

THE CASE OF WILL C. BARNES'S MISSING BROTHER

A Historical Footnote

HISTORIANS ARE WELL ADVISED to question commonly held assumptions. The editors of *The Journal of Arizona History* were recently reminded of this fact when we received a letter from David K. Martin of Phoenix. Mr. Martin, a grandnephew of Will C. Barnes, noticed a misstatement in Kathleen L. Howard's article, "Benham, Barnes, Brizard and The Curio," in the spring 2001 issue of the journal. "I thoroughly enjoyed the above named article by Ms Howard and was happy to find additional information on the life of my great uncle Will C. Barnes," he explained. "Uncle Will' became part of our family when he married Edith Talbot, my paternal grandmother Miriam Talbot's older sister, in 1897. However the article did contain one error that should be noted.

"Will C. Barnes was not an only child as stated. He had a younger brother, Thomas F. There are at least two articles in early day newspapers (*Arizona Republican*, April 19, 1892, and the *Phoenix Herald*, April 30, 1897) that mention their relationship. Such information can be further verified in the Probate Records of Storey County, Nevada, after the untimely, unexpected and, unfortunately, intestate death of his father September 23, 1863, on a business trip to San Francisco. While I have not been able to look at the birth certificates for the Barnes boys, it seems to be an accepted fact that Will was born June 21, 1858 in San Francisco while Thomas, according to the federal census records I have reviewed, was born June 1860, in Indiana. Probably in LaPorte where his grandparents Croft were living at the time.

"Perhaps I am making too much of Uncle Will being listed as an only child in the article but I still vividly remember the

homework 8th grade assignment I had been given to write about someone who had lived in Arizona during the 'pioneer days.' I chose to write about Uncle Will having been awarded the Medal of Honor and to spice the story up a bit I added that he had fought his way through hordes of Apaches while crossing the river. When I showed my literary efforts to my father, he handed it back with the comment, 'David, part of this story isn't true. When you write history, make sure all of it is true. If they aren't, you are writing fiction.'

Mr. Martin's letter and kind offer to share the information he has gathered on the Barnes/Croft families opened a rewarding correspondence, at the same time that it sent us scurrying to the archives. With Mr. Martin's help, we learned that Thomas Finley Barnes was born on June 24, 1860, in Indiana, and died on January 21, 1944, at age eighty-three, in Los Angeles. In 1888 he was a partner in Kingsley & Barnes, in 1900 he was an oil broker, and by 1920 he was a department manager in a paper-box factory. Thomas Barnes married Florence Heriot McDonald and the couple had one child, Ethel Mary. Phoenix newspapers noted Tom Barnes's presence at his brother's wedding to Edith Talbot in 1897 and listed him as a surviving relative when Will died in 1936.

The question next arose, "Why doesn't Will Barnes mention a brother in his autobiography, *Apaches & Longhorns*, published by the Ward Richie Press in 1941 and reprinted by the University of Arizona Press in 1982?" The answer appears to lay in an unintentional oversight on the part of Frank C. Lockwood, who edited the autobiography for publication, and a lack of careful attention by subsequent historians. In his introduction to the 1941 edition, Lockwood—an English professor at the University of Arizona—enthused that "I undertake the editing of this volume as a labor of love and, also, as a service to the State of Arizona, to which I acknowledge a deep devotion, as did also the writer of these memoirs." He went on to explain how "during his later years Will Barnes spent much time in the preparation of his autobiography, writing down with racy and graphic detail the more exciting and worthwhile incidents of his remarkable life. Indeed, the record was so full and extended that it has seemed to Mrs. Barnes and me that it would gain in unity and would appear to better advantage in book form if limited to an account of the author's Arizona

experiences." Lockwood, therefore, omitted the first 172 pages of the manuscript autobiography, in which Barnes describes his youth and young manhood, that includes references to his younger brother, Tom. Lockwood mentions only that after the death of his father, Enos Rollin Barnes, in 1863, Will "and his widowed mother went to make their home at LaPorte, Indiana, with his grandfather Croft," leaving the reader to assume that Will was an only child. In fact, Will and Tom lived with their mother in Indiana, and for awhile on their uncle's farm in Minnesota, until Tom struck out on his own in December of 1876.

Paul J. Scheips, in his brief biography, *Will Croft Barnes: A Westerner of Parts* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Corral of the Westerners, 1981), acknowledges the manuscript copy of Barnes's reminiscences in the Will C. Barnes Collection at the Arizona Historical Society and explains that "a comparison of Lockwood's published version . . . with the original manuscript, made for the present author by Thomas C. Barnes, indicates a high degree of conformance between the two." Scheips apparently refers only to the portions of the reminiscence that Lockwood actually used in *Apaches & Longhorns*. In the same note, Scheips describes Thomas F. Barnes as "a brother with whom Will evidently did not get along." Tom is not mentioned in the text, however. In reprinting *Apaches & Longhorns*, the University of Arizona Press replaced Lockwood's introduction with Scheips's brief biography, but deleted Scheips's footnotes, again leaving the impression that Will Barnes was an only child.

Although we have no evidence that Tom and his older sibling "did not get along," it is easy to imagine how Tom faded into the shadow cast by his colorful and famous brother. Mr. Martin acknowledges that even he might not have known about Uncle Tom if he had not met him at Will Barnes's funeral in 1936. He also provides a priceless glimpse of his Uncle Will through a youngster's eyes. "I was luckily seated next to Uncle Will at the family Sunday night dinners at my Grandmother Martin's home for the 4 years or so after Uncle Will retired in Washington, D.C. and they returned to make their home at Grandma's," he writes. "I can't remember Uncle Will ever mentioning any member of his family. In fact, I can't remember him ever talking about anything or anyone other than himself. Most of that was about his life as a

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cattlemen or his life in the army. And what better conversation for a 5 to 8 year old boy than to listen about cowboys and Indians. Although from time to time (when chopped spinach was on the dinner menu) he would suggest that he and I run away, with my parents' and his wife's permission, naturally, and become cattlemen where we could have good things to eat like fried rattlesnake brains and calf eye balls and any part of a bear that we could bite off." He sounds like the kind of great uncle any young boy would give his eyeteeth to have around.

Although we still know comparatively little about Tom Barnes, we can at least set the record straight and alert future historians that Will C. Barnes did indeed have a younger brother. And, the editors of *The Journal of Arizona History* have had the pleasure of corresponding with David Martin, who takes history as seriously as we all should. "If Will and John Benham hadn't been pointed out as each being an only child in 'The Curio' in the *Journal*, I don't know if I would [have] decided to try and help when you mentioned you felt the next step was to try and [find out] when and where Tom died," he explains. "That they were brothers seemed to be apparent from the evidence that I sent you. And if they were brothers from the moment Tom was born, what did his date and place of death have to do with that? And then it dawned on me; that is what historians like to do, gather all the information." We couldn't agree more. We hope that this brief story encourages researchers to dig deep for the facts and take nothing for granted.