



Historians Corner, Paul R Petersen

Paul is the Author of *Quantrill of Missouri*, *Quantrill in Texas*, *Quantrill at Lawrence* and *Lost Souls of the Lost Township*. Petersen is a retired U.S. Marine Corps master sergeant and a highly decorated infantry combat veteran of the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is a member of the William Clarke Quantrill Society, the James-Younger Gang Association, the Sons of the American Revolution, and the Jackson County and Missouri State Historical Societies.

Lawrence Raid Sesquicentennial

This month we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the famous August 21, 1863 cavalry raid by Colonel William Clarke Quantrill's Missouri guerrillas on Lawrence, Kansas. It was declared to be the most daring light cavalry raid of the entire Civil War. Due to a recent book, *Quantrill at Lawrence* by noted author Paul R. Petersen we can now document what actually transpired on that memorable day. The raid was in part retaliation for the premeditated murder of five young Southern girls by Union authorities and for years of depredations caused by the Kansas Jayhawkers.

Before being enlightened by Petersen's diligent research former histories have perpetuated a false record of the Lawrence raid. For example previous Yankee writers have wanted us to believe that the people of Lawrence were all peaceful, unarmed citizens. Modern data bases and recently compiled historical records from both local and national repositories have indicated that almost all of the male citizens of Lawrence were either in the regular Union army or in the State's militia organization. Because the Kansas Provost Marshal's files were unfortunately destroyed during the raid a number of the victim's military records cannot be ascertained. Names without military designations can be assumed to have served in the local Kansas militia when records show that they were armed and drilled for that purpose.

Irresponsible writers have continuously asserted that Quantrill's Missouri raiders destroyed over 300 buildings in Lawrence on that fateful day. Extensive in-depth research, much of it provided by University of Kansas Professor Geo. M. McCleary, has proven that there were a total of 300 buildings comprising the town of Lawrence in August 1863. Only 86 of these buildings were destroyed by fire, half of those due to collateral damage from the adjoining buildings.

In their hatred of the guerrillas, the citizens of Lawrence, Kansas colluded to shift the blame off themselves for years of wanton plunder and pillaging and the murder of unarmed citizens and rape of women and Negro slaves in Missouri on their depredatory raids. What the citizens of Lawrence referred to as the camp of unarmed recruits first encountered by the guerrillas as the raid began is a complete misnomer. From statements taken by eyewitness accounts of Lawrence citizens the camp of recruits were all uniformed, armed, drilled and mustered into service for a new Kansas regiment. The ages of the recruits, many who had prior military experience, were several years older than the raiders they came into contact with.

The Free State Hotel in town was also another misnomer to wit, the hotel was used for military purposes and used as the headquarters for the militia. According to Richard Cordley, a militia member and a citizen of Lawrence, "Several companies used it as a barracks." In another glaring omission by Yankee writers is that the town also hosted five forts or earthen enclosures for the Lawrence militia. According to Cordley "These earth works were circular, and some of them one hundred feet in diameter. The largest was at the crossing of Massachusetts and Pinckney streets. It was built of hewn timbers, banked up with earth, and a deep trench dug all around it. It was five feet high." Another was at the crossing of Massachusetts and Henry streets. A third was near New Hampshire Street, north of Henry. Two others were west of Massachusetts Street, one of them on Kentucky Street commanding the ravine. The [fort] at Massachusetts and Henry streets was arranged for cannon. Each of these defenses was in charge of an officer, and had a contingent of troops assigned to its defense." Over two hundred soldiers could man each of these



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forts making over 1,000 men for defense while hundreds more were patrolling on horseback around the perimeter of the city.

Assuring a later generation of writers that Lawrence was indeed a military stronghold Richard Cordley goes on to state that, "Military companies were organized in Lawrence and in the country around about, and full preparations made for defense in case a conflict was forced upon them. Embankments were thrown up at exposed points and the town was put in position to stand a siege." One young woman who kept a hotel in town remembered the daily scene in Lawrence. "It looked strange to see the street paraded from morning to night by men in military array; to see them toil day and night throwing up entrenchments, to see them come in to their meals each with a gun in his hand, sometimes bringing it to the table." Kansas records also indicate that almost every man in town owned a Sharps carbine, the most modern and deadly weapon of its day.

Besides being a military town Lawrence was also widely known as the "citadel of stolen goods" and its citizens commonly referred to as "pirates of the prairie". Over \$20,000 worth of stolen goods were transported weekly to the mining camps further west. The entire town readily acquiesced in the receiving and selling of stolen property taken from Missouri. One guilt ridden citizen in Lawrence reported that an honest businessman could do well in Lawrence, as he would have no competition. Guerilla Captain William Gregg announced that the

raiders destroyed more Missouri property during their raid than they did of Kansas property.

Another widely false account perpetrated by the Yankees is the number of killed during the raid. Even contemporary accounts often refer to 300 people being killed. Robert S. Stevens who took an unofficial accounting of the dead recorded 133 names. Union General Thomas Ewing's official report recorded almost the exact number listing 140 dead. Captain Henry Palmer of the 11th Kansas Jayhawker Regiment listed 145 killed and Richard Cordley in his account, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, listed 150 dead. Lawrence citizen Matthew Shaw wrote that there were 130 men killed in his personal memorandum book. With the archival of historical records and the development of modern databases now available it has been discovered that at least 40 percent of the victims in the Lawrence raid were in the Federal military with the rest being in the Kansas militia, proof that the claim the victims were unarmed peaceful citizens was nothing short of a lie.

Now with the truth finally published for the first time in 150 years the great Lawrence raid can in reality be commemorated in the spirit for which it took place: the daring of Colonel William Clarke Quantrill's brave soldiers in achieving a monumental victory against overpowering odds.

References:

A History of Lawrence by Richard Cordley
Pioneer Days in Kansas by Richard Cordley
Quantrill at Lawrence by Paul R. Petersen

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