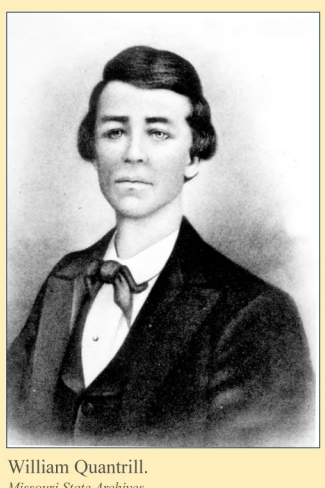
VIGILANTE VIOLENCE

THE MURDER OF OBADIAH SMITH

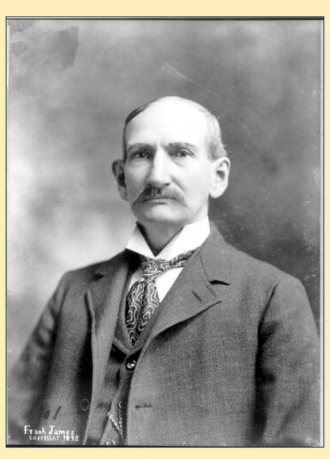
In late April 1863, a band of bushwhackers killed Obadiah Smith near his home north of the town of Stockton in Cedar County. A prosperous farmer, Baptist minister, and Missouri state representative, Smith was suspected by Confederates of having aided Kansas general Jim Lane in the burning of the town of Osceola, Missouri in September 1861. Some believe that Smith's murder, which was part of a larger spree that ended in the killing of as many as nine other Union men from Cedar County, was carried out in retaliation for the damage done in Osceola. Legend has it that the band of bushwhackers responsible for Smith's death was led by William Quantrill and included Jesse James's older brother Frank.

On May 1, 1863, the *St. Louis News* reported that the bushwhackers had been dressed in blue Union uniforms and had fooled Smith into believing that they were troops from Kansas. This had allowed them to approach Smith and take his rifle. The paper also reported that the bushwhackers stole between $700 and $800 from Smith after they killed him.

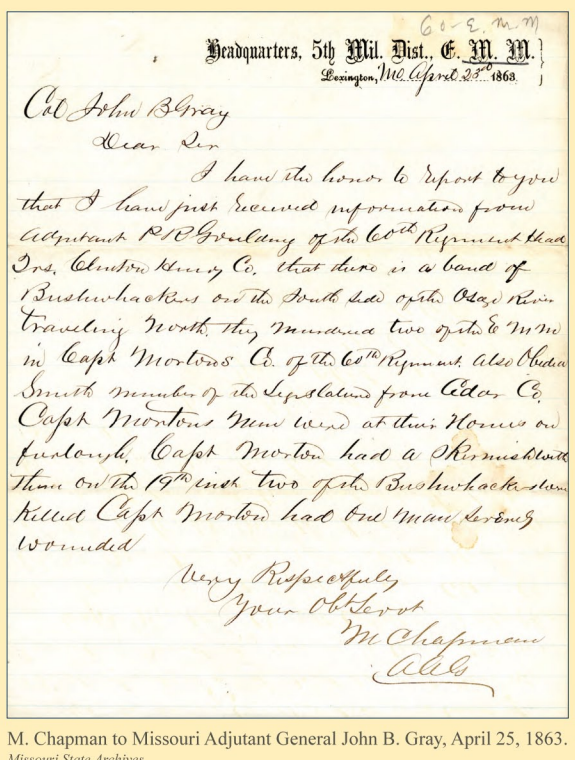
Obadiah Smith's murder by a band of bushwhackers was said to have been carried out to avenge his role in Union General Jim Lane's raid on the town of Osceola, Missouri in 1861.
Library of Congress



William Quantrill.
Missouri State Archives



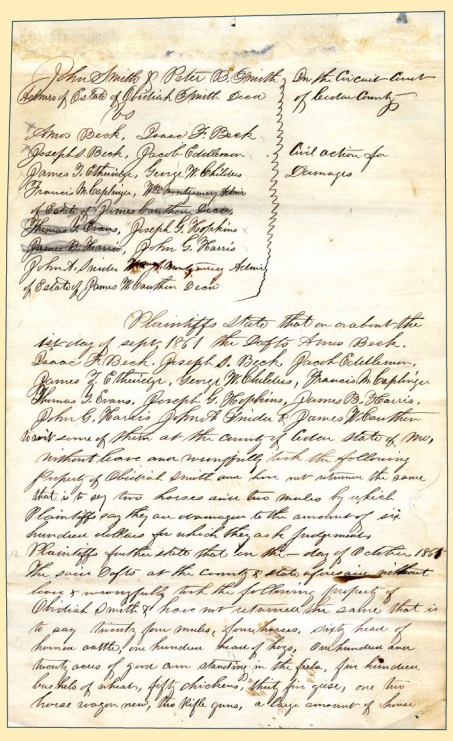
Frank James, 1898.
Library of Congress

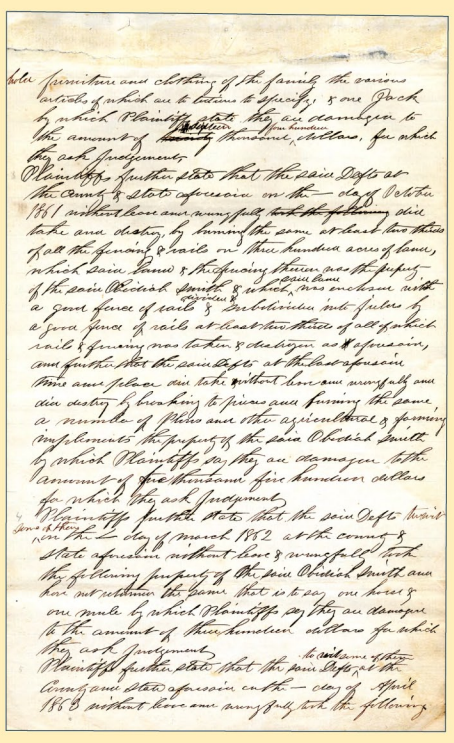


M. Chapman to Missouri Adjutant General John B. Gray, April 25, 1863.
Missouri State Archives

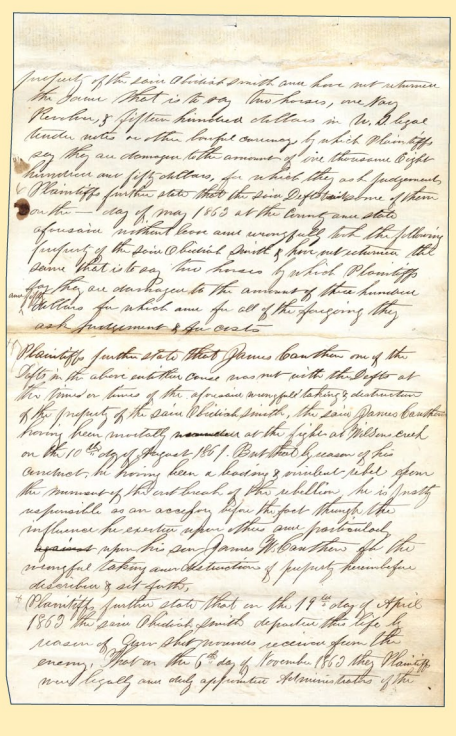
SEEKING DAMAGES

In 1866, John Smith, the administrator of Obadiah Smith's estate, sued Amos Beck and 12 other defendants for stealing and destroying property belonging to Obadiah Smith on five separate occasions between September 1861 and May 1863. Even though Beck was wounded at the Battle of Wilson's Creek and died in Arkansas in December 1862, he was listed as an "accessory before the fact" because he was a leader in the rebellion against the United States government. The Cedar County Circuit Court awarded Obadiah Smith's estate $12,000 in damages.





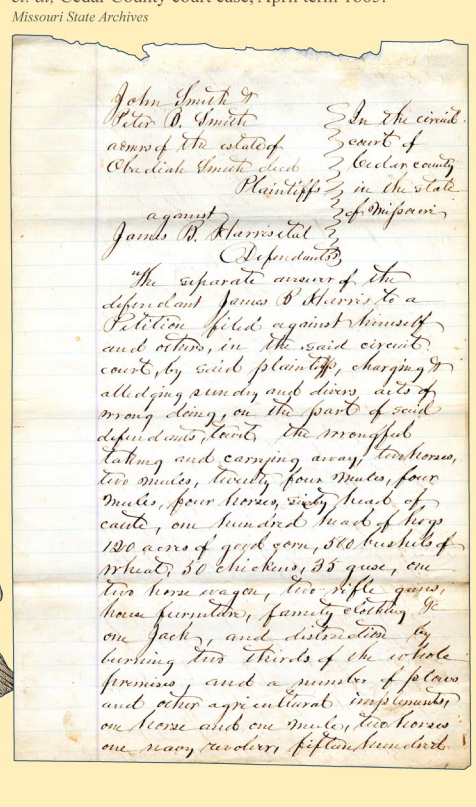
Attachment for damage, *John Smith, administrator of estate of Obadiah Smith, deceased, v. Amos Beck et. al,* Cedar County court case, April term 1865.
Missouri State Archives

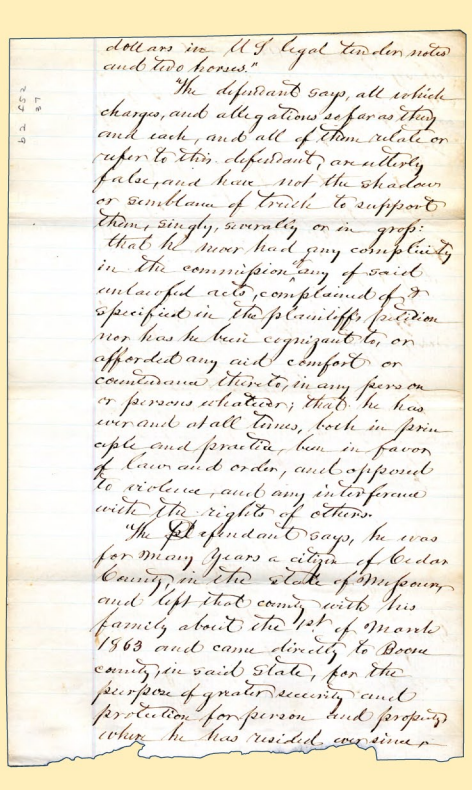


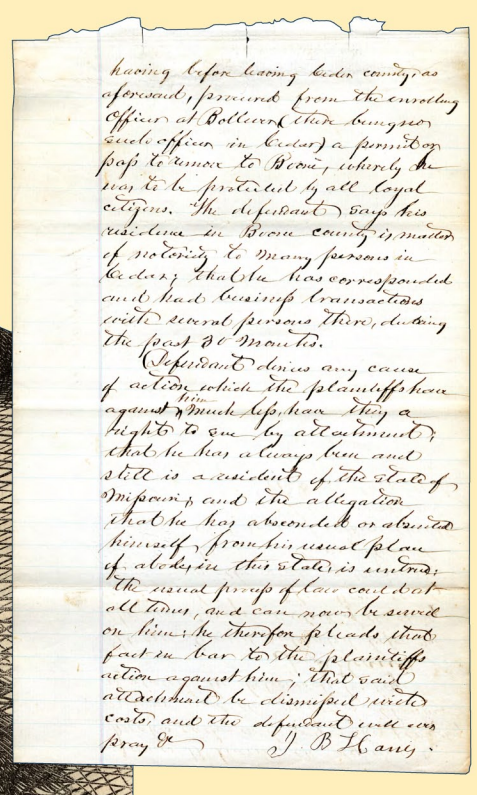
"The Defendants . . . have not returned . . . Twenty-four mules, four horses, sixty head of horned cattle, one hundred head of hogs, one hundred and twenty acres of good corn standing in the field, five hundred bushel of wheat, fifty chickens, thirty-five geese, one two-horse wagon new, two rifle guns, a large amount of house furniture and clothing of the family."

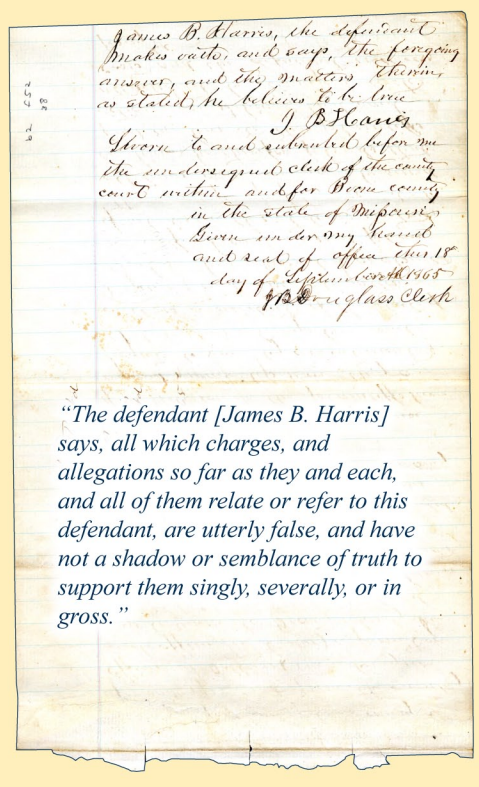
Under the Flag
Harper's Weekly

Defendant's reply, *John Smith, administrator of estate of Obadiah Smith, deceased, v. Amos Beck et. al,* Cedar County court case, April term 1865.
Missouri State Archives









"The defendant [James B. Harris] says, all which charges, and allegations so far as they and each, and all of them relate or refer to this defendant, are utterly false, and have not a shadow or semblance of truth to support them singly, severally, or in gross."

1865