

"Dutch" Henry Born

Born, often accused of crimes ranging from horse stealing to murder, was described as "one of the most desperate characters of the frontier." He "is the most noted horse thief on the border—has stolen more horses, been captured, wounded oftener, broken jail oftener, and been through more thrilling adventures than any other man in the West." It was said that he could and would steal anything on four legs. But fine horseflesh always had a special place in Henry's heart.

On July 2, 1849, he was the first child born to John and Margaret Born, German natives, of Manitowoc, Wisconsin. They would soon move to Montague, Michigan and he would have three brothers and two sisters. He left home at an early age and picked up the nickname "Dutch." Dan Thrapp in his *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, said it was because he spoke with a dialect from living with his parents. At any rate, it stuck with him for the rest of his life.

In 1867, he was employed by General George Armstrong Custer of the 7th U.S. Cavalry as an Indian scout. He was with Custer on November 27, 1868, at the Washita Massacre when the 7th Cavalry killed Chief Black Kettle, 11 warriors, 16 women, nine children and old men, most of them as they were fleeing. Dutch Henry decided he did not like the life and especially did not like Custer.

So, he quit the Cavalry and went to work as a cook in a buffalo hunting camp. Not long thereafter he quit that job to obtain his own buffalo hunting outfit. That worked fine for about six years, until a band of Cheyenne ran off his stock. Chasing the Cheyenne on foot he was wounded and headed for Fort Lyon. Rather than helping him recapture his stock, the officer in charge accused him of "stirring up" the Indians and ejected him from the post. Dutch Henry (**photo at right**) was so angry he stole a span of mules and a good riding horse from the army and sent them a letter admitting to the deed and promising to steal 100 horses from the Indians. And he did. And a criminal and a life of crime were born.



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In 1874, Dutch Henry made a stop at Adobe Walls, an outpost in the Texas Panhandle that, ten years before, had been attacked by approximately 3,000 Indians and defended by 396 soldiers and scouts and two artillery pieces. While he was there to buy some supplies, the post was once again attacked by Indians. This time, Quanah Parker led a party of about 700 Indians made up of Comanche, Cheyenne and Kiowa warriors. There were 27 other people inside the post, including Bat Masterson and one woman cook. The battle lasted for a few hours and the post was successfully defended. One of the most famous shots in western history was made when Billy Dixon, with his buffalo rifle, shot an Indian off his horse from almost a mile away.

From there Dutch Henry moved on to Ellsworth, Kansas, where Sheriff Alexander Ramsey with a U.S. warrant was able to arrest him after an exciting chase and fire fight in which Dutch Henry was slightly wounded in the face and two other places, but none were serious. He was taken to Hays City to stand trial but was released on a technicality.

While in Russell, Kansas, in 1876, he was again arrested by a sheriff and a local citizen. However, a scuffle broke out over the guns; the sheriff pulled a knife and in attempting to stab Dutch Henry, severely sliced the arm of his civilian helper. Another attempt was successful, and the horse thief was stabbed in the side, penetrating his stomach lining. He cried out, "I'm dying." But he was taken to the doctor, patched up and escaped.

In 1877, Charles Goodnight, the Texas cattle king, met with Dutch Henry and eighteen members of his band camped on Commission Creek near Fort Elliott. They made a pact, sealed with a drink, which bound the outlaw leader not to raid below the Salt Fork of the Red River, the northern boundary of Goodnight's range. Born remained true to his word, and Goodnight left him alone.

His old buddy from Adobe Walls, Bat Masterson, was the next to arrest him while in Trinidad, Colorado, in December of 1878. Masterson took him to Dodge City and Dutch Henry's luck continued. The jury acquitted him on insufficient evidence and supposed statute of limitations.

Finally, his luck did run out. He was convicted in Judge Isaac Parker's Federal Court in Ft. Smith, Arkansas and sentenced to prison. Evidently, he still had some luck as his stay was brief, but the length of time is unknown. He did decide that he had gotten "even" with the Indians and the Government and became a law-abiding citizen. But there are those that claim he never gave up rustling completely.

In the 1880s he was prospecting with his brother in Colorado and later he opened the successful Happy Thought Mine at Creede, Colorado. In the 1890s he filed on 160 acres on the West Fork of the

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San Juan River twenty miles from Pagosa Springs. He successfully disputed a rival claim and was issued a patent in 1903. The place subsequently became known as Born's Lake and he became a trout farmer.

In 1900, he returned to Montague, Michigan, and married Ida Dillabaugh. They settled on Born Lake. The couple had a daughter, then two sons and Dutch Henry discovered a new occupation. On January 28, 1912, he became an obstetrician and delivered his second daughter. His old friend Bill Tilghman, who had become one of the great marshals of the old west, was a frequent visitor and fishing buddy. Tilghman once commented that "in spite of his crimes a truer man and better pal never lived." A year later Dutch Henry died of pneumonia on January 10, 1921. Ida survived him by 28 years, dying on August 2, 1949. They are buried together in the Hilltop Cemetery in Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

Sources: Lt. Col. William H. Lewis: *Duty, Honor, Country*, by Ann Oldham; *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, by Dan L. Thrapp; "Dutch" Henry Brown, an article by Ann Oldham; *Born, Henry*, article in *The Handbook of Texas Online*.

