

THE COWLEY COUNTY CENSOR

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TO THE WORLD AND BUTLER COUNTY, KANSAS.

Since the first settlement of Butler, Sedgwick and Cowley counties, dating back to 1868, the people have suffered from the depredations of horse thieves. Within forty miles of Douglas, Butler County, at least three hundred horses have been stolen within the past year. In hardly any instance was a horse recovered, and no horse thief has been successfully prosecuted in any court of justice. The evidence was clear that a regular organized gang of horse thieves existed in the county. Parties loosing horses would trace the animals to certain localities and suddenly loose any clue to them. There have also been quite a number of murders perpetrated in that region, but nobody suffered any penalty therefore.

So numerous were the horse thieves that no man dared to institute a prosecution against any other man for horse stealing, however strong his suspicions might be.

THE SUSPECTED MEN, whom everybody felt confident were horse thieves, swaggered about the streets of Douglas, Eldorado and Wichita, and threatened the loves of any man

who should ever utter any of his suspicions concerning them. Among the men who indulged in this style of conversation were James Smith, George and Lewis Booth, Jack Corbin, Wm. G. Quimby, Dr. Morris and his son Alex., Michael Drea, Curdy Walker, two young men named Spratt, one Ledford, a man named Cox, (who appeared under the assumed name of Black,) Jacob Bump, Cady and others.

Such were the leaders of the gang who stole horses, stole cattle, hanging around the new towns of the country, armed to the teeth, threatening the lives of quiet citizens, and distributing written notices to persons who had had horses stolen saying that they would be "sent to hell" unless they kept their mouths shut.

This state of things lasted until about the 1st of November last. At about that time arrived some men named Crawford, a father and two sons, came from the east, with some live stock, horses and mules, and settled on the Arkansas, a few miles below Wichita. Shortly after, one of the boys rode one of the mules to Wichita. While there he was approached by several men, in the public street, who claimed his mule and took it away from him. He returned to the camp of

the family. Thereupon, Mr. Crawford and his sons went to town, found their mule and started back with it. Shortly afterwards, they were overtaken by Dave W. Wallingford, now lying in the Shawnee county jail, James Smith, Corbin and George Booth, who

KNOCKED THE OLD MAN OFF HIS HORSE

with their revolvers and threatened to kill him if he did not deliver the animals himself and sons were riding. The boys spurred their horses and attempted to escape, being unarmed. The gang beat the old man, who is quite advanced in life, with their revolvers, but he hung to his bridle. The robbers soon left him and gave chase to the boys, but the young men reached their camp first, armed themselves, and returned driving off the robbers and releasing their father.

MORE HORSES STOLEN.

Shortly after this affair, five horses, belong to the Crawfords, were stolen. The old man Crawford and his younger son appeared in Douglas, on Election Day, in search of their stock. While they were in town, George Booth, James Smith and Jack Corbin came in, and were recognized by the Crawfords as the men who had made the assault on them a few days

before. They said nothing to the party, but inquired of citizens concerning them.

THE FIRST EXECUTION.

That night Jack Corbin and George Booth stayed at Lewis Booth's house, four miles from Douglas. At about half past nine o'clock a party of men rode up to the door of Lewis Booth's house, and called for all the men in the house to come out. They knew their time had come and obeyed. They were marched to the timber, a few rods from the house, and Jack Corbin confessed, in the hope of saving his life, that himself, George Booth and Dave Wallingford and James Smith were the men that had stolen the Crawfords' horses. He gave particulars of the robbery, and stated that a man name Smith had herded the horses the night before, but he could not tell where they were at that moment, as he supposed they had changed hands. He gave the name of many horse thieves, and having finished his confession he was hung to a tree. The two Booths seeing his fate, started to run, telling their captors to "go to h--l." The result was a volley which laid them dead on the ground, where they were left without anything taken from their persons. The party then left and met James Smith at the crossing of the Little Walnut, who seeing them approach fired on them, and dashed his horse into the underbrush. His pursuers

returned his fire and he was finally shot dead.

MORE THREATS BY THE GANG.

The next day after these transactions Wm. G. Quimby, Michael Drea, Dr. Morris and his son Aleck Morris, said in the streets of Douglass that they would hang every man that had anything to do with the work of the night before. They mentioned the names of several citizens whom they said

THEY HAD "SPOTTED", and whom they would "send to hell."

Immediately after, these men became very active in riding the country day and night, and endeavoring to recruit a party to retaliate for the death of the Booths, Corbin and Smith, and boasting that they could at a moment's notice, raise any number of men to "bounce" the executioners of their friends. Wm. Gallagher and Dr. Morris, went into a store in Douglass, and finding the merchant, a new-comer in the place, alone, attempted to force him to make a statement as to what he knew about the affair, and said that they had the money and the power to ferret the thing out, and they were going to do it, if it

COST THEM THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS.

Other men of the same gang threatened citizens elsewhere in the county. The Crawfords were arrested for murder in the first degree, on a warrant sworn out by Wallingford. They, although

in Sedgwick County were arrested on their claim, and were taken to Augusta, Butler County, for trial, on the pretense that they were fugitives from justice.

BOGUS SOLDIERS;

About the time the Crawfords were arrested, a party of five or six men, dressed military clothing, but were not soldiers, came to the house of D. W. Boutwell, two miles from Douglass, early one morning. One of the party professed to be a United States Detective, and said the party was sent by Gen. Custer to ascertain all the facts concerning the hanging and shooting of the Booths and others, and to bring the guilty parties to justice. They told Boutwell if he would tell them all about the matter they would let him off, otherwise they should arrest him, and that when this was done his accomplices would leave and he would be obliged to bear the punishment of all of them. He told them he could tell them nothing, and asked them if they wished him to go with them. They replied no, that they would be compelled to return to Council Grove and procure an order from Gen. Custer for his arrest. The said the General was at Council Grove with a company of troops. Quimby and Dr. Morris also stated that "Road Agents" were coming to send the people of Douglass "to hell," that the "Road Agents" had cleaned out the "vigilantes" at Wichita, and would do the

same thing in Douglas. Soon after these events

**BOUTWELL WAS
ARRESTED,**

at dark, by the Deputy Sheriff of Butler County, for murder in the first degree, on a warrant sworn out by Wallingford. On Saturday morning, Boutwell was taken by a force of four then to Augusta, to testify against the Crawfords. The trial came on and Wallingford failing to appear, as prosecuting witness, the State got a continuance. Boutwell got a change of venue to Douglass.

On Saturday Wm. Galligher swore out a warrant for John Long, John Stanley, and S. E. D. Parker, on a charge of murder, but they were absent from home. Warrants were subsequently sworn out by Benton Cramer against Messrs, Uhl, Kellam, Plumby, and others, Cramer, and Peter Harpool, a deputy constable, and a man named Lard, went to the houses of these citizens and found Uhl, who refused to be arrested in the night by a set of horse thieves, but he said he would be arrested by any respectable citizen. Cramer and Lard went to Augusta and reported that they had been resisted by a mob. Harpool went to Douglas and got Quimby, Dr. Morris and his son, and Mike Drea, to aid him. On Monday morning Uhl and some of his neighbors came into Douglas, and had a conference with the Quimby party, who threatened to arrest Uhl and his friends,

and kill them. Citizens came into town while this discussion was in progress and generally took side with the Ule party. Quimby and Harpool said men would come from Augusta and make the arrest at any rate. By Monday night there were two hundred men collected in Douglas. The sentiment of the crowd was that they would

ABIDE BY THE LAW

but would not be arrested by any known or suspected horse thief, with a chance of being murdered afterward. We may remark that the threat had been made that the Crawfords and Boutwell should be lynched if acquitted. During the day affidavits were made against Quimby, the Morrises, and Michel Drea, for horse stealing, and they had an examination before a justice and their cases were continued for fifteen days. These parties stated from the first that they would kill every man on the streets of Douglas that day if they got loose.

During the day the Quimby party had been placed under guard. The next day, Tuesday, Boutwell, and all the parties who had been arrested for murder, expected the Crawfords, had an examination, but none of the prosecuting witnesses appeared against them, and the cases were dismissed. Quimby and the three others were held for trial, and were allowed to remain with their families most of the time until Thursday night.

During this period several citizens of the anti-thief party received written notices, signed with a picture of a rope, to leave the country, on pain of death. On Thursday night, December 2d, about one hundred men seized Capt. Tanner a deputy constable with the guard over Quimby, and his companions, and took Quimby, the two Morrises and Mike Drea, two miles from Douglass, to the timber, by the side of the public road, and made a scaffold by placing a plank in the forks of two trees, and hung the four men side by side. None of the party attempted to escape, and no female member of their families was present at the time of their execution. None of the party ventured to make any resistance, but did make some disclosures. The next day the crowd which had been collected in Douglass dispersed. The bodies of the men who had been hung were taken down and an inquest held. Seven hundred dollars in cash and drafts was found on the bodies.

Quimby at his execution confessed to have planned and aided in the stealing of horses and hiding covering up stolen property. I know likewise. Morris and his son Alex made a full confession of guilt giving over one hundred name of citizens of said counties belong to the gang, with the badges they word etc. with full particulars; that they were thoroughly organized in every town and village thought said

counties. Among the number may be found Farmers, Lawyers, Doctors, Merchants, Sheriffs, Constables, Justice of the Peace, and in fact men in every avocation of life. These names are on file with the proper parties, and among those named are found William Galligher, J. C. Lambden, J. Carey, Peter Harpool, Lard, Paul, Cramer, W. B. Parsons, McCabe, Charles Smith and others. Under the circumstances, we the citizens or regulators, if you see fit to call us, have acted. Parsons and other of the gang are prosecuting our members. A special term of court with a Grand Jury has been called by them to be composed of horse thieves, herded together by Sheriff Thomas (who is one of the gang). These men boast that they will ferrit out the parties who killed their friends and bring them to trial. Thus the matter rests; ant is has become a question whether honest men of the country shall leave or this gang. We propose to stay, and in our effort to stay if it becomes necessary to shed more blood it will be done. Self preservation is the first law of nature; and however much we deplore the further use of violence in order to secure life and property, yet we shall not hesitate to do justice to the guilty if it is necessary. We are law abiding citizens with the good of our country at heart, yet we have been driven through grievous wrongs that were upon

us to take life; and in so doing are proud to say that the country will be better thereby. It is should become necessary in the future to take the lives of horse thieves in order to protect our own, whether attacked by them in arms or through prosecuting witnesses, we shall do it. We here give warning to all concerned that the prosecution now commenced must cease, and unless it is done we will be compelled by the law of self-preservation to take the lives of witnesses as well as others

---AND WE WILL DO IT.

If the prosecution no instituted by men is Eldorado is continued we will open the pall and blood will run like water, while burns a light by which hones men can and may see the bright future that lays just beyond these troubles. This is not written to intimidate any person, but it is a warning, and the actions of the last sixty days will justify us, when we say that this is no idle boast, but the honest expression of great deliberation. We have the money, arms and ammunition to carry out the good work that has begun. Believing that we are right and that the desperate character of the gang justifies the desperate remedy that has been applied we appeal to all honest men to support us; for the people are the law, and when the laws of a state or Territory prove insufficient for the protection of its citizens in any particular locality, it is their right to take such measure as will protect

them, believing that the laws of God and man will justify it. With these views we submit the case to the people, in the full determination that the work we have been forced to commence will be continued until property and life are safe. Criminal prosecutions neither intimidate us nor make us afraid; and we repeat that persecutions only unite us and will force us to take a desperate step if it shall and does become necessary. By order of Seven Hundred and Ninety eight organized men, comprising the Vigilantes of Butler, Cowley, and Sedgwick counties.

This is a transcription of an article in the Cowley County Censor that resides on the wall of the Cowley County Historical Association Museum in Winfield, Kansas. It is the declaration of war between the settlers of Cowley County and their adversaries the horse thieves and Sheriff of Butler County. More about this story is covered in detail in "The History of Cowley County, Vol. 1 The Beginning" by Richard Kay Wortman and Mary Ann Wortman. A detailed academic analysis is included "THE BUTLER COUNTY KANSAS VIGILANTES: An Examination of Violence and Community, 1870" by Lisa Miles Bunkowski in her PhD Dissertation submitted to Kansas University in August, 2003. Bill Bottorff, April 27, 2006.