

JOHN BROWN'S 1858 RAID IN VERNON COUNTY:

Contemporary Accounts and Official Reports

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Selected and Edited by W. Arthur Mullies, Ph. D.

Hume, Missouri, 2008

“AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER”

Legend on a British Half Penny Token issued by the Society for the Abolition of Slavery in the 1780s. In 1838 American abolitionists placed into circulation their own token, “Am I not a Woman and a Sister” These copper coins were approximately the size of a half-dollar. B. Franklin was the first head of the American Society for Abolition in the 1780s.

A) Harvey G. Hicklin's Eyewitness Account *

Hume, Missouri

August 9, 1886

On the night of December 20, 1858, about 11 or 12 o'clock, I was awakened by the cry, "Hello, d__ you, get up and make a light!" I jumped out of bed and as the moon was shining bright I saw the yard was full of armed men. Believing the men I saw were robbers.... I got my pocket-book.. The men were now battering in the east door of the room. Our two small children were sleeping in an old-fashioned trundle-bed in the middle of the room. I raised the feather tick and slipped the .. money into the straw tick under the children..., and just as I stepped away.. the door flew open. I had not struck a light, but there was some light from the old-fashioned fireplace.

The men entered the room, covered me with their Sharp's rifles and ordered me to surrender.... They then went through all four rooms of the house.... in search for money.

By this time John Brown himself came into the room. He said to me, "Well, you seem to be in a very tight place, but you shan't be hurt if you behave yourself, "etc. He said he knew I was only a tenant there, but he was going to take off all of the negroes and free them, and he was also going to take provisions for them and property enough to bear their expenses to freedom. He talked with me rather pleasantly for thirty minutes or more. He said he was doing the Lord's will and was not ashamed, etc. At last a man came to the door and said, "Captain, the wagons are loaded and all is ready." Then Brown rose and left, as did all of his men but two, who were left as guards over me with orders ... to shoot me if I attempted to escape...Brown and his men left my house just at 2 o'clock in the morning. The guards stayed only about an hour ... and left too.

I slipped out the back way and ran about three-quarters of a mile to the house of Peter Duncan...I called up Mr. Duncan and told him what had happened. We went down to John Larue's and found the old gentleman, Issac Larue, sitting by the fire. John Brown and his party had been there and had done about as they did at my house; they had also taken John Larue and Dr. A. Ervin prisoners and taken them off with them. They had not been gone long, as we could still hear the rattle of the caravan on the way to "poor Bleeding Kansas." It was not yet daylight...

Brown and his party took from me or from my possession five negroes, James and his wife Narcissa, and their two children and another young negro man named Samuel; also, two horses and harness, one yoke of oxen, and some other articles belonging to my father-in-law James Lawrence, deceased; also some provisions, pork, lard, tallow, and a saddle, shot-gun, overcoat, pair of boots, two or three bed blankets, and other articles...They took from the old man Isaac Larue five negroes, including two named George and David; also six head of good horses, one wagon, 800 lbs. of pork, a lot of bedding, clothing, and many other articles...

Nothing that was taken away was ever recovered....Brown said to me that we might get our property back if we could; that he defied us and the whole United States to follow him...

About two weeks afterward five more men from Bain's Fort , who I suppose were with Brown on the first raid, came to my house one night and took from me four horses and .. [three] .. horses from ..old acquaintances of mine who were spending the night. They lived in Kansas but they had got scared and left their homes for a time. Both were strong Free State men then.

I am a Southern man, and always have been, but I make this statement without prejudice

against any one. What I have stated is the truth as I verily believe, and I am willing to swear to it. I do not hold any particular malice or prejudice on account of these old transactions. Old things have passed away, but the **truth** can never pass away.

H. G. Hicklin

* Published in I. R. Holcombe, HISTORY OF VERNON COUNTY MISSOURI,
 (Saint Louis: Brown & Co., 1887), pp. 226-228
 (Clinton: The Printery, rept. 1974).



B) Slaves as enumerated in James Lawrence Estate Papers prior to the Raid *

Certificate of the Appraisement of the Estate of James Lawrence

1 Negro Boy Jim (supposed to be 30 years old)	appraised at	1,200 00
1 " woman Marcipa " " 25 " " " "	" " "	800 00
1 " Boy Sam " " 18 " " " "	" " "	1,000 00
1 " girl Mepouri Jane! " " 5 " " " "	" " "	300 00
1 " boy Willis Hee! " " 3 " " " "	" " "	300 00
1 sorrel horse blaze face		100 00
1 bay horse one eye		60 00
1 black Mare		40 00
1 sorrel Mare 8 years old	" " "	95 00
1 Iron grey filley 2 years old	" " "	95 00
1 sorrel filley 1 year old		40 00
1 Cow & Calf		22 50
1 yoke Oxen		80 00
1 " do		70 00
1 " do		60 00
5 two year old Steers	* 1200	60 00
1 two " " heifer		

* Probate Court Records, Vernon County, Nevada City, 1858.

- C) John Brown's position on the raid, published in the Lawrence *Tribune* and the New York *Tribune*, known to history as John Brown's Parallels.

Trading Post, Kansas, January 3, 1859

Gentlemen-- You will greatly oblige a humble friend by allowing the use of your columns while I briefly state two parallels in my poor way.

Not one year ago eleven quiet citizens of this neighborhood, [the eleven are named] were gathered up from their work and their homes by an armed force....and without trial or opportunity to speak in their own defence were formed into a line and all but one shot--five killed and five wounded.... All were left for dead. The only crime charged against them was that of being Free State men. Now, I inquire, what action has ever-- since this occurrence in May last -- been taken by either the President of the United States, the Governor of Missouri or the Governor of Kansas, or by any of their tools, or by any Pro-Slavery or Administration man, to ferret out and punish the perpetrators of this crime? [known as The Marias des Cygnes Massacre]

Now for the other parallel. ... On Sunday, December 19th, a negro called Jim came over to the Osage settlement [Ft. Bain] from Missouri, and stated that together with him, his wife, two children, and another negro man, was to be sold within a day or two, and begged for help to get away. On ... the following night two small companies were made up to go to Missouri and forcibly liberate the five slaves, together with other slaves. One of these companies I assumed to direct. We proceeded to the place, surrounded the buildings, liberated the slaves, and also took certain property, supposed to belong to the estate.

..We then went to another plantation where we found five more slaves, took some property and two white men. We moved slowly away to the [Kansas] Territory for some distance, and then sent the white men back, telling them to follow us as soon as they choose to do so. The other company freed one female slave, took some property, and, as I am informed, killed one white man, (the master), who fought against the liberation.

Now, for the comparison. Eleven persons are forcibly restored to their natural and inalienable rights, with but one man killed, and "all hell is stirred from beneath." It is currently reported that the Governor of Missouri has made a requisition upon the Governor of Kansas for the delivery of all such as were concerned in ... the "dreadful outrage." The marshall of Kansas is said to be collecting a posse of Missouri men at West Point, in Missouri, a little town about 10 miles distant [today, Drexel], to "enforce the laws." All Pro-Slavery, conservative Free State and doughface men, and administration tools are filled with holy horror.

Consider the two cases and the action of the Administration party.

Respectfully yours,

John Brown

* From, HISTORY OF VERNON COUNTY, op. cit, pp. 233-234.
Portions appearing in brackets, [] are the editor's.

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D) Effects and Impressions of Brown's Vernon County Raid *

"The next day runners were sent throughout the country and the alarm given generally. There were no telegraphs or railroads here then, but the news was soon in St. Louis and over the United States. Of course the details were exaggerated, and by the time they reached the outer world they had it that Brown, Montgomery, and Lane, at the head of a thousand men, had invaded Western Missouri, freed five hundred slaves, burned three-score houses, and killed a hundred men, women, and children !

"The second day about 250 men chiefly from Vernon and Bates assembled on Duncan's Creek, hovered about the Kansas line awhile, but at last sneaked back home rather than cross it and attack Bain's fort and fight the devil with fire.... Had the force crossed over, Brown and his party would have been captured, killed, or dispersed, the negroes recovered and justice done. ... And so, nothing was done."

Within a month no slaves could be found within fifty miles of the Missouri-Kansas line.
.....

Sworn depositions were given to local Justices of the Peace . J. P.s were N. R. Marchbanks on Duncan Creek and John Antony Sartorius on Pryor Creek, deponents were Harvey G. Hicklin and Issac Larue. Also, a formal petition was sent to Missouri governor Stewart:

"The undersigned, citizens of Vernon Co., Mo., most humbly pray your Excellency to take into consideration the accompanying affidavits from citizens of this county, who have been robbed and outraged at their homes by a band of lawless men from the Territory of Kansas, supposed to be headed by the notorious Brown and Montgomery, and also the terrible situation of the family of the late and lamented David Cruise, who has been foully murdered, in the bosom of his family by these desperadoes. The state of our border country needs your Excellency's immediate attention. We are unorganized, without arms, ammunition, or the means of subsistence in case of a border war. We most solemnly appeal to you, as Executive of the State, for the protection which we need in the present crisis. This lawless band in Kansas is organized, armed with Sharp's rifles, and also have in their possession a cannon, and threaten our whole border, causing life and property to be insecure in the last degree. " Signed:

Philip Zeal	Potillen Bohannan	Cyrus Nugent	N. R. Marchbanks
Wm. B. Fail	Wm. Smith	Levi Welch	Nicholas Hagan
Wm. Barlett	Ezekiel Rhea	Jas. M. Rucker	James Barlett
W. C. Gates	Isaac B. Larue	H. M. Davis	F. Barney
Wm. Pryor	Andrew Townsend	Wm. Welch	John Larue
Peter Duncan	Peter Duncan	Wm. Newgent	A Hagan
Edward Wade			

In May a circuit court returned indictments for murder and robbery against John Brown and the other raiders known by name. "But the finding of the indictments amounted to nothing. Not a man indicted was ever even arrested. Those of the subordinate brigands sank into oblivion; the leaders, met violent deaths: Kagi was shot at Harper's Ferry; John Brown was hung at Charleston, Va., and, it is said, "his soul goes marching on."

* From, HISTORY OF VERNON COUNTY, pp. 236-240.

JOHN BROWN'S VERNON COUNTY RAID

"I have only a short time to live—only one death to die, and I will die fighting for this cause. There will be no more peace in this land until slavery is done for."

— John Brown, August 30, 1856.

John Brown's Vernon County Raid: Prelude to Harpers Ferry

Near this and other locations in Vernon County, John Brown conducted a raid to liberate Missouri slaves. On the bitterly cold night of December 20, 1858, two parties of heavily armed raiders, led by John Brown, slipped across the border into Missouri. Brown, of Osawatimie, Kan., was an abolitionist captain who was hated and feared by Missouri slaveholders for good reason. Brown's mission that night was to liberate slaves held in Vernon County and incite renewed violence along the Missouri-Kansas border. Ten months later Brown would launch a more ambitious raid at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, an event that would propel the South toward secession and hasten the coming of the Civil War.

John Brown had come to Kansas Territory in 1855, where he played a bloody role in the fight over the territory's status as slave or free. A violent, uncompromising zealot, he came to believe that God had ordained him to bring about the overthrow of slavery. In 1856 he returned east to raise money for an ambitious plan to incite slave rebellion in Virginia and ignite a war which slavery could not survive.

Sporting a beard and using the alias "Shubel Morgan," Brown returned to Kansas in June 1858 and found the territory largely at peace. Clashes continued, however, around the town of Fort Scott, where free-state guerrillas — "jayhawkers" — under James Montgomery were evicting slave-state settlers. Proslavery marauders retaliated by killing or wounding to free-state captives in the Marais des Cygnes massacre. "It seems the troubles are not over yet," Brown wrote, and hurried south to John Montgomery.

In Southeast Kansas, Brown and a growing band of followers occupied a fortified cabin near the border called "Fort Bain." On Sunday, December 19, one of Brown's scouts encountered a slave named Jim from Vernon County, Mo. The man belonged to the estate of the late James Lawrence. Jim claimed that he and others were to be sold south to Texas and begged to be rescued. With national attention focused on Kansas, Brown seized the opportunity to liberate the slaves. By flaunting the laws protecting slavery, he might goad Missouri slaveowners into violent reaction. A renewal of open warfare would prove the feasibility of his Harpers Ferry plan to his wealthy New England backers.



Lawrence House



Slave cabin on Lawrence farm

The home of the late James Lawrence was the principal target of John Brown's raid. The log building is said to be a slave cabin on the Lawrence farm. The farmstead was situated west of this location.

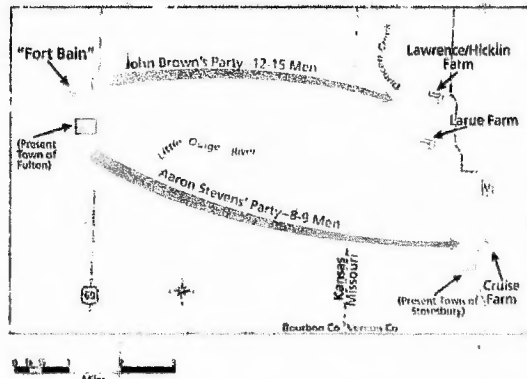
Courtesy of Helen Ewan and the Bushwacker Museum.

A STATE DIVIDED: THE CIVIL WAR IN MISSOURI

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



John Brown's Vernon County Raid, Dec. 20, 1858



Five slaves — Jim, his wife Narcissa and their two children, and a man named Samuel — were loaded in farm wagons along with looted provisions and assorted plunder. About 2 a.m. Brown departed, leaving guards to prevent anyone from raising an alarm. When the guards left an hour later, Hicklin ran to John Larue's farm. Brown had already been there, carrying off five more slaves, a wagon and six horses, 800 pounds of pork, bedding, clothing and other articles; Larue and a boarder, Dr. A. Erwin, had been taken hostage.

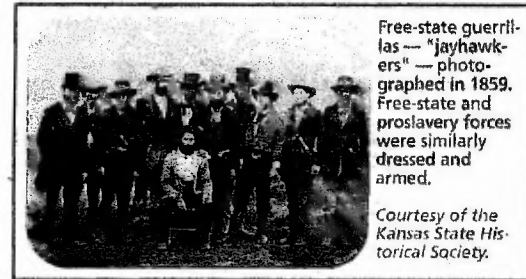
South of the Little Osage, Aaron D. Stevens, with eight or nine men, rode to the home of 60-year-old David Cruise, a prominent early settler. Cruise owned several hundred acres and two slaves, George and Jane. According to Cruise's young son, the jayhawkers pretended to be travelers and begged to be admitted from the cold. Once inside, they shot Cruise in cold blood and ransacked the house, forcing Mrs. Cruise to assist. The slave George was absent, but Jane, who was pregnant, was loaded on a wagon along with provisions and clothing; she gave birth a few days later. The raiders rounded up a head of mules and several horses then continued to the farm of Hugh Martin, who owned no slaves. There they took a valuable mule and hurried to rejoin Brown.

Convoying the liberated slaves, Brown's band arrived at Osawatimie, Kansas, on Christmas Eve. While part of the raiders dispersed with their share of loot, Brown watched for the pursuit he hoped would come. Several hundred outraged Missourians had assembled on the border, but they decided against breaking the peace and petitioned the authorities to deal with the raiders.

Aftermath

Disappointed that warfare had not been rekindled, Brown penned a letter for publication to justify his actions. He claimed that the raid was retaliation for the Marais des Cygnes massacre, in which five free-state men had been killed and five wounded. In contrast, his expedition had restored 11 persons "to their natural & inalienable rights" and killed only one, a slaveholder "who fought against the liberation."

Accepting Brown's account, the Northern press portrayed the raid as a heroic rescue against great odds; the fact that Brown had invaded



Free-state guerrillas — "jayhawkers" — photographed in 1859. Free-state and proslavery forces were similarly dressed and armed.

Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

private homes, stolen property and been party to murder was ignored. Abolitionist Gerrit Smith, a Brown backer, wrote in satisfaction: "Our dear John Brown is invading Missouri and pursuing the policy which he intended to pursue elsewhere."

The reaction in Kansas was less positive. Although some praised Brown, the Lawrence Herald of Freedom, an antislavery newspaper, condemned the raid. The governor proclaimed it a lawless outrage, while Jim Lane — himself a notorious jayhawker — offered to capture Brown. Even Montgomery denounced the affair as "simply a thieving, plundering, murdering raid." To disapproving friends, Brown conceded to "draw the scene of the excitement to some other part of the country."

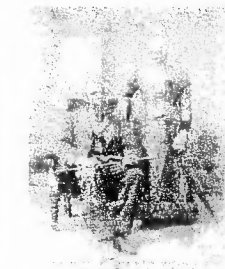
Aided by Kansas abolitionists, Brown moved the fugitive slaves into Iowa. They were hailed as they made their way to Detroit and on to freedom in Canada, where they arrived on March 12, 1859. Now with the full support of his backers, Brown moved ahead with his Harpers Ferry scheme, but the raid failed to spark the slave rebellion he foresaw. Although the attempt cost Brown his life, it had the effect he desired and helped bring on a violent national upheaval and the eventual destruction of slavery.



Library of Congress



Kansas State Historical Society



Kansas State Historical Society

John Brown (above left) was born May 9, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut and raised in frontier Ohio. A confirmed abolitionist, he went West in 1835 to prevent the spread of slavery to Kansas. The following year, he led a party that backed to death five proslavery settlers along Pottawatomie Creek. Less than a year after the Vernon County raid, on October 16, 1859, Brown seized the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He intended to arm the slaves and lead them against their masters, but the uprising failed to materialize. Brown was captured on October 18 and convicted of murder and treason. He was hanged on December 2, 1859, believing that his sacrifice was not in vain.

Aaron D. Stevens (above center), one of Brown's lieutenants, led the attack on the Cruise home. He was captured with Brown at Harpers Ferry the following year. Before his execution for treason, Stevens confessed to shooting David Cruise.

Sam Harper (above right) was among the slaves Brown liberated in Vernon County and took to freedom in Canada. Sam and his wife were photographed in Canada in 1859.

A Closing Observation

John Brown was universally feared and hated throughout the South, and his actions here as elsewhere interpreted as the actions of a crazed madman, thief, cutthroat and murderer. He was a detested Abolitionist, a Jayhawker, a villain pure and simple.

Elsewhere he was a great hero, an honorable Liberator, and his hanging at Charleston, Va. on December 2, 1859 was viewed as a horrible and undeserved fate. Throughout the North schools and businesses closed on that day, and church bells from Boston to Chicago and beyond tolled at the moment of his hanging and throughout the day. As his body was returned to his home in New York, great crowds gathered at railway stations to honor him.

John Brown became a martyr and a symbol of a nation divided. The animosity felt toward him is yet evident in those portions of the nation which defended slavery as a matter of simple "property" in the tragic war which followed in his wake; and no less real is the admiration and celebration of his legacy by those who elevated him to near sainthood and who vowed, like Brown "to die to make men free."

This difference between Brown's detractors and admirers is ample testimony to the great chasm which divided the nation then, and is even today evidence of the enduring legacy of the Civil War which we share.

"His truth goes marching on!"
Arthur Miller