouse where his murderers had their trial.

Before entering upon the recital by Elder Clawson, it may be stated that Elder Standing was just entering upon the last half year of his second mission in the Southern States. He had been signally successful in this missionary field, was a good speaker and an untiring worker. He was about 26 years of age at the time of his death, was of medium height, of rather heavy build, and possessed of a disposition that endeared him to all who became acquainted with him.

**MR. CLAWSON'S STORY.**  
Mr. Clawson's narrative follows: "At the April conference of 1879 I received a call to perform a mission in the Southern States, in May went to the mission headquarters, and shortly afterwards began laboring with Elder Joseph Standing in Whitfield county, Georgia. In July a conference was to be held in Rome, Floyd county, about 20 miles south and west, and we were

invited to attend that gathering. While tramping across the country to the proposed place of meeting, Elder Standing decided that it would be well to visit some of the saints living in the vicinity of Varnell's Station, where he had previously met with considerable success in making converts.

"Accordingly a call was made at Varnell's, but a family who it was expected would extend a hearty welcome to us was much perturbed by an anti-Mormon feeling that was prevalent

**Told for the First Time in Print By His Companion Elder Rudger Clawson—Recent Visit to the Scenes of Brutal Crime by Prominent Churchmen Recalls Black Stain on Georgia's Fair Escutcheon.**

home the family had retired, but the head of the house answered in person the call, and after mentioning the fevered sentiment existing against the elders, Mr. Standing in particular, he bade us welcome and said: 'Damn the man who dares to intrude during your

and there is no law in Georgia for Mormons,' replied the mobber, and we were commanded to go with them. The face of Elder Standing was blanched and inflexible, but he seemed not to be possessed of fear. He walked erect and sufficiently fast to be en-

ing was evidently enduring mentally the physical dissolution that would soon be his.

**YOUNG WOMAN APPEARS.**

"Soon we were met in the woods by Mary Hamlin, a young woman

mounted men who had left the party some time before put in an appearance. The command was given by one of them, follow us!"

**SHOT AS HE STOOD.**

"At that instant Joseph Standing rose to his feet, faced the three horsemen, clasped his hands together in front of him, and in a loud voice exclaimed: 'Surrender!' Scarcely had the word been uttered when one of the men sitting raised his gun and fired. Elder Standing whirled around a number of times and fell prone upon his face, but in an instant turned upon his

murder, I feared that they might come to the conclusion that dead men tell no tales, and perhaps would pick me off with their rifles before I reached shelter, and accordingly I did not run until I reached the nearest timber. Then I traveled with all the speed I could command. Presently hearing a man shouting timber, I saw a man running the stream that intersected the road. He answered, and I told him a man had been murdered a short distance away and asked if he would render assistance. He replied that he was too busy and went on with his work.

**WAS NOT SURPRISED.**

"I soon arrived at the home of Mr. Holston, and as he had been informed that the mob was on our track, he was not surprised at the story I told. He promptly granted my request that he go to the scene of the murder, and he furnished me with a horse to ride in search of a coroner and a physician, and having been misdirected had to go several miles additional to find the proper parties. While going through the woods, I met part of the mobbers riding pell-mell, evidently intent upon getting into the state of Tennessee, which bordered on Whitfield county. I had no opportunity to turn from the road before they were upon me. I thought this time surely I must die, for I believed that they had come to consider what my testimony would mean against them. We drew rein immediately in front of each other and I was asked what I had done with Standing, and where I was going. I replied that his body was where I sent a messenger to Elder John Morgan in Utah, and to the governor of Georgia, informing them of the tragedy.

**SHOT REPEATEDLY.**

"It was sundown when the coroner, Mr. Holston, myself and others reached the spot where the dead body of my companion lay. A small crowd was already there. Mr. Holston had been to the scene earlier in the day, and placed a shade over Brother Standing, who was still breathing. Our friend had not remained, as members of the mob were seen by him lurking in the nearby woods, and he feared for his own life. After his departure the mobs returned and shot repeatedly into the head and neck of the dying man, doubtless instantly ending the misery he was suffering, but with no such charitable purpose in view.

**FRIEND IN NEED.**

"After the inquest, a tier was improvised, and the body of Elder Standing was carried through the darkness to the home of Mr. Holston, that gentleman again proving himself a friend in need by making the proposition that his house be made the morgue. Arriving at the place, the remains were placed upon a platform under the eaves, and the task of washing and laying out the body devolved upon myself alone. None of us had any experience in that direction, and I was the only one who had the inclination to begin at that time. The ordeal occupied the greater portion of the night, and then, from sheer exhaustion, I slept like a log until morning. The coroner had advised strongly against my attempting to take the remains home, but I was determined to do it at all hazards. I went next day to the state capital, distant, and procured the necessary clothing and casket. I had no money, but the undertaker accepted my promise to pay in a short time. He sent a helper with me to prepare the corpse and seal the casket. This man became so wrought up over my recital of the tragedy that he imagined he saw a mobber issuing from every shrub and tree as we rode along, and this added to my own nervous condition. The services of this man were not such as to insure the safe shipping of the remains, and the casket and contents were taken to Dalton where the work was properly done, and I commenced my long and journey homeward."

**FUNERAL IN TABERNACLE.**

"It may be added that every movement of Elder Clawson for the bringing home of his friend's remains was made at the peril of his own life and was undertaken over the protest of well meaning persons in the vicinity. The corpse arrived in Salt Lake City on the first day of August, and two days later the funeral was held from the Tabernacle, 10,000 persons being in attendance. Eight months later Mr. Clawson returned to Georgia as a witness against three of the mobbers, Jasper N. Nations, Andrew Bradley and Hugh Blain, who had been indicted for murder in the first degree, but whose trial was more or less of a farce, and the acquittal of all followed. The names of the other assassins were David D. Nations, A. S. Smith, David Smith, Benjamin Clark, William Nations, Andrew Bradley, James Faucett, Joseph Nations and Jefferson Hunter."

**PICTURES OF SCENE.**

The pictures of the scenes of the tragedy which accompany this interview were taken a few weeks ago. The figures shown in the photographs at President Ben. E. Rich of the Southern States mission (light suit and Panama hat) Elder George Albert Smith (straw hat and dark suit) and the clerk of the court at the time of the alleged trial of the assassins.

the community. Threats had been made against missionaries from Utah and anybody that would harbor them, and after a little rest and the partaking of refreshments, we decided to walk to the home of Henry Holston, a non-member of the Church, whose name has been suggested as one who would probably entertain us.

**DREAM FULFILLED.**  
"The reluctance of the family first mentioned to furnish hospitality was in exact fulfillment of a dream had some time previously by Elder Standing and related weeks before to me and to others.

"He dreamed, he said, that he went to Varnell's and there clouds of impenetrable darkness descended over and around him. A family visited manifested great alarm and feared to befriend him, and in the midst of the dark and forbidding circumstances he awoke. As he walked that night through the murky woods on his way to Henry Holston's, did Elder Standing remember his dream? Doubtless such was the case, for I, who trudged by his side, did, and my mind was impressed with the thought that the dream was beginning to be verily fulfilled.

"When we reached the Holston

stay beneath my roof. I'll shoot him down like a dog."

**TOOK PRECAUTIONS.**

"Before retiring, Brother Standing securely locked the door and fastened the windows, afterwards placing a heavy iron poker beneath his pillow, precautions that I thought entirely unnecessary. But then, I had never encountered a mob, while my companion had, and he even thus early sensed the danger that was lurking near. Next morning we went to the home of our Mormon friends, where we had the evening before left our grips, and securing them, we started on our return to Mr. Holston's. It was a beautiful Sabbath morning, and all was quiet and peaceful in the woodland through which we passed.

"Suddenly, at a bend in the road, we came face to face with a dozen armed men, some afoot, but most of them on horse. They knew at once who we were, and waving their hats exultantly gave vent to uproarious yells. Approaching us, the leader said: 'We place you under arrest.' Elder Standing asked by what authority we were thus molested upon the public highway, told him we were law-abiding citizens, and asked that we be permitted to go on our way.

**"NO LAW FOR MORMONS."**

"The United States is against you,

tirely satisfactory to our captors. With me it was different; I believed that we were going to our death, and I felt in no hurry to hasten the event. A man walking behind me struck me a violent blow in the back of the head with his clenched fist, and I went face downward to the ground. Upon arising, I saw that he was a young person and physically inferior to myself, and I felt chagrined that I had to suffer in silence the indignity. The withering look that I gave him, however, caused him to attempt to use a club over my head, but his arm was caught by a fellow mobber, and I was spared the blow.

**TRIED REASON.**

"As we went along, Elder Standing endeavored to reason with the men, telling them that we were only sojourning a short time in the vicinity on our way to another county, and begged that we be allowed to depart in peace, but they were deaf to all entreaties. My companion was seized with a burning thirst, and asked to be taken to where there was water, a thing that did not enter my head in the stress of conditions surrounding us. I have since pondered the circumstance seriously, and my conclusion is that he was suffering against mortem throes of death. Men wondered on the battlefield crave for water more than all else, and Joseph Stand-

whom we knew, and who, as I afterwards learned, had been sent by her mother to warn us that the mob was scouring the forest in search of us. I feared that she would be subjected to indignity, if not violence, and I was determined that if such attempt were made I would defend her at the peril of my life. With the remark, 'We have your brethren, and we will tend to your case later on,' they permitted her to pass alone. Shortly afterwards we met an old man, riding a skeleton of a horse, and accosting him, one of the mobbers asked, 'Is there anything the matter with your animal, if so these Mormon elders will curse him by the laying on of hands?' The man, one Jonathan Owensby, passed on, and it was mostly due to him that the exact personnel of the mobster party was subsequently ascertained.

**DRANK AT SPRING.**

"Arriving at a spring, beneath a shady tree, a halt was made and we all sat around in a circle. Elder Standing seemed to have lost his inclination for a drink, and it was only after being told several times that he would not be molested that he finally lowered himself to the water. He drank and drank until I thought he would never get through, and then resumed his place in the circle. An hour was passed in parleying, when three of the

back, with his arms outstretched, exactly in the shape of a cross.

**IN DEADLY PERIL.**

"Shoot that man," shouted the leader, pointing towards me and immediately every weapon was leveled directly at me, and folding my arms I said 'shoot.' I thought that the end of my life had surely come and my sight became oblivious to everything about. This sensation lasted for a number of seconds, though it seemed much longer, when I heard the counter-command from the leader, 'don't shoot.'

**LEADER WEAKENS.**

"I stepped over to where my companion lay, saw the gaping hole in the lower part of the forehead, from which the brain was oozing, and heard the death rattle in his throat. He was already unconscious. I raised his head and placed his hat under it. The leader approached me and said, 'This is terrible, terrible!' I said, 'Yes, it is terrible.' He then repeated, 'It is too bad that he shot himself, isn't it?' a sentiment that I in no wise coincided with, though I gave no voice to my dissent. I repeatedly begged the leader said, 'you go.' I stood not upon the order of going, but went. The first 40 rods was a clearing, in full view of the men at the scene of the

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