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Bloody Bill Anderson In A Rut

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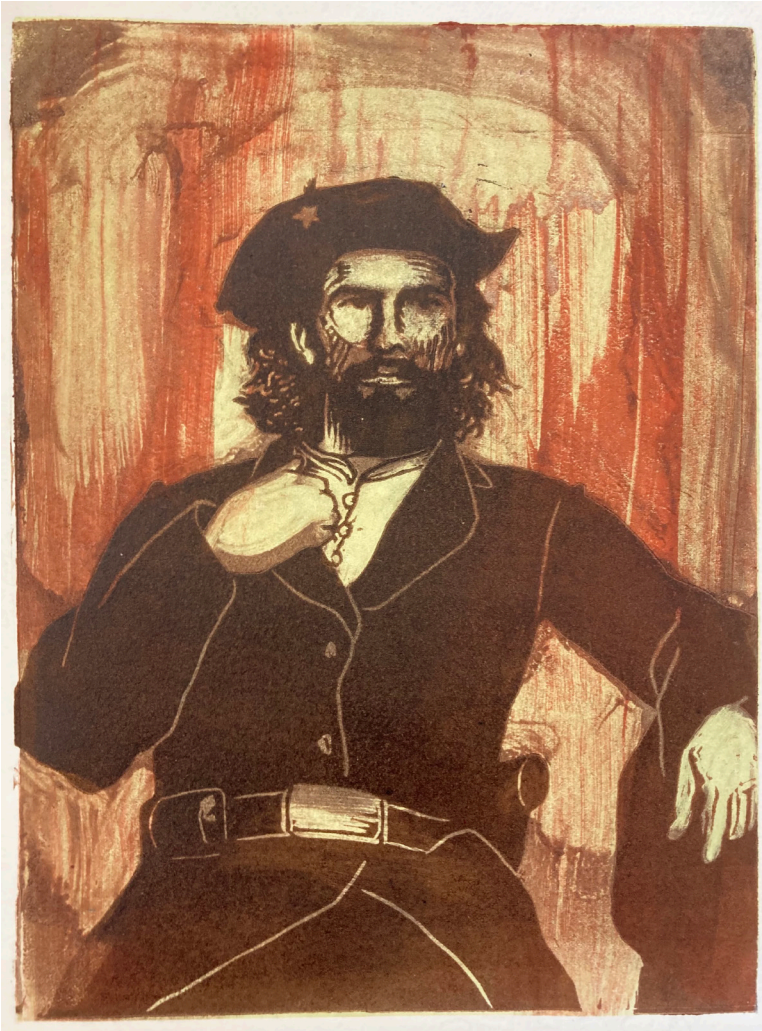
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Bloody Bill
Matthew Regier

BLOODY BILL ANDERSON IN A RUT

Born in Kentucky in 1839, young William T. Anderson moved with his family to Kansas when he was 18.

They settled in Lyon County at the Bluff Creek crossing on the Santa Fe Trail in 1857, where they farmed and sold provisions and whiskey to travelers on the trail.

Young Bill took jobs in the vicinity and made several trips over the trail to Santa Fe working for wagon trains. Lured by easy money, Bill became a horse thief with his brother Jim and cousins, stealing horses over a wide area and selling them to travelers on the trail and in Council Grove and other towns.

In late 1861, Bill and Jim escalated their predatory ways on a plundering raid led by former judge A.I. Baker, who owned the Agnes City trading post on Rock Creek west of the Andersons. Later conflict between these neighbors culminated in Baker shooting and killing Bill's father on May 12, 1862. Wanted locally for their criminal activities, Bill and Jim escaped east on the Santa Fe Trail. Their sisters followed, abandoning the home in Kansas. In Missouri, the brothers joined with lawless gangs in killing, looting and burning at anti-slavery farms and towns in Kansas and northern Missouri. They were bushwhackers, striking hard and fast on the best horses they could steal, then fleeing to evade capture.

Out for revenge for his father's death, Bill returned with cohorts to Agnes City on July 3, 1862, and after dark sent one of the men to Baker's house with a request for whiskey. Baker went to the store cellar for the whiskey. Bill, Jim and the others were waiting for him as he came up the stairs. A gunfight ensued. The gang kicked the wounded Baker down the steps, set a heavy

barrel on the cellar door and set all of the buildings on fire. They stole Baker's best horses before riding off into the night.

The killers raced east along the Santa Fe Trail, reaching Allen on 142 Mile Creek at about midnight. They burst into O.F. O'Dell's store there and looted it while they related how they had killed Baker. Trading their tired mounts for fresh stage-line horses, they continued east.

At Elm Creek the gang paused to shoot holes in the station house door, wanting to kill Henry Jacoby, who as constable had been involved in the events leading to the shooting of Bill's father. Scared off by sounds from a wagon train nearby, they rode on to the stage station at the Chicken Creek crossing. With fresh horses they raced 20 miles to the 110 Mile Creek station in Osage County, arriving about sunrise. Giving the station owner 15 minutes to make breakfast, they ate quickly and headed east. By stealing fresh mounts from stage stations on the trail, they made it to Missouri in less than 16 hours.

In early May of 1863, Bill and Jim Anderson again traveled west on the Santa Fe Trail with other bushwhackers, armed men moving at night in small groups of two or three. Led by notorious bushwhacker Dick Yeager, their wagons were loaded with weapons, ammunition and provisions. They were on a covert

mission for the Confederate military to try to instigate an uprising in the West that would divert Union troops away from the Civil War.

In Lyon County, someone recognized Bill in the moonlight, and soon a large posse rode in pursuit. Pausing at Council Grove for supplies, the guerillas took the wagons on the trail 18 miles southwest to Diamond Springs station. There they murdered the storekeeper, shot his wife in the arm and burned the buildings.

The posse later came upon the wagons at Cottonwood Hole, six miles beyond Cottonwood Crossing where the trail forded the Cottonwood River in Marion County. They took the wagons and guards into custody, but the bushwhackers on horseback split into small groups and escaped back to Missouri. Dick Yeager, Bill Anderson and others left the trail, avoiding it to move rapidly east and north across the open prairie.

Riding east-northeast through Lyon County, they came back to the Santa Fe Trail halfway across Osage County at the 110 Mile Creek station, where they stole horses. At the Black Jack station in southeast Douglas County, the bushwhackers paused to rob a mail coach and its passengers and stole stage-line horses. Reaching the stage station at Gardner, they again robbed and stole horses before riding on to



Sign with Horses
Phil Epp

Missouri, where they divided the horses and other loot. They had not returned home empty-handed.

Bill Anderson became one of the most notorious bushwhackers of the Civil War era, the leader of a band of lawless men who did not dare disobey him. He died in a hail of Union Army gunfire on October 26, 1864, near Albany, Missouri.

From the Author: Please note that conflicting stories exist about Bloody Bill's brief career, including several about the events at Agnes City, because of reliance on hearsay and varied wording as the events were reported and retold.

Sharon Spade, with experience in genealogy, fiber arts and museum work, is director and curator of the North Lyon County Museum at Admire, Kansas. A native Emporian, she appreciates the subtle beauties of the Flint Hills.