

Reviews

Season of Terror: The Espinosas in Central Colorado, March-October 1863

By Charles F. Price

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Reviewed by Forrest Whitman

A new book about an old terrorist threat is getting a lot of press in Central Colorado lately. Felipe and Vivian Espinosa, and later their nephew Jose Vicente, terrorized Colorado in 1863 (some would extend that threat into 1864). By some accounts they hoped to lead a revolt against the U.S. Government at a time when the U.S. was gradually taking control of New Mexico and Southern Colorado. By some accounts they killed upwards of forty people, all innocent Anglos. They themselves boasted that the kill was 42 Anglos, but other authorities point to 32. At least one of the murdered was of Salida interest. The victim, Henry Harkins, has descendants who knew Harkins well.

The Espinosa stories go on and on. Colonel Inman's famous book "The Old Spanish Trail" has the Espinosas leading a minor revolt. He cites no less an authority than the old tale teller Dick Wootton on that point. There have even been accounts told about the heads of the Espinosas being preserved in alcohol in the basement of the state capitol in Den-

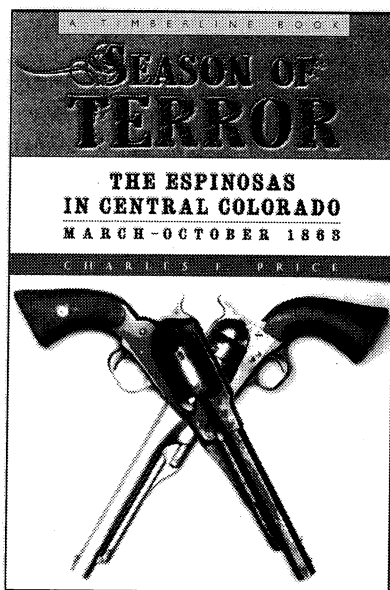
ver. At least a dozen different stories depict Tom Tobin bringing the severed heads of the two brothers to Colonel Tappan and throwing them on the dance floor during a reception. Charles Price sets out to research all of these many stories and find out something of the truth. He does a good job.

One misunderstanding has long been about exactly when the terrorist outbreak happened. A generally reliable source is the James Perkins book "Tom Tobin." Tobin is the man who eventually managed to track and kill Felipe, after the U. S. Army killed Vivian. Perkins dates the outbreak of the Espinosa rampage in the spring of 1863, but carries it on into the spring of 1864. This new Price book convincingly refutes that

claim. He is sure the killings started in March of 1863, but were done by October. He verifies this in a good many ways and is pretty convincing on the point that Tom Tobin killed Felipe in the fall, probably October. That's why Price calls his chronicle *Season of Terror: March - October 1863*. Price also sets a fairly low number of Anglos actually killed. He thinks it's not over ten or twelve. While this reviewer is something of a Colorado history buff, I'm not ready to weigh in on the historical minutiae. Price does a convincing job on the many points in dispute and has obviously been careful in his research.

Of more interest to the general reader will be Price's "big picture" account of the period. He points

out with clarity just why the Mexican population felt so angry and disenfranchised following the "Mexican War." They woke up one morning to learn they were now expected to apply for U. S. citizenship. They saw themselves regularly referred to as "greasers" in the press of the time. Their religion was disparaged. They



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