

# Suspect List

## for the Murder of John Rains

### Suspect #1—Widow Merced Rains

John Rains' widow Merced was believed by some to have had a hand in the murder. Suspicion fell on Merced because Rain's guns were missing the morning of the murder and because Merced failed to notify authorities when the horses returned to the ranch without him.

A few weeks after the attack, a posse of vigilantes showed up at Uncle Billy Rubottom's tavern, now the Sycamore Inn in Rancho Cucamonga, looking for justice.

Horace Bell in *The Old West Coast* quoted Uncle Billy Rubottom as saying "One afternoon Eli Smith dropped by my place; in a little while George Dyche came in, then another and another, all of whom I recognized as personal friends of the rancho. About a dozen of them, all armed to the teeth. They ordered supper. I listened around until I gathered that they had assembled for the purpose of hanging the suspected widow [Merced]. I made up my mind that it wouldn't happen."

Rubottom pulled out a double-barreled shotgun, took their guns and ordered them on their way.

Merced, mourning her husband, pregnant with her fifth child, and overwhelmed by the tremendous debts her husband had run up was unaware of how close she had come to being murdered herself.



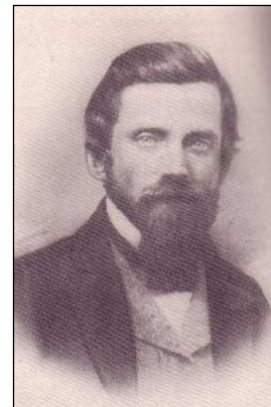
Merced Rains,  
1839-1907

### Suspect #2—Brother-in-Law Robert Carlisle

In 1864, Merced's brother-in-law Robert Carlisle obtained power of attorney from her giving him control of all the property. Some pointed to Carlisle as involved in the Rains murder in some way, perhaps hiring the killers.

Suspiciously, on the day that John Rains was killed, Robert Carlisle was supposed to have been sworn in as a newly elected member of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. However, according to the board minutes of November 17, 1862, he did not attend the meeting. No clues as to his whereabouts turned up.

Moreover, Judge Benjamin Hayes wrote that the fact that Ezra Drown and Jonathan Scott went to a party at Carlisle's on November 26—just nine days after the Rains murder—deserves scrutiny. It is difficult to explain why a party would be planned while the body of a murdered brother-in-law was yet to be located.



Robert Carlisle,  
1830-1865

### Suspect #3—Ranch Employee Cuervo Reyes

Cuervo Reyes, a ranch employee fell under scrutiny because of his suspicious conduct: he was absent from the house all the morning of the murder and did not return until about the time Rains left.

Also on the household staff was an Indian boy named Juan, whom Robert Carlisle had recently lashed. Juan confessed that he had stolen Rains' pistols and given them to his brother at Temecula. Later he claimed that he had no brother at Temecula.

#### **Suspect #4—Alleged Hit Man Manuel Cerradel**

Manuel Cerradel was arrested and, while in jail, fell ill with small-pox. Perhaps, because he was expecting to die, he confessed and claimed that he and three others—Tal Eugenio, Procopio Bustamante, and Jesus Astares—were paid \$500 by Ramon Carrillo, another ranchero and political opponent, to kill Rains.

In November 1863, Cerradel was convicted, not of the murder of John Rains, but of the assault to commit murder on the deputy sheriff who had arrested him. In the harbor on his way to a steamer that was to transport him to prison, a group of vigilantes, indignant at the light sentence imposed, seized Cerradel and hung him from the flagstaff. Stones, brought aboard in packages by the vigilantes were then tied to his feet, and his corpse was thrown overboard.

#### **Suspect #5—Bandit Tomas Procopio Bustamante**

Tomas Procopio Bustamante, one of California's best-known bandits, was arrested for Rains' murder, but released due to the lack of evidence. He then fled north and continued his life of crime. Procopio was implicated in the 1863 murder of the Aaron Golding family in Calaveras County, of teaming up with notorious outlaw Tiburcio Vasquez, and cleverly escaping a lynching in Bakersfield after his capture near Tejon Pass in 1877.

#### **Suspect #6—Former Indian Agent Cave Coutts**

Cave Coutts was a West Point graduate who had married Ysidora Bandini, daughter of Juan Bandini, a prominent San Diego citizen. Coutts later purchased the San Marcos, Buena Vista, and La Jolla ranches, as well as government land, amounting in all to about 20,000 acres.

Captain H.S. Burton wrote in 1856 that, "It is generally believed that Cave J. Coutts, Esq. Indian sub-agent, whipped to death two Indians." Because of that incident, Coutts was relieved of his appointment as sub-agent for the San Luis Rey Indians and replaced by John Rains. Coutts may have sought revenge.



Cave Coutts,  
1821-1874

#### **Suspect #7—Fired Ranch Employee Ramon Carrillo**

Ranch employee Ramon Carrillo and John Rains reportedly had "high words" before the murder, and Rains insultingly discharged Carrillo from his job.

Ramon Carrillo was actually arrested for the murder, tried, and found innocent. Judge Benjamin Hayes strongly believed in Ramon Carrillo's innocence. He wrote, "The most terrible suspicion is that against Don Ramon Carrillo, and it shows how dangerously suspicion may work."

That same year, while riding near Cucamonga Station with a companion, Ramon Carrillo was shot to death from ambush, perhaps another echo of the Rains murder.

## **Whodunnit?**