



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.

The John B. Saunders Home

A few examples of historic homes still stand reminding us of the terrible times along the Missouri-Kansas border during the Civil War. In December 1860 William Clarke Quantrill foiled an attempted Kansas Jayhawker raid on the Morgan Walker farm in Blue Springs, Missouri. The Jayhawkers were attempting to steal Walker's thoroughbred horses, mules, slaves and the large amount of cash he was known to keep in his house. In retaliation Jayhawkers only increased in numbers to continue their depredations.

On Tuesday morning, October 1, 1861, a squad of Jayhawkers struck near Walker's farm. They rode from farmhouse to farmhouse and pillaged the farmers of money, silverware, and jewelry. One of the residents rushed word of the raid to Quantrill, and he quickly rode to Walker's farm. There he gathered Andrew Walker, Morgan T. Mattox, John Little, William Haller, John Hampton, and six other youths, and they raced after the Jayhawkers.

Quantrill formed his men into an ambush on the Independence and Blue Springs Road and waited for the Jayhawkers. Somehow the raiders got wind of the trap and detoured to another road with people to rob. Two miles west of the Walker farm, the Jayhawkers attacked the farm of

Daniel DeWitt, which had been the last hiding place of the Jayhawkers prior to the ambush at the Walker farm the previous December. The Jayhawkers then moved north toward the Strother Stone farm. Here they insulted Stone's wife, and one of them struck her on the head with his revolver when she protested their actions. After looting the house, they rode down the road to the farm of William Thompson.

As Quantrill and his men came riding up they saw Stone's wife standing in her yard, her face covered with blood, pointing out which way the Jayhawkers had headed. For a brief moment the Southerners

were stunned at the sight of the shaken, bleeding woman. James Campbell recalled that Quantrill had told his companions earlier, "Any member of his troop who insulted a woman should be shot." After they resumed the race toward the Thompson farm, their shock turned to anger. The Jayhawkers had already set fire to the Thompson place by the time the guerrillas arrived, but they had not as yet ridden away. Many were just mounting their horses when Quantrill and his men boldly charged toward them.

Quantrill was the first to charge into the Jayhawkers with his gun blazing. Already known as an unerring shot, he killed the man who had struck Mrs. Stone. His men wounded two others. The rest of the Jayhawkers fled down the Old Blue Springs Road (later R. D. Mize Road) toward the safety of Independence, five miles away. The fight became a wild horse race as Quantrill's men continued in hot pursuit of the Jayhawkers.

One of the Jayhawkers was shot from his saddle in front of the John B. Saunder's home. The home had been built in the early 1850's by slaves of homemade bricks burned in a kiln located on the property. The Saunder family were Southern sympathizers, but they carried the wounded soldier into their home, nursed him back to life and strength, and enabled him to rejoin his command.

When word of the Jayhawker's death reached Independence, Unionist citizens clamored for an arrest; this was the first instance of a Federal soldier being killed in Jackson County. The town marshal arrested both Stone and Thompson the next day for the soldier's death.

Not wanting innocent men to be charged for something that he had done, but knowing that he might be putting his life in danger, Quantrill went to



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Independence and had a justice of the peace assist him in swearing out an affidavit stating that the killing was his responsibility. To Andrew Walker, Quantrill said, "They can't catch me, and I'll save 'em if I can." This affidavit satisfied the authorities, and Stone and Thompson were released. After learning the circumstances of the Jayhawker's death, the authorities brought no charges against Quantrill. This incident, however, led the Unionist militia in Independence to target Quantrill, and for a short time he was forced into hiding.

The Jayhawkers remained in Jackson County continuing their depredations. Three weeks later they raided the Brooking Township eight miles south of Independence. On October 27, they burned the home of Martin Flanery, who then joined Quantrill. Flanery reported that Charles Jennison's Jayhawkers had burned a church and twenty-seven other homes in the neighborhood and had pillaged the home of Reuben Harris in the middle of the night.

Two years later, during General Thomas Ewing's infamous Order #11, orders were given to burn Southern homes in Jackson County. The soldier who had been nursed back to health by the Saunder's family had risen to the ranks of command. He used his authority to order that whoever touched fire to Saunder's home would have to answer to him in person. The old home was still there when Saunders returned after the war. In 1884 it became the James Latimer home. In 1918 it was acquired by Lester H. Haas who operated a dairy and orchard on the farm. The old house still stands at 17601 R. D. Mize Road. Today as people pass by few realize its significance to those terrible times.

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Ref:

Pearl Wilcox, Jackson County Pioneers, 1975, Jackson County Historical Society

Paul R. Petersen, Quantrill of Missouri, 2003, Cumberland House Publishing