

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE LAWRENCE RAID.

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MY EXPERIENCE IN THE LAWRENCE RAID.

O. W. MCALLASTER.(1)

IN 1856 I was residing in Chicago, and in the fall of that year Gen. James H. Lane, of Kansas, came to the city and delivered a public address, urging those who desired that Kansas should become a free state to assist in accomplishing that object by contributing of their means, influence and votes, or by emigrating to the territory. At that meeting I resolved to make my home in Kansas, and to go there the following spring, as soon as the Missouri river was open to travel.

In the office where I was employed were two young Germans, who decided to join me in the adventure. They were brothers, and one had just married.

In the spring, 1857, agreeable to our plans, we set out for Kansas, traveling by railroad as far as Jefferson City, Mo, where we took a steamboat for Kansas City. In St. Louis we purchased supplies for several months' subsistence, and on our arrival in Kansas City we procured a wagon and a yoke of oxen. On this wagon we loaded our goods and started for Osawatomie, where we met O. C. Brown, who questioned us as to our politics and intention in coming to the territory. Finding we were all right politically, he advised us to take claims on Middle creek, in Linn county, southwest of Osawatomie, which we did, each of us taking 160 acres.

In the fall, having pre-empted my claim, and being sick with fever and ague, I removed to Lawrence, traveling in a stage coach, with Mr. Henry Tisdale as driver. Soon after I went to Lecompton, where the Lecompton constitutional convention (2) was in session, and worked in the office where the printing for the convention was done. Later on I returned to Lawrence, and was employed in the Herald of Freedom office, where I remained until the office was suspended for want of support. I then rented the job office, running that until the State Journal was established by Trask & Lowman, when I accepted a situation with them.

When the war broke out I enlisted in one of the several militia companies in the city, and was orderly sergeant of company A, Third regiment, Kansas State Militia, with Holland Wheeler captain and Colonel Charles Williamson commander of the regiment.

About the 1st of August, 1863, the militia companies in the city and in portions of the county were called out, and with a small squad of United States infantry were stationed on Mount Oread. The mayor of the city had received information that Quantrill and his band could be expected at almost any time, and he therefore sought to give them a warm reception and welcome them to hospitable graves. But like many previous alarms, it proved false, Quantrill failing to appear. Mayor Colamore, who was a very reticent, peculiar and careful man, sent the companies home,

and had most of the muskets of the city companies placed in a store room on Massachusetts street, with only one or two men in the building on guard duty. The United States troops, believing all immediate danger over, retired from Mount Oread to the north side of the river, where they had better camping grounds, with plenty of wood and water. At that time there was no bridge, the only means of crossing being by fording in low water and by ferry boat when the river was high.

The night before the raid all thought of an invasion had passed from the minds of the Lawrence people, and a public meeting to consider some railroad project was held in front of the Eldridge House. The Journal office was then where Mr. Selig's insurance office now stands, and it was nearly eleven o'clock at night when I went to my home on the east side of Rhode Island street, about the middle of what is now the 700 block. It being very warm, I was up about five o'clock on the morning of August 21, 1863. A noise attracted my attention, and I looked south and saw between 300 and 400 horsemen on Rhode Island street, just east of the park, near Hancock street, I at first supposed they were United States troops, as it was a very common thing for them to be passing through the city, but in an instant they spread out, taking possession of New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont streets principally, shooting every person they saw. On New Hampshire street, near the south part of what is now block 900, they reached a camp of thirty two unarmed recruits, waiting to be mustered into the United States service. I saw them shooting down these men, who ran in every direction, some crawling under sidewalks and into bushes, only about five escaping with their lives. Then I realized that Quantrill and his guerrillas were upon us.

William L. G. Soule was then city marshal, and lived with his mother and two sisters in my house, E. W. Wood and I boarding with them. These people I quickly awakened. By this time the invaders were separating. The larger number, with the commanding officer, rode rapidly down Massachusetts street to the Eldridge House, shooting all men and boys as fast as they appeared in

sight, while others, equally, merciless, took Vermont and New Hampshire streets, and a smaller number went into each of the other streets, extending to the river and into West Lawrence. I was so completely taken by surprise that the bushwhackers had reached Winthrop street by the time I realized they were really upon us and on all sides of us. Houses were burning in all directions, and I so feared being burned in my house that I climbed down the well, a few feet east of the building. Mr. Wood came to the well and inquired, "What are you doing down there?" I replied by immediately coming up, and we all went into the basement kitchen of the house, locking the outside doors. It was fortunate for me that I left the well, for several large stones were afterward found to have been thrown down into it, which, had I been there, would have ended my life.

City Marshal Soule had only one revolver with him and in it were but two or three loaded chambers. My musket and ammunition were at the office. Soule's mother and one sister (the other sister was then teaching school in Kanwaka), Mr. Wood and I placed ourselves near the foot of the stairs, while Mr. Soule stood near the head of the stairs with his revolver in hand, ready to shoot the first ruffian who should enter the house.

We had not long to wait. They soon came to the doors, pounding and demanding admittance and threatening to set the house on fire. The greater portion of the ruffians by this time had collected on Massachusetts street, where the most favorable opportunity offered for plunder, and we thought we saw a way clear to escape by getting out of the house and running east to a cornfield down in the bottom. One man had his horse hitched on the street near our front door, and, after trying the door without success, had gone on to the next house south. So, seeing no man to the east, we decided to attempt an escape in that direction. Before starting out I went upstairs to my room and got my watch and what money I had on hand. By the time I came down Mr. Soule had started, with Mr. Wood next and Mrs. Soule and daughter following. As I hurried on to overtake them I saw that Mr. Soule and Mr. Wood had been intercepted by four or five horsemen who came riding up, demanding their watches and money, so I handed my money and watch to Miss Soule as I passed by her. The ladies were not disturbed. I had on that morning only a shirt and pants, having laid off my blue blouse, an article of wearing apparel which was very offensive to

rebel bushwhackers, and I looked so much like a forlorn tramp as to be able to pass the ruffians apparently unnoticed. At any rate, Mrs. Soule, her daughter and I were allowed to go on to the cornfield.

The raiders who had robbed Mr. Soule directed him to enter David Evan's stable and bring the horses out to them. These men seemed to be the quiet farmers of the band, doing guard duty for that portion of town, and taking no part in the shooting of men and burning of houses. From the cornfield we could see the villains riding in every direction and firing buildings, my house among the number. From a neighbor, who was hidden in the bushes, we learned that the ruffian who had tried our doors and then gone on to the next house south came back, and, finding the back door of my house open, as we had left it in our flight, entered and went through the rooms, taking what he wanted and carrying it out to where his horse was hitched in front; he then started a fire on a lounge and left it to burn. When we returned the woodwork was all burned out, but the brick work was standing, and in such good shape that I soon had it enclosed again. The grand lodge of Masons of the state very kindly loaned me \$500 for the purpose. The members of this order, through the grand lodge, assisted many widows, orphans and brethren in distress at this time.

As soon as we found the invaders were leaving town we returned to behold a most sickening sight. The main street was almost entirely in ruins and dead bodies lay along the sidewalk in every direction. The work of burying the dead we commenced at once. Many were engaged in finding their own dear ones and preparing them for the last sad rites; others were collecting the dead bodies of those without known relatives and conveying them to the old Methodist church on Vermont street, where the seats were removed and the floor nearly covered with the dead. The wounded were carried to their homes or to the house of some friend or neighbor, wherever they could receive care and surgical attention. A party repaired to the cemetery, volunteering to dig graves for the burial of the dead, and the bodies of fifty-three unknown dead, without friends or relatives, were buried in one long trench in boxes hurriedly nailed together. This work was carried on for three days before it was fully accomplished. The cries of the bereaved were heard

in all parts of town, and filled our hearts with greater sadness.

A partial list of the killed and wounded, published in a Leavenworth paper August 26, 1863, showed the number of killed and missing to be about one hundred and fifty, with twenty-two wounded. For many days and weeks the survivors were in a frightfully nervous state, consequent upon the shock received. Any unusual noise would startle us. The following Sunday evening a rumor was started that Quantrill was coming again, and men, women and children rushed pell-mell from the city, north and west, while the people in the country mounted their horses, shouldered their guns and rushed for the defense of the town. The story was very soon contradicted, but it was almost impossible to convince many that it was a false alarm.

Business of every kind was literally obliterated, but many people were determined to stay and rebuild the town, while others, having lost everything, became discouraged, and decided to seek their fortunes in some less dangerous quarter.

I, having come to Lawrence to stay, commenced to look around to recover some of my losses and do what I might toward making myself a home.

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NOTE 1.-[biography of OCTAVIUS WARREN MCALLASTER]

NOTE 2.-The Lecompton constitutional convention met September 7, 1857, continuing in session only long enough to organize. On September 11, on account of the approaching election of October 5, the convention adjourned to reassemble on October 19. From October 19 the convention continued until November 3, when it finally adjourned. The secretary of the Historical Society was an apprentice in the office in Lecompton, where the printing for the convention was done.