

## A PIONEER STORY

### THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF DOCTOR J. M. WHITLOCK IN 1868 AT FORT SUMNER, NEW MEXICO

**JOHN MARRIAGE** — WHITLOCK, D.D., was a native of Kentucky and immigrated to New Mexico in the early 40s. He settled in Las Vegas, married Mrs. Josefa Lucero of San Miguel County and moved to Agua Negra valley.

When the Civil War broke out, he enlisted as a surgeon for the First New Mexico Volunteers—Colonel Christopher ("Kit") Carson commanding—serving until the close of the war, then taking up the practice of his profession in Las Vegas.

For a short time during the year 1862 his family lived in Albuquerque. He had two children at that time, John M. Whitlock and Josefa Whitlock Robinson, both since deceased. The Rev. J. H. Whitlock, Jr., a resident of New Mexico all his life, was educated in Kentucky and took up the ministry as a profession, serving as missionary within the Presbyterian Church in New Mexico for about thirty-five years. Josefa, the daughter, married John Robinson, later sheriff of Mora County. Shortly after Dr. Whitlock was killed, Mrs. Whitlock was remarried to Mr. James W. Holman, who was associated in business with Dr. Whitlock at the time of the latter's death. Mrs. Whitlock died at Agua Negra in 1891.

The killing of Dr. Whitlock was the result of a dispute between him and the captain of a company of Regulars while taking about five thousand Navajo Indians from Fort Defiance to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, in 1868. It seems that on a certain occasion the captain came into camp with a Navajo baby impaled on the bayonet of his rifle and playing with the body of the child as though it were an animal. Doctor Whitlock saw him and called his attention to what he called an outrage and that no gentleman, especially a soldier

REF 43  
1/2

same time perhaps calling the captain a harsher name than we wish to repeat. Whereupon the captain said, "If you don't like that back you will have to fight a duel with me." To which Whitlock replied, "Alright, go and get your pistol and we will shoot it out. I will not swallow my words or apologize to you." In a short while the captain appeared at the doctor's tent and called him out. Whitlock, pistol in hand, came out and both, without further ado, fired almost simultaneously. The captain fell, apparently shot through the heart. Whitlock went back into his tent.

In the meantime, the alarm was given to the captain's company. A lieutenant, whose name I do not now recall, mobilized the company and announced that their captain had been shot to death by Doctor Whitlock. Immediately, without any investigation, the lieutenant headed his company towards the doctor's tent and without any trial ordered his soldiers to fire then and there, shooting the doctor to pieces. He is buried right where he fell, as it was impossible to move the body. No investigation of this cruel murder was made by the War Department and no one was ever punished for the awful deed.

The Reverend John M. Whitlock, at the time of his father's death, was a lad of about fifteen or sixteen years of age going to school in Kentucky. Doctor Whitlock was a descendant of the well-known families, the Pendletons, Marmadukes, Whitlocks and Morgans of Virginia and Kentucky.

At the time of the herein mentioned tragedy, the government had celebrated a treaty with the Navajo Indians to be found around the western part of New Mexico and eastern Arizona. The reason given for their removal to Fort Sumner, where they were held for only a short time, was that they were making forays on the people of New Mexico and had almost ruined the stock industry which was small in those days. Furthermore, a quasi guerrilla warfare had been going on for several years between the Navajo Indians and the native people of northern New Mexico, provoked by the Indians making raids on the villages in western

and northern New Mexico, campaigns were started by some daring spirits in New Mexico against the Indians, these taking young Indians as captives and selling them to well-to-do families in New Mexico. This, the government ordered to be stopped, and in or about 1870 or 1872-3, a great many Indians were ordered returned to their families in the Navajo Country. Those that had been reared from childhood and couldn't be identified by their Indian relatives remained with their Spanish-American parents. They are to be found in New Mexico to this day. At this time, 1868-69, the Navajo Indians were entirely destitute of property except for a few horses. No sheep were to be found. They were living on grass seed which they ground and made into gruel.

This article is written by one of John Marmaduke Whitlock's grand-daughters, Mrs. B. C. Hernandez of Albuquerque, New Mexico.