

# BROTHER ALBERT PIKE'S DUEL

by

George L. Marshall, Jr.

"A MAN MAY SHOOT THE MAN WHO INVADES HIS CHARACTER, AS HE MAY SHOOT HIM WHO ATTEMPTS TO BREAK INTO HIS HOUSE."

– SAMUEL JOHNSON

**M**ost Masons are aware of Albert Pike's imposing presence in the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. How he served as Sovereign Grand Commander of the Rite, rewrote its rituals to make them more coherent and to infuse them with a higher order of ancient philosophy and wisdom as it related to Free-



masonry, and produced his *Magnum Opus* which provided the bulk of the text for his *Morals and Dogma*, a book which expanded the lessons contained in the Scottish Rite degrees and introduced literally thousands of Masons to occidental and oriental theosophy and theology as taught by the sages and the various mysteries practiced in ancient Greece, Rome, India, China, and by other societies as well.

Fewer are probably aware that Pike was also a member of the York Rite and was an active participant (at least for a time) in that Rite as well. He was made a Royal Arch Mason in November 1850, a Select Master in December 1852, and a Knight Templar in February 1853. He served as Grand High Priest of Arkan-

sas from November 1853 until November 1855. He was also a Past Illustrious Master of Occidental Council No. 1 of Cryptic Masons in Little Rock, Arkansas and served as Eminent Commander of Hugh de Payens Commandery of Knights Templar in Little Rock. Moreover, he made significant contributions to the York Rite in other capacities, both statewide and nationally, and doubtless was influenced by his York Rite experience when he restructured the Scottish Rite after becoming Sovereign Grand Commander of that Rite.

Quite likely, even fewer know that Pike saw active service in the Mexican-American War and became involved in a duel over an occurrence in that War. This article is the story of that duel.

To begin with, let us briefly review Pike's life. He was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts on December 29, 1809, and was the oldest of six children born to Benjamin and Sarah Andrews Pike. Pike was raised in a Christian home and attended the Episcopal Church. Pike passed the entrance examination at Harvard College when he was 15 years old, but he could not attend because he had no funds. He worked for a time as a teacher in his hometown and educated himself by reading all the books he could get his hands on. However, his hometown had no opportunities for him, and hearing of the opportunities that existed

in the West, he departed in 1831 to seek his fortune. After traveling as far west as Santa Fe, Pike eventually settled in Arkansas where he worked as editor of a newspaper, studied law, was admitted to the bar, and married. In Little Rock, Pike acquired the reputation of being a great orator and a man who fought tenaciously for what he believed was right. His home in Little Rock is shown at right.



In 1845, after the annexation of Texas to the United States, the scent of war was in the air. Pike recruited a company of cavalry, known as Company "E" of Arkansas, which he commanded as captain, and with which he served in Mexico with distinction. He participated in the Battle of Buena Vista on February 23, 1847, in which the Americans were outnumbered 4 to 1, and was cited for bravery in that battle. But he was not satisfied with the behavior of a part of the Arkansas regiment in that battle, and it was this dissatisfaction that ultimately involved him in a duel with a fellow officer.

John Selden Roane, the son of storekeeper and slaveholder Hugh Roane and Hannah (Calhoun) Roane, was born in Lebanon, Tennessee, in January 1817. He was part of a prominent political family, and his uncle Archibald Roane served as governor of Tennessee from 1801 to 1803.

John Roane was educated in a Tennessee common school and later attended Cumberland College in Princeton, Kentucky. Roane moved to Arkansas in 1837 and settled in Pine Bluff where he studied law under his older brother, Samuel Calhoun Roane, a leading jurist and owner of one of Arkansas' largest plantations. With his elder brother's knight templar

influence and patronage, John Roane moved easily and comfortably into the frontier elite.

With the help of his brother, he was elected to several increasingly important local and state offices and was elected ultimately in 1844 as the speaker of the state General Assembly.



John Roane

Roane probably would have run for another term had it not been for the start of the Mexican War. He, like Pike, raised a company of mounted infantry

from Van Buren, Arkansas, and they became part of the First Arkansas Mounted Rifles. Archibald Yell, the state's only sitting U.S. congressional representative, was elected colonel. The men elected Roane lieutenant colonel, and the regiment set off for Mexico. The unit, led by men with almost no military experience, was poorly trained and performed badly at the Battle of Buena Vista, in the course of which Yell was killed. The performance of the regiment became the subject of heated controversy and set Roane and Pike on a collision course.

Coming back from the Mexican War to Little Rock, Pike used the columns of the *Arkansas Gazette* newspaper to inform the populace of Little Rock, in his frank and hearty Pike way, just what he thought of the poor performance of part of the Arkansas regiment which happened to include Roane's men. Pike had blamed Yell (and, by inference, Roane) for the poor training that led to many Arkansans running and some dying. (By the way, both Yell and Roane were Freemasons.)

Roane considered Pike's comments as reflecting on him personally and retaliated with his opinions of Pike, as well as (mistakenly) saying in a newspaper account that Pike's squadron did not fight in the battle at all. A challenge was issued by Roane and was promptly accepted by Pike. The meeting took place early in the morning of July 26, 1847, on a sand bar in the Arkansas River opposite Fort Smith in what is now Oklahoma. Each man was accompanied by a doctor (called a surgeon) and two seconds, as well as a few friends. There were a number of other spectators, but the seconds and surgeons kept these at a safe distance.

Pike's conduct was unusually cool and

unflinching. With his long strands of hair being blown about by the river breezes, he contentedly puffed on a cigar until the command was given to "fire". Both parties stepped forward ten paces, Pike facing upstream and Roane down. The customary nineteenth century dueling weapon was a large caliber single-shot flintlock pistol. The dueling pistols were loaded and placed in their hands. Both men were firm and determined, showing no fear or nervousness. At the word, they turned and fired, but neither was wounded. A second fire was then had with the same result (although some said Pike's beard was touched).

After the second fire, Pike and his surgeon, Dr. James Dibrell, were sitting on a log on the edge of the forest which was next to the sand bar, and Roane's surgeon, Dr. Phillip Burton, approached and beckoned Dr. Dibrell to meet him. Upon meeting, Dr. Burton remarked, "Dibrell, it's a damned shame that these men are to shoot at each other until one or the other is killed or wounded. They have shown themselves to be brave men and would fire all day unless prevented.



The seconds on neither side can interfere, because it would be considered a great disparagement for either to make a proposition for the cessation of hostilities. So, let us, as surgeons, assume the responsibility and say they shall not fire another time; that unless they do as we desire, we will leave the field to them, helpless, however cruel it may be.” Dibrell related this proposition to Pike, who said, “I want one more shot at him and will hit him in a vital part. I believe he has tried to kill me. I have not tried to hit him.” After some reflection, he added, “Do as you think proper about it, but do not by anything compromise my honor.”



After more consultation among the surgeons and seconds, Roane came forward and offered his hand to Pike, who accepted it, and the two shook hands heartily. In a few minutes, they were conversing with the party and with each other as if there had never been the slightest difference between them. Moreover, a bit later after the reconciliation had occurred, all parties returned to Fort Smith for a banquet. Roane and Pike were both very good shots—so that all concerned had expected a funeral instead of a banquet.

Pike and Roane afterward became close friends and companions. Roane went on to become governor of Arkansas in 1849. Due to difficulties with the legislature over financial issues, he chose not to seek reelection in 1852. knight templar

He returned to his plantation in Pine Bluff and never held public office again. Roane, like Pike, served as a Brigadier General in the Confederate army in the Civil War. However, he showed little talent for military service and was not well liked by his superiors or the men he led. After the war, Roane returned to Pine Bluff, where he died on April 8, 1867. He is buried in Oakland Cemetery in Little Rock. His grave is shown at left.

Pike, of course, went on to become Sovereign Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite from 1859-1891. He died on April 2, 1891, at the Scottish Rite Temple in Washington, age 81. Buried first in Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington, by special permission of Congress his remains were later exhumed and re-interred in a crypt at the House of the Temple in Washington as seen in the photo below.



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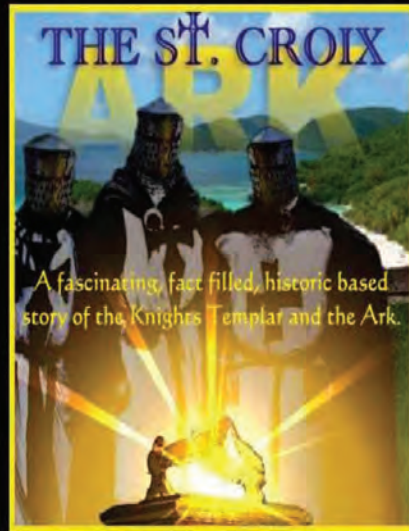


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