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# The Marais des Cygnes Massacre and the Execution of William Griffith

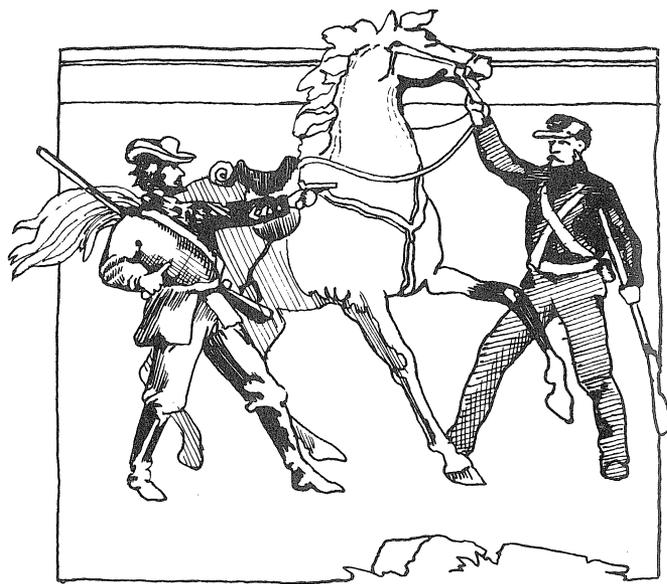
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by Harvey R. Hougen

**M**Y CURIOSITY concerning the Marais des Cygnes Massacre led me on a fruitless search for a complete and accurate account of the tragedy. This paper is an attempt to provide such an account. Readers who are familiar with the event may question the spelling of the name "Hamilton." In most Kansas sources it is spelled with an "e" (Hamelton). Be assured that the more conventional spelling is the correct one. Sources concerning the Hamilton family, primary and secondary, are available in the Georgia Department of Archives and History (GDAH), Atlanta, and were consulted (see note 9).

This account of events on the day of the massacre is based for the most part on primary sources—the statements of survivors who were interviewed or who wrote their recollections soon after the tragedy. The narrative of Rev. B. L. Read in his long letter to Rev. Nathan Brown (*La Cygne Weekly Journal*) and the statements of Read and William Hairgrove (*New York Times*) added a new dimension to the story. Newspaper accounts based on interviews with the survivors were also valuable. These sources became the basis for the evaluation of secondary materials. Ely Snyder's *Personal Experiences* was written by Snyder during his elderly years and so was used with caution.

Concerning secondary sources, the brief account of the massacre in Alfred T. Andreas' *History of the State of Kansas* appears to have been based on information obtained from Rev. Read and is probably accurate as far as it goes. The single most valuable secondary source is William A. Mitchell, *Linn County, Kansas: A History*. Mitchell's book was used with caution, how-



ever, for it is poorly organized and contains some information which is clearly untrue (for example, his remarks concerning Rev. Read's experiences after he left the massacre site). On the other hand, his accounts of other events were based on interviews with Austin Hall, the massacre survivor who lived out his years in Linn County, and fit well with the information obtained from primary sources. Secondary sources appearing in the *Kansas State Historical Collections* (especially the articles written by Joel Moody and Edmund Smith) were used to flesh out the narrative, but these works are of uneven quality and were also used carefully.

Edmund Smith's eyewitness account of the Griffith execution (from the *Mound City Clarion*, reprinted in Mitchell, *Linn County*) and news reports from the *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce* were the principal sources for the treatment of the trial and execution of William Griffith.

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MOUND CITY, KANSAS, had no courthouse in 1863, so Judge Solon O. Thacher held the October term of Linn County district court in City Hall. The murder trial of William Griffith was the feature attraction of the session, ending in a guilty verdict on the fifth of October. Thacher delayed sentencing until the next day.<sup>1</sup>

First-degree murder carried a mandatory death penalty, but it was up to the judge to set the execution date. When Griffith returned to the courtroom on October 6, Judge Thacher asked him if he had anything to say before hearing the sentence. The prisoner nodded and asked to be hanged immediately. The judge explained in kindly tones that he had intended to allow him at least two months to prepare himself, but Griffith was insistent, grumbling that he had no clean clothes and that he wanted to get the thing over with. Thacher considered the request and decided to schedule the execution for October 30. After formally pronouncing the sentence, he ordered the sheriff to supply the condemned man with clean clothes as often as necessary. Griffith had less than four weeks to live, but he complained that the time was too long.<sup>2</sup>

The Griffith case was a tardy postscript to the period 1854–58, when “Border Ruffians” and “Jayhawkers” turned the boundary between Missouri and Kansas Territory into a bloody skirmish line. Griffith’s crime? He rode with the Hamilton band on May 19, 1858, when it murdered five free-state men in the infamous Marais des Cygnes Massacre. Charles Hamilton, his two brothers, and thirty others had participated in the fatal activities that day, but William Griffith was the only man to answer for the crime. The atrocity occurred in Linn County and was the last great violent event of the “Bleeding Kansas” era.

**Border Ruffians and Jayhawkers**

The border warfare that led to the Marais des Cygnes Massacre had been set in motion by the very law that organized Kansas Territory. The northern limit of slavery for unorganized Louisiana Purchase lands was established in 1820 by the Missouri Compromise. No slave states were to be carved from territories situated above thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude, a line extending westward from Missouri’s southern boundary. The Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed that provision, substituting the principle of “popular sovereignty” under which the settlers

themselves would decide whether the new territories would be open to slavery.

Proslavery men had no designs on Nebraska, but slave-holding Missourians were determined to prevent the admission of adjacent Kansas Territory as a free state (a state which forbade slavery). Extremists on both sides of the slavery issue recruited settlers for Kansas. Proslavery leaders toured the South, recruiting men like the Hamilton brothers for the Kansas proslavery cause. Proslavery settlements quickly developed at Atchison, Leavenworth, and other locations near the Missouri border. On the antislavery side, the New England Emigrant Aid Company helped to establish free-state enclaves around Lawrence, Topeka, and Manhattan.

The early advantage in the struggle went to the proslavery faction, for President Franklin Pierce believed that the future of the Democratic party depended on the peaceful resolution of the Kansas question in favor of slavery. The proslavery men controlled all appointive territorial offices, including the courts, but they resorted to extralegal measures as well. “Blue lodges” and “social bands” formed in Missouri to inter-

*Territorial locations in Kansas Territory and Missouri, reprinted with permission from the Historical Atlas of Kansas, by Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, copyright 1972 by the University of Oklahoma Press.*



1. *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 8, 1863.  
 2. *Ibid.*, and L. D. Bailey, *Border Ruffian Troubles in Kansas: Some Newspaper Articles Written for the Garden City Sentinel and Kansas Cultivator in 1887* (Lyndon: N.p., 1899), 42.

vene in territorial elections and to terrorize free-staters (settlers who opposed the extension of slavery into Kansas Territory). The proslavery legislature, elected in March 1855, enacted a harsh slave code that provided severe penalties for persons who interfered with the "peculiar institution."

The situation rendered Kansas Territory virtually lawless. Disgusted by the proslavery voting frauds, free-staters boycotted the elections, refusing to recognize the proslavery legislature or its laws. During 1855, they formed the "Free-State" party, established a separate government in Topeka, adopted a constitution which forbade slavery, and organized a militia force. The proslavery faction responded by forming the "Law and Order" party and a militia which consisted largely of proslavery Missourians. The free-staters contemptuously referred to the Missourians as "Border Ruffians." As early as December 1855, the two military forces faced one another at Lawrence. A pitched battle was narrowly avoided through negotiations between Wilson Shannon, the official territorial governor, and Charles Robinson, head of the unofficial free-state government in Topeka.<sup>3</sup> In any event, the ensuing border warfare claimed at least fifty lives (estimates range as high as two hundred), and its impact on the United States was dynamic.

As the results of popular sovereignty unfolded, incidents like the sack of Lawrence (by a proslavery posse) and the Pottawatomie Massacre (an atrocity committed by abolitionist John Brown and a band of free-state men) emblazoned themselves on the nation's consciousness, fueling the sectional controversy that preceded the Civil War. Lawrence was a center of free-state activity and the home of free-state governor Robinson. Moreover, Lawrence's two newspapers were a constant irritant to proslavery leaders. In May 1856 a proslavery grand jury declared the newspapers and the city's Free State Hotel to be "nuisances" that could be "removed." Sheriff Samuel Jones responded by forming a large posse that entered Lawrence and destroyed the offending enterprises as well as other businesses and the home of Governor Robinson; two Lawrence citizens were killed. John Brown was en route to Lawrence with a free-state militia company when he received word of the "sacking." Three days later, on May 24, 1856, Brown retaliated by butchering five Franklin County proslavery men near "Dutch Henry's Crossing" on Pottawatomie Creek.<sup>4</sup>

Such events were widely publicized, but the situa-

tion in the southern border counties of Linn and Bourbon received less attention. There, the presence of proslavery and free-state settlers in near equal numbers and the proximity of proslavery bases in Missouri created an explosive situation.

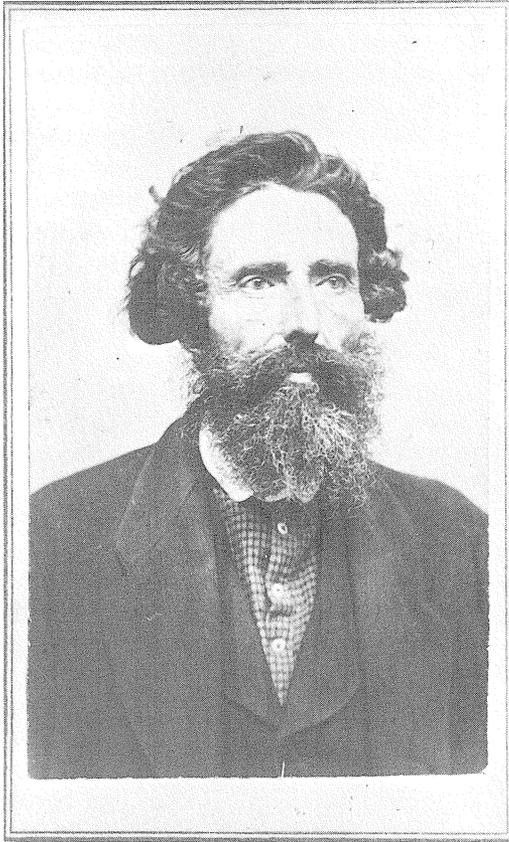
The soil in the southern border counties was as fertile as any in the region, and rich stands of timber grew along the streams that divided the rolling green hills. The main watercourse in Linn County is the Marais des Cygnes River, which flows across the county in a southeasterly direction before entering Bates County, Missouri, where it joins the Little Osage to form the Osage River. The county immediately south of Linn is Bourbon; the Little Osage flows across Bourbon in an easterly direction, just below the county line. Frenchmen who explored the upper branch of the Osage were impressed by the number of swans in the marshes along the river; hence, the name Marais des Cygnes. Located on the river's north bank, about four miles west of the Missouri boundary, was a cluster of buildings known to the early settlers as Chouteau's Trading Post (later organized as the town of Trading Post). The "Post," as it was sometimes called, had been established by fur traders in 1834 and was one of the earliest white settlements in the Kansas region.<sup>5</sup>

The early arrivals in the southern counties were proslavery, but as settlement progressed an increasing percentage of the newcomers were free-staters. Fearing loss of political control, proslavery leaders formed night-riding "posses" to intimidate the unwelcome newcomers—to warn them out of the territory. Few actual settlers rode with the posses. In the main, the night riders were Border Ruffians—men whose policy it was to "vote and shoot in Kansas" but who slept in Missouri for safety. There were a few proslavery ideologues among the Border Ruffians, but most of them appear to have been frontier roughnecks of the traditional variety. The posses sometimes used the torch to underscore their warnings to free-staters. During the summer of 1856, a large force of Border Ruffians under command of a proslavery leader named George W. Clarke swept through Linn County laying waste to several farmsteads. One of the first to watch his cabin burn was a small, black-bearded Ohioan named James Montgomery. Rather than leave Kansas Territory at the behest of Border Ruffians, the forty-one-year-old Montgomery built a defensible cabin and formed an association of free-staters—a group committed to mutual protection.<sup>6</sup>

3. Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts*, 2d ed. (St. Louis: Forum Press, 1980), 72.

4. *Ibid.*, 72–74.

5. *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1101–2.



Free-stater James Montgomery, whose cabin was burned by Border Ruffians, led a band known as "Jayhawkers."

Montgomery's group had grown into a formidable band of fifty men by 1857. All of them were armed with Sharps breech-loading rifles, shipped from the East by abolitionist sympathizers. Rev. B. L. Read, a minister of the Missionary Baptist Church, reportedly picked up the weapons at Westport Landing, Missouri, delivering them to Montgomery in Linn County. It was probably because of that daring exploit that Read later suffered brutal treatment at the hands of Border Ruffians.<sup>7</sup>

The Montgomery band became known as "Jayhawkers." The origin of the name has been argued, but many attribute it to an amusing remark by one Pat Devlin, a lanky, red-haired Irishman who rode with

the feisty Ohioan. Devlin, according to legend, made a one-man foray into Bates County, Missouri, where he visited a Border Ruffian camp. While in the camp, he saw a great stack of kitchenware and other items which he believed had been stolen from Linn County free-state families. Devlin waited for the right moment, then made off with the booty, returning to Linn County leading a horse loaded down with a variety of pots, pans, skillets, and jars of molasses. When he distributed the loot, a free-state man asked how he had managed such a feat. Devlin replied that in Ireland there was a bird called the jayhawk that "just took things," and that he believed his horse might have acquired a similar habit. Soon, free-staters in Kansas Territory were retelling the story and laughing uproariously, but the proslavery faction applied the term "Jayhawker" in a pejorative sense to Montgomery's men, who accepted the name as a "badge of honor."<sup>8</sup>

In November 1857, the Kansas free-staters abandoned their voting boycott and won the legislature. They voted again in January 1858, defeating a referendum on the proslavery Lecompton constitution. The controversial document was far from dead, however, having been forwarded to Congress by President James Buchanan as a result of a previous referendum—one that the free-staters had boycotted. Buchanan was as concerned about the future of the Democratic party as his predecessor, Franklin Pierce, so he chose to ignore the January plebiscite. The party was strong in the South, and admission of Kansas as a slave state, under the Lecompton constitution, would assure the loyalty of southern Democrats. The proslavery faction in Kansas had boycotted the January referendum, but the number of free-staters voting demonstrated that they were now a clear majority. The Lecompton constitution was the last hope for proslavery Kansans, and many of them were furious at the results.

One of those angry men was Capt. Charles A. Hamilton,<sup>9</sup> an aristocratic Georgian who had been recruited for the proslavery cause by E. M. "Milt" McGee, a founder of Kansas City, Missouri. McGee toured the South several times during the period 1854–57 to solicit money for the proslavery struggle and to encourage Southern emigration to Kansas. In late 1855 or early 1856 he delivered a fiery address to a gathering at Cassville, in northwestern Georgia. One of the speakers on the program was Dr. Thomas A.

6. Ibid.; James C. Malin, "The Proslavery Background of the Kansas Struggle," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10 (December 1923): 285–305; Jay Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border, 1854–1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1955), 81; and William Ansel Mitchell, *Linn County, Kansas: A History* (La Cygne: J. W. Mitchell, 1928), 15–19.

7. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 20–21, 21n, and 387n (in index under Henry Ward Beecher).

8. Ibid., 22–23, 22n; and William A. Lyman, "Origin of the Name 'Jayhawker,' and How It Came to Be Applied to the People of Kansas," *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1915–1918*, 14:203–7.

Hamilton, a wealthy and prominent physician whose outspoken support for the proliferation of slavery belied his Quaker background. Dr. Hamilton endorsed McGee's mission, publicly contributing one thousand dollars, and his three adult sons decided to emigrate to Kansas Territory. Charles Hamilton and his younger brothers, George and Al, gathered a large group of Georgians to move with them, arriving in mid-1856. Charles took up a claim east of Trading Post on the Missouri boundary, where he lived ostentatiously with his slaves and fine horses. George P. Hamilton, who had followed his father into the medical profession, went to Fort Scott, in east-central Bourbon County. Algernon S. Hamilton (known as Alvin or Al in Kansas) settled in Paris, a now-extinct Linn County town, where he studied law under Judge James Barlow, a prominent proslavery man.<sup>10</sup>

Charles Hamilton, handsome in his mid-thirties with a burly five-foot ten-inch frame, was accustomed to authority. As captain of the "Cassville Dragoons" during the Mexican War he had proven himself an able commander. In accordance with custom, he retained his military title after mustering out. Hamilton built a fortified log cabin on his claim near Trading Post. He and his brother George became the principal leaders of the "Bloody Reds," a group of Border Ruffians that ranged over Linn and Bourbon counties making trouble for free-staters. Members of the group could usually be found swilling whiskey at Sam

Brown's saloon in Trading Post or Jerry Jackson's store on the Missouri side of the boundary.<sup>11</sup>

During 1857, several new sets of neighbors moved into the Marais des Cygnes Valley and settled near the Hamilton plantation—much to the owner's distaste. William Colpetzer, Ely Snyder, Michael Robertson, Rev. B. L. Read, and the brothers Austin and Amos Hall were among the new arrivals; all of them were sympathetic to the free-state cause. The forty-three-year-old Ely Snyder, a blacksmith, became a special irritant. Soon after his arrival, Snyder became embroiled in an argument with a Bloody Red in Sam Brown's saloon. When the man reached for a knife, Snyder floored him with a hard punch to the head. Several months later, the blacksmith had a confrontation with Hamilton himself, during which the Georgian threatened to kill him. Snyder kept a loaded shotgun at his side from then on.<sup>12</sup>

Hamilton also disliked William Hairgrove, a fellow Southerner who was nominally proslavery. Hairgrove's leathery complexion and snowy, white hair caused him to appear much older than his fifty-eight years. His neighbors referred to him as "Old Man" Hairgrove, but they admired his intelligence. He and his adult son Asa established a claim near Hamilton's in 1857. Soon afterward, the elder Hairgrove, who had become acquainted with the Hamilton family while living in the South, called on the Georgian to pay his respects and was rudely turned away. The Lecompton constitution appears to have been at the bottom of Hamilton's contempt for Old Man Hairgrove, because despite his proslavery sympathy, Hairgrove opposed the Lecompton document.<sup>13</sup>

In the fall of 1857, Hamilton withdrew temporarily to Missouri. Using Bates County as a base, he and the Bloody Reds joined in an effort to drive free-staters from the valley of the Little Osage. One group, led by a notorious roughneck called "Fort Scott" Brock-

9. The name "Hamilton" is incorrectly spelled "Hamelton" in important Kansas secondary sources; for example, in Mitchell, *Linn County*, and Joel Moody, "The Marais des Cygnes Massacre," *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1915–1918*, 14:208–23. The incorrect spelling has been carried forward into more widely read works, such as William F. Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 78. The root of the problem can be found in an editor's footnote to John H. Rice, "Capt. Charles A. Hamelton [sic]," *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1901–1902*, 7:467. Rice was a Kansas newspaper publisher who knew the Hamilton family while living in Cassville, Georgia, during the antebellum years. When queried about the spelling of the Hamilton name, Rice assured the editor that it was spelled "with an e (el, not il)." Unfortunately, Rice was as wrong about the spelling of the name as he was about certain biographical data concerning the Hamiltons. The conventional spelling is used in all references to the Hamiltons in official military and legislative records as well as in secondary sources held by the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta (GDAH).

10. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 200; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1106; John H. Rice to Hon. Joel Moody, Fort Scott, Kansas, July 7, 1892, in Moody, "Marais des Cygnes Massacre," 209–10; Elmer LeRoy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854–1858," *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1919–1922*, 15:394–406; Pearl Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers* (Independence, Mo.: By the author, 1975), 270–71; and George M. Battey, Jr., *A History of Rome and Floyd County, State of Georgia, U.S.A., Including Numerous Incidents of More than Local Interest, 1540–1922* (Atlanta: Webb and Vary Co., 1922), 1:630.

11. W. P. Tomlinson, *Kansas in Eighteen Fifty-Eight, Being Chiefly a History of the Recent Troubles in the Territory* (New York: H. Dayton, 1859), 63; E. R. Smith, "Marais des Cygnes Tragedy," *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1897–1900*, 6:366, 368; Military Records, 1846–1848, file 1, GDAH; Capt. Charles A. Hamilton to Gov. George Crawford, September 25, 1847, GDAH; and Ely Snyder, *The Personal Experience of Capt. Ely Snyder in the Early Settlement of Kansas* (Osawatomie: N.p., 1897), 3, hereafter cited as *Personal Experiences*, the first-page title. According to William A. Mitchell in *Linn County*, the owner of the saloon in Trading Post appears to have been a man named Daniels, but Ely Snyder recalls in his *Personal Experiences* that the saloon keeper was Sam Brown. Brown, of course, could have been an employee of Daniels.

12. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 207; Snyder, *Personal Experiences*, 2–4; and Tomlinson, *Kansas in Eighteen Fifty-Eight*, 64.

13. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 200, 207; *Leavenworth Times*, June 5, 1858; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1102.

ett, was blamed for shooting a prominent free-state man named Isaac Denton. The murder may have been intended to scare the free-staters, but it had an opposite effect: James Montgomery and the Jayhawkers took the offensive.<sup>14</sup>

Using techniques similar to those of the Border Ruffians, Montgomery began an effective “warning out” campaign. The proslavery newspapers heaped invective on the Jayhawkers. The *Cass County* (Missouri) *Democrat* labeled Montgomery a “thief and a jackal,” blaming him for the “hundreds” of proslavery refugees who had been forced to leave Kansas Territory. Indeed, if the Jayhawkers, as individuals, were superior in virtue to the Border Ruffians, this factor has never been conclusively demonstrated.<sup>15</sup>

In late April 1858, Montgomery decided to clean out Sam Brown’s saloon in Trading Post. The establishment was doing a thriving business with Hamilton’s Bloody Reds, for the Georgian had returned earlier that month to prepare his fields for planting. The tiny settlement on the north bank of the Marais des Cygnes consisted of about a dozen buildings, four of them dating back to the fur-trading days. One of the old build-

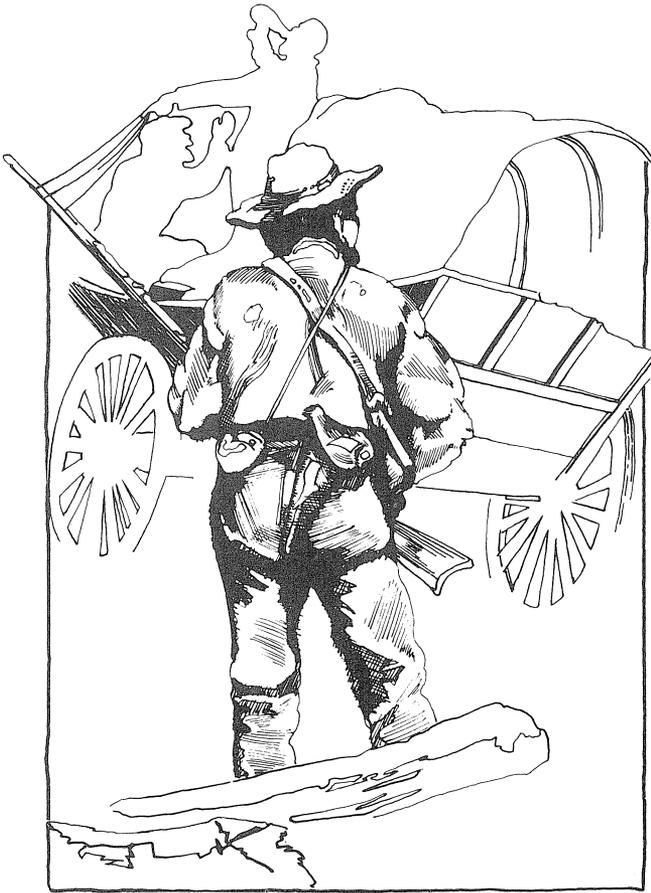
ings housed a general store; another, the saloon. When the Jayhawkers rode into Trading Post, they found a crowd of Border Ruffians loafing in front of the dog-gery. After disarming them, Montgomery went inside to roll out several barrels of corn whiskey. The thirsty Ruffians watched while the Jayhawkers smashed the barrels with axes. Montgomery then headed the sad spectators toward the Missouri boundary, minus their weapons, with a stern warning not to return. As a former Campbellite preacher, Montgomery may have been a teetotaler, but the sight of liquor spilling in the street was probably as distressing to the Jayhawkers as it was to the Bloody Reds. Hamilton apparently feared an attack by the Jayhawkers, for he left his plantation soon after the destruction at the saloon.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the free-staters who lived near Trading Post approved of Montgomery’s activities, but many of them feared retaliation. Accordingly, they formed a volunteer defense company which stayed on the alert until mid-May. The local situation remained quiet and, in any case, it was planting time. On May 17, the defense force disbanded and the members returned to their fields. Hamilton learned of the company’s dissolution within hours. He immediately sent a message to Judge Barlow, his brother’s legal mentor: “Come out of the territory at once, as we are coming up there to kill snakes, and will treat all we find there as snakes.”<sup>17</sup>

#### Hamilton Raids Linn County

Hamilton had withdrawn to Missouri when he left his claim. On May 18, he attended a meeting at a proslavery refugee camp at Papinsville, a now-extinct town in southern Bates County, Missouri. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss alternatives in handling the situation that Montgomery had created. Several hundred refugees and Border Ruffians were present, and the whiskey flowed freely.<sup>18</sup>

Hamilton delivered a passionate speech, demanding an all-out invasion of the southern border counties. Judge Barlow, who had come from Paris after receiv-



14. Smith, “Marais des Cygnes Tragedy,” 366; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 64.

15. Article from *Cass County Democrat*, Missouri, n.d., reprinted in *Herald of Freedom*, Lawrence, May 29, 1858; and Malin, “Proslavery Background,” 285–305.

16. Smith, “Marais des Cygnes Tragedy,” 366; W. A. Mitchell, “Historic Linn: Sketch of Notable Events in Its First Settlement,” *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1923–1925*, 16:641–42; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 23, 199; and Tomlinson, *Kansas in Eighteen Fifty-Eight*, 62–63.

17. Smith, “Marais des Cygnes Tragedy,” 367; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 201–2.

18. Smith, “Marais des Cygnes Tragedy,” 367; and A. H. Tannar, “Early Days in Kansas: The Marais des Cygnes Massacre and the Rescue of Ben Rice,” *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1915–1918*, 14:229.

ing Hamilton's warning, attempted to dissuade the crowd, pointing out that proslavery men still had control of the courts and that their problems could be resolved legally. But Hamilton had whipped his listeners into a frenzy. A mob of about two hundred rode out of the camp with him.<sup>19</sup>

Judge Barlow got the motley army's attention again when it halted near the border to organize. By that time, the effects of the whiskey had begun to wear off; many of the would-be invaders were cold, hungry, and sick. They listened as Barlow explained that their squirrel rifles and shotguns would be of dubious value against the Sharps rifles of the Jayhawkers. Hamilton angrily broke up the meeting, calling out his brothers; "Fort Scott" Brockett and the Bloody Reds joined them. A party of thirty-three crossed the territorial boundary, following the south bank of the Marais des Cygnes westward.<sup>20</sup>

The dawn of May 19, 1858, promised a beautiful day. The sun was already burning brightly when a young Bourbon County farmer named Patrick Ross passed through Trading Post at about 8:00 A.M. He might have noticed a group of laborers beginning their day's work on the new sawmill which was under construction in the village. Ross was heading southward, toward his farm on the Little Osage—land that Border Ruffians had forced him to vacate a few weeks previously. About one mile south of the village, he encountered a band of armed horsemen led by Capt. Charles A. Hamilton, who immediately took him prisoner. Ross undoubtedly recognized some of his captors as the men who had evicted him.<sup>21</sup>

After seizing Ross, Hamilton forded the river and approached Trading Post on the north bank. The marauders emerged from the timber at the sawmill construction site, capturing the surprised workers. John Campbell, a young Pennsylvanian who operated the general store for its absentee owner, was talking with a customer when he heard the commotion; he walked outside and greeted the approaching horsemen cheerfully. Hamilton arrested Campbell and his customer, then allowed his men to plunder the store. After searching the village, he released all prisoners except Ross and Campbell. Marching on foot, the two men hurried to keep up with their mounted captors as they rode northward, out of the village.<sup>22</sup>

The Reverend B. L. Read, who had delivered the Sharps rifles to Montgomery, lived on a farm north of Trading Post. Read and his wife Sarah had come to Kansas from Waukegan, Illinois, in July 1857. At about 9:00 A.M., the minister saddled his pony and rode to the nearby farm of Sam Nichols to borrow a draft horse. He was about to turn in at the Nichols farm, one mile north of the village, when two friends hailed him. The three were talking when the Border Ruffians surrounded them. Hamilton ordered Read to get in line with Ross and Campbell, but the minister refused. "You won't, eh? God damn you," growled Hamilton, drawing his revolver. Read and his friends quickly complied.<sup>23</sup>

William Stillwell departed Mound City with his team and wagon early on the morning of May 19, bound for Kansas City to pick up a load of machinery for a client. Rumors concerning Border Ruffian activity caused Mrs. Stillwell to fear for her husband's safety, but William had laughed and kissed away her tears before taking his leave. She watched him drive away into the coming sunrise, whistling a gay tune, but the tune suddenly faded as he crossed the hilltop. The whistling, she thought, must have been for her. Mrs. Stillwell returned to the one-room cabin and busied herself; the children would soon be up. Stillwell's trip was uneventful until he passed through Trading Post. Now, he saw horsemen blocking the road at the Nichols farm; the situation made him uneasy. He was carrying over two hundred dollars in cash, so he stopped momentarily to hide the money under some hay in the wagonbed. When Stillwell approached, the Ruffians ordered him to dismount; then, after searching and questioning him, they ordered him to get in line with the other prisoners.<sup>24</sup>

Hamilton clearly wanted Sam Nichols, a prominent free-state man, but Nichols had gone away on business. After ransacking the farmstead and terrorizing Mrs. Nichols and her children, the Border Ruffians stole three of Nichols' horses, as well as Read's pony and Stillwell's team, but they left Stillwell's wagon standing on the road, the money still hidden under the hay. Before leaving the Nichols farm, Hamilton released Rev. Read's two friends but held Read and Stillwell, along with Ross and Campbell.<sup>25</sup>

Hamilton now turned eastward, heading back

19. Smith, "Marais des Cygnes Tragedy," 367-68; and Smith, article from *Mound City Clarion*, n.d., reprinted in Mitchell, *Linn County*, 211-15.

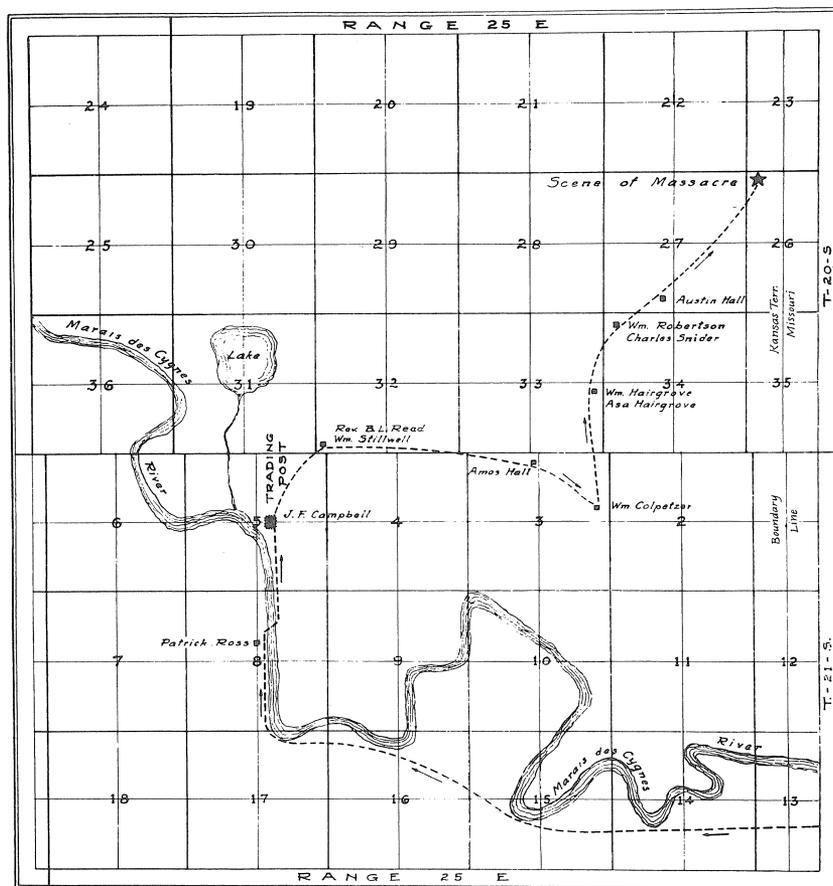
20. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 212.

21. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 207.

22. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 203.

23. Rev. B. L. Read to Rev. Nathan Brown, Osawatomie, January 18, 1859, *Paola Citizen*, n.d., reprinted in the *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879. The name "Read" is also spelled "Reed" in some sources.

24. *Ibid.*; interview with Mrs. William Stillwell, *Linn County Republican*, Mound City, May 28, 1897; and *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104-5.



MAP  
BY WILLIAM ELSEY CONNELLEY—  
SHOWING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY HAMELTON  
AND HIS FORCE IN GATHERING THE FREE STATE MEN  
FOR THE  
MARAIS DES CYGNES MASSACRE

*Prepared by William E. Connelley and August W. Ross about 1918, this map shows the route used by the Hamilton band in 1858. The locations where the free-state men were captured have been changed to reflect the sequence described by Rev. B. L. Read.*

toward the Missouri boundary. With the four captives marching on foot he had to move slowly, but he sent detachments ahead to seize the Hall brothers and William Colpetzer. Both Halls were ailing. Amos had stayed in bed that morning, suffering with fever and chills, but Austin, whose eyes were badly inflamed, had yoked his oxen and taken a plow to Snyder's blacksmith shop for sharpening. The Ruffians entered the cabin, ordering Amos from his bed. He refused, but his visitors convinced him that they were willing to shoot him where he lay. Amos pulled on his boots and followed them outside.<sup>26</sup>

In the meantime, Sarah Read busied herself in her cabin. The Reads had just returned to Trading Post after a short stay in the nearby town of Moneka (now extinct) and were still getting settled. Had Sarah gone outside after her husband's departure, she might have witnessed the events occurring on the road in front of the Nichols place, for it was located less than a mile away and in full view. Now, a lone horseman rode up to the cabin, calling for her. The visitor was one of the Trading Post sawmill workers who had been taken by the Hamilton gang and released. He told her that the Reverend Mr. Read was Hamilton's prisoner but as-

25. Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879; and *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104-5.

26. *Ibid.*; and "Map by William Elsey Connelley Showing the Route Taken by Hamelton [sic]. . .," *Kansas State Historical Collections*, 1915-1918, 14: between 212 and 213.

sured the startled woman that she had “no occasion for alarm.” Sarah Read thought differently, fearing that her husband would be taken into Missouri and that she would never see him again.<sup>27</sup>

She decided to follow the gang if she could, so she took her spyglass and hurried to the Nichols farm, where she found Mrs. Nichols and her children crying and the house in great disarray. In any event, Mrs. Nichols pointed out the eastward course of the Border Ruffians. With the spyglass, Sarah saw the entourage about two miles distant, in the vicinity of the William Colpetzer farm. She hurried after them.<sup>28</sup>

When she arrived at Colpetzer’s she found Mrs. Colpetzer with Mrs. Michael Robertson and Mrs. Charles Snider. She quickly learned that all their husbands had been taken. Mrs. Colpetzer had urged William to hide when Hamilton’s henchmen approached, but he insisted that he had nothing to fear. They seized Colpetzer but assured his terrified wife that no harm would come to him. Another detachment of Ruffians had visited the Robertson place. Mrs. Snider and her husband Charles (not related to Ely Snyder, the blacksmith), had come from Effingham, Illinois, to visit the Robertsons. The Ruffians seized Snider and Robertson, telling the women that they only intended to talk to the men. Apparently, the three women had accepted the Hamilton gang at their word, for Mrs. Colpetzer cordially invited the minister’s wife to spend the afternoon with them. Sarah Read didn’t share their optimism, however; she continued on her way.<sup>29</sup>

The marauders left the trail at Michael Robertson’s place, heading in a northeasterly direction, toward Ely Snyder’s claim. Hamilton now had ten captives. In addition to Amos Hall, Colpetzer, Robertson, Snider, and the four men captured in the vicinity of Trading Post, the invaders had taken William and Asa Hairgrove. Old Man Hairgrove had been planting corn when he looked up to see Al Hamilton on horseback, glaring down at him. “Come with me to the Hall place,” ordered Hamilton. “By whose authority,” retorted Old Man Hairgrove. Al Hamilton pulled a Sharps rifle from its boot and pointed it at him; Hairgrove cooperated. When they arrived at the Hall place, about thirteen mounted Ruffians were standing outside the cabin with Amos Hall, who was on foot, appearing ill and shaken. The group marched to Hairgrove’s farmstead, where they seized Old Man Hairgrove’s son Asa and stole a span of mules. Old

Man Hairgrove’s wife, daughter-in-law, and grandson watched them march away. Continuing on the cross-country trek, Hamilton soon observed an ox cart approaching on the line of march; it was Austin Hall, Amos’s brother, returning from Snyder’s blacksmith shop. A detachment rode forward to intercept him. Hall’s infected eyes rendered him virtually blind in the hard, bright sunlight. By the time he realized what was happening, the Border Ruffians were upon him.<sup>30</sup>

Hamilton now stepped up the pace, causing the eleven captives to move at a trot. When they faltered, the Ruffians bumped them with horses. A man asked to drink from a stream as he waded across but was told to “wait and get it in hell.” The captives recognized former neighbors among their tormentors: the Yealocks, Mike Hubbard, Tom Jackson, and of course Charles Hamilton. There were other familiar faces; included were George and Al Hamilton, Brockett, Charles Matlock, and William Griffith. Old Man Hairgrove would remember Griffith, for he was leading two mules that he had stolen from the Hairgrove farm.<sup>31</sup>

When the raiding party halted on a hilltop called Priestly Mound, Hamilton announced that he intended to call on “his friend” Ely Snyder and departed with a detachment. The blacksmith shop was close by, at a lower elevation, clearly visible from the hilltop. In the shop with Snyder were his brother and a neighbor; his sixteen-year-old son was in the nearby cabin. The captives watched while the four men successfully fought off their assailants, severely wounding one Ruffian. Hamilton himself absorbed seven pieces of buckshot from Ely Snyder’s shotgun, and his horse, undoubtedly a favorite mount, had been shot through the neck. He returned to the main body of his band riding a horse belonging to a subordinate, while the man led the injured animal. The Georgian was in a nasty mood. A captive had the effrontery to ask him what had happened at Snyder’s. “He gave me a little of what I intend to give you a good deal of,” came the ominous reply.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Marais des Cygnes Massacre

Hamilton had no inkling of Montgomery’s whereabouts. The Jayhawkers could already be in pursuit; if so, the firing at Snyder’s place would have revealed his location. In any event, there was no time to waste. The marauders descended from the hilltop, then moved up a ravine located a few hundred yards from Snyder’s

27. Statement of Mrs. B. L. Read, January 18, 1859, *Paola Citizen*, n.d., reprinted in *Ly Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 12, 1879.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*; and *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104–5.

30. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 203–4; and statement of William Hairgrove, *New York Times*, June 9, 1858, 2.

31. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 204–5; and *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 8, 1863.



*The Marais des Cygnes Massacre, as portrayed in A. D. Richardson's Beyond the Mississippi (1867).*

shop but separated from it by a hill mass. As the ravine narrowed, the captives marched at the bottom in single file, finally halting beneath a wide rock shelf. The Ruffians remained on horseback, occupying both slopes of the ravine, while the eleven prisoners stood in line, facing eastward. William Hairgrove, the white-haired patriarch, insolently stared upward at his antagonists. "Gentlemen," he growled, "if you are going to shoot us, take good aim."<sup>33</sup>

"Make ready!" Hamilton commanded. "Take aim!" Then a moment's hesitation. "The men don't obey the order, Captain," shouted Dr. George Hamilton. The irrepressible Old Man Hairgrove appeared to be more angry than fearful. "They are a good deal like as we are—we don't want to kill innocent persons," he sneered from the bottom of the ravine. Ignoring the remark, Hamilton issued the commands a second

32. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 204; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1105; Snyder, *Personal Experiences*, 7; Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879; statements of B. L. Read and William Hairgrove, *New York Times*, June 9, 1858, 2; and *Herald of Freedom*, Lawrence, May 29, 1858.

33. Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104–5; and Mitchell, *Linn County*, 204–5.

time, to no effect. William Stillwell now raised his arms in the Masonic sign of distress. Fort Scott Brockett may have recognized the sign, for he suddenly pulled his horse out of line. The disturbance enraged the frustrated leader. "Brockett, God damn you! Why don't you wheel into line?" The Fort Scott man stared at Hamilton coldly. "I'll be damned if I'll have anything to do with such a God damned piece of business as this," he responded. "If it was in a fight, I'd fire." Brockett turned the tail of his horse toward Hamilton and departed.<sup>34</sup>

Hamilton quickly issued the command to fire, squeezing off the first shot himself. All captives fell during the uneven fusillade that followed. Al Hamilton's revolver misfired, but he recocked it and pulled the trigger a second time, dropping Rev. B. L. Read. The minister had turned half around, so the ball ripped through his ribcage below and behind his left shoulder, missing the vital organs. William Stillwell's Masonic distress sign earned him a load of pistol balls,

34. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1105; Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879; statement of William Hairgrove, *New York Times*, June 9, 1858, 2.

fired from a shotgun by Dr. George P. Hamilton, a fellow Mason; Stillwell fell dead. A load of buckshot put Old Man Hairgrove down. As he fell, a rifle ball tore into his back, passing through one lung before lodging in his chest. Austin Hall stood between Old Man Hairgrove and William Colpetzer. He turned to see Colpetzer fall, going to the ground with him, uninjured.<sup>35</sup>

The executioners held their positions in silence for a few moments before Hamilton ordered two men to dismount and finish off any victims who showed signs of life. As they descended into the ravine, William Colpetzer struggled to rise, begging to be spared. A Ruffian shot him through the head. While the bodies were kicked and prodded, Al Hamilton sat on his horse taking potshots at the fallen men.<sup>36</sup>

Men on horseback shouted advice to their com-

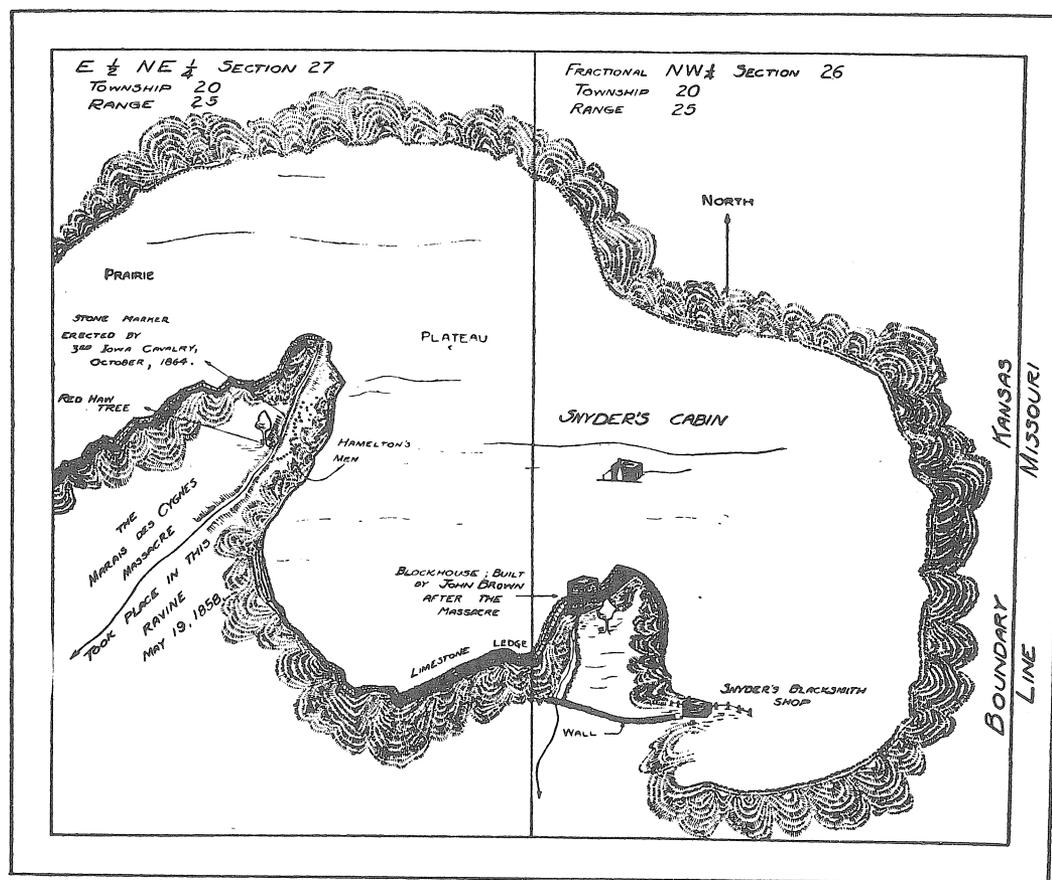
rades in the ravine. Mike Hubbard noticed that Amos Hall was breathing. "Put a pistol to his ear," he advised. A mop-up man carelessly placed the muzzle of his weapon against Amos's cheek and fired. The ball nearly severed his tongue, but he lived on. "Old Read ain't dead," observed Hamilton. "Which is him?" came the query. "Why there the old Devil is, looking at you," responded another. The victim indicated was actually Patrick Ross; a bullet in the head finished him. "See that man humped up, he ain't dead," called a kibitzer, indicating Austin Hall. One of the mop-up men kicked Hall and rolled him over, finding him covered with blood. "He's dead as the Devil," came the response. But the blood that drenched Austin Hall had flown from the wounds of Old Man Hairgrove, who was lying next to him. Satisfied, Hamilton ordered his men to infiltrate to safer territory in-groups, then to assemble at Jerry Jackson's store on the Missouri side.<sup>37</sup>

Sarah Read had turned northward after leaving

35. Ibid.; *Leavenworth Times*, June 5, 1858; *Kansas Tribune*, Topeka, May 29, 1858; and Mitchell, *Linn County*, 205.

36. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 205; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1105; and Smith, "Marais des Cygnes Tragedy," 369.

37. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1105; Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 205.



This sketch of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre site was included in W. A. Mitchell's *Linn County, Kansas: A History* (1928).

the Colpetzer place, hurrying along the route that the Hamilton gang had taken. She walked about two miles before sighting them from a hilltop; they were still marching in a northeasterly direction, toward the fatal ravine. Perhaps she could head them off at or near the Missouri boundary. With that plan in mind, Sarah descended the steep hillside, losing sight of the horsemen as she crossed a thickly timbered valley. While passing through the timber she heard firing. It occurred to her that the Ruffians might be shooting the captives, but she pushed the thought from her mind.<sup>38</sup>

Leaving the timber, she climbed another hill. Now she sighted about eight horsemen, moving away from her; she had crossed their line of march. Certain that the men were members of the Hamilton gang, she took off her bonnet and waved it, running after the riders as fast as her tired legs would carry her. The men stopped momentarily—once, then a second time, glancing back at her before starting downhill. Sarah drew close enough to recognize her husband's pony; one of the riders was leading the animal. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw another group of horsemen riding toward her and begged them to stop. She asked where the prisoners had been taken, but the man leading the contingent mumbled an evasive answer. She turned and pointed toward the group ahead. "You are the men, for there is a man leading my pony." The spokesman called to the rider indicated, motioning for him to come back to the hilltop. The two conversed in undertones, then the man led the pony to her. "If it is yours, take it!" he said. She accepted the animal but pressed her case. "Where are the prisoners?" she asked. "My husband is among them." The leader shrugged and replied that he couldn't recognize him among so many. Mrs. Read insisted that she wanted to know where they all were. The man responded evasively before riding down the hill.<sup>39</sup>

Moving westward now, in the direction from which the riders had come, Sarah Read encountered a third group of horsemen. "Whose pony are you leading?" one of them asked. She was still leading the animal, for the saddle was missing and she would have had difficulty mounting the pony, let alone riding it bareback. Sarah returned the man's stare haughtily. "It is my own, sir." "Very well," he responded, and rode on. Several of the men stopped when she asked them to. They conversed with her politely but were unwilling to say much about the captives. Before leaving, one of the Ruffians advised her that she might find some of

them in the timber ahead. Sarah continued on her way. She had already walked more than five miles at a brisk pace, much of it over rough country, and she was encumbered by a long skirt and petticoats; nevertheless, in her anxiety she was unmindful of fatigue.<sup>40</sup>

The massacre victims lay where they had fallen as the sound of the Hamilton gang's hoofbeats faded in the distance. Austin Hall, who had survived unscathed, called out to the others. Several answered, begging him to keep silent until certain that the Ruffians were no longer in the vicinity. Hall stayed where he was for a few minutes, then crawled out of the ravine to the hilltop. From that vantage point, he saw the raiders crossing another hilltop, about one mile distant. Returning to the others, he discovered that John Campbell, B. L. Read, Charles Snider, the two Hairgroves, and his own brother, Amos Hall, were still living. Campbell, the Trading Post storekeeper, appeared to be in the worst condition, bleeding badly from abdominal wounds. Hall made the storekeeper as comfortable as he could, taking note of his final messages, then hurried down the ravine in search of help.<sup>41</sup>

Sarah Read now crossed the hilltop above Ely Snyder's place and stared down into the ravine. She saw figures stretched out on the ground at the bottom. Taking them to be members of the Hamilton gang in repose, she called to them as she approached. After calling several times, she heard her husband's voice answering and rushed forward to him, thanking God for guiding her steps. The Reverend Mr. Read assured her that he and the other survivors were bound to die, but that they wanted to tell their story before doing so. Sarah began to feel faint but quickly got herself under control. Her husband urged her to go quickly—to bring witnesses to the site while survivors could still testify. She replied, "I have got the pony; can't you ride?" Again he told her that he believed he would die. She wanted to help him and the other wounded first, but Read insisted that she go immediately. Before leaving, she thought of the Ruffians' assurances to Mrs. Colpetzer and learned from her husband that William Colpetzer was among the dead. Sarah was disoriented but again chose her direction fortuitously for, as she later learned, she reached the Hairgrove farm by the shortest possible route.<sup>42</sup>

At the time of the fight at the blacksmith shop, Ely Snyder had no idea that Hamilton was escorting cap-

38. Statement of Mrs. B. L. Read, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 12, 1879.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 205.

42. Statement of Mrs. B. L. Read, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 12, 1879; and Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879.

tive free-state men toward the Missouri boundary. The Snyder group had fared well against the intruders, but Ely had taken a ball in the fleshy part of a thigh, in addition to several superficial wounds, and he knew that the Hamilton gang was strong enough to take him if it wanted him badly enough. Accordingly, Ely ordered his wife and younger children to seek refuge with one of the neighbors, while the four men took to the brush. A short time later they heard firing—an intense fusillade followed by sporadic shooting that lasted about five minutes. The four stayed in their hiding place, a defensible location at the edge of a dense growth of underbrush. Snyder soon saw a lone man approaching and brought his gun to bear on him, waiting to see whether he was friend or foe. As the man drew closer he recognized him as Austin Hall, who had been at the blacksmith shop with his plow that very morning. Knowing nothing of the ordeal which Hall had survived, Snyder hailed him. “What are you doing here without a gun?” Hall told his story to Snyder and his men, assuring them that the Border Ruffians had withdrawn to Missouri. On their way to the massacre site the five men passed Snyder’s shop, finding a team and wagon waiting for the blacksmith. Upon learning of the emergency, the wagoner volunteered his services.<sup>43</sup>

Sarah Read was exhausted and emotionally drained as she climbed out of the ravine to do her husband’s bidding. After gaining higher ground, she made her way in a southeasterly direction, along the side of a long ridge, hurrying as best she could. In the valley at the end of the ridge was a house. Her call for assistance was rudely declined by a proslavery man who called himself a “friend to good law in society.” Continuing on her way, she encountered Old Man Hairgrove’s young grandson. After assuring the youth that his father and grandfather had survived the shooting, she asked him to take her pony and ride to Sam Nichols’ house for assistance. He leaped astride the animal and galloped away. Next, she met Mrs. Ely Snyder and her children, who were returning to their cabin near the blacksmith shop. Mrs. Snyder had sought sanctuary with neighbors, but the people were proslavery and had turned her away. She feared that her husband and son might be among the slain. Alone again, she pushed onward, disconnected thoughts rushing through her mind: a slave child torn from its mother’s arms; a slave husband sold away from his wife and children; brave men lying on the ground, life’s blood oozing from their wounds. Slavery, she thought, was nothing but a source of heartache.<sup>44</sup>

She found Mrs. Colpetzer as well as the two Hair-

grove women at Old Man Hairgrove’s farmstead. Mrs. Colpetzer was shattered to learn of her husband’s fate but recovered quickly, offering her wagon and oxen to help the wounded. The four women put containers of water, bedclothes, and other necessities on the wagon and started for the ravine. Initially, they had difficulties with the oxen, but Mrs. Colpetzer’s twelve-year-old son soon caught up with them and took control of the animals.<sup>45</sup>

Arriving at the grisly scene, they found the five dead men (Ross, Stillwell, Colpetzer, Robertson, and Campbell, who died shortly after Hall’s departure) and Charles Snider, who was severely wounded. The remaining four had gone into the timber in search of water. Sarah Read gave Snider a drink and covered him with a sheet to protect him from the burning sun, then stood for a moment with Mrs. Colpetzer next to the lifeless form of her husband William. Before accompanying the younger Mrs. Hairgrove into the timber, Sarah brushed the flies away from the dead and covered the faces with hats. The younger Mrs. Hairgrove quickly found her husband Asa, and Sarah came upon Old Man Hairgrove and Amos Hall. The elder Hairgrove was faint from loss of blood, but he told her that Rev. Read had discovered that he could walk and guessed that he had made his way to one of the nearby farmsteads.<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, Ely Snyder’s group arrived at the massacre site and helped load the wounded on the Colpetzer wagon. When the women had started on their way to Trading Post with the wounded, Snyder and the others loaded the dead on the other wagon. Free-state men were already gathering at the Nichols farm when the Hairgrove boy arrived on Sarah Read’s pony with news of the massacre. Several of the men rode out to escort the women and the wounded. Others rode on toward the massacre site. The injured men were taken to a cabin near the Nichols farm, where they were treated by physicians, while the dead were laid out in a vacant house, also located in the vicinity of the Nichols place.<sup>47</sup>

Sarah Read searched the timber fruitlessly, then made her way back toward Hairgrove’s. She was near exhaustion when the wagon carrying the dead picked her up. The driver prepared a seat for her in the

43. Snyder, *Personal Experiences*, 7–8.

44. Statement of Mrs. B. L. Read, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 12, 1879.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*; and Read to Brown, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1879.

47. Snyder, *Personal Experiences*, 8–9; and Mitchell, *Linn County*, 206.

wagon box, situated in a manner that allowed her to face away from the bodies, then took her to the Nichols farm. Later, she received confirmation that Rev. Read was indeed alive—that he had taken refuge with persons who were hiding in the timber. Sarah rode on horseback to find him; it took her until 11:00 P.M. After resting for a few hours, she rode for help, returning in the morning with two physicians. The doctors treated Rev. Read's wounds and drove him to his farmstead.<sup>48</sup>

William Stillwell's body was taken to Mound City for burial, but Ross, Campbell, Colpetzer, and Robertson were buried side by side in a mass grave located on Timbered Mound, a hill just north of Trading Post. The wounded recovered quickly. Old Man Hairgrove's injuries were still tender when he shocked newspaper reporters some three weeks later by arguing in favor of slavery as a "moral institution."<sup>49</sup>

Montgomery was out of the county at the time of the massacre but returned that evening. When he learned of the atrocity, he assembled the Jayhawkers and joined with other Linn County groups. A combined force of more than two hundred crossed the border in a fruitless pursuit. Montgomery later mounted a punitive expedition, harassing proslavery men living in the vicinity of Lecompton.<sup>50</sup>

In May 1858 the Lecompton constitution was still alive—a last-ditch effort to compromise on the slavery issue in Kansas Territory—but little hope remained for the proslavery cause. The Marais des Cygnes Massacre undermined what was left of that hope, for it was repudiated by many proslavery persons on both sides of the border. The proslavery *Leavenworth Herald* spoke for them when it called the atrocity "one of the most diabolical and fiendish outrages which has ever been chronicled . . . in Kansas." Taking Montgomery's operations into account, the editor observed that "no principle of retaliation can justify [the Hamilton band] in such cowardly acts of murder."<sup>51</sup>

On the national scene, the Marais des Cygnes Massacre raised the pitch of the sectional controversy, arousing great indignation in the North. The early reports were garbled and contradictory. The version of the incident that was circulated in proslavery circles apparently caused elation in the South. Captain Ham-

ilton and about twenty others, all of whom had been driven from Kansas Territory by Montgomery, had returned to Linn County to "look after and protect their property." Arriving at Trading Post, Hamilton seized a number of Montgomery's men, who informed him that a company of thieves (presumably the main body of Jayhawkers) were holed up at Ely Snyder's place. Hamilton disarmed and released the prisoners when they agreed to return to their homes. But the Jayhawkers failed to keep their word; instead, they went to a nearby house and partially rearmed, then took a shortcut to the Snyder place and took positions from which they could ambush the Hamilton band if it attempted to attack the blacksmith shop. Unaware of the Jayhawker skulduggery, Hamilton proceeded to a point in the vicinity of Snyder's where he split his force and approached the shop from two directions. When one of the converging elements received fire from the ambushing Jayhawkers, Hamilton maneuvered his entire force into the attack and defeated the bushwhackers handily, killing about ten of them. In the meantime, the "thieves" stationed at Snyder's place made good their escape.<sup>52</sup>

Opposed to the foregoing were reports that appear to have been reasonably accurate. Three weeks after the massacre, the *New York Times* published lengthy witness statements by Rev. and Mrs. B. L. Read and Old Man Hairgrove that thoroughly discredited the proslavery version. Many Northerners were outraged, especially the abolitionists.<sup>53</sup>

The abolitionists elevated the massacre victims to the status of martyrs. John Greenleaf Whittier, a charter member of the American Antislavery Society who had been associated with William Lloyd Garrison since the 1820s, paid tribute to them in his poignant poem "Le Marais du Cygne," which was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in September 1858. There is no evidence to indicate that any of the victims were abolitionists, however. To the man, they appear to have been moderates—free-staters who simply sought to pattern their society on the agricultural states of the Old Northwest rather than the slave-based plantation economy of the South. Nonetheless, they preceded John Brown to abolitionist martyrdom.<sup>54</sup>

John Brown had long been the friend and ally of Montgomery. He may indeed have welcomed the massacre in the sense that it gave the abolitionists a current issue. When he learned of the bloody incident he came to Linn County and, using the name Shubel Morgan,

48. Statement of Mrs. B. L. Read, *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, July 12, 1879.

49. Mitchell, *Linn County*, 206, 208; *Leavenworth Times*, June 5, 1858.

50. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1105; and Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border*, 104.

51. *Leavenworth Herald*, n.d., reprinted in *Herald of Freedom*, Lawrence, June 5, 1858.

52. *New York Times*, May 28, 1858, 5.

53. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1858, 2.

54. *Atlantic Monthly* 2 (September 1858): 429–30.

## LE MARAIS DU CYGNE.\*

A BLUSH as of roses  
 Where rose never grew!  
 Great drops on the bunch-grass,  
 But not of the dew!  
 A taint in the sweet air  
 For wild bees to shun!  
 A stain that shall never  
 Bleach out in the sun!

Back, steed of the prairies!  
 Sweet song-bird, fly back!  
 Wheel hither, bald vulture!  
 Gray wolf, call thy pack!  
 The foul human vultures  
 Have feasted and fled;  
 The wolves of the Border  
 Have crept from the dead.

From the hearths of their cabins,  
 The fields of their corn,  
 Unarmed and unweaponed,  
 The victims were torn,—  
 By the whirlwind of murder  
 Swooped up and swept on  
 To the low, reedy fen-lands,  
 The Marsh of the Swan.

With a vain plea for mercy  
 No stout knee was crooked;  
 In the mouths of the rifles  
 Right manly they looked.  
 How paled the May sunshine,  
 Green Marais du Cygne,  
 When the death-smoke blew over  
 Thy lonely ravine!

In the homes of their rearing,  
 Yet warm with their lives,  
 Ye wait the dead only,  
 Poor children and wives!  
 Put out the red forge-fire,  
 The smith shall not come;  
 Unyoke the brown oxen,  
 The ploughman lies dumb.

Wind slow from the Swan's Marsh,  
 O dreary death-train,  
 With pressed lips as bloodless  
 As lips of the slain!  
 Kiss down the young eyelids,  
 Smooth down the gray hairs;  
 Let tears quench the curses  
 That burn through your prayers.

Strong man of the prairies,  
 Mourn bitter and wild!  
 Wail, desolate woman!  
 Weep, fatherless child!  
 But the grain of God springs up  
 From ashes beneath,  
 And the crown of His harvest  
 Is life out of death.

Not in vain on the dial  
 The shade moves along  
 To point the great contrasts  
 Of right and of wrong:  
 Free homes and free altars  
 And fields of ripe food;  
 The reeds of the Swan's Marsh,  
 Whose bloom is of blood.

On the lintels of Kansas  
 That blood shall not dry;  
 Henceforth the Bad Angel  
 Shall harmless go by:  
 Henceforth to the sunset,  
 Unchecked on her way,  
 Shall Liberty follow  
 The march of the day.

\* The massacre of unarmed and unoffending men in Southern Kansas took place near the Marais du Cygne of the French *voyageurs*.

*John Greenleaf Whittier paid tribute to the massacre victims in "Le Marais du Cygne," published in the September 1858 Atlantic Monthly.*

recruited a defense company and built a "fort" next to Ely Snyder's shop. Old Man Hairgrove joined the company, spending many days with the famous abolitionist during the summer of 1858; the two men apparently got along well. If Hairgrove was proslavery, he was definitely anti-Border Ruffian. In any case, the situation remained quiet, for the Marais des Cygnes Massacre had engendered a distaste for violence on both sides. Montgomery sensed the change; in July, the newspapers reported that he had returned to his fields.<sup>55</sup>

Men like John Brown were no longer relevant to the free-state cause but, as a militant abolitionist who behaved in the manner of a monomaniac, Brown was insensitive to the altered Kansas mood. When the defense company disbanded he departed Linn County temporarily, returning during the autumn with several of his abolitionist cohorts. In December 1858, using Linn County as a base, he launched a two-pronged raid into Missouri, freeing eleven slaves. Brown led one raiding party himself, spiriting ten slaves into Kansas without spilling blood, but his subordinate

Aaron Stevens, who led the second party, killed a slaveholder in the process of liberating one person. Brown, of course, received credit for the "dreadful outrage"; both President Buchanan and the Missouri governor saw to it that rewards were offered for his apprehension.<sup>56</sup>

Brown responded by writing his famous "parallels." He wrote the message at the home of his friend Augustus Wattles in Moneka, Linn County, but dated it at Trading Post to divert suspicion from Wattles and the Franklin County persons who were providing sanctuary for members of his abolitionist group and the liberated slaves. In the document, he compared his Missouri raid to the Marais des Cygnes Massacre, expressing astonishment that the same authorities had made no determined efforts to "ferret out and punish" the Hamilton band. Brown could have pointed to another parallel, that of his own exploit on Pottawatomie Creek in 1856 and the Marais des Cygnes Massacre, for both incidents involved the brutal murder of five

55. Moody, "Marais des Cygnes Massacre," 220-21; and *Leavenworth Journal*, July 8, 1856.

56. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104; and Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 261-62.

unarmed men. In any event, he mailed copies of his parallels to the *Lawrence Republican* and the *New York Tribune*. Eleven months later John Brown hanged at Charlestown, Virginia (now Charleston, West Virginia), following his conviction for treason in connection with the abortive raid on the Harper's Ferry arsenal; his friend and lieutenant Aaron Stevens met a similar fate in March 1860.<sup>57</sup>

The Lecompton constitution, sweetened by the English Bill, was submitted to voters in Kansas Terri-

tory a final time in August 1858. The English Bill promised substantial federal land grants to the new state in return for voter approval, but the electorate turned down the bribe overwhelmingly at the polls. The rejection of Lecompton delayed statehood for Kansas, but it ended the slavery controversy. The situation remained quiet during 1859, providing an appropriate climate for the formulation of the free-state Wyandotte constitution, under which Kansas was finally ushered into the Union in January 1861.

57. *History of the State of Kansas*, 1104; Oates, *To Purge This Land*, 263, 356–58; and Oswald G. Villard, *John Brown: A Biography Fifty*

*Years After, 1800–1859* (1910; reprinted Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929), 679–80.

## John Brown's Parallels

Trading Post, Kansas, Jan., 1859

GENTS:—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, viz.: Wm. Robertson, Wm. Colpetzer, Amos Hall, Austin Hall, John Campbell, Asa Snyder, Thos. Stilwell, Wm. Hairgrove, Asa Hairgrove, Patrick Ross, and B. L. Reed, were gathered up from their work and their homes, by an armed force [sic] under one *Hamilton*, 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. One fell unharmed, pretending to be dead. 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 the occurrence in May last, been taken by either the President of the United States, the Governor of Missouri, the Governor of Kansas, or any of their tools, or by any pro-slavery or Administration man, to ferret out and punish the perpetrators of this crime?

Now for the other parallel. On Sunday, the 19th of December, a negro man called Jim, came over to the Osage settlement, from Missouri, and stated that he, together with his wife, two children, and another negro man were to be sold within a day or two, and begged for help to get away. On Monday (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 however learned, before leaving, that a portion of the articles we had taken belonged to a man living

on the plantation as a tenant, and who was supposed to have no interest in the estate. We promptly returned to him *all we had taken*. We then went to another plantation, where we freed five more slaves, took some property, and two white men. We moved all slowly away into the Territory for some distance, and then sent the white men back, telling them to follow us as soon as they chose 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 a 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 last named "*dreadful outrage*." The Marshal of Kansas is said to be collecting a posse of Missouri (not Kansas) men, at West Point, in Missouri, a little town about ten miles distant, 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

*Lawrence Republican*, January 13, 1859

### The Execution of William Griffith

In the aftermath of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre the free-state newspapers demanded that the murderers be punished with death, “especially the leaders,” but the Hamilton band faded into the landscape. According to rumor, the three Hamiltons had returned to Georgia. Linn County authorities soon learned that one of the marauders, Charles Matlock, was in Bates County, Missouri, boasting about killing Kansas abolitionists. A Linn County posse quickly rode into Bates County and arrested him. Amos Hall’s wounds were still healing, but he joined the posse. Linn County had no jail, so Matlock was held at Ely Snyder’s place for a time, then taken to the county seat at Paris to face a grand jury. In Paris, an inattentive guard allowed Matlock to escape, and he was never recaptured. In any event, the grand jury brought a first-degree murder indictment against the entire Hamilton band.<sup>58</sup>

William Hairgrove was sixty-one when Fort Sumter fell, too old to enlist in a volunteer regiment, but the Linn County militia welcomed him. In the spring of 1863, a series of disorders in the city of Leavenworth caused the commander of Fort Leavenworth to declare an emergency. Hairgrove’s militia unit was called into service at the fort to help enforce martial law in Leavenworth County.<sup>59</sup>

One day Hairgrove traveled to Parkville, a town located twenty miles south of Leavenworth on the Missouri side of the river. In Parkville, he recognized William Griffith, the man who had stolen his mules on the day of the massacre, five years before. Hairgrove returned to Fort Leavenworth and reported the matter to his commander, who was also from Linn County. The officer ordered a sergeant and a squad of soldiers to accompany Hairgrove back to Parkville to arrest the Missourian. The detachment seized Griffith without difficulty and promptly turned him over to Linn County civil authorities.<sup>60</sup>

At the time of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre, William Griffith lived in Bates County, but he was frequently seen at Fort Scott in the company of Brockett and other Border Ruffians. A former Jayhawker who knew him recalled that people on both sides of the border considered him “a stupid, ignorant, and harmless kind of a man.” Griffith attended the Papinsville meeting and had consumed his share of the whiskey

before being swept up in the excitement generated by Hamilton’s speech.<sup>61</sup>

When arrested by the militiamen at Parkville, Griffith had made it known that he wanted to hang. At the arraignment in Linn County, he entered a guilty plea and asked to be executed immediately, but Judge Thatcher refused to accept the plea. Instead, he appointed two able lawyers to defend the accused man and ordered that the case be tried. The attorneys based their defense on the Amnesty Act of 1859, which had been passed by the legislature to end recrimination relating to border warfare. The law forbade prosecution of all crimes stemming from “political difference of opinion” during the preceding four years. The massacre appears to have been exactly such a crime, but the prosecution maintained that it was a vendetta. In any case, the Amnesty Act meant little under the circumstances, for the Civil War had revived the border skirmishes on a grand scale.<sup>62</sup>

Griffith admitted being with the Hamilton band, helping with the arrests, and stealing Hairgrove’s mules, but he attempted to mitigate his guilt by claiming that he had been posted elsewhere at the time of the shooting. His story was plausible, for it is unlikely that the stolen horses and mules were led into the ravine, and Hamilton probably posted sentinels before he entered it. Several massacre survivors were called as witnesses, but it appears that none, save Old Man Hairgrove, could definitely place Griffith at the massacre site. The jurors deliberated for three hours before bringing in the guilty verdict.<sup>63</sup>

The sheriff held Griffith in a vacant building to await his October 30 execution date, heavily guarded by Linn County militiamen. The prisoner smoked and drank coffee with his guards, maintaining an attitude of careless good humor. There were undoubtedly some who would have relished lynching Griffith, but Mound City residents lavished kindness upon him during his brief period of waiting. Three clergymen administered to him spiritually. The Reverend Mr. Goodright, pastor of the Christian church, may have had a slight upper hand in the soul-saving, for on October 21, Griffith made a profession of faith and Rev. Goodright baptized him by immersion. The ceremony reportedly brought tears to the eyes of many witnesses and left Griffith “weeping like a child.”<sup>64</sup>

61. *Ibid.*; and Charles E. Cory, “The Soldiers of Kansas: The Sixth Kansas Cavalry and Its Commander,” *Kansas State Historical Collections*, 1909–1910, 11:229.

62. Bailey, *Border Ruffian Troubles*, 42; *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 8, 1863; and *Kansas Territory, General Laws*, 1859, ch. 104.

63. *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 8, 1863.

58. *Leavenworth Times*, May 29, 1858; and Mitchell, *Linn County*, 108–9.

59. Smith, article from *Mound City Clarion*, n.d., reprinted in Mitchell, *Linn County*, 211–13.

60. *Ibid.*

During the final week, Mrs. Griffith came to Mound City. She left four small daughters with friends in Parkville but brought her three-month-old baby. A prominent local family took the frail woman in, caring for her and the infant hospitably. Sheriff C. S. Wheaton allowed Mrs. Griffith free access to her husband; she spent virtually all of her waking hours with him.<sup>65</sup>

October 30, 1863, was a beautiful autumn day. When Griffith walked from the building into the sunlight with his guards, he found a team and wagon waiting in the street and three companies of uniformed militia in parade formation. He climbed into the wagon and seated himself on a walnut coffin. Two of his spiritual advisors, Rev. Josiah Terrill, United Brethren, and Rev. William Hobbs, Baptist, joined him in the wagon; the Reverend Mr. Goodright, it appears, remained behind to console Mrs. Griffith. The soldiers marched to the rhythm of a beating drum as the procession moved up Main Street to the edge of town, then across Big Sugar Creek and into a grove of trees; the grove was crowded with hundreds of spectators. When the procession halted at the scaffold, Griffith climbed down from the wagon, calmly removed his coat, and ascended the steps to the platform.<sup>66</sup>

He reportedly showed no emotion when he saw the scaffold, but the gruesome device must have caused him anxiety. Two upright posts with a crossbeam rose ten feet above the platform. A box of anvils, weighing about four hundred pounds, was suspended by a rope from one of the posts. The hangman's noose hung from a pulley at the center of the crossbeam, with the other end of the rope tied directly to the box of anvils. Sheriff Wheaton nervously read the death warrant, then offered Griffith an opportunity to speak. The condemned man humbly thanked the sheriff, the militiamen, and the citizens for their many kindnesses.<sup>67</sup>

A few minutes later, Griffith stood in a shroud with his arms and legs bound; a black cap had been pulled over his face and the noose adjusted snugly about his neck. Standing next to the box of anvils was a man in military uniform with head uncovered, his long white hair flowing down over the collar of his coat. In his hand he held a sharp hatchet, poised to cut the rope that held the weight; he watched Sheriff Wheaton intently. At 1:07 P.M., Wheaton gave the sig-

nal and Old Man Hairgrove drove the hatchet deep into the post, severing the rope. As the box of anvils crashed to the ground, Griffith was yanked sharply into the air, falling back suspended. One of the militiamen fainted.<sup>68</sup>

Griffith's guards and other Linn County citizens collected money to pay for the coffin and for transporting it to Parkville. They oversubscribed the goal, enabling them to present Mrs. Griffith a cash gift of more than thirty dollars. On the day following the hanging, a wagon driven by the Reverend Mr. Terrill left Mound City, bound for Parkville, with Mrs. Griffith, her baby, and the walnut coffin aboard.<sup>69</sup>

### Reflections

There are questions concerning the Marais des Cygnes Massacre that may never be satisfactorily answered but should nevertheless be considered. First and probably most important, was vengeance the motive behind the Hamilton raid, or was it intended to further the proslavery cause? Hindsight tells us that the proslavery cause was indeed a lost one by May 1858—that the free-state majority in the territory was clearly destined to have its way. Charles Hamilton, at the time, would probably have disagreed. Proslavery federal appointees still held critical positions in the territorial government, and statehood under the Le-compton constitution was a possibility until its final defeat at the polls in August 1858. Moreover, proslavery majorities in Linn and Bourbon counties might have petitioned for annexation to Missouri when Le-compton failed to carry the territorial vote. Hamilton and others of his persuasion probably considered the struggle for political control of the southern border counties well worth the effort.

A second question, intertwined with the first, concerns Hamilton's intentions when he entered Kansas Territory on May 19, 1858. Virtually all who have contributed to the literature on the massacre have assumed that homicide was his original purpose—that he intended to round up free-state men and murder them. There is no doubt that he planned to seize captives, but it is unlikely that he intended summarily to execute them. When Border Ruffians under George Clarke raided Linn County in 1856, captive free-state men were taken into Missouri, tried before a kangaroo court for infractions of the proslavery version of "law and order," then ordered not to return to Kansas Territory under pain of death. Hamilton probably held similar intentions. Apparently, members of the raiding

64. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1863; and Smith, article from *Mound City Clarion*, in Mitchell, *Linn County*, 213.

65. *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 8, 1863; and Smith, article from *Mound City Clarion*, in Mitchell, *Linn County*, 213.

66. Smith, article from *Mound City Clarion*, in Mitchell, *Linn County*, 214.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

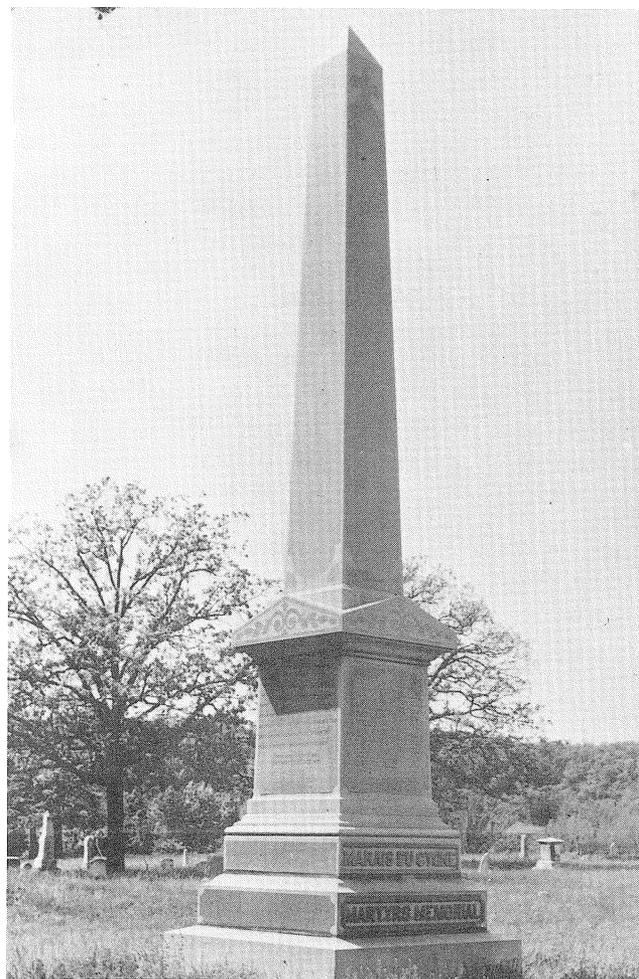
69. *Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, November 3, 1863.

party were unaware of plans to shoot captives, for they were reluctant to fire on them. Recall that Hamilton issued the command to begin firing several times, then squeezed off the first shot himself to get his men started. One might conclude that they were incredulous—that they were unwilling to believe what they were hearing. Moreover, if he had planned to massacre his captives he would certainly have taken Fort Scott Brockett into his confidence, for Brockett was a trusted lieutenant who was no stranger to violence. But Brockett's remarks at the time of his desertion indicate that he might have thought better of joining the foray if he had known that helpless men were to be gunned down.

The summary execution of the captives can be explained. Ely Snyder's repulse of the attack on the blacksmith shop did more than superficially wound Hamilton with buckshot; it injured the arrogant Georgian's pride—angered him. Perhaps the prisoners paid the price for Snyder's successful defense. Moreover, pursuit by Montgomery's band must have been a major concern, for Hamilton had spent several hours in the vicinity of Trading Post. The firing at Snyder's blacksmith shop could have revealed his location; time was running out. The captives, marching on foot, had become an encumbrance impeding a timely withdrawal from the territory. To release them without a trial would have been an admission of defeat; shooting them was the alternative. Anger and expedience, then, appear to have been the immediate reasons for Hamilton's decision to murder his victims.

But why was the marksmanship of the Hamilton band so poor? The Border Ruffians fired at their victims point-blank, at a range of not more than twenty-five feet, and six of the eleven victims survived. The explanation may be twofold: first, the Ruffians fired from horseback; second, some of the shooters were probably reluctant. A horse can be an unstable firing platform and the opening shots could have spooked some of the animals, causing subsequent shots to go awry. Evidence concerning the reluctance of the shooters has been discussed previously. Brockett's desertion at the crucial moment probably increased that reluctance. Some of the Ruffians might have followed Brockett when he left the edge of the ravine, but Hamilton's leadership was a force to be reckoned with. Still, if the situation soured Brockett, it must have been equally revolting to at least a few of the others; their shooting could have been deliberately inaccurate.

The fact that authorities failed to seek out the Hamiltons and return them to Kansas for prosecution is troublesome. But it would have been virtually impossible to obtain the cooperation of slave-state govern-



*Four of the massacre victims were reburied at the Trading Post cemetery under this monument.*

ments during the period immediately following the massacre, because of the sectional conflict between North and South, and out of the question after passage of the 1859 Amnesty Act by the territorial legislature. The Amnesty Act was ignored during the war, as demonstrated by the trial and execution of William Griffith, but it remained on Kansas statute books and would have rendered post-Civil War attempts to extradite the Hamiltons ludicrous. In any event, it appears that Kansas authorities made no such attempts.

William Griffith emerged as a scapegoat during the Civil War, at a time when the fires of border warfare had been rekindled and were burning hotly; his execution probably did much to sate the public appetite for vengeance. Griffith's trial and conviction were within the legal tradition of the period, but the hanging flagrantly violated the Kansas statute governing procedures for such events. According to the law, executions were to be conducted "in a private enclosure,"

and persons in attendance were limited to a prescribed number of officials and witnesses; in other words, public executions were strictly forbidden. William Griffith's execution, conducted in public, was a vainglorious attempt to ape a pompously ceremonial hanging performed some five months earlier at Fort Leavenworth. The latter affair, however, was conducted under military jurisdiction, so the laws of the state did not apply.<sup>70</sup>

### Epilogue

The six massacre survivors recovered their health. Charles Snider returned to his home in Illinois when his injuries were sufficiently healed. Old Man Hairgrove and his son Asa moved to Wilson County after the Civil War. Asa Hairgrove was already participating in county politics at the time of the massacre, and he went on to serve a successful term as auditor of the state of Kansas, an elective office. The Hairgroves sued the Hamilton brothers and twelve other members of the band for damages in district court and obtained judgments of several thousand dollars, thus acquiring Charles Hamilton's Linn County property. The elder Hairgrove lived out his years in Kansas, but his son

Asa was living in Del Norte, Colorado, when he died. Amos Hall moved to Virginia City, Montana, where he became a banker and a prominent citizen. His brother, Austin, remained in the vicinity of Trading Post during his lifetime, prospering as a merchant and miller. Rev. B. L. and Sarah Read became respected citizens of Osawatomie, Kansas. Ely Snyder and his family also settled in Osawatomie.<sup>71</sup>

The four who were buried on Timbered Mound rested in their common grave for some thirty years before their coffins were disinterred and reburied in the cemetery at Trading Post under a suitable monument. William Stillwell's body remains at Mound City in accordance with the wishes of his wife. Mrs. Stillwell moved to Indiana but returned to Mound City occa-

70. *General Laws of the State of Kansas, 1862*, ch. 32, secs. 241–54; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, May 6, 1863; and *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, May 6, 1863.

71. Snyder, *Personal Experiences*, 9; *Miami County Republican*, June 7, 1889; Mitchell, *Linn County*, 206–7; *Kansas State Historical Collections, 1907–1908*, 10:269; and Register of Deeds, Book A, 320–21, Linn County, Kansas. An account of the case *Hairgrove v. Hamilton*, et. al. can be found in *Jackson v. Latta*, 15 Kansas 217–21 (1875).

*Today a historic marker at the site recounts the events of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre.*



sionally to visit her husband's grave. A newspaper reporter who interviewed her during one such visit recalled many years later that she was a "slight, delicate and very pretty woman . . . with the gentle dignity of one who has suffered and endured."<sup>72</sup>

The Hamilton brothers had indeed returned to Georgia after the massacre. Dr. George P. Hamilton joined his aging father at Rome, in Floyd County. According to reports, he soon traveled to Mississippi, where he contracted yellow fever. Whatever the cause, he died in June 1859, less than thirteen months after that bloody day in the valley of the Marais des Cygnes. Algernon S. Hamilton established a law practice in Jones County, his father's birthplace, located south of Atlanta. When the Civil War came he received a captaincy and by 1863 had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel, commanding the Sixty-sixth Georgia Infantry in the Army of Tennessee. He was badly wounded at the Battle of Franklin in 1864. Franklin was a disaster for the Confederacy, but Al Hamilton received a laudatory comment in his commanding general's after-action report. He returned to his law practice when the Confederacy fell and became one of Jones County's most respected citizens. In 1877, he was elected to the Georgia constitutional convention, following which he served a term in the Georgia Senate. He died of natural causes in 1886.<sup>73</sup>

In his hasty departure from Kansas Territory, Capt. Charles A. Hamilton abandoned nearly all of his material assets. After an unsuccessful attempt at establishing a plantation in Cass County, Georgia, he failed at a similar venture in neighboring Floyd County. Almost totally insolvent, he applied for bankruptcy. On the day following the court's judgment he departed for Texas, probably with financial assistance from his father. Settling near Waco, he soon established a prosperous plantation and acquired a stable of fine racehorses. During the Civil War, the Texas governor appointed Charles Hamilton to a three-man commission charged with cementing relations between the Confederacy and the Five Civilized Tribes in neighboring Indian Territory (present Oklahoma). Following the war, he joined brother Al in Jones County,

Georgia, where he became a planter and politician. During Reconstruction days, Hamilton and his brother collaborated with other Jones County stalwarts in resisting the "carpetbag" government. Because of his leadership in local affairs, he was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1873, serving one term. Hamilton, who was admired as a sportsman and breeder of fine horses and dogs, presided as master of ceremonies at Jones County fox hunts. Many Georgia gentlemen traveled long distances to participate in those convivial three-day affairs. Always the gracious and genial host, Hamilton loved to tell stories about the cunning fox outwitting the huntsmen and dogs. He was never happier than when racing horses or riding to the hounds. In 1880, he suffered a seizure while on horseback, falling to the ground dead.<sup>74</sup>

Today Kansas sightseers and out-of-state tourists eat their picnic lunches under the whispering boughs of pine trees in the state park located on the formerly bald hilltop that overlooks the site of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre. Following lunch, they walk to the rock shelf from which Hamilton's men gunned down their captives; there, they read the inscriptions on the monument that commemorates the tragedy. Before leaving the park, most will visit the museum in the restored cabin near the sites of John Brown's fort and Ely Snyder's blacksmith shop. [KH]

74. Williams, *History of Jones County, Georgia*, 60–63, 170, 538–41; Rice, "Capt. Charles A. Hamelton," 466–67; Rice to Moody, in "Marais des Cygnes Massacre," 209–10; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1106; *War of the Rebellion*, ser. 4, vol. 1, 322–25; Military Records, 1846–1848, file 1, GDAH; Hamilton to Crawford, September 25, 1847, GDAH; and *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1873*, 5.

According to some reports, Charles Hamilton received a colonelcy during the Civil War and commanded a Texas volunteer regiment in Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Those reports are erroneous, for Hamilton's name does not appear in the Army of Northern Virginia's order of battle; nor does it appear in any Confederate army's order of battle. Reports of Charles Hamilton's activities in Jones County, Georgia, during the postbellum years usually use the honorific title "Captain," the rank he held during the Mexican War.

72. *Linn County Republic*, May 28, 1897.

73. Carolyn White Williams, *History of Jones County, Georgia, for One Hundred Years, Specifically 1807–1907* (Macon: J. W. Burke Co., 1957), 24, 45, 185, 194, 358, 441, 538–40, 544, 549; Battey, *History of Rome and Floyd County*, 1:631; Civil War Service Record, LTC Algernon S. Hamilton, Sixty-sixth Georgia Infantry, microfilm, GDAH; *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890–1901), ser. 1, vol. 28, 2:328; vol. 31, 3:885; vol. 32, 2:588; vol. 45, 1:686–87; Rice, "Capt. Charles A. Hamelton," 466–67; and *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1878*, 331.