



The Last Cowboy Raid of Kearney

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Article Summary: In 1875 a group of Kearney citizens decided to put an end to the cowboy raids that had terrorized the town.

Cataloging Information:

Names: E C Calkins, Milton M Collins

Nebraska Place Names: Kearney

THE LAST COWBOY RAID OF KEARNEY

By Maud Marston Burrows

Kearney lay on the route of the cattle trails from Montana to Texas, and was frequently subjected to cowboy raids. Half drunk and crazed with liquor after their long, hard drive, the cowboys rode down Wyoming Avenue (our main street) shooting right and left, destroying windows and store fronts and frightening everyone. The only course was to take refuge under or behind anything available and wait for the danger to pass.

At last, early in the autumn of 1875, a group of citizens decided to put a stop to this terrorizing. With E. C. Calkins as captain, they organized a company of Civil War veterans not long out of service and willing to shoot to kill if justified. They notified the cowboys that no more raids would be tolerated.

The test of strength was not long in coming. Straight thru the town rode the strangers, shouting and shooting, but in less time than seemed possible the company of militia was mounted and in hot pursuit. The cowboys

made a stand back of some freight cars on the Burlington tracks, but soon saw that they would be flanked and away they rode, southward to the Platte.

Across the north channel of the river stood the primitive little cabin home of Milton M. Collins. Hearing the unusual clatter of hoofs, he stepped to the door to see what was going on. Thinking he was about to fire, the cowboys shot him down and raced on, but several of the militiamen stopped.

They found the man dead, and a poor little baby creeping on the floor, dripping with its father's blood; the wife wringing her hands, tears streaming down her face. Nothing to be done there; and, infuriated, the men hurried on.

Three of the cowboys were captured across the river and placed in a shack under guard. One escaped that night; the others were taken back to town and tried. It was impossible to establish which one had actually shot Collins, and no conviction was possible. Angry citizens would have strung up all of them; but, having invoked the law, the militia resisted its being over-ridden and so wiser counsel prevailed.

That was the last cowboy raiding of Kearney, however. When they met real resistance from the men who meant what they said and who would shoot to kill, they found it quite possible to refrain from the lawlessness they had assumed to be their prerogative.

(Note: Altho a very different version of this story appears in Andreas' History of Nebraska, we publish this because personal acquaintance with Mrs. Burrows revealed her possession of a high degree of intelligence and honesty. In a letter of July 27 she wrote:

"Feeling just a bit better this morning, I have written this little story which has long been 'on my chest.' At the Pioneer Party I heard two women telling that they saw Collins shot here in the town! It was two miles from town, at his island home across the channel.")