

## J.W. "Doc" Brink Buried in St. Joe Co-Defendant with "Wild Bill" Hickok In Rock Creek Station Murders, 1861

*Editors's Note: The following article was contributed by Marilyn Bryan. It serves as background information for the upcoming May 19 Gateway field trip.*

The first emigrants over the Oregon-California Trail encountered few residents in today's Kansas or Nebraska. It was Indian Territory and any squatters were routinely routed by troops from Ft. Leavenworth.

In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the area for settlement and among the settlers were persons who established "road ranches" along the trail. Hardly ranches in the modern sense, these crude establishments supplied emigrants, Colorado gold-seekers and the military with needed services and supplies. In 1857, a trading post and stage stop was located along the west bank of Rock Creek, just over the today's Kansas-Nebraska border north of Marysville, Kansas. In 1859, David McCandles bought this ranch, adding another ranch house, an emigrant toll bridge, stables, and corral on the east bank.

David McCandles reportedly ran off West with his mistress and monies he absconded from collection duties as sheriff in North Carolina. Initially heading for the gold fields in Colorado, he stopped short in Nebraska after meeting disappointed prospectors. Later, McCandles' wife and children arrived at the Rock Creek Ranch.

Depending on which version of the story you adhere to, McCandles is either an enterprising, respected businessman or an 1860's version of the infamous Ken Rex McElroy, with the aid of a gang, bullying and terrorizing those who displeased him.

McCandles is reported to have punished an errant employee by lassoing and dragging him behind his horse up and down a frozen road. McCandles, a Southern sympathizer, reportedly had a contract supplying horses to the Confederacy, accomplished by impressing horses in Kansas. Some suggest the contract was a ruse and McCandles took the horses for his own trading. In April 1861, McCandles sold Rock Creek Ranch to the Pony Express for use as a relay station, agreeing to periodic payments.

The Pony Express sent Horace Wellman and his wife to run the station and assigned young James Butler Hickok as a stable hand. Hickok, at the time, was also known as "Dutch Bill". J.W. "Doc" Brink, a Pony Express rider, was also assigned riding between there and 32 Mile Creek Station. Some versions of the story romantically link Hickok and McCandles's mistress, Kate Shell, who lived nearby.

It is not surprising that the Pony Express, progressing in 1861 toward bankruptcy, failed to make timely payments to McCandles. By July, an irate McCandles made repeated demands of Wellman to come up with the money. Wellman even made an unsuccessful trip to Brownsville, Nebraska, with McCandles' 12-year old son, Monroe, in an attempt to get the money from his supervisor.

On July 12, Wellman and his wife were in the station ranch-house when McCandles, his son, and two employees, Woods and Gordon, came demanding payment. Hickok was either already in the station or came inside to investigate the commotion. At the door, Ms. Wellman intercepted McCandles, who called for her husband to come out. Whatever ensued, resulted in Hickok



*Wild Bill Hickok*

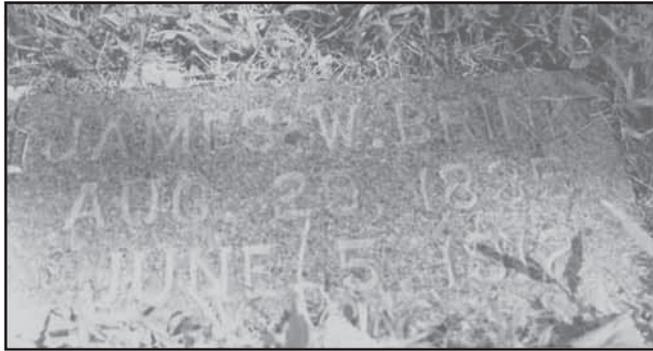
shooting and killing McCanles and wounding Woods, who Wellman, it is claimed, beat to death with a hoe. Gordon was also wounded, fleeing to the creek where, it is claimed, he was shot from behind by "Doc" Brink. Monroe, the son, if he was in danger, escaped.

A complaint of murder was filed by Leroy McCanles with the justice of the peace in Beatrice, Nebraska, naming "Dutch Bill", "Dock" and "Wellman", as those who committed the crime. Monroe was subpoenaed to testify, but was not permitted to do so at trial. Hickok, Brink, and Wellman, successfully pleading self-defense and protection of company property, were acquitted, with no other witnesses testifying. Perhaps McCanles's rogue reputation led the court in its decision, despite deaths that had resulted from being beaten or shot in the back.



*Today, the restored cabin where the shooting took place can be seen at Rock Creek*

Hickok went on to fame as "Wild Bill" Hickok, meeting his demise in 1876 in Deadwood, South Dakota, during a card game.



*Grave stone of Pony Express rider "Doc" Brink in Mount Auburn Cemetery in St. Joseph.*

He was said to be holding the famous "dead man's hand" (2 black aces, 2 black eights and another card historians disagree on).

James W. "Doc" Brink's family had moved to western Missouri in 1860. As Pony Express rider, he had carried the mail between Rock Creek Station and 32 Mile Station on the inaugural west-bound run on April 4, 1860. After the McCanles affair, he served as a scout during the Indian Wars. In 1882, Brink was living with his wife in St. Joseph, Missouri, where they raised two daughters. He worked as a butcher and restaurateur, living in the city for the last 29 years of his life. No one in St. Joseph seems to have been aware of his part in the Rock Creek affair or his prior service as a Pony rider. He is buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery.



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