Affair at Rawlings Lane

Missouri's CIVIL WAR

The plaque pictured at left has been placed in Sunset Hills Cemetery in remembrance of eight Union cavalry soldiers who died in action and are buried here.

In central Missouri in the summer of 1864, bands of Southern partisan cavalry roamed the countryside making life difficult for civilians and militiamen alike. In late July, 1864, William "Bloody Bill" Anderson led a raid out of Rocheport (located 10 miles to the east north of the Missouri River). That raid went far north and east, nearly to Hannibal. Anderson may have been in Boone and Howard counties during August, 1864, but people generally assumed that all of the "bushwhacking" in this area was the work of Anderson and his band.

A detachment of the 4th Missouri State Militia Cavalry (Union), under the command of Captain Joseph Parke, was stationed in Boonville at this time. After hearing reports that Anderson and his men were in the vicinity, on August 28th Parke with 44 troopers of the 4th Cavalry charged into Howard County. Heading east in the direction of Rocheport, Parke's command got caught in ambush at a place called Rawlings Lane, on the old Boonville-Rocheport Road about 3 miles northwest of Rocheport. These were Anderson's men for the most part, but a small group of riders led by Clifton Holtzclaw of Howard County was there as well.

Anderson had placed several horsemen in the lane to the Rawlings farm to serve as decoys, while the bulk of his men lay in wait over a hill, in a line parallel to the farm lane. Parke took the bait, following the decoys as they rode east through Rawlings Lane. Parke charged, and once all of his men were in the lane the Southern cavalry charged up and over the hill. Parke's detachment was decimated in the attack.

Captain Parke left the scene before the action was finished, and on the road to Fayette he met Major Reeves Leonard and a detachment of Union cavalry moving south in the direction of the fight. Anderson drew his men off, but some continued the fight along the Boonville-Rocheport Road. Survivors from Parke's command fought a rear guard action while retreating to Boonville. Captain Parke was dismissed from the service for his actions at Rawlings Lane.

Men of the 4th Militia Cavalry who were killed in the action at Rawlings Lane were: Sergeant Alvin Moore and George Baugh; Corporal David A. Slough; and Privates John H. Harshaw, Alfred Gossnell, James O'Neal and Thomas Mitchell. The bodies were brought to Espian Hall, placed in coffins and prepared for burial. The Reverend James Morton conducted the funerals of Davis, Sheppard, H. Hathaway, Alfred Gosnell, James O'Neal and Thomas Mitchell. The bodies were brought and Thomas Mitchell. The bodies were brought and Thomas Mitchell. The bodies were brought and turned over the burial ground to the City of Boonville. The ground was accepted by the city, and served as the city cemetery for many years. As you stand facing this plaque, the original Methodist burial ground is in the lane to the Rawlings farm to serve as a jumping off point for Union troops from Illinois and Iowa who were involved in campaigns in Missouri. Men from the 1st and 5th Iowa Infantry regiments were at Boonville in 1865, passing her as they joined Union campaigns targeting Springfield. Companies of the 5th Illinois Infantry, for example, occupied Boonville during the winter of 1864-65. Sunset Hills was the burial place of the Illinois and Iowa soldiers of those regiments who died of disease or other causes while stationed here, but the bodies of these men were exhumed and reburied in the Jefferson City National Cemetery after the war.

There were local Union troops who survived the war and remain at rest here. Sergeant Leon Harris died on February 29, 1864, in the 64th Regiment of Infantry, United States Colored Troops (USCT). The 64th regiment served in the defense of Fort Pickering, Tennessee and the siege of Fort Blakely, Alabama, among other engagements. Sgt. Harris mustered out of the army in February, 1866 in Louisiana. Three other African American Civil War veterans are buried in Sunset Hills Cemetery; Charles Collins, James Whipley and Cyrus Wilson of the 62nd and 65th regiments, USCT. Companies "C," and "E" of the 65th Regiment, to which Collins and Whipley belonged, fought in the last battles of the Civil War, on May 13, 1865 at Palmetto Ranch, Texas. Both men enlisted in Boonville in November, 1863.


The story of Little Willie is one dear to the hearts of the people of Boonville. Be sure to see the graves of William Colt and Mrs. Little son. They died in Boonville in 1856 from a fever contracted as they traveled overland from Kansas. The town cared for them in their final days, and laid them to rest, and it cared for a desolate wife and sister who survived to complete the wagon trip home to New York.

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