

Mercer's little booklet, THE BANDITTI OF THE PLAINS was published in Cheyenne in the spring of 1894. From the start, it infuriated the stockmen. Mercer was mobbed, and beaten repeatedly. His books were destroyed, almost by the hundreds. Today they are rare. They have been stolen, bought up and destroyed in an unavailing effort to remove this overwhelming evidence from public view. So near as I can learn, less than half a dozen are now in existence. My copy, presented to me as soon as off the press, I consider too valuable to keep with me. It is in another state and reposing in a bank vault. State and bank are unknown to my children who will be notified by the bank at my death.

Before the raid started, as Mercer tells us, papers all over the country were filled with accounts of desperate doings in northern Wyoming - murder, stealing, burning homes and ranges, etc. The country at large was made to believe that Northern Wyoming was in almost open rebellion and that laws were ignored and violated continually. The law officers, wherever the common people had managed to elect a man, were called rustlers or were said to be hand in glove with the rustlers. About this time, in some portions of the north, small ranchers and sympathizing towns-people were electing men, not stock men or men knuckling to the big stock men, but such men as Sheriff Angus of Johnson County as well as some few others in neighboring towns. These men, elected by the people, were, were real officers and tried to see that justice was done and all treated alike. Just as soon as a law officer arrested or tried to arrest a cowman or one of his trusted employees he was classed in sympathy with the rustlers. This was the condition existing in Northern Wyoming in the eighties and early nineties. In fact, in most of Wyoming.

Dunning's confession is very plain along all lines. He tells of how men were hired, by whom hired, what the wages were, etc. His confession is long, with what Mercer calls "superfluous verbiage" but it is well worth the reading. We will

include it at the conclusion of these necessary notes. It is to be found in Mercer's booklet but as that is practically out of print, we will include the "confession" herewith.

Champion, in his diary, says "Two men in a buckboard passed the K. C. Champion was not in position to closely observe and as he failed to see the wagon box, he naturally supposed it a buckboard. In reality it was Flagg and stepson with running gears as related in my story.

I have described the breastworks surrounding the T. A. Ranch. I will include a drawing of same with these notes.

Applications were made to the commandant at Ft. McKinney for a cannon, but he refused to lend one, saying, "It is forbidden by government regulations." I have been told, by men supposedly informed, that the commandant intentionally left a cannon without the walls that night expecting the deputies to come and take it. I know nothing of this. If true, we failed to find out in time. It may be that he did this, personally, I always considered him friendly with Angus and the people, but if he did this, Angus knew nothing of it. Neither did Arapahoe Brown or his partner, Snyder.

Burial of Champion and Ray. Mercer tells us about all that is necessary, but I want to mention a few facts. During the time these bodies lay in store awaiting burial, hundreds looked them over and the effect on the small ranchers and town people was about the same as the effect of the scalped and mutilated bodies of the early frontier folk. Men would look at the bodies and turn away cursing and vowing vengeance on Canton and his gang. Women would shed tears and then, in anger, urge fathers, brothers, husbands or sweethearts to arm and avenge them. If Angus ordered, or permitted this knowingly and for the purpose of stirring the people to a frenzy, he surely knew how to inflame and keep his deputies stirred to the death and their fury at white heat.

Allen taken to the post. Mercer fully describes this, but he did not witness

the moving as did Negus and I. Allen surely was a frightened man. Never have I seen a man show more fear. Not a word was said to him although enough cursing was done after he left. Angus had told us that we must be quiet, that the only way the country at large could be made to realize true conditions was to remain quiet and allow things to go on in peace. All admitted that hanging was too good for this man but all felt that such action would react against the country and the settlers.

Clay was returning home after a visit to Scotland. He heard the news while anchored off the Irish coast. He hastened to Wyoming as soon as he landed and threw himself into things in order to get his comrades out of the pickle they were in. His book tells it all.

In spite of the claims of rustling, more stock was gathered in the fall roundup than claimed by the ranchers. (Shown by books and tally sheets) This shut up the cry of rustling. The stockmen were stunned. Beyond a doubt the bulk of the rustling was done by their own men, through false books and tally sheets.

Of the cold blooded murder of Dudley Champion, there is little more to say. Shonsy escaped, supposedly to Mexico. Reports of his death, of the death of the Texas Kid and others filtered back into the country. Many of the men taking part in the invasion met their fate either at the gun of other desperado, or at the hands of the law.

PART SECOND Jones shot by Fred Hesse. I have never believed this. I knew Fred Hesse, knew him very well. I do not believe now and never have I believed that Fred Hesse would shoot a man in the back. I have always believed, and I still believe that Jones was killed by Canton. The earmarks of the Jones and Tisdale killing were the same. Undoubtedly the same fiend killed both men. That fiend was Frank M. Canton. He was seen at the scene of the crime; he had threatened Tisdale; Canton, and Canton alone, was the paid killer of the Cattle Association.

Of other attempted murders, I could name several such attempts. Twice, riding in company with someone slated for execution or extermination by the stockmen, I was fired on. Each time we swung aside and dismounted. We drew out our Winchesters from their saddle scabbards and waited the assault, which never came. These hired assassins were very careful of their own lives. Two well-armed men, sheltered by horses were too formidable for close attack. On both occasions, riding to the scene of the ambush, we found empty 45-90 shells. Leading away were horse tracks, and in the distance, dust clouds showing where racing horses had sped over the ground.

Mercer's little booklet. My copy, too valuable for home keeping, reposes in a bank vault in another state. This was given to me as it come from the press. Its contents agree with what I know and I lived in the country and knew conditions.

THIRD PART. Star (*) shows reference to Dunning's confession.

FOURTH PART. Yellow pine trees beside the road. This clump, four large yellow pines, grew right beside the road. Here was the place I had picked out for my burial in case I should meet a bloody fate. It was some distance down stream and below the old burying ground on the east bank of the LaBonte. These trees have now entirely disappeared. Floods, storms, or possibly, ranchers have accounted for them. Not a sign of their presence now remains.

WESLEY MOULTON. Moulton and his partner Anderson, lived in the LaBonte country in the early sixties. LIGHT-IN-DARKNESS. This was the Indian name of Moulton's wife. See my historical romance of early LaBonte days: LIGHT-IN-DARKNESS.

PLACED UPON PAY ROLL. Before this could be done trouble began. Our names were never placed upon the roll, at least they were never published. To be sure neither of us was really known by name. Throughout the entire trouble we were called "The Kids." Always together, except when separated by Canton and Smith at the Tisdale Ranch,

we were merely called "The Kids." A young friend who had read this history was recently at Buffalo. Talking with an old timer he was astonished at the knowledge of conditions shown by the young lad. Said my young friend in answer to his inquiries, "An old fellow lives near my home in Colorado. He has written a history of these times. I have recently read it." Asked my name and it was given as was the name of Negus. Said the old timer, "I do not remember the names, but I do remember of them damned reckless kids. They were always together and always in trouble, always were they playing jokes on someone." More he said, but modesty forbids my recording his flattering statements.

PART SIXTH. * Ray shot. Smith, at Casper, had been put in charge of the Texans, Canton of the others and with Wolcott over all as Commander in Chief. The Texas Kid, one of Smith's men, openly boasted at the time that it was he who had first shot Ray. Charlie always believed it to be the truth.

* A SCALP WAS A SCALP. See early frontier history. Money was paid by some of the colonies for Indian scalps. Scalps of men, women and children were turned in for this so-called "bounty."

* CHAMPION UNWOUNDED. In his diary, Champion makes no mention of being wounded. This diary he kept up until he closed it to make his last run. He makes no mention of being wounded. Surely had he been struck by bullet he would have made note of it. This being the case he must have received all his wounds in his race for life or else many shots were fired into his lifeless body as he lay prostrate before his assailants. From the sound of the shots, Charlie always believed his body was riddled after he fell. This is easy to believe when we consider the men hidden in the gulch.

* SAM CLOVER. Clover was the newspaper correspondent who accompanied the invaders when they left Cheyenne. So confident were the leaders that they could continue "pulling the wool over the eyes of the outside public" that they had with them newspaper correspondents to send outside full accounts of the doings. These men

were, of course, "stuffed" from the start by the leaders. Soon their eyes were opened and eyes once opened, they deserted. The murder of Champion and Ray coming at the start was reported by them. Soon, very soon, they learned enough to make them suspicious. When this happened they deserted at once.

* CLOVER SAYS in his write-up of the Champion killing, "And there, in the dawn." Either this is a slip or else Clover wrote it thinking it would sound better to his eastern readers. Champion was killed in the late afternoon.

As we said before, "Champion in his diary does not mention being wounded." The bullet wounds found in his body, eight and twenty in number, were then received when he ran the gauntlet or were given by the men concealed in the gulch. This would bear out the report of Sam Clover who says he was shot by these men. This would also go to show that these men riddled the body after it was on the ground. This is not unbelievable. It was commonly reported, the reports coming from the invaders themselves, that they fired so long as they could see a quiver in the body.

PART SEVENTH. GRAIN FED HORSES awaited the invaders. The invaders had planned everything. Grain fed horses, hot lunches, extra supplies, etc., awaited them at stated stations. Champion's stern resistance, alone, held them back. But for this delay they might have surprised Buffalo and even wiped out Red Angus and others.

* THE DOOMED CITY OF THE PLAINS. Solon says, "From the start the leaders so designated Buffalo. So sure were they that they would win out that not a single expression of doubt was heard until the news of Angus's approach was made known to them. Then, all changed. Terror took the place of confidence. All knew, or had heard of Red Angus. They knew that he would enforce the laws, that wealth and political influence would not weigh with him. They had already committed murder and arson. They faced the prison or the rope at the hands of the law and they faced the noose

of the regulator or vigilantes of the hands of the justly aroused ranchmen. No word of confidence was heard until the shelter of the T. A. was reached.

PART EIGHTH. COMING OF THE SOLDIERS. The soldiers, under Colonel J. J. Van Horn, came in from the northeast. Three troops of cavalry, they passed between rifle pits two and three. They entered in the following order. Reading from the right to left: C. D. H. No resistance was offered by the deputies. Instead they roundly cheered the soldiers.

INVASION SONG. This song was composed, in part, by a drunken cowboy and set to music by one of Buffalo's "soiled doves." It was very popular among the besiegers of the T. A., was sung for a long time after and is still, by old timers, sung or chanted.

The history of this song is the history of all folk songs: founded on some actual incident, and sung at the time by those knowing the happening, it spreads east, west, south and north. Words, lines and even stanzas are added thereto and in time we have the finished ballad.

In this incident we witnessed not only the birth of the song, in which we had some little part, but the incidents which led to its being written. The song, crude as it is, describes or tells of actual incidents in what has now become known as the JOHNSON COUNTY STOCK WAR, INVASION SONG.

1.

Sad and dismal is the tale
I now relate to you,
'Tis all about the cattlemen,
Them and their murderous crew.
They started out on their manhunt,
Precious blood to spill,
With a gang of hired assassins
To murder at their will. *

REFRAIN

God bless poor Nate and Nick *
Who gave their precious lives
To save the town of Buffalo,
Its brave men and their wives.
If it hadn't been for Nate and Nick
What would we have come to?
We would have all been murdered by
Frank Canton and his crew.

II.

Poor Nate Champion is no more,
 He lost his precious life,
 He lies down in the valley -
 Freed from all care and strife.
 He tried to run the gauntlet *
 When they had burned his home
 And Nick was lying lifeless,
 Lips wet with bloody foam.

REPEAT REFRAIN

III.

The run was made; his doom was sealed,
 A fact you all know well.
 They left his lifeless body there
 On the slope, above the dell.
 No kindred near to care for him,
 To grasp his nerveless hand:
 A braver man was never faced
 By Canton's bloody band.

REPEAT REFRAIN

IV.

The very next name upon the list
 Was that of brave Jack Flagg. *
 Frank Canton must have surely thought
 That he would "fill his bag."
 Jack and his stepson came in view
 A riding round the curve:
 "Throw up your hands! By God they're off!"
 Frank Canton lost his nerve.

REPEAT REFRAIN

V.

"Red Angus" next, the "Canny Scot," *
 Was marked for Canton's lead;
 But Angus, warned by bold Jack Flagg
 For aid and succor, sped.
 The countryside now swarmed to life,
 The settlers armed in haste;
 Soon Red had hundreds at his back
 Who Canton's minions faced. *

REPEAT REFRAIN

VI.

To Crazy Woman's winding bank
 The cowed invaders fled.
 With K. C. blazing in their rear,
 And Ray and Champion dead. *
 Here, held at bay the cravens halt
 Till soldiers come to aid;
 And now secure in jail they rest,
The debt of blood, unpaid.

NOTES TO POEM. A gang of hired assassins. Read Dunning's confession which follows conclusion of notes and songs.

* RAN THE GAUNTLET. This is told in the account of the fight at the T. A.

* RED ANGUS. Angus was Sheriff of Johnson County and a braver and more fearless officer was never known in the west. The plot to kill him failed and a more fearless officer was never known in the west. The plot to kill him failed and he "got busy." Several hundred deputies were appointed. The invaders were cornered at the T. A. Ranch and but for the arrival of the soldiers, every man would have been shot or hanged.

RAY AND CHAMPION. Nick Ray and Nate Champion were cornered at the K. C. and shot down by the ruthless invaders. The cabin was set on fire after Ray had been wounded. Ray's body was badly charred by the flames. The writer, one of Red Angus' deputies, is perfectly familiar with the entire proceedings. For several years we had known the country and the men, both sides. Friendly, in the main, with both cattlemen and small rancher, our sympathy went, naturally, with our own class, the small rancher and homesteader.

NATE CHAMPION'S DIARY VERSIFIED

I.

It was a little blood-stained book that a bullet had torn in two, 1.
It told the tale of Nate and Nick which is known to all of you.
He had the nerve to write it down while the bullets fell like rain.
At your request, I'll do my best to tell these lines again.

II.

Two men stayed with us here last night, Bill Jones and another man, 2.
They went to the river with a bail but will come back if they can. 3.
I warned poor Nick to not go out, there might be someone near.
He opened the door, fell to the floor, will never live, I fear. 4.

III.

It's two hours since the fight began and bullets thick as hail!
I must wait on Nick, he's awful sick, he's still alive, but pale. 5.
At the stable, river and back of me, are gunmen sending lead. 6.
I cannot get a shot to hit. It's nine, and Nick is dead. 7.

IV.

Down at the stable I see a smoke! I guess they'll burn the hay. 8.
From what I've seen, they do not mean for me to get away.
It's now about noon, I see a rope thrown in and out the door. 9.
I wish that duck would show his pluck. He'd use a gun no more. 10.

V.

I don't know what has become of the boys that stayed with us last night. 11.
 Just two or three good boys with me and we'd guard the cabin right. 12.
 It's lonesome, boys. It's two o'clock, two men just came in view,
 And riding fast, as they went past, were shot at by the crew. 13.

VI.

I shot at a man down in the barn, don't know if I hit or not.
 Must look again. I see someone. It looks like - there's a blot. 14.
 I hope they did not get those men that across the bridge did run.
 If I had a pair of glasses here, I think I would know someone.

VII.

They're just through shelling the house again, I hear them splitting wood;
 I guess they'll fire the house tonight, and burn me out for good.
 I'll have to leave when night comes on, they'll burn me if I stay;
 I guess I'll make a running break and try to get away.

VIII.

They've shot another volley in, but to burn me is their game,
 And as I write, it's not yet night, the house is all aflame.
 So good-bye boys, if I get shot. I've got to make the run,
 So on this leaf I'll sign my name, Nathan D. Champion. 15.

IX.

The light is out, the curtain drawn, the last sad act is played.
 You know the fate that met poor Nate and of the run he made.
 And now across the Big Divide, and at the Home Ranch Door,
 I know he'll meet and warmly greet the boys that went before.

Author Unknown

NOTES TO POEM.

1. A blood-stained book. Champion's diary, blood stained, was found on his murdered body. It was read by his murderers but aside from blotting out where he had written "It looks like ____" they did not destroy it. Seemingly among them were men who respected bravery enough to forbid its desecration. The above ballad is founded on this diary.

2. Two men. These were the trappers, Jones and Walker .

3. Went to the River. They went to the river, first one and then the other. Captured and held by the invaders they did not return. They were taken to Omaha and railroaded toward the penitentiary on the trumped-up charge of selling whiskey to the Indians.

4. Nick shot. After the trappers failed to return Nick came to the door, passed into the yard and heading for the wood pile, picked up an ax to cut wood for the breakfast fire. Tisdale, one of the invading ranchmen said, "We don't want him! He's not a rustler!" About this time one of the Texans opened fire: in addition to \$5. per day and all expenses they/a ^{received} fifty dollar bonus for every man killed.

The writer of the above ballad did not write all Champion's heroism: Ray, wounded, fell by the wood pile and tried to crawl to the house. Champion sprang to the doorway, emptied his Winchester into the ranks of the invaders, tossed the gun back into the house and ran forth and dragged Ray to shelter. Then he reloaded and again opened fire. No braver or more courageous act was ever performed. Almost fifty men were shooting at him when he did this.

5. Nick was awful sick. Wounded to the death, Ray was very ill and called continuously for water. Champion cared for him while holding his enemies at bay.

6. In the stable, along the river, in back, etc. The K. C. was surrounded. Fire was poured in from all sides.

7. Nine and Nick dead. Nick died within a few hours.

8. Champion writes, "At the stable someone is throwing a rope out into the open and drawing it back. I wish he'd come out where I could get a shot." Why this was done no one knows. Possibly a hint of what would happen to Champion if taken alive.

9. He'd use a gun no more. Champion was a good shot and if any of the invaders had come into the open he would have thinned their ranks.

10. Champion wonders what had happened to their company. They were kept, bound, just below the river bank.

11. Just two or three good boys with me. Champion had to defend the cabin alone. This meant darting from side to side and from end to end to hold off the enemy.

12. Two men riding past. Jack Flagg and his stepson. Flagg on horseback and his boy with a team and running gears. Flagg quirted the horses into a run and they escaped.

13. Looks like _____. Champion had written the name, probably Elliott; the name was erased by the cattlemen.

14. I've got to make the run. Champion knew he was doomed. One man against almost three score.

15. The run he made. No greater deed of daring has ever been known. Not only did

Champion hold them off all day, but he almost escaped when he made his last run. In preparation for this run, he stripped for the race and hatless, shoeless, and in his shirt sleeves, he fled. In his hands, his rifle and at his belt his six gun. He ran the gauntlet, not uninjured, but still alive and fighting until fairly free. Beyond most of his enemies he was almost free when several hidden in a glade arose almost beside him and shot him down. So fearful were they, that they fairly riddled his body. No fewer than twenty nine wounds were found on it. Either he was fairly shot to pieces during the day or else the cowards filled his dead body with lead. This last is the solution, his diary makes no mention of wounds.

WAS CHAMPION A RUSTLER? (Cattle thief.) This is a moot question. He was so-called in this early day by many, and by many he is still so called. If by rustling it is meant that a man "bee-fied" a maverick now and then, he was probably guilty. We all were. In this early day, we cowboys were paid from two to five dollars per head for every maverick we branded for the ranch. No questions were asked. Many a big stockman of the day openly boasted that about the only time he tasted his own beef was when he was away from home and eating with a neighbor. Very few of the ranchmen, none to my knowledge, were above slapping their brand on a maverick.

I knew, personally, practically every ranchman in the invading army. I knew, personally, practically every small rancher and cowboy with Red Angus' deputies. Neither side could boast "clean skirts." "Of two evils choose the lesser." The side of the homesteaders was, by long odds, the lesser.

CHAMPION'S DIARY. This I have given in an earlier portion of the history. I need not here repeat it.

THE DIARY. The account in the diary was under the printed heading of April 9, 1892. It was written in lead pencil. As I have given it. It was published in the newspapers and copied off by friends and others.

(W. A. Martin.)

The above song was founded on the diary of Champion. I now include a poem of my own, recently written. This after reading the book, POWDER RIVER.

Written after reading an article on Nate Champion, murdered with Nick Ray,
by the cattlemen at the K. C. Ranch, April, 1892.

MIDNIGHT MUSINGS

I.

I think of the days, the days of old,
Of the days when I was young;
When I roamed in youth o'er the sandy wold;
When I trod the hills in my search for gold
And the songs of the trail were sung.

II.

And I think of the men with whom I rode,
The comrades, true and tried;
How over the hills in pride we strode
Where the mountain torrents dashed and flowed
Contented, side by side.

III.

Together we shared the good and ill,
Scant food and the low canteen;
Together we scouted by grove and rill;
Together we climbed the towering hill
And camped in the valleys green.

IV.

We fought, together, the red and white,
Together we faced the wild;
And blanket we shared on the frosty night
And venison halved, to the latest bite,
And with song the trail beguiled.

V.

And the thoughts come to me as here I sit
And muse on the days long past;
And the shades draw near and about me flit;
And the graves are rent apart and split
As if torn by the powder's blast.

VI.

And "Little Carl" shows to my gaze,
And with joy I welcome him;
And we journey back to the early days
When the game on the rolling prairies graze
And trout leap in the canons dim.

VII.

And others come forth to welcome me
Arise from the plain and hill;
And the red and the white anear I see
And they stand before me, tall and free,
And I hear their voices, shrill.

VIII.

And another comes, and I welcome him,
This friend of long ago;
This hero stout, erect and trim,
Whose eye of flame but death could dim,
This friend I once did know.

IX.

From his lonely grave in the Northern Land
 The land we loved to roam,
 He reaches to me his fleshless hand,
 The chieftain he of the ghostly band
 That rise from their bed of loam.

X.

For eight and forty years he's slept
 Alone in his bloody grave,
 And slowly the passing years have crept
 Since we buried him, damp with the tears we wept,
 This comrade, true and brave.

XI.

They named him "rustler," alive and dead,
 This friend of an older day.
 But they kept their distance till life had fled
 And concealed, from a distance the balls they sped,
 Till bloody he lifeless lay.

XII.

In the Powder Valley his bones shall rest
 Till his trump does Gabriel blow;
 And he summons the souls from east and west
 And their bodies rise from earth's loving breast
 Their records, to Him, to show.

XIII.

In that great day shall Nate Champion stand
 A smile on his fearless face;
 To witness bear 'gainst the knavish band
 That murdered him there in our western land,
 A cruel, treacherous race.

XIV.

Nate was the friend of the meek and low,
 Nate was the friend of all.
 Fearless he faced the guns aglow,
 Tho' doomed from the start he well did know,
 No friend to hear his call.

XV.

I knew him long and I knew him well
 This friend of an olden day.
 An honest man, and a brave - he fell
 And his slayers burn in the flames of hell,
 And there shall burn, always.

XVI.

If God IS GOD, and God is Love,
 As the Teachers preach and cry,
 Then Nate has made his final move
 And is safe with THE MASTER, high above,
 In His Mansions in the Sky.

(-W. A. Martin.)