

CHAS. S. KERBER, SHERIFF DURING THE SALT WAR, DIES AT YSLETA

**Was a Soldier of Fortune, a
Jurist and a Peace Officer
One of El Paso County's
First American Citizens.**

Capt. Charles S. Kerber, one of the picturesque characters of El Paso county's early history, is dead at his home in Ysleta, death supposedly being caused by heart failure.

Soldier of fortune, captain of volunteers during the civil war, sheriff during the early days, justice of the peace, and school teacher, captain Kerber was a maker of history. He has been called the hero of the Howard salt riots and the Ysleta riots, for it was his work that suppressed these bitter feuds.

Since his relinquishment of the office of justice at Ysleta about six years ago, he had lived in retirement on his ranch just west of the town. It was his daily custom to drive over to town for the mail, and this he continued even to the day he died. During the past month his health had been poor, but not so as to prevent him being up and around.

Last evening about 6:30 o'clock he was sitting on the porch with Mrs. Kerber after the evening meal, when he complained of feeling badly. As he spoke the words, he pitched forward onto the floor and before Mrs. Kerber could raise his head, he was dead.

Born in Germany.

Capt. Kerber was born in Germany about 73 years ago. He served his enlistment in the Germany army, and upon his expiration, emigrated to this country at the time that such adventurous spirits as Schutz and Sigel were coming here in search of fortune and adventure, having already seen the war cloud hanging like a pall over America.

This was in the year 1854, Kerber enlisted at once as a private in the United States regular army and saw service on the plains, but when the bloody conflict of '61 broke out he raised a company of volunteers and fought under the union banner as captain. It is said that his company was a part of a Colorado regiment, but the claim is also made that he fought in an eastern regiment. His record during the war was a conspicuous one, and at its close he was breveted a colonel.

School Teacher and Sheriff.

It is at this point that his history becomes so intimately entwined with that of this county. After a year or more of wandering, he appeared in Ysleta and began to teach the public school. The teacher of that day had trials to contend with that would try the stoutest heart, for many of the pupils were full grown men, some with beards, who made it a point to go after the teacher's "nanny." But Capt. Ker-

ber got away with his teaching job so well that in 1878 he was elected sheriff of the county, the county seat then being located in Ysleta; the courthouse being the same building which is used today as a public school.

In the Salt Wars.

Capt. Kerber was sheriff when the Cardis-Howard salt riots broke out. These riots are oft repeated history, the trouble arising over the order of Charles Howard directing the Mexicans to stop gathering salt from the salt fields northeast of San Elizario. The Mexicans had made their livelihood from these salt beds, and resented Howard's order and a reign of terror followed, which resulted in many deaths.

Both Cardis and Howard were killed as well as many of the Mexicans, while for a time the law was powerless to check the carnage. Sheriff Kerber, however, swore in a force of deputies, and set out to suppress the riot. At first his efforts were anything but successful, and for days he and his men were surrounded in an old adobe house on the hill at Ysleta by an angry mob too large to control. His men were practically without food, and under a constant fire, but they held the improvised fort, and, once free, soon put down the uprising.

The Ysleta Mayorality Riots.

As a peace officer, Kerber was also called upon to suppress the Ysleta riots which grew out of the mayorality campaign in 1889. I. G. Gaal and Benigno Alderete were the candidates for the office. As the fight waxed hot, the henchmen of the two candidates became excited, and before the mobs could be broken up, blood was shed. It is said that over three hundred men took part in these riots.

Gaal's House Shot Up.

The principal occurrence of these riots was the surrounding of the house of Mr. Gaal by a hundred or more Mexicans, bent on seeking out the opposing candidate. Mr. Gaal had had warning, however, and was not in the house. Mrs. Gaal, her son, Charles, at present connected with the city health department, and a Mexican, were in the house, hidden. The Mexican walked out onto the porch when the firing commenced, and raised his hand in token of a truce. In an instant a dozen bullets were shot into his body and he fell dead. The house was shot up, and finally an entrance forced and the house searched.

Was County Judge.

When Capt. Kerber retired from the sheriff's office, he served for a time as county judge and later became justice of the peace, holding that office for years. He was also a trustee of the school of Ysleta, and is said by some people to have served a term in the state legislature. Capt. Kerber took a lively interest in the affairs of the county and was one of the best posted men on its history.