

SHOWDOWN AT STAHL

An on-going family feud came to a tragic end on January 27, 1894, when Ephraim Bransteter fatally wounded William A. Lloyd with a revolver in Stahl, Missouri, a town of 45 people located on the O.K. Railroad, approximately 15 miles west of Kirksville. Neither family was living in the town at the time, but it was the site of the showdown stemming from a misunderstanding concerning rented land in Stahl.

This Adair County town was one of the centers of the mining industry which was developing in Northeast Missouri during the turn of the century and, like most mining towns, was mainly self-sufficient. Stahl consisted of a post office, railroad depot, and two general stores where, according to long-time Stahl resident Alberta Novinger, "You could get anything you wanted: produce, hardware, even had men's clothing and dress suits." A quiet, industrial town, Stahl became the site of a final, violent clash between the Bransteter and the Lloyd families in 1894.

Nineteen years before this clash, there was a manslaughter charge brought against Peter Bransteter and his son William concerning the death of John B. Young, a farmer from the Polk

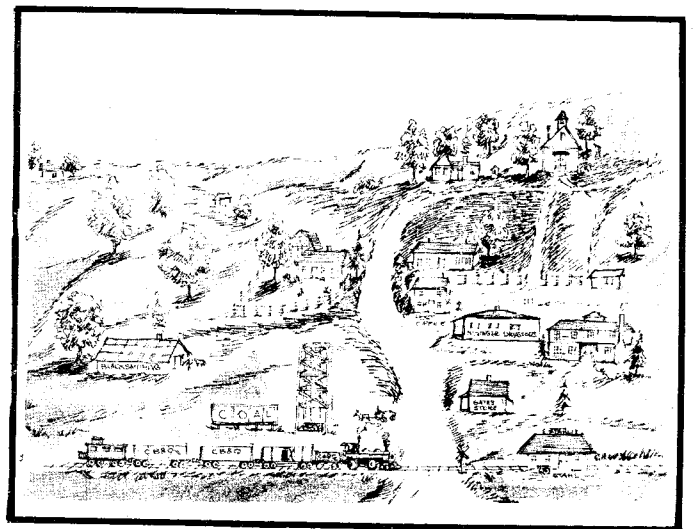
township. Mr. Young's son reportedly found his father hanged in his home, and the Bransteters were brought to trial for this murder; the townspeople felt that the tension between the Bransteters and the murdered man could have been a motive. After a long and arduous trial, the Bransteters were acquitted and the real murderer's identity remained a secret until a few years later when the son of the dead man admitted to the offense on his deathbed.

Subsequent to that incident, the Bransteters led quiet lives without conflict until their dispute with the Lloyds. The Lloyds were renting land in Stahl to the Bransteters and had a misunderstanding concerning this land. The disagreement was brought to court as a petty lawsuit which was decided in favor of the Lloyds. The lawsuit left both parties with ill feelings toward each other which were further aggravated when three Lloyds attacked some Bransteters with clubs on their way home from church on Sunday, January 7, 1894.

After the church incident, both parties decided to solve their problems, permanently. Two designated men, William Lloyd and Ephraim Bransteter, complete with backup brothers, two



Mrs. Alberta Novinger (right) has lived in Stahl since 1921. Mrs. Hazel Wilson (left) and Glenn Riley (center) attended a one-room schoolhouse in Stahl. They provided much of the information about the town's early history.



This drawing of Stahl was done by Glenn Riley's son, Glendale. Mr. Riley explained that his son's picture might not be completely accurate as "he drew that from memory."

for the Bransteters and one for the Lloyds, were to meet in Stahl (neither family lived in Stahl at the time). William A. "Wig" Lloyd arrived in Stahl from his home in Sidney, Missouri, on Saturday, January 27, 1894, accompanied by at least one of his 15 siblings and a black snake whip. He was met there by Ephraim Bransteter and two of his brothers. Everyone involved was armed with a revolver. At first, words were exchanged while each tried to prod the other into making the first move. This all took place on the front porch of Moore Brothers Store, one of the general stores in Stahl.

Ephraim Bransteter invited William Lloyd to take a walk with him, to which Mr. Lloyd declined. Ephraim Bransteter continued to verbally goad William Lloyd until he ultimately struck Mr. Bransteter with the butt end of the snake whip. Ephraim Bransteter then fired at "Wig" Lloyd, missing him and allowing Mr. Lloyd the chance to run into the store. Once inside the store, William Lloyd drew his revolver and prepared to shoot Ephraim Bransteter, but he was not quick enough. Mr. Bransteter fired a shot which left "Wig" Lloyd lying dead with a head wound on the floor of the Moore Brothers Store. As Ephraim Bransteter began running towards the woods, William's brother, James Lloyd, fired three futile shots at him.

Immediately, a posse was formed, and the search for Ephraim Bransteter began. On Sunday evening Sheriff Rupe and Marshall Pratt spotted Bransteter in a ravine west of Greentop. Mr. Pratt fired at him and missed, and Mr. Bransteter again disappeared into the woods. Ephraim Bransteter continued to



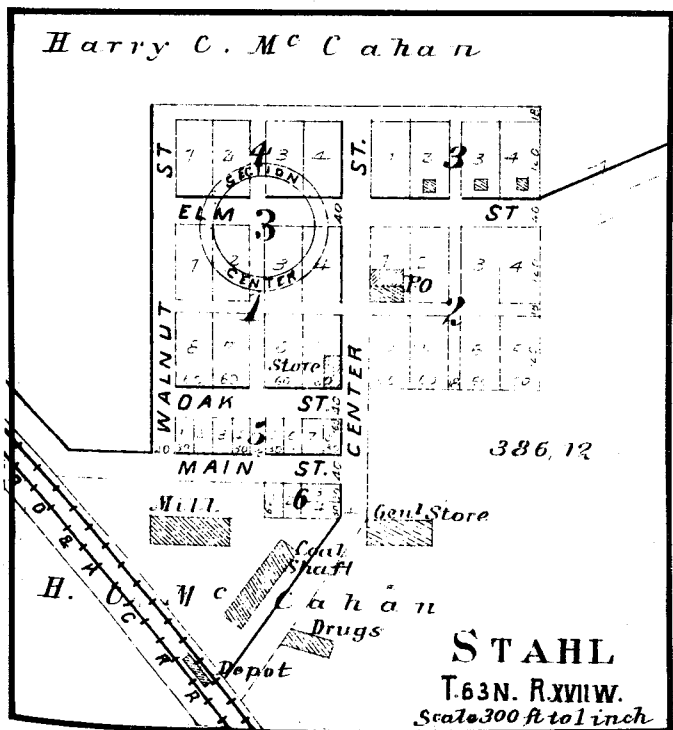
Gary Lloyd, a descendant of "Wig" Lloyd, supplied much of the information concerning the shootout which occurred in Stahl on January 27, 1894.

evade pursuers until word reached him that the sheriff of Lewis County had been telegraphed to bring his bloodhounds to track down Mr. Bransteter. After Ephraim Bransteter's friends informed him of this development, Mr. Bransteter surrendered to Sherrif Rupe at Jack Young's house ten miles north of Stahl.

Ephraim Bransteter entered the Kirksville jail at 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 31, 1894. He joined his brother Charles, who had already been arrested as an accomplice, and James Lloyd, "Wig's" brother, who fired at Mr. Bransteter. The Bransteter-Lloyd case did not reach trial until July 23, 1894, in a special session of the circuit court. The jury listened to four days of contradictory testimony before reaching a verdict on Thursday, July 26, 1894. Ephraim Bransteter was charged with manslaughter in the fourth degree and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary.

The Bransteter-Lloyd feud, shooting, and subsequent trial were a reflection of the conflicts occurring in mining areas at the turn of the century. In small mining towns which were beginning their booms (Stahl reached 500 people by 1907 according to Glenn Riley, former Stahl mailman), an influx of strangers may have created feelings of tension and economic competition. In any event, for a short while at least, Stahl, Missouri, was the site of the explosion of tempers, as well as gunpowder, resulting in the death of William A. Lloyd.

After the incident, Stahl once again appeared to be a small, peaceful town to outsiders. Only the inhabitants of the town, described by historian Maxine Montgomery as "just country people," realized the violence and anger which had spurred the showdown at Stahl.



This map, taken from the ATLAS-ADAIR COUNTY MISSOURI 1898, shows the Moore Brothers Store (labeled Genl Store) where "Wig" Lloyd was shot by Ephraim Bransteter in 1894. (Photo courtesy of Pickler Memorial Library)

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