

# Pioneer Hauled Gravestone 250 Miles in Wheelbarrow to Mark Wife's Grave

By GARY CHILCOTE  
(Staff Writer)

A lone grave on the Nebraska prairie more than 250 miles from St. Joseph marks the end of the trail of a pioneer tragedy involved this city.

It was 119 years ago that the pathetic story began in Lafayette County, Mo. Related events are sufficiently documented to warrant inclusion in a "Death Valley Days" episode on television. Lafayette County is east of Jackson County and the Kansas City - Independence area.

In 1852 Susan Hail and her husband left their home in

Lafayette County with a wagon train headed for the new lands of the west. Misfortune struck the family in Nebraska, and Susan, like so many others, died of Asiatic cholera on the Oregon Trail.

The woman who now lies buried in a lonely grave northwest of Kenesaw, Neb., met an untimely death after she drank water at the old government well near Dead Man's Ranch.

For many years it was believed that Indians had poisoned the water. Historians have since determined that the pioneers themselves polluted the

water supplies as there was very little knowledge of any form of sanitation when the wagon trains were moving westward.

Not wanting her grave lost nor her body dug up by wolves, Mr. Hail fashioned a crude coffin for his wife from the lumber out of his wagon. He left a temporary grave marker and left the wagon train, riding his team of horses back to St. Joseph, 253 miles southeastward.

At St. Joseph, Mr. Hail sold the team and used the money to purchase a grave stone. With his few remaining dollars

he bought a wheelbarrow and made the trip back to Nebraska on foot. Freight charges at the time were too expensive, and Mr. Hail had no other way of hauling the heavy stone.

The original gravestone has long since disappeared, and the third stone was placed on the grave in 1933.

The inscription on the present stone states, "Susan O. Hail of Lafayette County, Missouri, who died June 2, 1852, age 34 years, five months, 12 days. Legend says this pioneer died after drinking water poisoned by Indians. Erected and dedicated by the Hastings Outdoor Club June 30, 1933."

Visiting the grave recently were Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Potter of St. Joseph who have been researching incidents which occurred along the Oregon Trail more than a century ago.

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# Wild Bill Will Share Stage at Rock Creek Park

The legend of James "Wild Bill" Hickok began in Nebraska 117 years ago. And soon it will stir anew.

Rock Creek Station, where Hickok shot his first man (and second and third), will be developed into a state historical park.

But the park won't focus on Hickok alone, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission said. Rock Creek was more important as a Pony Express station and Overland Stage stop on the route between St. Joseph, Mo., and Sacramento, Calif.

In cooperation with the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The commission has proposed spending \$125,000 to begin development — conducting archaeological work to pin down building sites, creating a park headquarters, roads and parking area, plus planning a visitor center.

"Duck Bill"

No date has been set for completion, said Dale Bree, assistant commission director.

The site earned its niche in western lore after Hickok, then 23, shot to death David McCandles, station owner and first farmer in Jefferson County; his cousin, James Woods; and a friend, James Gordon, on July 12, 1861.

McCandles owned the station and had sold buildings to an ex-



—World-Herald Map

press company which employed Hickok as "assistant stock tender" (likely a dignified title for stable hand).

The company was slow making payments and McCandles thought it was either bankrupt or its manager was pilfering the payments. McCandles became upset, went to

see the manager, an argument arose and Hickok stepped in and shot the three men.

Hickok, identified as "Duch Bill," was arrested, but a justice of the peace freed him, said Marvin Kivett, historical society director.

Records of the case were discovered in 1926 in the courthouse at Beatrice, Kivett said. "Duch" may have been a variation of "Duck Bill," a nickname McCandles reportedly gave Hickok because of his protruding nose and chin.

Another Version

peragoes and he saw them to protect himself and others, commenting: "I felt as quiet and cool as if I was a-going to church" before the confrontation.

Western writers later named him Wild Bill and spun yarns about his purported exploits as scout, plainsman, peace officer and gambler who allegedly killed more than 100 men before Jack McCall shot and killed him in a Deadwood, S.D., saloon.

Over the years, the Hickok

legend grew, and pro-Hickok and pro-McCandles factions arose.

Some called Hickok a killer glorified into a hero by writers. Others said Hickok did the citizenry a service because McCandles and associates allegedly were preparing to prey on travelers along the trail.

Full Issue

In 1927, the Nebraska State Historical Society gave a full issue of Nebraska History magazine to the incident and concluded McCandles was a solid citizen, Hickok a murderer who

used to hold that view, Kivett said. A diorama of the incident — showing Hickok aiming a rifle at McCandles — is on display in the society's headquarters in Lincoln, along with the rifle.

Kivett said some of McCandles' relatives still live in Nebraska. The incident has been recreated at pageants.

Kivett said the society will move some displays to the station after there is a place to house them.

*Order history on chairs reading*