

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom.
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Seventy-Eight

Hickok And Masterson

LESSON IDEA

To describe the exploits of Bat Masterson and Wild Bill Hickok — two of the most famous lawmen of the Old West.

PREPARATION

Be prepared to discuss the concept of law: what it is and what it is supposed to accomplish in a civilized society.

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PRIOR TO THE eruption of the buffalo hunting and cattle business in Kansas, most communities found no pressing need for professional lawmen. Men settled their scores on their own or depended upon the U.S. Army to maintain order. But as the free-wheeling, rambunctious Texas cowpokes continued to "shoot it up" in such towns as Abilene, Ellsworth, Newton, and Dodge City, the peaceful citizens of these communities formed vigilante committees. Their justice was swift, and they would string up troublemakers whenever necessary.

Later they hired iron-nerved lawmen to keep the peace — men who were good with a gun, like Wild Bill Hickok and Bat Masterson.

Ironically, James Butler Hickok first came to Kansas to escape the law; he thought mistakenly that he had killed a fellow laborer on the Michigan Canal in Illinois. Hickok worked for a time in Leavenworth and later became the constable of Monticello. He was not very happy, however, living in one place very long. Craving adventure, he signed on with the Overland Stage Company to drive freight wagons

down the Santa Fe Trail from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico. On one trip through Raton Pass, Hickok was scouting ahead of the train when his horse spooked at the sight of a grizzly and threw him to the ground. The huge bear attacked, believing her two cubs were threatened, and Hickok emptied his pistol into the attacker's stomach. The wounded bear, enraged still further, grabbed him and began mauling his arms. Somehow he managed to pull out his Bowie knife and ram the razor-sharp blade deep into the grizzly's chest. The dying bear fell on top of him, knocking him unconscious.

Fortunately Hickok's friends found him before he bled to death and got him to a doctor. When he was well enough to go back to work, his employers sent him to Rock Creek Station in Nebraska to work as a stocktender. After his close brush with death, Hickok was content feeding horses at Rock Creek for awhile, but his peace was soon destroyed by a boisterous bully named Dave McCandles. Whenever McCandles rode by the station he'd stop to ridicule Hickok, calling him "Duck Bill" because of Hickok's protruding upper lip.

Feelings got so hot between the two men that Hickok was forced to kill him in self-defense. The bully's two friends, who had come along to help, were wounded in the shoot-out and ran off into the woods. They didn't get far. Two of Hickok's friends finished them off. Although Hickok and his two helpers were arrested, they were soon released after pleading self-defense.

