

1837: The Wilson-Anthony Knife Fight

<p>Shots of period illustrations of frontier Arkansas, interspersed with photographs of natural Arkansas scenery.</p> <p>Cut to the scene in the House of Representatives. The room is still uncompleted, but further along than in the previous scene. The desks are still makeshift, but there are fewer boards and barrels.</p> <p>The members of the House are talking in an animated fashion to one another. We can hear them under the narration, growing louder and louder.</p> <p>The Speaker bangs his gavel.</p> <p>Kuykendall speaks with a German accent.</p> <p>Shot of Wilson at podium. His remark starts a discussion among the</p>	<p>Narrator Voice Over: Frontier Arkansas was a wild region, inhabited by a hardy breed of men and women characterized as “half horse, half alligator.” The contentious politics of Arkansas territory and early statehood pitted the followers of Tennessee’s Andrew Johnson with those of Kentucky’s Henry Clay. This bitter rivalry often ended in duels.</p> <p>One of the most famous such encounters occurred in the House chambers of the State House. Representatives were debating a measure to place a bounty on wolf pelts in an effort to exterminate the animals. The issue had stalled over the question of how the bounty was to be paid. Was it to be paid in federal currency or the much less reliable state scrip? Were local magistrates required to pay the bounty out of their own pocket and be reimbursed later? How was the State to guard against fraud in the administration of the program?</p> <p>Speaker Wilson: Quiet in the House! Amos Kuykendall, the bill’s sponsor, has the floor</p> <p>Kuykendall: Perhaps the local magistrate could issue some manner of voucher on taxes, so they will not be out any money. Shall we then require the magistrates to turn in the pelts? If so, to whom? I don’t know about you gentlemen, but an untreated wolf pelt is not something I care to have lying around awaiting my next trip to Little Rock.</p> <p>Wilson: The Chair welcomes suggestions from the floor as to how the wolf bounties might be dispensed</p>
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legislators. Cut to a young J. J. Anthony seated at his desk. He looks first contemplative, then suddenly amused. He rises.

Shot of Wilson at the podium.

Anthony speaks with false sincerity.

This comment produces a sudden burst of laughter at Wilson's expense. This gives way to anger on the part of some.

Shot of Wilson getting angry as he realizes the joke is on him.

Shot of legislators, some looking amused, some offended.

Shot of Anthony looking pleased with himself.

Wilson has reached the boiling point. He poses a stern question to Anthony.

Anthony feels he has the upper hand.

Wilson's anger is now past controlling.

Anthony is not about to back down before a crowd.

Wilson tries to regain control of the situation.

Anthony feels he is being challenged. He opens his coat to reveal a knife in his waistband.

Wilson opens his jacket to reveal his own knife.

Anthony draws his knife and makes his way to the aisle, but does not proceed forward. Wilson draws his knife, leaps

without offending the Representative's sense of smell.

J. J. Anthony: Mr. Speaker!

Wilson: The Chair recognizes Representative Anthony.

Anthony: I propose that the pelts be signed by the President of the Real Estate Bank.

Narrator Voice Over: Because the bank president's signature appeared on state scrip, the implication is that by signing the pelts he would transform them into money. Anthony's remark is a slur on the state banks, the most controversial issue of the time. They were founded with the expectation that Arkansas land would rapidly increase in value, but due to a nationwide financial panic in 1837, land values had dropped, leaving the banks holding worthless mortgages.

Wilson: Is the Major aware that I am the President of the Real Estate Bank?

Anthony: I am, Mr. Speaker.

Wilson: Is it your intention to be personal?

Anthony: My remarks speak for themselves.

Wilson: You are out of order. Be seated!

Anthony: I have made a motion. I will not yield.

Wilson: Yield or I shall make you.

Anthony: You are welcome to try.

from the Speaker's Platform, and charges up the aisle. Legislators shout and rush from their seats. One thrusts a chair between Anthony and Wilson. Both men grasp it with their left hands and stab with their. The legislators around them fall back a step, crying for the two men to stop. Anthony slashes Wilson's left wrist, forcing him to release the chair. Wilson counters by ducking under and forcing the chair up with his shoulder into Anthony's face. Simultaneously Wilson thrusts under the chair and drives his knife hilt-deep into Anthony's chest. Anthony drops straight backwards to the floor. Wilson stumbles, bleeding profusely. Wilson's supporters grab him and help him to the floor.

Wilson — winded, bleeding, holding his wrist

A legislator examines Anthony's body.

Shot of Wilson being held by his supporters.

Cut to shot of Anthony's body

Wilson: It was not the first time he has insulted me.

Legislator: It will be the last.

Supporter: Help me bind his arm before he bleeds to death.

Off Camera Voice: I told you we needed a Sergeant-at-Arms.