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### Introduction to "I Found the Country Greatly Excited': A Civil War Letter by E. E. Lott." *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 17 no. 1 (Summer 1978): 65.

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# "I found the country greatly excited"

FEARS of a slave insurrection were constant during Smith County's experience with slavery, but they were particularly acute in the period from 1860 until the end of the War Between the States. The 1860 census showed that 37% of the county's population was in bondage, a fact which frightened most of the whites, whether they held slaves themselves or not. The state-wide panic in July and August of 1860, which led to the deaths of seven persons in the counties immediately surrounding Smith, and which prompted the creation of twenty-four hour guard duty in Tyler and Starrville, heightened the anxiety.

Eventually, approximately 1,500 Smith County men were recruited for the war, which reduced the home defense to an alarming level, especially when these men took with them most usable firearms. Many slaves did remain faithful to their

masters during the war; some even followed their owners into battle. Still others did not actively revolt but slowed their work with their normal task-masters absent.



E.E.Lott describes here one "insurrection" in March, 1862. In the latter part of 1863, a slave was reported to have murdered his master near Tyler. He was apprehended and burned at the stake in a "gala-day for all the good people of Smith County."

The close of the war brought an end to slavery but did not bring an end to the fear of an uprising. Kate Stone reported in the summer of 1865 that it was not uncommon to "hear of a Negro shot down and lying unburied in the woods."

Racial problems would intensify during Radical Reconstruction.

Starrville March 21th/62

Hon O. M. Roberts

Dear Sir I Returned home day before yestaday found the country greatly excited from a supposed insurrection amoung the negroes they have executed one and have some forty or fifty now in prision I doubt not but such thing was in contemplation but they had no maturated plan fortunately for the country the plot was discovered in time to bring them all to punishment I shall leave for Houston in a few days I wanted all the companies to get Ready in this section & start because other Regiments are trying to get them the Company from Wood left a few days ago --- I think I shall be able to get one from Harrison Co I Received a note from Parson Awault this morning you will see what he says I will start next week yours & Col Hubbards familys are well or was a few days since Mrs Lott is in f\_\_\_\_\_ health but I hope She will be s(oon?) I can leave here say by the 26th \_\_\_\_\_  
my Respects to Col Hubbard & all \_\_\_\_\_

by (very?) truly yours E.E.Lott

INTRODUCTION  
BY  
**Vicki  
Betts**

LT. COL. ELISHA E. LOTT (22nd Texas Infantry) and COL. O.M.ROBERTS (11th Texas Infantry) were Tylerites who played important roles in the Texas story. Lott, who made his home at Starrville, had served many years in the state legislature prior to the war, while Roberts had served as chairman of the Secession Convention. This letter is copied from the original in the O.M.ROBERTS PAPERS in the library of the University of Texas at Austin. -Ed.