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Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2016 - Future of the Flint Hills (Larry Patton,  
editor)

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## Yeager's Raiders

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### Recommended Citation

Hoy, Jim (2016). "Yeager's Raiders," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*. <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2016/orientation/6>

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The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

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OLD BANK WITH SANDRA'S DOG, ELMDALE  
*Mark A. Fisher*

## YEAGER'S RAIDERS

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William Least Heat-Moon, in *PrairyErth*, mentions a bit of Civil War action that occurred very near the site of this year's Symphony in the Flint Hills.

In 1863 Elisha Mardin, who at that time owned and operated the second-largest ranch in Chase County, kept a diary. His home was east of Strong City a few miles, about where the Palenske feed yard is now located. On May 8 he recorded the following entry:

*I went up to the falls [i.e., Cottonwood Falls] & over to Bazaar after a band of garillas got back about two oclock in the after noon Jo Randolph and Charles Bundren came with me.*

The guerillas that Mardin was helping to track were Confederate sympathizers led by Richard Francis Yeager, one of William Clark Quantrill's captains. Dick Yeager was born in Kentucky in 1839, and soon thereafter the family moved to Missouri, where his father became the presiding judge of the Jackson County Court. The elder Yeager also had a freighting business, and his son led wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail.

In 1861, soon after the Civil War broke out, Yeager returned from Santa Fe to find his father's house burned to the ground, the result of a raid by anti-slavery Jayhawkers. Yeager immediately joined forces with Quantrill.

Yeager's first raid into Kansas occurred in late October 1861, when he and thirteen others, including Cole Younger, invaded the Johnson County town of Gardner brandishing double-barreled shotguns. No one was injured, nor were the bushwhackers successful in their attempt to rob a store.

Yeager undertook his most daring raid in early May 1863. Accompanied by some two dozen or more bushwhackers (terrorists, in today's parlance), he headed deep into Union territory in order to wreak havoc and spread fear among Union supporters.

Volume XIV of the *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society*, published in 1918, contains some interesting information about the raid, as recalled by longtime residents of the Council Grove area. The band, according to these early-day Morris County citizens, committed cowardly acts of murder, robbery, horse theft, and burning. On the afternoon of May 4, they camped along Elm Creek near Council Grove on land owned by General George Armstrong Custer. The next morning Yeager and a companion rode into town and straight to the office of Dr. J. H. Bradford, a fellow Missourian who knew Yeager as a Santa Fe Trail freighter.

Once inside, Yeager spoke to the dentist: "Doctor, I expect that you

know me, but I have a tooth that aches like hell, and if you will give me relief I will be good. But if we are bothered by any movement on the part of your Unionists, we will burn the old town before we leave, for that is what we came for." Bradford pulled the offending tooth and gave Yeager a bottle of pain-killing laudanum.

True to his word, the marauder spared Council Grove, but the next day (May 5) the guerillas rode west to Diamond Springs, where they robbed Augustus Howell's stage station and general store. When he attempted to stop them, they shot and killed him and severely wounded his wife, Sarah, when she tried to defend him.

The raiders stayed in the area another day or two, before heading back to Missouri. On the way they killed a Union soldier at the Rock Springs stage station and robbed a stagecoach near Black Jack.

Not surprisingly, details of Yeager's raid vary in the retelling. Some

think that Yeager raided Diamond Springs the night before going into Council Grove to get his tooth pulled. Malcolm Conn, a prominent early resident and storekeeper in Council Grove, thinks it was his intervention, not the tooth-pulling dentist, which saved the town. Conn, a Missourian who had become friends with Yeager when the latter was a Santa Fe trader, claims to have gone into Yeager's camp on the evening of May 4, when the raiders were just outside Council Grove, and persuaded him to spare the town, not only because of their friendship but also because of the many southern sympathizers who lived there. (But, I wonder, why would Yeager have been bent on destroying Council Grove if it were leaning toward the Confederacy?)

Area folklore also has Yeager raiding Diamond Springs the day before arriving at Council Grove. In this telling the gang intended to camp along the Cottonwood River in the

vicinity of present-day Clements. Unable to find firewood there, they rode back southeast about three miles to Coyne Springs, where a couple of cottonwood trees provided enough dead branches for a campfire. The next day they rode into Diamond Springs, robbed and killed the storekeeper, then went on to Council Grove.

I like this last version of the story best because Coyne Springs, located on the Flying W Ranch, is only about a mile to the southwest of the 2016 Symphony in the Flint Hills concert.

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*Jim Hoy, an emeritus professor of English, directs the Center for Great Plains Studies at Emporia State University. He and his wife, Cathy, both past board chairs of the Symphony in the Flint Hills, own the Flying H Ranch at Cassoday, first settled by his great-grandparents in 1877.*