

# BEECHER ISLAND

Continued from Page 1A

play a number of events including entertaining at nursing homes.

Highway 385 consists for four area men who enjoying "pickin' the strings" to a little bit of bluegrass, country and 50s rock-n-roll, just to name some. They say they are just a bunch of country boys from the high plains of eastern Colorado having a good time.

The Everharts come from Iowa and are known for their traditional country, folk and bluegrass music. Mr. Everhart created and host-produced the PBS television show "Old Time Country Music," which aired in 22 markets for seven years. He also hosted and produced a syndicated radio program called "Old Time Music Hour" for seven years. His current project is another radio program called "Bus Sto," a combination of Greyhound bus travelers and old-time music. He is also working on another television program

called "Tradition." They have performed world-wide and received many awards.

The activities began on Friday at 7 with the 385 Highway Band.

The black powder shoot, games including the pedal tractor pull and turtle races are held on Saturday. The Swinging Seniors will be playing in the afternoon and that evening, the Everharts will be entertaining at 7 p.m.

Pancakes will be served Sunday morning. The monument rededication ceremony will be held along with a flag ceremony at 9:40. There will be a 10 a.m. worship service with lunch following around noon. That afternoon, The Garage Boys will be singing; Mark Mahlberg will give the historical presentation of "The Life of a Dog Soldier" and there will be drawings for prizes.

For a full schedule of events, turn to the advertisement on Page 2 of this issue.



**HIGHWAY 36 BAND** will be performing at Beecher Island Days on Friday evening. Pictured, left to right, are: Terry Souther, Dan Steerman, E.J. Carpenter and James Lightle.

## Know the history behind the 1868 Beecher Island Battle site

By Karen Krien

Today, the battle site which took place on Beecher Island, 19 miles west of St. Francis on U.S. 35, then north, is a peaceful place. The cottonwoods shade the area which is just north of the Republican River which lazily moves along. This quiet setting is a far cry from the fierce battle which took place in 1868.

The Battle of Beecher Island did not take place until Sept. 17, 1868, but the cause may be traced back to 1864 when the Brule-Sioux and Ogallala Indians murdered all of the settlers in three counties in Minnesota. They took all of the guns, ammunition and stock of these settlers.

Home guards were raised and then never let up. The Indians were driven across the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and then into western Nebraska.

For a year and a half, they were very destitute but, by 1866, they had tanned enough buffalo robes for teepees to be comfortable and had cured enough meat for provisions, but they did not have ponies. They were very quiet for about 10 months and, in 1866, they visited the Cheyennes and Arapahoes and also the Red Cloud band of Sioux to get acquainted.

The council decided to murder all the frontier people in Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska but there were two drawbacks: 1) they had two enemies whom they dreaded more than they did the whites. They were the Pawnee Indians of Nebraska and the Kaw Indians of Kansas. These Indians were "reservation Indians" and they would help the whites.

The council figured the only way to accomplish their plan was to steal the ponies of the Pawnee and Kaw Indians.... without their ponies, they would be "out of commission."

Another fact in favor of the fierce Indians was there was only one regiment of United States soldiers guarding an area of 400 miles north and south, and 500 miles east and west.

The Indians began stealing stock until they had stolen 400 head of ponies from the Kaw. They raided the settlers on the Neosha River, Smokey Hill River and the Saline River.

They killed frontiersmen, outraged and murdered their women and carried their younger children into captivity. Many of the settlers on the Saline River were people who had served in the Civil War and they were ready to fight.

About this same time, General P.H. Sheridan appointed Major George Forsyth to command a group of scouts against hostile Indians. The Major would personally select the scouts and offer them \$1 a day and 35 cents a day for the use of their horses.

While they would not be enlisted men, they would still have equipment from the government and soldiers' rations. Major Forsyth's second in command was Lieutenant Fred Beecher.

Each scout's equipment consisted of a blanket, saddle, bridle, lariat,

picket-pin, canteen, haversack, butcher knife, tin plate and cup. The also received a Spencer repeating rifle (carrying six shots in the magazine besides the one in the barrel), a Colt's revolver (Army size) and 140 rounds of rifle and 30 rounds of revolver ammunition.

Each carried seven days of cooked rations in his haversack. Also taken with the scouts was a pack-train of four mules carrying camp kettles, picks, shovels, 4,000 extra rounds of ammunitions, some medical supplies and extra rations of salt and coffee.

The 50 men were selected and were easy to find as work was scarce and the money offered was very good for that time.

They made their way across the Saline River and south fork on the Solomon and then struck Beaver Creek where the Short Nose Creek emptied into it. It was evident that there had been a great sun dance and that is where the Indians had probably decided to go to war with the whites.

The scouts were called to the site of an Indian attack where two Mexicans had been killed. They were part of a freighter's train.

Following the tracks, they eventually met up with a dead end. They again found tracks which led them to believe that there was a very large tribe of Indians ahead.

They followed the signs for some time, but, on Sept. 16, horses tires and hungry, they stopped early. The valley was small and well grassed. Nearby, was a river which had an island which was about 200- by 50-feet and about 70 yards from either side of the bank.

The book, *The Battle of Beecher Island*, describes the long sage grass growing on the center of the island while, just at its foot stood a young cottonwood tree that was 20-feet tall.

Evidently sensing danger, the major ordered his men to not only hobble the horses, but also see that every horse's lariat was perfectly knotted. Before laying down to sleep, the scout was to inspect his picket pin and see that it was firmly driven into the ground.

In case of an attack, each man was to seize his horse's lariat as soon as he grasped his rifle and to stand by his horse to prevent a stampede.

Early the next morning, a small tribe of Indians attack the camp, rushing down on the camp shouting, beating Indian drums and rattling hides in an endeavor to stampede the horses but every man was standing with his horse's lariat and ready for a shot, thus, only a few horses were lost.

By the time it was light enough to see the surrounding objects a few hundred yards away, the Indians were seen. In Major Forsyth's account of the incident, "The ground seemed to grow with them. They appeared to start out of the very earth. On foot, on horseback, over the hills, out of the thickets, from the bed of the stream from the north, south, east and west, along the opposite bank and out of the long grass on every side of us."

In all, there were approximately 1,000 warriors. This did not count the women and papooses who had come along to watch the slaughter of the scouts.

When they saw that they were outnumbered, the scouts were ordered to go to the island, make a circle with their horses, tying them to the bushes. They threw themselves on the ground and, working two men together, tried to throw up the earth to cover themselves. Three men remained temporarily along the bank of the river. As the Indians attack, the men shot from beneath their horses.

As the Indians attack, they saw their error too late as they had not planned on the scouts occupying the island. The attacks were constant all that first day and by the end of the day, there was one man, Lieutenant Beecher, killed, several seriously wounded including Surgeon J.H. Mooers and others injured including the major.

Evidently, the Indians had many killed and injured as the women who had come to watch the scouts slaughtered and chant words of encouragement were not wildly wailing.

As darkness fell, the Indians did not attack, giving the scouts a chance to take care of their wounded, fix something to eat and dig trenches to better cover them from the Indian attacks. All of the horses had been slaughtered but they had taken the bullets met for the scouts. For the next six day, the scouts would exist on horse flesh, even as it became spoiled, as there was nothing else to eat.

Major Forsyth's account of the

battle is very detailed and takes many pages of *The Battle of Beecher Island* book. At one point, he describes the attack made by Roman Nose, the leader of the Indians: "I saw their chief facing his command, and by his gestures, evidently addressing them in a few impassioned words. Then waving his hand in our direction, he turned his horse's head toward us and at the foot of the island."

"As Roman Nose dashed gallantly forward and swept into the open at the head of his superb command, he was a very beau ideal of an Indian chief. Mounted on a large, clean-limbed chestnut horse, he sat well forward on his bare-backed charger, his knees passing under a horsehair lariat that twice loosely encircled the animal's body, his horse's bridle grasped in his left hand which was also closely wound in its flowing mane, and at the same time his rifle, while its barrel, crossing diagonally in front of his body, rested slightly against the hollow of his left arm, leaving his right free to direct the course of his men."

"He was a man of over six feet and three inches in height, beautifully formed and save for a crimson silk sash knotted around his waist and his moccasins on his feet, perfectly naked. His face was hideously painted in alternate lines of red and black and his head crowned with a magnificent war bonnet..."

During this attack, both Roman Nose and the medicine man were killed. The wild shrieks from women and children on the hill had increased.

It should be noted that the Indians rode their mounts with their knees under lariats because, if they were

injured or killed, their ponies would carry them off and their enemies would not be able to scalp them. If the Indian lost his scalp, he believed that he would not be allowed to go to the "Happy Hunting Ground."

After the first day of battle, two scouts, walking backward with their feet bound in rags to resemble moccasins and wrapped in blankets to resemble an Indian, were able to escape to go for help over 100 miles away. The second night, two more scouts tried to sneak out but could not find a way. The third night, two more were able to escape and eventually, all brought help but it wasn't until the sixth day of the siege that help arrived. By that time, most of the Indians had left.

### Indians' view

*The Battle of Beecher Island* book contains the view of the Indians.

The camps had become alive with excitement and great activity as the young men rounded up their ponies and prepared for war. Roman Nose had sent a messenger to the Cheyennes telling them to go to battle and not to wait for him as he would come later when he was ready.

Roman Nose's war bonnet had been made a long time ago and shielded the Indian as he rode into battle. There were certain things that, if disregarded, would take away the protective power of the war bonnet and one was if the wearer of the bonnet were to eat something lifted out of a pot or pan other than with a wooden stick.

Roman Nose was not ready because several days before the scouts had arrived, he had been invited to a feast by a certain Sioux and the woman who had prepared the food

had used an iron fork to lift the bread out of the pan. It was recommended that he go through a cleansing ceremony which would take considerable time.

He explained this to the chiefs and said that he would surely die in battle but they pointed out that there were many of his warriors depending on him and many were dying. He prepared for battle, put on his war bonnet and mounting his spirited horse to the lead in which he hoped to ride over and annihilate the white enemy.

He was shot down but was able to creep up from the river bank where some young bucks carried him away. He died about sundown.

No more massed charges were made after Roman Nose fell through sporadic fighting continued. Some years later, Roman Nose's wife was asked why the Indians gave up the fight when they knew the number of scouts were few compared to the number of Indians. She replied, "we felt that the Great Spirit was fighting on your side."

### In the end

Major Forsyth saw the upheavals between the Indian and white man this way: "...it is useless to discuss the causes that led to this state of affairs; that there were faults in abundance on both sides there is little doubt, but taken in its entirety, it was the advance of civilization against barbarism, with the assurance in the end of "the survival of the fittest," a harsh, cruel, but seemingly inexorable law, that has obtained since the dawn of creation.

*Editor's note. Much of the information for the above article was taken from the book, The Battle of Beecher Island.*

## BUSINESS CARD DIRECTORY

*To list your business drop us a card!*  
Call 785-332-3162 today.

**Western Kansas Center for Comprehensive Dental Diagnosis & Rehabilitation**  
1690 W. 4th • Colby, KS  
460-3999 or toll free 1-866-305-3999

**Jeffrey M. Rayl, D.D.S.**

- Comprehensive bite analysis
- TMJ/TMD diagnosis and rehabilitation
- I.V. Sedation for all dental procedures including surgical removal of wisdom teeth
- Dental Implants: surgical placement and restoration
- Complete endodontic services (root canal molar and anterior teeth)
- Extensive cosmetic procedures
- Laser periodontal (gum disease) therapy
- Esthetic crown and bridge restorations: all ceramic (no metal)
- General dental procedures: cleanings, tooth colored fillings, partial dentures, biologic dentures

## Bison

Rx compounding & Therapy

Customized prescriptions for patients with unique medical situations requiring unique medical solutions.

James E. Hampton, RPh, PCCA Member  
416 State Street, Suite A  
Atwood, Kansas 67730  
(785) 626-3237  
(800) 696-3214  
Bison Rxcompounding@atwoodtv.net

**S. Casey McCormick**  
Advertising Manager  
**The Saint Francis Herald**  
**Bird City Times**

Phone/Fax 785-734-2659      785-332-3162  
PO Box 220      785-332-3001 (fax)  
Bird City, KS 67731      sfherald@nwkansas.com

## FLANDERS GUTTERING

*"A better way to go"*

**SPECIALIZING IN:**

- 5 inch seamless guttering
- Roofing • Windows
- Soffit and Fascia

**CALL FOR SPRING SPECIALS!**  
FREE ESTIMATES  
785-694-2865 or 785-462-0632

nwkansas.com

INTERNET Access  
as low as \$14.92/month

Tech help Available  
Hookup Same Day as Signup

The Saint Francis Herald

P.O. Box 1050 ~ St. Francis

The world. As close as your phone. 785-332-3162

Residential & Commercial

## ROOFING

Local DURO-LAST Contractor

Murray Roofing

740 E. 4th  
Colby, KS 67701

FREE ESTIMATES

785-462-6908  
800-794-3204  
Jeff Dreiling/Sales

Kelli Gartland

CTX Mortgage Company

Giving back to the Great Community I was raised in and meeting your home financing needs. Local references available about the Great Care you will receive.

Toll Free • 888-749-4253  
Cell • 303-257-3766

kelli.gartland@ctxmort.com  
www.ctxloanofficer.com/kelli