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The End of the Track – Newton in July 1871

Episode Number: 1871-05

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and information presented in the provided excerpts related to the early days of cattle trails in Kansas and the nascent town of Newton in 1871. The sources collectively paint a picture of a raw, violent, and rapidly developing frontier environment.

Main Themes:

Violence and Lawlessness on the Cattle Trails: The introduction of new cattle trails brought with it significant conflict and violence, particularly when trails intersected with settled areas. The "Pasted Text" excerpt on the "THREE MEN BUTCHERED" incident vividly illustrates the brutal and swift escalation of violence over seemingly minor disputes.

Rapid Growth and accompanying Social Chaos in Newton: The completion of the railroad to Newton in July 1871 triggered explosive growth, attracting a diverse and often unsavory population. Judge Muse's account describes a sudden influx of cowboys, gamblers, saloon operators, and prostitutes, leading to a chaotic and vice-ridden atmosphere characterized by heavy drinking, gambling, and dance houses.

Prevalence of Weapons and Personal Security Concerns: The descriptions of individuals carrying a wide array of weapons – derringers, bulldogs, dirk knives, and large navy revolvers – highlight the pervasive sense of danger and the necessity for self-protection in early Newton. The anecdote of M.L. Sargent seeking refuge in the depot due to gunfire underscores the constant threat of violence.

Frontier Justice and Impromptu Law Enforcement: The incident described in "UNKNOWN MAN" showcases an informal and almost arbitrary approach to law enforcement. The immediate summoning of a stranger to a coroner's jury, with threats of violence for refusal, demonstrates the lack of formal legal structures and the reliance on ad hoc methods for dealing with death and crime.

Cultural Clash and the Rejection of "Civilized" Norms: The formation of the "anti-dude" club in Newton reveals a strong cultural resistance to effeminate appearances and behaviors perceived as being out of place in the frontier environment. The harsh fines and threats of

physical violence for displaying such characteristics emphasize the emphasis placed on a rugged, masculine identity.

Newton's Reputation as a "Tough Town": Buffalo Bill's quote explicitly labels Newton as exceptionally violent and reckless, surpassing even other notorious towns like Dodge City and Mason Junction in its depravity. This reputation is corroborated by the numerous instances of violence and lawlessness described in the other excerpts.

Most Important Ideas/Facts and Supporting Quotes:

The Surveying of New Cattle Trails Led to Conflict and Violence: The establishment of a new trail near Park City immediately resulted in a deadly confrontation.

Quote: *"The first, as we are informed, arrived at Park City last Sunday, and as near as we can learn, both joy and bad whisky was unconfined, and all joined in the jubilee."* This sets the scene for the events that followed.

Quote: *"The whole matter ended in two men being killed and one mortally wounded. This was more shooting than human flesh could endure."* This starkly describes the deadly outcome of the dispute.

The Arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in Newton Fueled Rapid, Disorderly Growth: The completion of the railroad served as a catalyst for Newton's transformation into a bustling but lawless town.

Quote: *"The scenes which followed the completion of the railroad beggar description. The festive cowboy, gamblers, saloon men, and roughs of every description began to flock in..."* This emphasizes the immediate and significant change in the town's population.

Early Newton Was Characterized by Widespread Vice and Entertainment catering to a Rough Crowd: Dance houses, gambling, and heavy drinking were central to the social scene.

Quote: *"All night the halls were filled with cowboys, gamblers and roughs, who in company with the "soiled doves" "treaded the mazes of the giddy waltz" until daylight came, or weary nature failed to furnish strength."* This vividly depicts the nocturnal activities and the nature of the town's entertainment.

Heavy Armament Was Commonplace, Reflecting the Dangerous Environment: Individuals carried a variety of weapons, making them "travelling arsenal[s]."

Quote: *"In harmony with their surroundings and character, cowboys, gamblers, and pick pockets all went heavily armed, their pockets loaded down with derringers or bulldogs, and dirk knives, while around their waist, or in their bootlegs were suspended huge navy revolvers, and other instruments of death, making each one appear like a "travelling arsenal"."* This detailed description highlights the pervasive nature of weapon carrying.

Law Enforcement Was Informal and Often Arbitrary: The "UNKNOWN MAN" incident demonstrates the lack of established legal procedures and the use of coercive tactics to form a coroner's jury.

Quote: *"No sooner had he reached the platform in front of the depot, than he was halted by a man, a pair of spurs, and a pistol."* This immediate and aggressive approach to a traveler sets the tone.

Quote: *"Don't know what his name is, but somebody's got to be on the jury, you're my honeysuckle, so come or drop."* This quote illustrates the blunt and threatening nature of the request for jury duty.

Newton Developed a Reputation for Extreme Violence and Depravity: The town's notoriety was well-known, even among those familiar with other tough frontier settlements.

Quote: *"The toughest, cussedest wild West town I ever knew," said Buffalo Bill once, "was Newton, Kansas, as it was in the early seventies."* This direct quote from a well-known figure establishes Newton's reputation.

Local Residents Actively Resisted Non-Conformist Appearances: The "anti-dude" club enforced strict sartorial and behavioral norms through fines and threats of violence.

Quote: *"Its members set fines for various infractions: \$5 for carrying a cane, \$10 for wearing kid gloves and a plug hat, and \$20 for parting one's hair down the middle. Worse infractions would be dealt with by hanging or by bullet."* This lists the specific rules and the severe consequences for breaking them.

In conclusion, these sources collectively portray early Newton as a boomtown born of the railroad and the cattle trade, but one where rapid growth was coupled with a stark absence of established law and order. Violence was a constant threat, and social norms were largely dictated by the rough-and-tumble inhabitants, leading to a reputation for being one of the most challenging and lawless towns on the frontier.

Thought-Starters

What led to the establishment of Newton as a cattle town?

The completion of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad to Newton on July 23, 1871, was the pivotal event that transformed it into a significant cattle shipping point. This provided a direct rail connection for cattle arriving from Texas via trails. While there was an earlier attempt to establish a new trail closer to Park City, this proved unsuccessful due to a violent incident involving herders and locals. The rail line to Newton effectively shifted the focus and made it the primary destination for cattle drives.

How did the arrival of the railroad impact the social atmosphere of Newton?

The completion of the railroad brought a rapid influx of individuals associated with the cattle trade, including cowboys, gamblers, saloon owners, and "roughs of every description." This led to the swift erection of dance houses and saloons, which were centers of drinking, dancing, and other activities. The town quickly became characterized by a wild and lawless environment, as described by Judge Muse, with residents and visitors often heavily armed.

What was the reputation of Newton compared to other frontier towns?

Newton developed a reputation for being exceptionally rough and lawless, even when compared to other well-known "tough towns" of the era like Dodge City and Mason Junction. According to Buffalo Bill, Newton in the early 1870s surpassed these other locations in terms of "wholesale depravity and recklessness," suggesting a particularly intense and uncontrolled atmosphere.

What were some of the dangers faced by individuals in Newton?

The sources highlight several dangers present in Newton. The "Pasted Text" excerpt mentions a violent incident on a cattle trail attempt near Park City that resulted in multiple deaths, demonstrating the potential for deadly conflict. The prevalence of armed individuals in Newton (described as "traveling arsenals") increased the likelihood of violence, as exemplified by the quick formation of a coroner's jury for a shooting victim shortly after the railroad's completion. Even staying overnight could be hazardous, as shown by the freight agent who barricaded himself in the depot and unknowingly used gunpowder kegs for protection.

How quickly did Newton develop following the railroad's arrival?

Newton experienced extremely rapid growth after the railroad reached it. It is described as one of those "mushroom cities" that typically spring up quickly at the end of a rail line. The prompt establishment of multiple dance houses and the immediate influx of a diverse and often unruly population indicate a very swift and dramatic transformation from a less developed area to a bustling (and chaotic) frontier town.

What was the "anti-dude" club and what were its aims?

The "anti-dude" club was a group formed by cowboys and merchants in Newton in the summer of 1871. Their purpose was to deter and remove "effeminate men" from the town. The club enforced their views through a system of fines for behaviors and appearances they deemed "effeminate," such as carrying a cane or wearing kid gloves and a plug hat. More serious infractions were met with the threat of extreme violence, including hanging or being shot. This highlights a strong emphasis on a rugged, masculine identity in Newton at the time.

Were ordinary citizens or visitors safe in Newton?

The sources suggest that ordinary citizens and visitors were not necessarily safe in Newton during this period. The incident with the traveler being immediately pressed into coroner's jury duty shortly after arriving illustrates the chaotic nature of the town and the lack of established legal structures. The freight agent's decision to seek refuge in the depot due to the sounds of gunfire, and the dangerous nature of his makeshift barricade, further indicate the pervasive sense of insecurity and the risk of becoming caught in the town's violence.

What role did alcohol play in the social dynamics of Newton?

Alcohol appears to have played a significant role in the social dynamics of early Newton. The report of the unsuccessful cattle trail attempt near Park City mentions "joy and bad whisky was unconfined," linking alcohol to the outbreak of violence. In Newton itself, the dance houses

were described as dispensing the "inseparable concomitant whiskey," suggesting that heavy drinking was a central activity and likely contributed to the unruly and often violent atmosphere.

Study Guide

Quiz

1. What was the proposed purpose of the new cattle trail running west of Wichita through Park City?
2. Based on the description, why did the first attempt to use the new cattle trail near Park City fail?
3. When did the first rail shipment from Newton on the Santa Fe railroad occur?
4. According to Judge Muse, what types of people arrived in Newton after the railroad was completed?
5. What was a common type of establishment erected in Newton after the railroad's completion, as described by Judge Muse?
6. How did Judge Muse describe the weaponry carried by the cowboys, gamblers, and roughs in early Newton?
7. Based on the "Unknown Man" excerpt, what was one way people in early Newton were sometimes compelled to serve on a coroner's jury?
8. What unexpected danger did M. L. Sargent encounter while seeking refuge in the depot in Newton?
9. According to Buffalo Bill, how did early Newton compare to other supposedly tough towns like Dodge City and Mason Junction?
10. What was the purpose of the "anti-dude" club formed in Newton in the summer of 1871?

Answer Key

1. The proposed purpose was to create a shortcut to Newton for cattle herds.
2. The first attempt failed due to conflict arising from cattle roaming into a cornfield, leading to multiple shootings.
3. The first rail shipment from Newton on the Santa Fe occurred on Sunday, July 23, 1871.
4. According to Judge Muse, the people who arrived in Newton after the railroad was completed included festive cowboys, gamblers, saloon men, and roughs of every description.

5. According to Judge Muse, a common type of establishment erected in Newton was dance houses, which also served whiskey and housed prostitutes.
6. Judge Muse described them as going heavily armed, with pockets loaded down with derringers or bulldogs, and dirk knives, and large navy revolvers around their waist or in their bootlegs.
7. People were sometimes compelled to serve on a coroner's jury by being halted by an armed man and told to "Come along."
8. M. L. Sargent discovered that the kegs he had used to build a barricade in the depot contained gunpowder.
9. According to Buffalo Bill, Newton could "give cards and spades on wholesale depravity and recklessness" compared to Dodge City and Mason Junction.
10. The purpose of the "anti-dude" club was to keep "effeminate men" out of town and discourage behaviors deemed non-masculine through fines and threats of violence.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the portrayal of lawlessness and violence in early Newton as presented in the provided excerpts. How do the different accounts contribute to this portrayal?
2. Discuss the impact of the arrival of the railroad on the social character and demographics of Newton in 1871, drawing specific examples from the text.
3. Examine the various perspectives on life in early Newton presented in the sources. How do these perspectives, ranging from newspaper reports to personal reflections, shape our understanding of the town?
4. Evaluate the specific incidents described in the excerpts (the cattle trail shooting, the coroner's jury anecdote, M. L. Sargent's experience) as illustrations of the daily realities faced by residents and visitors in early Newton.
5. Compare and contrast the descriptions of early Newton found in the historical accounts with Buffalo Bill's later reflection. What might account for the differences in their characterizations of the town?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Newton:** A town in Kansas that became a hub for cattle shipments with the arrival of the railroad in 1871.
- **Park City:** A location near Wichita where a new, but ultimately unsuccessful, cattle trail was surveyed.

- **Santa Fe:** Refers to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which completed a rail line to Newton in 1871.
- **Coroner's Jury:** A group of people summoned to determine the cause of death in a suspicious or unexplained case.
- **End of the Track:** A term referring to the temporary endpoint of a railroad line during its construction, often associated with rapid growth and lawlessness.
- **Jonah's Gourd:** A biblical reference used to describe something that springs up quickly but also withers just as fast, applied here to "mushroom cities" like early Newton.
- **Soiled Doves:** A euphemism for prostitutes.
- **Derringers:** Small, short-barreled pistols, easily concealed.
- **Bulldogs:** A type of revolver, often short-barreled and designed for close-quarters defense.
- **Dirk Knives:** Long-bladed stabbing knives.
- **Navy Revolvers:** Large caliber revolvers, commonly used in the mid to late 19th century.
- **Travelling Arsenal:** A descriptive term used to highlight the heavily armed nature of individuals in early Newton.
- **Anti-Dude Club:** A group formed in Newton to discourage men who were seen as effeminate or not conforming to the rougher image of the town.
- **Plug Hat:** A type of tall, stiff hat, often associated with formal wear.