

In old Albany, strangers paid for slurring Confederate general

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By Linda Emley

In 1877, the Edward Brothers of Missouri printed an Illustrated Map of Ray County that listed the town of Albany, population 150. It was 1 mile north and east of Orrick and was a brisk little town that had seven business houses, a school, a mill and a church. Albany was where Capt. Bill Anderson was shot in 1864. After reading the following story, it looks like he wasn't the only famous "Bill" that got shot in Albany.

The Richmond Missourian, Mar. 8, 1937: "Elmer Pigg and Jewell Mayes have decided that the signed article by Oliver J. Thompson, Lawrence Ks., in the *Kansas City Star*, might well be set down in local print. One reason for re-production is the hope that somebody in Ray County may have heard it first-hand from a parent or other person, and if so, will please write the local version for these chapters. Another reason for this presentation is that the story continues to be discussed locally – and, if true, (as it may be), it adds to the lore of Southwest Ray County.

"The following is Mr. Thompson's signed statement: In the *Sunday Star* on Dec. 27, 1937, I read a story picturing Wild Bill Hickok as a gloried 2-gunman of the West. There are several stories about Wild Bill that my father told me, which I have no reason to doubt. One of them I heard him relate several times.

"A short time after the Civil War, when the enmity and hard feeling still ran to grudge fights and murder along the Missouri and Kansas border, my father, accompanied by Si Jesse of Independence, journeyed to the town of Albany, east of Liberty. Their object was to purchase some horses owned jointly by Bob McCorkle and a man named Story, who was known as Bud Story, and McCorkle hired a wrangler for the horses by the name of John Wright, all three having served in the Confederate army. "When my father and Jesse arrived at Albany it was in mid-afternoon and they stopped at the only store to get something to eat. When they entered there were two men other than the storekeeper. They were sitting on a long table to one side of the building eating cheese with hard-tack and drinking cider from a large earthen jug. They made some minor purchases and were eating when several other men came in.

"My father asked about McCorkle and Story and was directed to Wright, who had entered and was sitting near the fireplace at the end of the building near the pair that sat on the table. Jesse and my father went over and were talking to Wright about the horses when three men rode up and dismounted and came into the store.

"One of these was in a uniform of the army and wore sergeant's stripes. Another in buckskin and the third was a well-dressed young man whose mustache was as well-kept as his clothes. The sergeant introduced himself to the storekeeper as a representative of the army wishing to purchase horses. He gave his name as Sgt. Earl McClure.



Wild Bill Hickok

“Then he introduced the well-dressed man as Billy Hickok, ‘the best shot in the whole Union army and killed more rebels than any one man that fought for Abe Lincoln.’ The other fellow was Luke somebody, who had been scouting in the West. No one had said a word but the soldier, and none seemed interested in him.

“After his first spell of bragging passed, he asked where he could find Story and McCorkle, as he wished to buy their horses. Wright told them they would be in soon, as they had to get some supplies. He had no more than spoken when they entered the door. One wore a gray coat and the other a pair of gray pants of Confederate uniforms. Wright said they were the men the sergeant was looking for. The sergeant looked them over a minute and said he wouldn’t buy horses from any rebel. Hickok spoke up and gave his idea of Sterling Price.

“Before he had finished, the younger of the two men setting on the table stuck his knife in the top of the head of cheese and walked over to the three. Taking the sergeant and Hickok by the shoulders, he turned them toward him. ‘Listen, You — ! General Price is not present to speak for himself, but he has several representatives here who will answer in his place. ‘Pologize now or — !’

“The sergeant and Hickok both dropped their hands. There was a flash and two rapid gun shots. The sergeant staggered and fell to the floor. Hickok’s gun fell to the floor and he was holding his right hand about the wrist. ‘Down on your knees and pologize!’ demanded the young man, still holding his gun pointed at Hickok. Hickok dropped to his knees and staring terror-stricken straight at the young man, offered amends to General Sterling Price.

“When he had finished, the young man ordered him to ‘get the hell out of the county and stay out until he could learn some common sense.’ Hickok got up and the scout took the sergeant with him! After the trio had gone, the young man went back to his cheese – and the group talked about the matter as if it were an everyday occurrence.

“Wright asked the older man if he had pulled his gun. ‘Naw,’ he replied, ‘If Jesse had needed any help I would have plugged the nearest one with this knife.’ It was Jesse and Frank James, who sat on the table.

“Many people thought that Hickok was left-handed, but my father always said that after that fracas at Albany his right hand was a little stiff from the flesh wound and he used his left faster than his right. He also claimed that the reason Hickok gave up his vaudeville tour of the county was because Jesse James followed him about for about a week, and when he came out on the stage to do his act he always found Jesse James sitting in the front row and even

Hickok did not dare attempt to take him, although there was a large price on his head at that time. My father always stated that Hickok became so nervous before he gave up the tour that he drank heavily and he thought that James was gunning for him.”

Did Wild Bill really get shot by Jesse James in Albany? Many such tales usually have some shred of truth and this one could be based on a true story. There was a man named Oliver B. Thompson who lived in Lecompton, Kan. in the 1930s. Oliver’s father Lewis may have visited Albany and been an eye witness to this story from the 1870s.

Wild Bill toured with Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show from 1872 to 1873 before he moved to Deadwood, Dakota. Wild Bill was shot in Deadwood in 1876 by Jack McCall, who was revenging his brother’s death. There are many interesting stories associated with Bloody Bill, Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill, but I find this one fascinating because Jesse James had to be thinking about his friend Bill Anderson’s death a few years earlier at Albany while sitting in that store eating cheese.

Yes, it looks like Wild Bill picked a bad day to visit Albany and speak poorly of southern “Rebels,” and we have a story that shows Ray County was truly a part of the “Wild West” .

Have a rootin’ tootin’ six-gun-shootin’ story for Linda? You can write her at raycohistory@aol.com or see her in person at Ray County Museum.