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THE TONGUES THEY SPEAK

BY AARON BAKER

They hanged Mr. Wendell to a tree a way north of Sweetwater on the Cimarron.

The sheriff asked him if there was anything

he would like to say, and Mr. Wendell sat on the horse, looking down at a handful of

lawmen and curious homesteaders and seemed

to be thinking about it—pondering as he gazed toward the deputy of Cloud Chief, who had arrested

him at a singing convention which Mr. Wendell

was leading back there on the Washita. Mr. Wendell, the name the itinerant singing professor

went under, was accused by the deputy of seducing

one of the young ladies with his golden voice and smooth talk. Though that was no capital crime,

the young widow happened to be the girlfriend

of the young deputy sheriff, who stood there coldly smug, waiting impatiently under the elm

to see what the prisoner was going to say.

Mr. Wendell finally spoke: "In this river I was aware of quicksand,

but in my heart there was only singing."



Artwork by Luciano Cerda

And before the puzzled sheriff could drop a hood over the victim's eyes, Mr. Wendell kicked his mount

forward, thus showing his courage and final protest

of innocence—claiming he borrowed horses only from would-be friends, never to steal them.

Of course, there's always talk after an execution.

"A man at the trial said he would have loaned him the last high-stepping, sorrel filly if he had

asked him." And "Here comes a wagon to cut him

down. Let's go!" The wind kicked up a late dust devil across the river, and the sunset was casting

*long shadows on the departing riders. **

(AARON A. BAKER, like many Oklahomans who for one reason or other live in exile, resides in Shreveport, Louisiana. He is a prolific writer and regular contributor to WESTVIEW, his favorite journal, and believes that SOSU offers a helpful service to readers of the unique history and folklore of the great Oklahoma Southwest.) (Editor's note: The preceding compliment wasn't solicited.)