



When Law Was in the Holster: The Frontier Life of Bob Paul

John Boessenecker

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One of the great lawmen of the Old West, Bob Paul (1830–1901) cast a giant shadow across the frontiers of California and Arizona Territory for nearly fifty years. Today he is remembered mainly for his friendship with Wyatt Earp and his involvement in the stirring events surrounding the famous 1881 gunfight near the OK Corral in Tombstone, Arizona. This long-overdue biography fills crucial gaps in Paul's story and recounts a life of almost constant adventure.

As told by veteran western historian John Boessenecker, this story is more than just a western shoot-'em-up, and it reveals Paul to be far more than a blood-and-thunder gunfighter. Beginning with Paul's boyhood adventures as a whaler in the South Pacific, the author traces his journey to Gold Rush California, where he served respectively as constable, deputy sheriff, and sheriff in Calaveras County, and as Wells Fargo shotgun messenger and detective. Then, in the turbulent 1880s, Paul became sheriff of Pima County, Arizona, and a railroad detective for the Southern Pacific. In 1890 President Benjamin Harrison appointed him U.S. marshal of Arizona Territory.

Transcending local history, Paul's story provides an inside look into the rough-and-tumble world of frontier politics, electoral corruption, Mexican-U.S. relations, border security, vigilantism, and western justice. Moreover, issues that were important in Paul's career—illegal immigration, smuggling on the Mexican border, youth gangs, racial discrimination, ethnic violence, and police-minority relations—are as relevant today as they were during his lifetime.

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