

The Burnt District, Cass County and the Youngers Podcast Transcript

Narrator: In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, Henry Washington Younger was the mayor of Harrisonville, Missouri and managed real estate and personal assets valued at \$37,000. By war's end, Younger had been murdered, his family had been forced from its home, and his daughters had been imprisoned. The Youngers were among the 20,000 Missouri residents affected by Order #11, which transformed the area's pioneers into refugees and forever branded the region as the Burnt District.

The Younger family came to Missouri from Kentucky nearly four decades before the Civil War, according to Carol Bohl, Executive Director of the Cass County Historical Society.

Carol: When the Younger family moved out here in the 1820s that would have made Henry Washington about ten. His father was a very shrewd horse trader, land speculator. He amassed a wealthy estate. He was known for his Kentucky bred hot blooded horses and owned thousands of acres of valuable property.

Narrator: Younger remained in Jackson County during his early adulthood, moving his family to Cass County in the late 1850s.

Carol: Washington was also a shrewd businessman and a stock trader. He was married at the age of twenty to Bursheba Frisco. He originally was living up in Jackson County. But he moved the family down to Harrisonville in either 1857 or 58 to set up a dry goods business, a livery stable and a blacksmith shop around the square. He also had the government mail contract. He was going to deliver the mail and used Harrisonville as a central spot for that. He owned more than 2,500 acres in Cass County. So he was well respected, the family was well received in Harrisonville so much that he was elected its first mayor in 1859.

Narrator: But the good times were short-lived. With the start of the Civil War, Missouri's border towns like Harrisonville became a target for Union actions based in Kansas. Among the men whom locals came to hate was Charles "Doc" Jennison, a well-known figure in Territorial Kansas who, after the start of the Civil War, was commissioned colonel of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry Regiment. Before his regiment was established, Jennison led an irregular force known as Jennison's Jayhawkers, which raided and plundered western Missouri towns like Harrisonville.

Carol: On July 17th, 1861 Jennison's Jayhawks rode onto the square where Henry's businesses were. And the Jayhawkers rode into town and burst into every business and basically looted the town. They took all of the dried goods from his store. They took his horses because they were known as the best. Took all the wagons he used in the mail order or in the mail delivery. And basically filled up all of those with clothing, saddles, clocks, jewelry, implements, anything they could load into the wagons and hauled it back to Kansas. And so Marshall law was declared in Missouri and Harrisonville became a garrison town in Missouri. Union troops moved in. They used the churches to stable their horses, the courthouse in the middle of the square to stable their horses.

Narrator: Tensions escalated after the Union army occupied Harrisonville. The Cass County Home Guard of the Missouri Cavalry was made up of pro-union

Missourians, including Illinois-born Bates County farmer Captain Irving Walley. When Walley and other Union soldiers attended a birthday party for a friend of Henry Washington Younger's daughter Sally, a scuffle ensued.

Carol: Cuthbert Mockby threw a party that winter for his daughter, who was turning sixteen. Sally Younger, daughter of Henry Washington was also sixteen, they were best friends. So she was invited to the dance. As was her brother Cole, who was seventeen. One of the Union officers, Irwin Walley was there. They were there to kind of keep an eye on the locals to see what was going on. And Captain Walley came up to Sally and asked for a dance. She refused, after all it was the same Union troops that had wiped out her father's business just a few months before. But Walley pressed the question, asked again. Well, her brother Cole, being a southern gentleman, stepped in to defend his sister's honor, and at that point Cole and Walley got into a heated verbal exchange, and probably some punches were thrown. Friends pulled them apart and Cole and Sally left the dance.

Narrator: The scuffle left Henry's son Coleman Younger at odds with the occupying Union Army. Cole's father urged him to leave Cass County. While hiding out at his farm in Jackson County, Cole encountered Jayhawk raiders. According to his memoir, Cole took to riding with pro-Southern guerillas in an attempt to protect his life, family and farm.

Although Cole Younger fled Harrisonville, Captain Walley never forgot the way Cole embarrassed him at the dance – and he took it out on the Younger family.

Carol: The summer of 1862 Henry Washington had gone back to New York City to restock his business. And then he'd gone up to Kansas City in July, actually July 20th to sell some horses to gather some more goods for his livery. On the way back, Captain Walley waylaid Henry Washington and shot him in the back three times and left him in the dust. He actually died there in the dust.

Bursheba was left at the age of forty-six as a widow with five small children still at home to raise. Left with an estate to settle. And left in the middle of a lot of turmoil that was happening on the border.

Narrator: The situation only grew worse for the Younger family. Federals burned their house in February 1863. In August, Henry Washington Younger's oldest daughters, and some of their cousins, were rounded up and jailed in Kansas City in a Union effort to keep them from assisting guerillas. Tensions further escalated on August 13, 1863 when a building in which some of the girls were held collapsed.

Carol: Four of the relatives of the Bushwhackers were killed; one was maimed. Two of those were cousins of Cole Younger. One was the sister of Bill Anderson who was another guerilla. And another of his sisters was maimed for life. So, this pretty much set some of the guerillas to thinking that their women had been brutally murdered on purpose.

Narrator: After Jayhawker raids and the Kansas City prison collapse, guerilla leader William Clarke Quantrill finalized secret plans to invade the abolitionist stronghold of Lawrence, Kansas.

Carol: So, they felt like this was probably the “den”, they said, of the abolitionists. They were also after Jim Lane, they didn’t care for him because he had been part of the burning and the looting and the thievery on the border for quite awhile. They just knew they were riding. They didn’t know why. They didn’t know where. On the morning of August 21st, they did show up and pretty much surprise the town of Lawrence ride in murder and kill over 150 men and boys burned a lot of the buildings, ride back out through Cass County and disappeared into the brush after their deed was done.

Narrator: Cole Younger – whose scuffle with Union Captain Walley had forced him into exile, whose father had been murdered, whose sisters had been imprisoned in Kansas City – was one of the guerillas who rode to Lawrence with William Clarke Quantrill. By the end of the raid, Quantrill’s men had killed in excess of 150 citizens and burned many houses and all but two of the city’s businesses.

General Thomas Ewing, Commander of the District of the Border, was in Leavenworth during the raid and did not receive word until 10:45 the following morning. Less than two days following Quantrill’s Raid, Ewing issued Order Number 11, which decreed the evacuation of Missourians from four border counties and the burning of their lands. In 1860, Cass County was home to nearly 10,000 residents. After Order #11, there were fewer than 600. Among those forced from their homes was what was left of the Younger family.

Carol: They burned the homes. They burned the crops. They burned anything that they couldn’t leave with and take with them, and drove over 20,000 people out of this area in fifteen days.

What happened to the Youngers was typical of what happened to all the families. As Cole tells it in his autobiography, the day the Federals came, his mother was weak. She was sick. And the captain in charge of the unit asked her why she hadn’t complied with Order Number 11. She said, “Well, I’m sick. I don’t have any place to go. I can’t leave.” The captain said, “Well, you must obey. We’re going to burn your building.” And she said, “If you will let me stay I will burn the house with my own hands the next morning.” So, they agreed. And the next day, they put her in the farm wagon. She couldn’t walk she was very frail by that time. And she did set the fire with her own hands.

Narrator: The family was never the same. After a short time in Lafayette and Clay Counties, they moved to Texas to start over. In 1870, Bursheba returned to Missouri, where she died.

Although most guerillas returned to more civilized pursuits in the years following the Civil War, Cole and his brothers Jim, John and Bob chose a life of crime, riding with the likes of outlaws Frank and Jesse James. John was killed in a shootout with Pinkerton agents in 1874. Jim and Bob were arrested in 1876 following a failed attempt to rob a Minnesota bank. Bob died in prison. Jim died soon after he and Cole were paroled, in 1901. Cole died in 1916 and was buried in Lees Summit, Missouri.

The border wars greatly affected communities on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri border. Order #11 forever changed the landscape of Jackson, Cass, Bates and Vernon Counties, which came to be known as the Burnt District.

Carol: So, it was very hard here for people for to get back into normal life but the actual community did recover. 38% of the people that were banished during Order

Number 11 came back. That means almost two-thirds never returned. The population was very different after the war because the people that did come back were 60% from northern counties, northern states. So they did bring a very different flavor to the county. The county after the war, by 1870, had actually doubled its population from before the war.

So, the majority of the people after the war hadn't experienced it, didn't know actually what had happened. Probably to this day, the ordinary person in Cass County does not know the story.

Narrator: Today, the Cass County Historical Society is working to ensure that the story of the families affected by the border wars is not forgotten. They have recently completed a Burnt District Monument to memorialize the events. The monument is on the grounds of the Cass County Justice Center.

Carol: It was a story that was about civilians. It was a war on civilians; it was families who lost everything they had at the beginning of the war. Almost everyone lost a family member to the war. They lost their property. They lost their homes. They lost their community. They were totally devastated. So, here on the border it was a true Civil War. It was a war against civilians. And that is the story of the burnt district. And the story of the war on the border in Cass County that we hope to tell and to commemorate.