

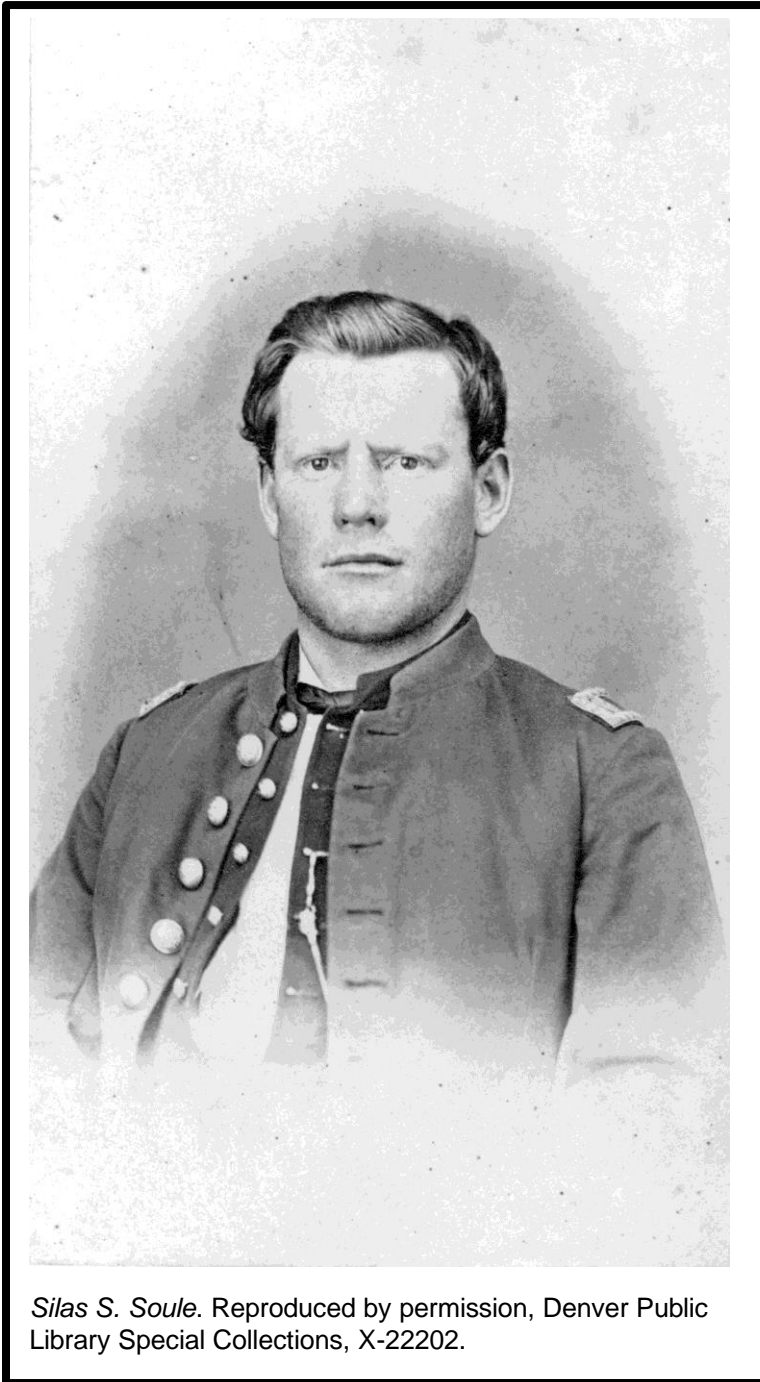
ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS

Mike Bell

The story of Silas Soule, a native son of Maine, is a fine example of quiet courage and patriotism of the highest order. Born into an illustrious New England family, Soule was one of many who migrated west and participated in the border wars that foretold the coming of the Civil War. His service in the Union volunteers in Colorado during that war would bring him face to face with evil itself and lead to martyrdom.

Born in Bath in 1838, Silas Soule was raised both in Maine and later in Massachusetts. He was descended from George Soule, who had arrived aboard the Mayflower as an indentured servant in 1620. By the middle of the 19th century, as slavery consumed the public spaces of debate, Silas and others of his family went west to work to contain the spread of this evil process.

Young Soule was involved in a variety of anti-slavery events in “Bleeding Kansas” as the war clouds darkened. Indeed, he developed skills that led him to consider a daring rescue of imprisoned members of John Brown’s failed raid in 1859. Brown refused the rescue, preferring to become a martyr. Soule’s focus soon turned to other pursuits and he found himself in Colorado in a gold rush that held great promise, but little by way of results.



Silas S. Soule. Reproduced by permission, Denver Public Library Special Collections, X-22202.

When the war between the states moved west, Soule volunteered for the army. He was soon assigned to the 1st Colorado Infantry and, as a lieutenant, saw action at the Battle of Glorieta Pass in New Mexico territory in March of 1862. The Union victory there ended Confederate hopes of establishing a foothold in the southwest. Soule was rewarded for his service with a captain’s commission.

The 1st Colorado was soon mobilized as a cavalry unit and patrolled various parts of Colorado. Troubles between native peoples and the onslaught of white explorers, farmers, and thrill seekers were inflamed, and the military was called in. Soule was part of an expedition that tracked down a village of Cheyenne and Arapahoe along Sand Creek in southeast Colorado. On November 29, 1864, Col. John Chivington, nicknamed the “fighting parson” led his troops into a sleeping village of natives and brought such death and destruction that later accounts would make even the most removed eastern-establishment types blanch. The soldiers shot men, elders, and women, savagely killing even babies, all while a white flag and a U.S. flag flew above the village.

Conspicuously absent during the wanton slaughter was Captain Soule and his command. Soule refused to participate in the massacre and ordered his men to stand down. In the months ahead, Soule would voice his indignation about the events in letters and testify against Chivington as part of an army investigation in January 1865.

The letter that Soule penned to his former commander, Major Ned Wynkoop, was unsparing in its disgust about the massacre. In horrifying detail he described the blood lust that seemed to have taken hold of the men as they attacked the village at Sand Creek. He would repeat the charges to the army investigators. The repercussions from his testimony and that of others had wide ranging impacts. Col. Chivington soon left the army and even the Territorial Governor John Evans was forced to resign.

Silas Soule stood his ground and stayed his course. His life took a positive twist when he married Miss Theresa Coberly on April 1, 1865. A photograph taken on his wedding day shows a young and confident man, with his future looking very bright indeed.

On the evening of Sunday April 23, while the manhunt for John Wilkes Booth was reaching its climax, and just three weeks after his wedding, Soule was out and about in the streets of Denver. He and his bride had been out earlier that evening and she had been escorted home. Soule, as Provost Marshal for Colorado, went to investigate a disturbance at what is now 15th and Arapahoe in downtown Denver.

There he encountered two men. In an apparent effort to disarm the men, Soule drew his weapon. One of the men involved, a soldier names Charles Squire, shot first, hitting Soule in the head. Silas Soule was dead before he hit the ground. Squire had fled the scene but was arrested two weeks later. In an odd twist of fate, the judge assigned to oversee Squire’s case was found murdered before the accused could stand trial. Squire himself died in 1869. Historians still debate whether the shooting was just another event in the daily life of a growing western city or was it a hit on Soule from people he had angered post Sand Creek. The jury is still out.

To this day, Silas Soule is honored for his courage by those he refused to fire upon. The Arapaho and Cheyenne nations have, in the past, honored Soule with a peace run to the battlefield at Sand Creek. A plaque in Denver at the junction of 15th and Arapahoe recalls his death. And to this day there is a movement to rename Mt. Evans along the front range to Mount Soule. Silas Soule rests today far from his home State of Maine. The good people

of Colorado care for his mortal remains as he cared for their safety so many years ago. It is, as a great American once said, altogether fitting and proper that they should do this.



Camp Weld Council, Denver, September 28, 1864. Reproduced by permission, Denver Public Library Special Collections, X-32079. [Note: Silas Soule is positioned in front, to the right, in uniform. For a further explanation of the significance of the Camp Weld Conference see <https://www.nps.gov/sand/learn/news/the-letters-and-the-leaders.htm>.]

Acknowledgement

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