

## MELVIN BAUGHN

A PONY EXPRESS RIDER WHO TURNED OUTLAW  
AND WAS HANGED

One of the first and best known of the Pony Express riders out of St. Joseph, Mo., was Melvin (generally called "Mel") Baughn, whose route, most of the time that he was in the service, was between that point and Seneca, Kan.

After the suspension of the Pony Express in 1861, he joined a band of horse thieves and outlaws which terrorized Northwestern Missouri and Northeastern Kansas for some time. After committing various depredations and murdering a prominent citizen of Northeastern Kansas, Baughn was captured and hanged at Seneca, Kan. Other members of the gang, including Zach Mooney, were later taken into custody and lynched at Atchison.

Under the heading of "The Baughn Tragedy," Andreas' "History of Kansas," published in 1882, gives the following account of the affair:

"On November 12, 1866, four men came to Seneca with a team and wagon, and with three loose horses, the latter, as it was afterward proved, stolen by them at Elwood, in Doniphan County. On the 16th, three pursuers arrived at Seneca, procured writs, and proceeding west, on information obtained, found the thieves encamped on the Vermillion, about ten miles from town. Making no attack, the pursuers returned, obtained the Sheriff

with a small force of citizens, and again started out to make the arrest, going on the North road, the men they were seeking coming into Seneca on the same day on the South road, passing through and stopping a little east of the town. Here they divided; two of them, named Jackson and Strange, remaining where they were, and being arrested, while the other two, Baughn and Mooney, started out on foot, eastward. The Sheriff summoned a posse of men, who started in pursuit, and overtook the men they were after, on the Caploma road, at the crossing of the Muddy.

"Three of the pursuers, Charles W. Ingram, Henry H. Hillix and Jesse S. Dennis, were in advance of the rest, and on seeing the men rode nearly up to them, Ingram remarking, as they did so, "We have come for you." At this, one of the men, having a double barreled shot-gun, discharged both barrels at Ingram, neither of which took effect. The other one had two revolvers, and shot at both Hillix and Dennis, one shot passing through Hillix's clothing, another striking him just below the shoulder blade, making a severe but not dangerous wound. He returned the fire, but without effect.

"Dennis received a bullet in the back, which passed diagonally through the body, through the lungs, and in close

proximity to the heart. He was fatally wounded, living only a few moments. The one having the gun, after getting over into the adjoining corn field, again fired at Ingram, who jumped from his horse, thus avoiding the shot. Both men escaped.

"A proclamation was at once issued by prominent citizens of Nemaha County, offering a reward of \$1,000 for the delivery of the bodies of Baughn and Mooney, to the legal authorities of said county within ninety days, a description of both desperadoes being given.

On January 6, 1867, Melvin Baughn, the chief offender in the tragedy, was arrested in Leavenworth, on a description or warrant sent from St. Joseph for a gang of burglars who had plundered a store in Wathena, a few days before. Upon being recognized as the murderer of Dennis, he was brought from Leavenworth, delivered to the county authorities, and lodged in jail, a preliminary examination having been held and the prisoner bound over to await trial at the next term of the District Court. On January 10 an unsuccessful attempt was made to lynch Baughn, going no further than demands for the prisoner and threats, but being only satisfactorily settled by the crowd appointing a Deputy Sheriff to have special charge of the prisoner until his trial. On February 6, Baughn with another prisoner confined in the jail, succeeded in forcing open the doors and escaping, helping themselves to arms and ammunition in the passage of the jail.

"Efforts were made at recapture, unsuccessful until June 1868, and then only due to the fugitive's committal of lesser crimes than the one for which he was wanted in Nemaha County. On May 25 a house was robbed at Sedalia, Missouri; the next day a suspicious looking carpet bag was expressed by some one, to Joseph King, Otterville. Officers there were posted, but in endeavoring to make the arrest of King, wounded him severely, but nevertheless allowed him to escape for the time being, capturing him, disabled by his wound, two days after he was shot. On its being discovered that the prisoner was none other than the notorious Baughn, and after the necessary legal formalities, he was returned to Seneca on June 27, and recommitted to jail.

"On August 2 his trial commenced, concluding on the 6th, the jury returning a verdict of murder in the second degree. On the 7th, Judge R. St. Clair Graham pronounced sentence, that on the 18th of September 1868, the prisoner should be legally executed.

"This sentence was duly carried into effect, at three p. m. of the day mentioned, the condemned man showing extraordinary nerve at the approach of death, and freely forgiving the community who had "tryannized" over him, attributing their "ill-feelings to ignorance and bad whiskey." It is unnecessary to state that he announced his reconciliation to God.

"Thus ended the Dennis murder case, with the first and last judicial execution the county has seen."