

The Many Faces of Ned Reddy By Cecile Page Vargo

At 4 p.m. in the afternoon on April 11, 1901, Captain Edward A. Reddy took his last breath, succumbing to the affects of a stroke which had left him in paralysis since July of the previous year. The much loved, Captain was touted in the obituaries of the San Francisco papers as being "genial, kindly and generous to a fault, always ready to assist a friend at whatever sacrifice of his own time or money." Captain Reddy earned his title in 1884 when he was appointed captain of the guard at the San Quentin State Prison, by Warden General McComb. Captain Reddy worked in this capacity until 1891, when he went on to pursue other interests. By 1905, the Board of Health selected by California Governor Budd, appointed Reddy to the position of superintendent of the Almahouse. Under his direction, this institution was completely free of flaw or scandal. Captain Reddy was survived by two children from a previous marriage, and his current wife, Mrs. Carrie Reddy. Mrs. Reddy served as matron at the Almahouse during her husband's term as superintendent. Thousands of Californians would mourn Captain Reddy's death.

Edward A. Reddy was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, to Irish immigrants. At age 16 years old he followed his older brother Patrick to the California and Nevada mining camps. Pat started out in the Sonora mines but would soon find himself in Aurora during its boundary dispute between the two states, taking advantage of the situation collecting unpaid Mono County warrants and declaring lawsuit against the Mono County treasurer. Pat lost his case, but would later find his forte' in criminal law. Edward, now known as Ned, wound up in Virginia City to try his hand at mining. When Pat went to Virginia City to look up his brother Ned, he got in an altercation during a card game and wound up with one arm when it was all said and done.

Pat Reddy had earned a reputation as the "terror of Aurora" in 1863 when he was there, but would go on to study law and earn his title as the one armed criminal lawyer. Ned would follow Pat wherever he went, staking out mining interests for the two of them. He would establish relationships in the boomtowns as respected saloon keeper and fearless gunfighter. Over the years, Ned Reddy would move to Virginia City, Cerro Gordo, Columbus, Panamint, Darwin, and Bodie, checking out gambling and saloon opportunities while he kept on the lookout for criminals in need of the legal services of his brother, Pat.

Between the two of them, the Reddy brothers obtained interests in many of the mines by staking claims, registering with County Recorder, and providing just enough work for the required assessments. Pat would also buy up already patented claims from others, then with his brother Ned, they would buy shares of stocks in the incorporated mines and properties. In essence they were jumping claims, and receiving interests in it in exchange for Pat's legal services. By 1875 Pat was frequenting tax sales of delinquent mining claims and gained interests in at least eighteen mines in Cerro Gordo, including the San Felipe, Guadalupe, Belmont, and the Union. It has been said by some, the gunfighting prowess of the Reddy boys may have played a part in their success in obtaining claim rights.

It was in Cerro Gordo, on Christmas Day, 1870, that Ned Reddy sealed his reputation as gunfighter. According to an article that appeared in the January 14, 1871 Inyo Independent, Ned Reddy stepped in to keep the peace between James Cock and Mart Sullivan at the saloon owned by John Hughes. The two men fought, with the crowd taking sides both encouraging and discouraging the fracas. Ned got into a clinch with Tom Dunn and knocked him to the ground near the billiard table. As Ned turned his back and went towards the water barrel, Dunn pulled a gun and shouted "Clear the road! Fair play!" A shout, "Look out Reddy!" and Ned quickly turned to shoot Dunn through the right breast. Ned surrendered himself to the Deputy Sheriff Joseph Duignan, later to be acquitted by Justice Moore at the inquest.

Ned was involved in a few other incidents, details of which are clouded by hazy reporting of local papers of the time. In Bill O'Neal's "Encyclopedia of Gunfighters" documented gunfights and confirmed skills of gunfighters are tabled, with Ned Reddy's six incidents over his life time earning him a place in the same ranks with Doc Holiday, Pat Garret and Luke Short, and ahead of Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Jesse James, John Ringo and the Sundance Kid.

Being quick on the draw in touchy situations and staking out mining interests for his lawyer brother was just one aspect to Captain Edward "Ned" Reddy's early history. He owned at least three saloons in the southern mining camps, where gambling and drinks could be had in the finest ambience of the day. His saloon in Cerro Gordo was known simply as Ned Reddy's Saloon. In Panamint City he was touted for his hard reputation, as owner of the most elegant Independent Saloon. When Darwin started to boom, his Capital Saloon was the first frame building built. John Wilson, who sold the Reddy boys the Defiance Mine, was Ned's partner in the business. Even in Bodie, following some time investigating mining opportunities in Tombstone and the Arizona Territory, 1882 newspapers show Ned Reddy as one-half owner of the Parole Saloon.

Throughout his life, Ned Reddy had his eye on politics and the law, much as his brother did. True to form, when Pat Reddy arrived back in Bodie in April 1879 to establish residence with his wife, Ned was there a month ahead of him with “kid gloves and carriages for the next prospecting outfit, if you please” according to P.A. Chalfant. While Pat worked on law cases for the bad men of Bodie and made the rounds of its saloons swapping drinks and tall stories, Ned found himself nominated by Democrats for the sheriff of Mono County. As candidate he was chosen for Grand Marshal in a Democratic campaign of 1880.”In the probably event of his election, there will be no foolishness among the roughs while Ned is around,” the Inyo Independent reported. Ned, like all Democrats, that year, lost to the Republicans in spite of endorsement by local papers.

Ned Reddy was definitely a man who had many faces and wore many hats, from 1844 when it is estimated he was born, till his death in 1901. At one point he was offered the position of Postmaster of Darwin, but turned it down without giving reason. He was quick to try his hand at musical skills, however, when the need arose for a brass band in Darwin. T.S. Harris of the Coso Mining News headed the six man ensemble with Constable Billy Welch on the horn, and Ned on the tuba. Instruments were ordered and instructor hired to teach them all how to play. The Independent news paper declared, “ we have no doubt some if not all of them will succeed.” The Darwin Brass Band did indeed succeed in it’s musical endeavors, just in time to sponsor the Independence Day Grand Ball, which was described as the “finest affair of its kind” passing with “ no accidents or serious disturbances of any kind worth mentioning.”

Ned Reddy and his brother Pat are forever immortalized in history. In Bodie, the Pat Reddy residence still stands today. In Cerro Gordo, the home of the first chapel in the towns history was formerly known as Ned Reddy’s garage, and stories of the brothers are told over the saloon in the restored American Hotel. A street sign in Darwin is still proclaimed Reddy Street. Much as they followed each other back and forth from each of the mining towns to another, the brothers followed each other within less than a year to the grave, with Pat Reddy paving the way. Ned’s fearless reputation was earned up and down the rough and rugged mining towns serving him well until his death as Captain Edward A. Reddy of San Quentin and the Almahouse.