



### 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.

## Kansas Civil War History - Not Quite True

Jayhawkers hid behind a façade of patriotism to express their desire for plunder. Cities in Kansas grew up overnight and prospered from the ill gotten gains stolen from the farms and plantations of Missouri. These parties until early in sixty three did not haul away much household plunder, contenting themselves with such as blankets, quilts wearing apparel and jewelry. Such articles as they could carry on their horses, but they usually went back to Kansas well loaded with such articles." One Kansas lieutenant admitted that "Kansas was filled with horse and 'nigger' thieves." "Every raid meant a robbery and plundering, maybe a house-burning and a murder. The booty obtained was held to be property acquired and when these pirates of the prairies returned to their homes after a successful foray, they were greeted with joyful acclaim." Dozens of communities were plundered in western Missouri, many of them being wiped out of existence by the Jayhawkers from Kansas.

The plunder arrived almost daily from the different Jayhawker units that returned from plundering Missouri farms. Lawrence citizen Erastus Ladd said that "More than one anti-slavery raiding party had its origin in the town, and more than one Lawrence family possessed articles of dress, furniture, and livestock which could be characterized by but one word, loot."

As a result during the early part of the war cattle, horses, and mules were taken from many of the border counties of Missouri during Jayhawker raids. It was estimated that at least four-fifths of the cattle in Vernon County, Missouri were stolen by Jayhawkers during the war. During the same period it was stated that in Webster County, Missouri the cattle there were nearly exterminated. Unfortunately cattle not stolen were killed. In Henry County it was reported that, "Beef cattle in immense numbers were driven from our county

during the first years of the war, and seemingly, horses and mules enough have been stolen and driven away to outfit an army."

The head of jayhawking expeditions centered at Lawrence, Kansas. "Lawrence was more prosperous during the first three years of the war than she had been the three year's preceding" and the criminal activities of Jayhawkers were to be credited. Writer Lucien Carr, called Lawrence a "mere fence-house for stolen property" once owned by Missourians. "Lawrence was a den of thieves, Jayhawkers, renegade Missourians, and abolitionists of every degree. Here lived and flourished on their ill gotten booty hundreds of depredators and plunderers of Southern men; here was got three million dollars worth of army stores and supplies."

When Lawrence citizen James Lane led his Jayhawkers on Osceola, Missouri the Kansans raced out of town with 300 of their force so drunk they had to be carried back in wagons. A million dollars' worth of property was stolen or destroyed, and Osceola, one of the most beautiful towns in western Missouri, had ceased to exist.

Mrs. Judge Graves was living in the Missouri countryside but because of the Jayhawker raids it was advisable for her to move to Kansas City. She recalled, "Daily wagons were seen loaded with pianos and other furniture, carpets, etc., for the purpose of furnishing Union homes and camps. Kansas settlers were well supplied from Missouri homes." Jayhawker Charles Jennison's favorite quote was when he told his fellow Kansans, "I have grown stoop-shouldered carrying plunder out of Missouri in the name of Liberty." The description of Jennison's plunder was described by fellow Jayhawker Captain Henry Palmer of the 11<sup>th</sup> Kansas Regiment. He said

that when Jennison returned to Kansas from his first raid into Missouri "They marched through Kansas City, nearly all dressed in women's clothes; old bonnets and outlandish hats on their heads, spinning wheels and even grave stones lashed to their saddles. Through the country strewn with worthless household goods, their road lighted by burning homes, this regiment was little less than an armed mob until Jennison was forced to resign, May 1, 1862."

A citizen of Westport south of Kansas City recalled the Jayhawker's mode of illegal operation. "The first Union troops stationed in Kansas City were well disciplined, and no irregularities were permitted. Later a body of militia was posted here who indulged in excesses, confiscating property and permitting Jayhawkers and Redlegs from Kansas to commit whatever depredations they pleased. Wagons would be brought in from Leavenworth and loaded with furniture and valuables of every kind belonging to southern sympathizers."

One report stated, "The vast majority of the army stores were transported by contractors to the various depots established on the great routes of overland travel. The freighting companies carried on a great amount of business not only by carrying government freight, but also private freight. The company of Russell, Majors and Waddell at one time had 6,250 wagons and 75,000 oxen engaged in freighting. The height of the freighting business on the plains was from 1863 to 1866. Between May and November 1864, 63,000,000 pounds of freight were carried over the plains and in 1865 about 224,000,000 pounds."

Jennison's plunder trains were so large that his commercial operations selling stolen merchandize to the gold fields out west were staggering. Research shows that cities like Lawrence and Leavenworth were shipping \$20,000 worth of goods out west every week. By today's standards this would amount to roughly two million dollars every month.

Most of the plunder stolen from Missouri was taken back to Lawrence and sold at public auction on the main street while much of the wealth of Western Missouri was loaded up on wagon trains and taken to the gold fields still operating in Colorado and points farther west. Even those citizens not actively participating in the

Jayhawker's raids readily condoned them. One settler commented about the support Lawrence gave the Jayhawkers, "No punishment could have been too severe for a community whose sympathies these rapacious renegades enjoyed or whose cowardice prevented a vigorous protest against their infamous machinations."

The added wealth brought with it prosperity even if it was not honestly earned. With the Federals becoming more emboldened in their depredations and brutality the guerrillas knew they had to take an audaciously daring step in their retaliatory measures. Many of them had seen the wealth that they had spent accumulating in a lifetime swept away in a single Jayhawker raid.

During the Lawrence raid guerrilla Lieutenant William Gregg rode past a block long series of temporary structures packed with Missouri plunder. As he rode past he recognized much of the stolen goods. He commented that the amount of plunder was staggering. Gregg estimated that there was more Missouri property in Lawrence than Kansas property. Gregg recounted, "When the order was given to burn, I repaired to the southern portion of the main town, where I found about forty shanties, built, three sides board, the fourth a hay stack and covered with hay. All of these shacks were filled with household effects stolen from Missouri. Many we recognized, many of these had feather beds, quilts, blankets etc. stacked in there higher than I could reach. Five bedsteads, bureaus, sideboards, bookcases and pianos that cost thousands of dollars, many of these shacks were in charge of negro women, many of whom we recognized that had been run off from their owners in Missouri. We went among the shacks touching matches to hay. It is stated that we destroyed property in Lawrence worth \$1,500,000. I don't know about that. I have always contended that the fires we started that morning destroyed as much property that had belonged to Jackson County people as that belonging to the citizens of Lawrence".

#### Article by Paul R. Petersen

Ref: *Quantrill of Missouri*, Cumberland Publishing;  
..... *Quantrill at Lawrence*, Pelican Publishing.