

= Banditti of the Prairie =

The Banditti of the Prairie also , known as " The Prairie Bandits , " " Pirates of the Prairie , " " Prairie Pirates , " or simply " The Banditti , " in the U.S. states of Illinois , Indiana , Ohio , and the territory of Iowa , were a group of loose @-@ knit , outlaw gangs , during the early @-@ mid @-@ 19th century ( 1800s ) . Though bands of roving criminals were common in many parts of Illinois , the counties of Lee , DeKalb , Ogle , and Winnebago were especially affected by them . In the year 1841 , the escalating pattern of house burglary , horse and cattle theft , stagecoach and highway robbery , counterfeiting , and murder associated with the Banditti had come to a head in Ogle County . As the crimes continued , local citizens formed bands of vigilantes known as Regulators . The clash , between the Banditti and the Regulators in Ogle County , resulted in the outlaws ' demise , near Oregon , Illinois , and decreased Banditti activity and violent crime , within the county .

Banditti and Regulator activity continued well after the lynching that took place in 1841 . Crimes continued , committed by both sides , across northern / central Illinois . The Banditti were involved in other notable events as well , including the 1845 torture @-@ murder of merchant , Colonel George Davenport , the namesake of Davenport , Iowa . Edward Bonney , an amateur detective who hunted down and brought to justice the killers , wrote of his exploits and alibi , which were recounted in his book , Banditti of the Prairies , or the Murderer 's Doom ! ! : A Tale of the Mississippi Valley , published in Chicago in 1850 . The outlaw gangs also , continued to be active in Lee and Winnebago counties following the events in Oregon .

= = The Banditti in Illinois = =

= = = Northern Illinois activity = = =

The " Prairie Bandits " were active , across northern Illinois , especially in Lee , Ogle , Winnebago , and DeKalb counties , from 1835 , until the events leading to their ultimate demise began on March 21 , 1841 . The Bandits wielded considerable influence in the area , collectively known as the Rock River Valley , following the influx of immigrants , after the Black Hawk War of 1832 , the last Indian war in Illinois . The Banditti posed a far greater threat , for a much longer period , than the exaggerated paranoia of the two month , Native American conflict . IFormer Illinois Governor Thomas Ford wrote in History of Illinois :

= = = = Banditti crimes in Lee and Ogle Counties = = = =

In Lee County , Illinois , the Banditti also , had enough power to get away , unnoticed . The group had enough allies that they were scattered throughout the county . The connections the Banditti had around the county made illegal activities such as counterfeiting and dealing in and concealing stolen property easy to perpetrate . It was reported , that , at one time , every township officer , in Lee County , was a member of the Banditti . Acts of theft were carried on in defiance of authority . Citizens were threatened when they tried to seek redress from the thieves .

In the end , the Prairie Bandits ' activity in Ogle and Lee County became more than area residents were willing to withstand . In Ogle County the crimes that occurred in March 1841 resulted in a kangaroo court which culminated with the lynching of two Banditti near Oregon , Illinois . In nearby Lee County , a Vigilance Committee was formed by men from throughout Lee County , and especially Lee Center Township took an active role in suppressing the Banditti activity .

Beginning with the events on March 21 , 1841 , violence and retribution escalated in , the area around the Ogle County seat , of Oregon . Illinois , still frontier in 1841 , was settled by large numbers of migrants after the Black Hawk War . The settlers were followed to the area by a criminal element . The Banditti of the Prairie were part of the crime problem that plagued much of northern Illinois . As such , the concerned citizens of Ogle County , organized and eventually took the law into

their own hands .

= = = Ogle County Banditti activity = = =

On March 21 , 1841 , six members of the Banditti were arrested on charges of counterfeiting . They were held at the Ogle County Jail in the city of Oregon . That night a fire broke out in the newly completed courthouse , which was to be used for the first time the next day . The fire , set by the Banditti , was meant as a diversion to facilitate the escape of the apprehended gang members . The diversion failed ; though the courthouse burned to the ground , the jail remained intact . The court records concerning the case had been safely concealed in the home of the court clerk . Ford , who sat as Ogle County Circuit Judge at the time , reconvened court at a new location and the trial for the accused counterfeiters went on as planned .

= = = Arrests and county court trial of Banditti = = =

The jury , as was common in Ogle County at the time , had been infiltrated by one of the Banditti , who subsequently refused to convict the accused . The other jurors persuaded the rogue juror to convict by threatening to lynch him in the jury room if he failed to agree with the majority opinion . The Banditti juror capitulated and three of the accused were convicted . The convicts , however , soon escaped and avoided their sentences .

= = = Formation of the Regulators = = =

In April , 1841 , the community of Oregon and Ogle County in general had reached a boiling point . During that month , a group of citizens , possibly acting under direct counsel from Ford , met at a schoolhouse in White Rock Township and formed an organization aimed at driving the outlaws out of the county . Membership in the new group grew quickly , soon numbering in the hundreds , and copycat chapters sprang up all over the Rock River Valley . These bands of citizen vigilantes were most often known as " Regulators " . Other names included , " lynching clubs " , and in Lee County one group was known as the " Associations for the Furtherance of the Cause of Justice " .

The Regulators in Ogle County began by whipping two horse thieves , one of whom joined the group after the incident . The first Ogle County Regulator captain , W.S. Wellington , stepped aside , after his grist mill was destroyed and his horse tortured and killed in April 1841 . The new captain , John Campbell , was a resident of White Rock Township . The local Banditti were the Driscoll family and members of the Driscoll Gang . At the head was John Driscoll , who had migrated from Ohio in 1835 with his four grown sons , William , David , Pierce and Taylor . The Driscoll 's lived on Killbuck Creek in northeast Ogle County . Driscoll and his son Taylor had both been convicted of arson while they lived in Ohio .

Campbell 's ascension to the lead Regulator post was met with hostility from the Driscoll camp . William Driscoll immediately sent Campbell a letter offering to kill him . Campbell responded in kind ; he assembled 200 Regulators , and marched to the Driscoll home . A small group of Banditti had gathered at the Driscoll homestead but seeing they were outnumbered they fled , only to return with the DeKalb County Sheriff and other authorities in tow . The Sheriff and his companions did not see the events as the outlaws had hoped ; they sided with the vigilantes , and the Driscolls promised to leave within twenty days . Instead of leaving , the Driscolls and the other Banditti held a meeting in which they determined that Campbell and his fellow Regulator , Phineas Chaney , had to be murdered .

= = = Regulator trial and execution of Banditti by firing squad = = =

Nearly three months later , on June 25 , 1841 , there was an attempt to kill Chaney . Two days passed , and on June 27 David Driscoll and his brother Taylor attacked Campbell at his farm . David fired the single , fatal shot . Campbell 's son , Martin , then 13 , fired at the Driscolls with a shotgun ,

but the weapon failed to go off .

The account that stated David and Taylor Driscoll were the gunmen came from Campbell 's wife . Despite this claim , hoofprints at the scene of the crime indicated that there had been an additional three horses there . It was these hoofprints that the Regulators followed back to the Driscoll home . Once there , accompanied by Ogle County Sheriff William T. Ward , the angry group confronted John Driscoll . After questioning by Ward and his accompanying mob , the sheriff was satisfied that John Driscoll was involved in Campbell 's murder and arrested him " on suspicion of being accessory to the murder " . While David and Taylor Driscoll , the gunmen , fled that fateful day , William and Pierce Driscoll were arrested by a group of Regulators from Rockford .

The regulator court was convened at " Stephenson 's Mill " in Washington Grove , Illinois , because of the courthouse fire in March , 1841 . The court was organized , witnesses gathered , and proceedings went forward . A crowd gathered at the mill , estimated to be as many as 500 . At this point , Ogle County Sheriff Ward appealed to have the Driscolls returned to his custody . E.S. Leland presided over the makeshift court as judge , a position he would later hold legitimately in Ottawa , Illinois . Leland directed those present who were Regulators to form a circle , 120 men initially stepped forward ; nine were dismissed as not being " real " Regulators . The 111 men remaining formed the " jury " .

On June 29 , 1841 , the vigilante trial began and William Driscoll admitted to telling his brother to kill Campbell , but only " in jest " . His father , John , denied vehemently that he had anything to do with the murder , though he did admit to stealing numerous horses . Pierce Driscoll was released from custody when no evidence was found linking him to the crime . At the trial 's end the guilty verdict was described as " almost unanimous " ; the Driscolls were immediately sentenced to be hanged on the spot . The Driscolls refused to be hanged and instead requested that they be shot . Before the execution was carried out , William Driscoll confessed to six murders ; John confessed to nothing . The Regulators then assembled a large firing squad and prepared to carry out the execution . The Regulators divided themselves into two separate squads , one for each man , of 55 and 56 riflemen . The line of 56 executioners shot first John Driscoll . William , by this time trembling , was gunned down next by the line of 55 Regulators .

The description in the 1909 Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois was somewhat more tame :

The lynching of the Driscolls did not spell the end of the Regulators , nor the Banditti , but it did serve to greatly decrease Banditti activity in Ogle County .

= = = Winnebago County Banditti activity = = =

Though the banditti continued to plague areas of northern Illinois , they were largely eradicated from Ogle County , following the lynching of the Driscolls . However , both the Banditti and the Regulators continued to be active . In Winnebago County , in early July 1841 , the offices of the Rock River Express were ransacked , an early predecessor to the Rockford Register Star , the daily newspaper of Rockford , Illinois . The offices were likely trashed in response to a scathing editorial published by the Express speaking out against the vigilante action taken by the Regulators .

= = = Murder of Colonel Davenport by Banditti in Rock Island = = =

Banditti crimes continued well into the 1840s . One of the most shocking incidents , outside of the murderous crimes of the Driscoll Gang , in Oregon , to be attributed to the Banditti , was the callous murder of Colonel George Davenport at his home on the grounds of Rock Island Arsenal . On July 4 , 1845 , Colonel Davenport was assaulted in his home by Banditti men who thought he had a fortune in his safe . Beaten and left for dead , he survived long enough to give a full description of the criminals before he died that night . Five men were charged with the murder of George Davenport , and all but one , who escaped before the trial , were hung for the murder . Three more men were charged with accessories to the murder . One man was sentenced to life in prison , but escaped and was killed three months later , one man served one year in prison , and the charges were dropped against the third man , who left the area .

= = = Lee County Banditti activity = = =

In Lee County , Illinois the Banditti were most active in the years 1843 @-@ 1850 , after the lynching in Oregon . During that period , crime and gang operations were rampant throughout the Mississippi Valley but Lee County , like its neighboring northern Illinois counties , saw consistent activity . Near the Lee County village of Franklin Grove , a brutal double @-@ murder was committed in 1848 . On May 20 , 1848 , area resident Joshua Wingert , while searching through the grove two miles ( 3 km ) west of town for his cattle , came upon a small log hut . Inside he discovered the bodies of two men , killed with their own axe . One of the men was nearly decapitated and the other had a large gash across his forehead . The assumed motive was robbery , as the hut was ransacked and bloody fingerprints were all about the small building . The Banditti perpetrator or perpetrators were never apprehended .

Also , in Lee County , the Banditti were active in and around Inlet Grove . In June 1844 the group carried out a daring robbery of a Mr. Haskell . Haskell 's residence was robbed by masked men in the midst of a summer thunderstorm . The perpetrators entered Haskell 's bedroom while he and his wife were asleep . The robbers dragged a trunk of money out from underneath the sleeping Haskell 's bed undetected , much of the noise they made probably drowned out by thunder . The Haskell's did not discover they had been the victims of a robbery until the next morning .

= = = Jo Daviess County Banditti activity = = =

= = = Central Illinois activity = = =

= = = Hancock County Banditti activity = = =

= = = Southern Illinois activity = = =

= = = Madison County Banditti activity = = =

= = = = Sturdivant Gang = = = =

= = = Pope County Banditti activity = = =

= = = = Sturdivant Gang = = = =

= = = Massac County Banditti activity = = =

= = = = Flatheads and Regulator War = = = =

= = = Gallatin County Banditti activity = = =

= = Banditti activity in Iowa = =

= = = Eastern Iowa activity = = =

= = = Jackson County Banditti activity = = =

= = = Lee County Banditti activity = = =

= = = Banditti activity in Indiana = = =

= = = Northern Indiana activity = = =

= = = Southern Indiana activity = = =

= = Banditti activity in Ohio = =