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Judge Barker and the Vengeance of "Bloody Bill"

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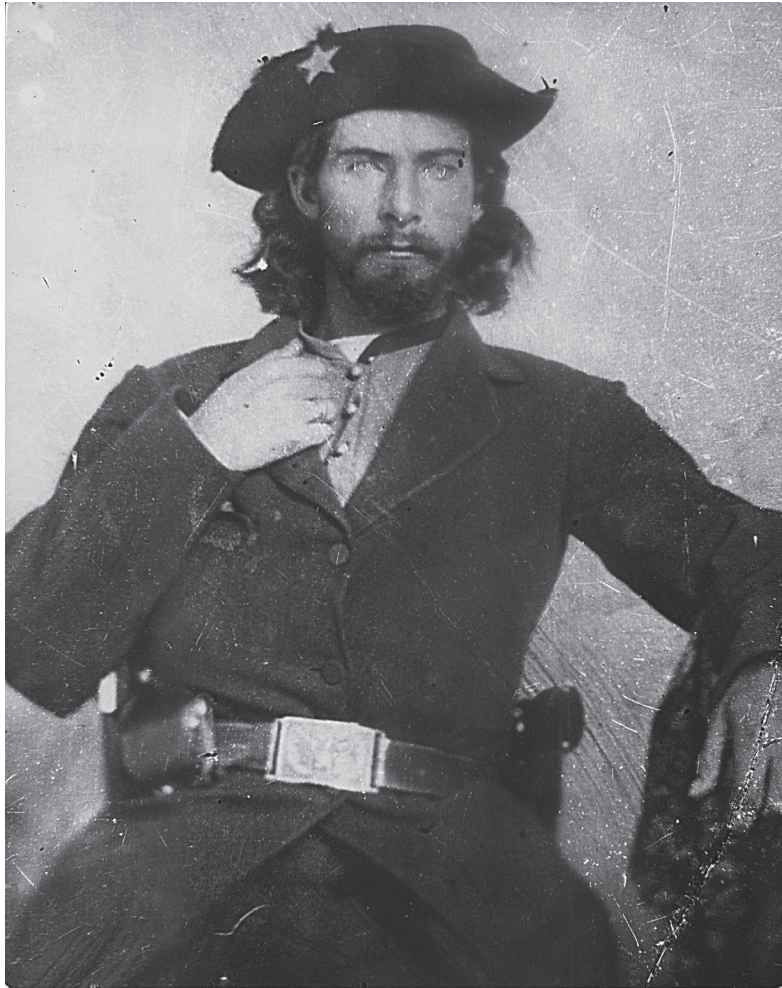
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“BLOODY BILL” ANDERSON
State Historical Society of Missouri

Judge Baker and the Vengeance of “Bloody Bill”

In the early pre-statehood history of the Neosho Valley, few events have rivaled that of the death of A.I. Baker. Histories state that his death at the hand of “a gang of pro-slavery bandits” led by the notorious confederate guerilla and Quantrill raider “Bloody Bill” Anderson, related to Civil War fighting. Such a generalized account of the motive for Baker’s death betrays the true motive of his death. Baker’s death was not a “political assassination” tied to the Civil War but a murder of personal vengeance.



The chaos and violence inherent in the years just prior to and during the Civil War provided the backdrop for the world in which Baker found himself.

As one of the earliest settlers and leaders of Kansas territory and the upper Neosho River valley, Baker employed

himself in various roles and activities.

Baker’s arrival in the Kansas territory was with the Sac and Fox nations as a blacksmith and trader in 1847. Six years later Arthur Baker moved west and settled ten miles east of Council Grove at Rock Creek crossing on the Santa Fe Road.

It was at Council Grove that Baker's extended family had previously settled, many working directly or indirectly for the Kansa Indian Mission and Agency.

The pies had been left unbaked on the kitchen table when the raiders struck and as the women were hiding they could smell the pies baking as the house burned.

Baker's life in the Upper Neosho Valley began with the opening of the Kansas territory and lasted until the night of July 3, 1862, when he was murdered in the cellar of his store at Rock Creek. His story is full of the paradoxes embroiled in the turmoil that became known as "Bleeding Kansas."

At Rock Creek, Baker's home became one of the focal points on the Santa Fe Road. Here he established a store and blacksmith shop where he not only serviced

the various wagon trains headed west but also traded with the local Indians. He built a two-story stone dwelling, which from 1855 to 1858 became the first county seat of Breckinridge County, and was a scaled-down version of the Kaw Indian Mission in Council Grove. He also established a post office, now named Agnes City for his mother. In census records Baker's farm and property value placed him as one of the wealthier settlers in the upper Neosho Valley.

Baker was a self-educated attorney, a real estate investor, and a promoter of settlement in the upper Neosho Valley.

He also worked as a surveyor who platted many of the early communities in Breckinridge (Lyon), Wise (Morris), and Chase counties. He was one of the original founders and the first mayor of Americus and became involved in the county seat war with Emporia.

Baker's role in territorial politics was paradoxical in that he was a Free Soil candidate for the territorial legislature in 1855 while at the same time owning slaves. By 1857 Baker was a founder of

the local Democrat Party prior to helping to establish the Free State Party which soon became the Republican Party. That same year he was elected Probate Judge of Breckinridge County and served until his death five years later.

After Americus lost the county seat to Emporia, Baker became tied economically to Council Grove and by January 1861 he was a publisher of the *Council Grove Press*. It was at this point that his personal life took a turn. His wife Susan passed away in March 1861 of "pulmonary affection." As a result Baker invested more of his time, resources, and effort into his Council Grove businesses. As secession and Civil War became a reality, Baker's editorials were pro-union and pro-Lincoln. He was also elected captain of the local home guard. His economic interests took a drastic turn downward as trade along the Santa Fe Road became disrupted. His newspaper folded and his hotel in Council Grove closed.

It was at this point that a final paradox of Baker's life came about, which resulted

in his brutal death. When the Civil War began in 1861, Baker was a businessman, publicist, and military leader, seemingly loyal to the Union. By the second year of the war, he was in a military prison at Fort Scott charged with being a secessionist.

Baker had gone to Missouri with a company of bushwhackers formed on Bluff and Rock Creeks with the alleged purpose of raiding along the Kansas-Missouri border. Several neighbors, such as Bill and Jim Anderson, accompanied him to Missouri. While there Baker was arrested, but most of his comrades, including the Anderson brothers, escaped.

At his trial Baker was accused of being in Missouri to accept a colonelcy in the Confederate Army under General Price.

Baker was acquitted and returned to the Upper Neosho to put his life back in order. At age 39 Baker began dating the daughter of his neighbor William C. Anderson. The Anderson family, who lived east of Baker on Bluff Creek, assumed that Baker's intention was such that they considered he was

engaged to marry the fifteen-year-old girl. Given the comparative economic difference between the families, if such a marriage occurred then it would result in enhanced status for the Andersons.

A union with the Anderson family did not occur as Baker showed the same inconsistency in his dating life that he demonstrated in his political life. He became engaged to an older woman, Anis Segur, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a recent settler to the area. Shortly after the announcement of his engagement, a team of his future father-in-law's horses was stolen. Baker, as Probate Judge, swore out a warrant for the arrest of Lee Griffin, a cousin of the Andersons. Baker's posse found the horses about eighty miles west of Council Grove and arrested a Mexican horse trader, taking him back to Baker's home for trial.

When the news of the arrest warrant for Griffin reached the elder Anderson, he and his oldest son Bill "saddled up their horses, rode to Baker's and told him if he did not have the warrant

withdrawn by . . . next day they would surely kill him and rode away." That evening the elder Anderson went to Emporia where he became drunk. At noon the next day, Anderson, still drunk, returned to Baker's home with "his double-barreled gun, loaded and cocked." He entered the home in search of Baker who was upstairs. Anderson started up the stairs stating his intention to kill Baker. When he was about half way up the stairs, Baker appeared at the top and "shot Anderson through the breast, killing him." A coroner's inquest was held and Baker was acquitted.

That day a group of local citizens arrived at Baker's vowing to take vengeance on all horse thieves. They seized the Mexican man from the court's custody and lynched him. Shortly thereafter Baker, as Probate Judge, issued a warrant for the arrest of the Anderson brothers. Perhaps fearing for his life and to avoid being taken by a vengeful mob, Bill Anderson went to 142 Mile Creek for the burial of his father and gave himself

up. At his hearing Bill Anderson was acquitted but swore vengeance on Baker not only for the killing of his father but also the jilting of his sister. Bill Anderson then fled and the remaining Anderson family members soon followed by moving away from the area.

With the Andersons gone Baker's life now centered on maintaining his store, his home at Rock Creek, and his marriage. Archaeological evidence showed that he did maintain vigilance regarding Bill Anderson's threat of vengeance. The 1972 excavation of his home found gun parts and unspent shells by its doors and windows. A friend of Baker later testified that Baker told him that "he would sooner or later die at the hands of Bill Anderson or his party, and he always prepared for the worst."

On July 2 the Anderson brothers did return to carry out their vengeance on Baker. Accompanied by three accomplices, Bill and Jim Anderson visited Rock Creek and learned that Baker and his bride were in Emporia.

The next day the Bakers returned to their home, and the Anderson brothers put their plan in action. That evening Bill Anderson sent a member of their party to Baker's home stating that he was a wagon master who had come ahead to buy supplies for his train. One of the items was whiskey which was kept in the cellar of the store. When Baker and his brother-in-law descended through the trap door of the cellar, the Andersons, along with several others, rushed into the store, fired, and hit both men. Baker then fired back with his revolver, hitting Jim Anderson in the thigh. The Andersons closed the cellar door and set fire to the building with their victims trapped inside. Being confident that Baker could not escape, the Andersons set fire to the remainder of his property, which included the Baker home. It was later reported that when Baker's body was found his "head, arms and legs were literally burned to ashes."

George Sequer, Baker's young brother-in-law, escaped by climbing through the back cellar window and hiding in

the underbrush of the creek. The next morning Sequor told what had happened just before he died from his burns. He claimed that rather than die in the flames, Baker shot himself through his head.

When Baker and his brother-in-law left for the store, his wife and family fled to the woods along the creek, hiding until the raiders left. Baker's family claimed that the women had been making apple pies in preparation of the following day's Fourth of July celebration. The pies had been left unbaked on the kitchen table when the raiders struck and as the women were hiding they could smell the pies baking as the house burned. In the 1972 excavation, pie tins were found where the kitchen table would have been.

Once they had fulfilled their vengeance, the Anderson raiding party fled back to Missouri, traveling over 120 miles in less than sixteen hours by stealing fresh horses from the various stage stops along the way. They stopped long enough only for Jim Anderson's

leg to be treated at 142 Mile Creek.

From the moment of Baker's death, Bill Anderson became known in history as "Bloody Bill."

Just as the life of Arthur Baker was one of controversy and paradox, the event of his death was also highly enigmatic. Baker was killed because of a personal grievance with his neighbors and former friends. Since his death occurred during the Civil War at the hands of "Bloody Bill" Anderson, a man destined to become one of the most feared and notorious Confederate leaders, his death became directly related to the greater conflict.

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Art Editor's Note

SO MANY STORIES...SO FEW PICTURES

Northern Lyon County is rich with stories, but little visual evidence of them remains. When Michael Stubbs, the Historical Research Editor for the Field Journal, and local historians Jan Huston and Jim and Cathy Hoy began the search for photographs and drawings to illustrate the stories, the search in itself became a fascinating story. Inquiries at local history museums, libraries, and the Kansas State Historical Society soon revealed that there is sparse visual documentation from the late 1800s.

An exception was the story of Dunlap and the Exoduster Connection. Michael Stubbs tracked down photos of the grandparents of London Harness by tirelessly investigating sources and following leads. The search did yield a few images for the Fruitland article. But for the article on Judge Baker, only one suitable photo for Bloody Bill Anderson was discovered and all visual evidence of Judge Baker was destroyed when his house was burned to the ground in vengeance.

No family photos of the Polks or Troutmans turned up until Jan Huston knocked on the door of the old Polk house in Bushong, where current owners David and Ann Stark have lived for thirty years. Ann remembered that some old photos were found in the attic during a renovation but she thought her husband had tossed them. David phoned Jan later that day to say, no, he had stuffed them in empty dog food sacks and stored them in his shed. Jan could come look at them. At their kitchen table, Jan dumped out the photographs and began to sort through a rediscovered history. These are the only known photographs of the Polk family and are published for the first time in this Field Journal.

The story goes on as Michael and Jan contact old-timers, trace descendants and continue to find material that has remained long forgotten in boxes and attics. Kudos to their efforts to ferret out the visual material that enlivens the past and preserves the cultural heritage that would be lost without their passion and commitment.

– Patty Reece