

# Photo of the Month

Fred Hill, Siloam Springs Marshal



Fred Hill, City Marshal and Deputy U.S. Marshal  
Siloam Springs, Arkansas  
1903

Courtesy Siloam Springs Museum

The 1903 Benton County Atlas featured a photograph of Fred Hill, which is shown at right, among other notable individuals of our area. His biographical sketch, included in that publication, indicated that he was born in 1871 in Dallas County, Missouri and that the Hill family moved to Benton County in 1873. In 1899, at the age of 28, Fred Hill was elected to the post of Siloam Springs City Marshal.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Siloam Springs, which is situated on the southwestern boundary of Benton County, saw its fair share of frontier crime. Benton County then bordered the Indian Territory, which was established in the 1830s as a home to the Indian nations removed from their

southeastern homelands. This large area, though, created a jurisdiction problem since the self-governing Indians were responsible for policing their own crimes, but a federal court handled crimes between whites and Indians and also sought to bring to justice fugitives hiding in the nations.

This situation created a fluid boundary for many communities as villains traveled freely between the two areas. By the 1890s, much of the Indian nations were opened to white settlement and Oklahoma was becoming a territory of the United States. This transitional period only seemed to heighten the conflicts between Indians and whites and further attract outlaws. For a peace officer during this time and in this place, upholding law and order was challenging.

It became a common practice for local law officers to hold dual appointments as federal officers. Fred Hill represents one such distinguished officer of the law that served the public in two roles. While maintaining the peace in the border community of Siloam Springs as City Marshal, by 1902 Marshal Hill also held a post as an Assistant Deputy U.S. Marshal. This arrangement allowed officers, such as Hill, to have authority to pursue criminals beyond the jurisdiction of their communities. In a practical sense, it also increased the often meager salaries paid to lawmen.

There are two stories of Marshal Hill's exploits that illustrate the nature of upholding law and order during this time. The first news article appeared in the papers as follows:

"A Siloam Springs dispatch announces that Don Beck was killed Friday at Maysville, this county, just west of Gravette, a few miles from the Territory line. The dispatch says: A large posse of officers and citizens pursued Don Beck for several days but he succeeded in eluding them in spite of the fact that a reward of \$350 had been offered for his capture, dead or alive. Marshal Hill, who is also assistant deputy United States marshal under the regular deputy, James Daniel, went to Maysville Friday and captured a whiskey peddler. Late in the afternoon Hill got word that Beck was at the distillery in the outskirts of town. Hastily summoning a posse he had the distillery surrounded. As soon as the men approached the building Beck ran out, mounted his horse and dashed away. Instead of halting at the command he drew his pistol and opened fire. A volley of shots rang out and Beck and his horse fell to the ground in a heap. The desperado was shot through the head with three Winchester bullets." (Rogers Democrat, February 14, 1901)

The second story highlights Hill's role as a town police officer:

"Wiley Barnes, whose home is near Southwest City, Missouri, in the Territory, was arrested last night at the home of Will Randolph in the west part of town by Marshal Fred Hill. Barnes is charged with the murder of Isaac Christman near Southwest City in July 1904 and has been scouting for some time, evading the officers. He owns a farm where he resides, having married an Indian. The murderer was committed by U.S. Commissioner J.A. Petty to the city bastille and on Monday next will be given a preliminary hearing before that official." (Benton County Democrat, August 31, 1905)

On March 24, 1906, Fred Hill took his second oath as a Deputy Marshal. Without a doubt, the individuals who chose to serve in this way were special people. They faced risks in order to maintain the peace for the people of their communities. Fred Hill exemplifies this character and his experiences illustrate the challenges faced in policing border communities during a time of great national change.