

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

BLEEDING KANSAS AND THE POTTAWATOMIE MURDERS

Disagreeing in most things else, friendly and hostile critics of John Brown unite in regarding the Pottawatomie creek murders of May 24, 1856, as the crucial act in his career.¹ But in their interpretation of the bearing of this event upon the character of Brown friendly biographers differ from hostile critics as midnight darkness from the noonday sun.² Although the affair has been much written about, students of Brown and of "Bleeding Kansas" will doubtless welcome, even now, additional contemporary evidence concerning it. Edward P. Bridgman, author of the letter here presented, grew to manhood at Northampton, Massachusetts, whence in 1856, a youth of twenty-two, he set out for Kansas. His arrival there and the circumstances which thrust him at once into the midst of some of the most exciting events which earned for contemporary Kansas its gory descriptive appellation are described in the letter itself. A few months after the sack of Lawrence, the proslavery men attacked Osawatomie, and Bridgman was one of the little band with which Brown fought his most notable battle. Some months later he returned to Massachusetts; he served through the civil war in the Thirty-seventh Massachusetts infantry, and in the early seventies migrated to northern Wisconsin. From 1901 until his death in the summer of 1915 Mr. Bridgman resided in Madison. Although an educated man and one of the last survivors of the battle of Osawatomie, historians of "Bleeding Kansas" and biographers of Brown seem never to have consulted Mr. Bridgman; their ignorance of him and the valuable evidence he might have supplied was probably due to his early removal from the territory and his subsequent pioneer life on another frontier (he was one of the first settlers of northern Wisconsin).

M. M. QUAIFFE

¹ For an interesting discussion of this point see the *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, 1: 320 ff.

² See *ibid.* for a convenient summary of the opposing views of Villard and Hill P. Wilson.

Kansas May 25, 1856.

Dear Cousin Sidney³

* * *

I write now to let you know my present situation & a little about the affairs of Kansas 1st I will give you a sketch of my trip from Kansas City to Osawatomie, where I am located 10th of May arrived at Kansas City, a place perhaps of 3,000. at first appearance from the river it is an uninteresting looking town, the principal st. is on the river back of which is a large hill or bluff, which hides the largest portion of the town. it is [a] very pleasant place a mile or so back of the river, the ground is rolling with many beautiful groves & fine locations for residences here I met with a company of 5 young men from Ill. who were going to look themselves out homes in Kansas. I thought I could do no better than to join them & did so Sat. noon the next day we left the City for the Territory; The first 6 or 8 miles were very rough & hilly. After that we came on to gentle rolling prairie We met 2 men on horseback who remarked "You are going into a glorious country" & we found it so in the fullest sense of the word Sat. night we pitched our tent & remained until Monday morning. we passed the Shawne Mission around which were many beautiful & well cultivated farms owned by the Indians. Monday night we came to Ball Creek. next night found us in Prairie City — a little village of 7 log huts. from there we proceeded to Osawatomie, where I stoped the rest went on to the Neosho country. here I met with Cornelius Kowlen. he has a good timber claim that he values at \$1500.

Osawatomie is a very pritty place, 50 miles from Kansas City, the same distance from Lawrence, the three towns form a triangle — at equal distance from each other. Osawatomie derives its name from the two rivers on either side of it — Osage & Potawatomie. I have a good claim 2½ miles from the town of Prairie. There is but little timber in the territory but that is taken, except on Indian reserve lands. The land around O. is beautiful. I never saw a place I liked so well. As far as the eye can reach nothing to be seen but one vast rolling prairie, with here and there a bluff, or as we call them at the East, hills; then on the rivers, as far as one can see is any quantity of timber, principally oak & black walnut. What I have seen of Kansas is all it is cracked up to be, as regards the scenery and beauty of landscape. I must say I am glad I have come to Kansas tho I have many inconveniences to put up with which I expected to meet with. The pioneer has many hardships to undergo, yet if he lives long enough he will outlive them. But let me give you a little account of the excitement which never was before so great in Kansas. In some small towns the men are called up nearly

³ The sentences omitted concern trivial personal matters.

every night to hold themselves in readiness to meet the worst. as scouting parties of Alabamians Georgians & Missourians are around continually, plundering clothes yards[?], horses & cattle, & everything they can lay hold of. A few miles from Lawrence a man was plowing. a party of Southerners came along and being hungry killed his best ox, ate what they wanted, took away some & left the rest. Such like occurrences are almost daily taking place. Last Thursday, news came from Lawrence that she was in the hands of the Ruffans, & that they had demolished the free state Hotel, burned Robinson's house, & destroyed the two printing presses. Almost immediately a company of 30 was raised. There was no reason why I could not go for one, so I borrowed a rifle & ammunition & joined them.⁴ The thought of engaging in a battle is not a pleasing one, but the free state men are compelled to. Why should I not do [so] as well as others, I have nothing to hinder me & my life is no dearer to me than the lives of others are to them. At sundown we started, traveled till midnight, rode some & marched some. We were divided into 2 divisions & took turns in walking. It was really affecting to see husbands & wives bid each other good bye. — not knowing as they would ever see each other again. yet the feelings & sympathies of the women are as much enlisted in the cause as the men. It is nothing uncommon to see them running bullets & making catriges. One woman yesterday told me that she had often been called up nights to make them, but to proceed with our march

At 2½ o'clock Friday morning we started again went as far as a place called Tawa Jones⁵ where we halted for breakfast & a short respit; At 4 o'clock we arrived at Prairie City, where we found the Prairie company ready to receive us here we camped till 12 o'clock at night when we started for Palmyra⁶ on the Santa fe road, 12 or 14 miles south of Lawrence, Here we now are, arrived here at 3 o'clock; dont know when we shall leave as a few men have gone to Lawrence to get further orders We heard last night that Robinson was in the hands of the enemy at Ball Creek, 15 miles east of here. We are drilled every day by Captain Dayton of Osawatomie. I will wait till I get to Lawrence before I finish the rest.

Tuesday, 27.

Since I wrote the above the Osawatomie company has returned to O. as news came that we could do nothing immediately, so we returned back.

⁴ This was Captain Oscar V. Dayton's company of Osawatomie.

⁵ This was John T. Jones, familiarly known as "Ottawa." Jones was an Indian who had married a New England woman. They were friendly to the free state cause and befriended Brown at different times; because of this their home was destroyed by the border ruffians on the day of the battle of Osawatomie.

⁶ Now Baldwin, Kansas.

On our way back we heard that 5 men had been killed by Free State men. the men were butchered — ears cut off & the bodies thrown into the river the murdered men (Proslavery) had thrown out threats & insults, yet the act was barbarous & inhuman whoever committed by we met the men going when we were going up & knew that they were on a secret expedition, yet didn't know what it was. Tomorrow something will be done to arrest them. there were 8 concerned in the act. perhaps they had good motives, some think they had, how that is I dont know. The affairs took place 8 miles from Osawatomie. The War seems to have commenced in real earnest. horses are stolen on all sides whenever they can be taken. I saw a young man who was at Lawrence at the time of the siege, a ruffan came up to him and demanded his Sharp's rifle & revolver. said he, "I haven't a rifle, & my revolver I bought and paid [for] & you can't have it." "We'll see, you G— d——d son of a b——h" (a very familiar phrase with them) "whether I'll have it or not," at the same time calling 5 or 6 of his men to him, they put their bayonets to his breast & thus forced him to give it up & [then?] demanded his money. nearly every house was broke open & plundered of its contents. threats have been made that they will destroy Osawatomie. General Robinson is taken prisoner at Westport. he requests his friends to do nothing in rescuing him, as it will be sure death to him. Gen. Pomeroy ⁷ I understand has gone East. Sidney I have a proposition to make perhaps its asking to much but its this. ask friends in Northampton to send me a Sharps rifle & send it out by Mr. Pomeroy or someone coming out in [if] there should be such an opportunity I cant afford to get one myself but I do wish I had one very much: think it over awhile before saying no. I will finish the rest of this tomorrow evening.

Weds eve.

Since yesterday I have learned that those men who committed those murders were a party of Browns. one of them was formerly in the wool business in Springfield, John Brown his son, (Jn) has been taken today, tho he had no hand in the act, but was knowing to it, but when I write to Maria I will give further particulars Osawatomie is in much fear & excitement News came tonight that a co. of Georgians and Alibamians were coming to make this their headquarters. All work is nearly suspended, the women are in constant fear It was really pleasing to witness the reception of our co. by the women after they came in to O. it was a little after dark. A long line of women and children stood by the roadside to greet us & joy was depicted on every countenance. hands were heartily shaken and congratulations offered but I must close.⁸

⁷ Samuel C. Pomeroy, United States senator from Kansas, 1861-1873.

⁸ The sentences omitted concern trivial personal details.

* * * Please direct in care of C H Crane Osawatomie. I fear this will not reach you on account of the war[?].

Yours truly, E

It wont be best for me to write my name so you must guess who wrote this but very few now attach their full name to a letter

AN UNKNOWN EXPEDITION TO SANTA FE IN 1807

That James, or Jacques,¹ Clamorgan played an important part in the early history of the trans-Mississippi west is generally recognized by students of the westward movement. But that he made an expedition from St. Louis to Santa Fe in the very year in which Pike returned from his famous expedition into the southwest is not so well known even to specialists. The following document, published now for the first time, indicates that Clamorgan and four companions with four mule-loads of merchandise made their way to Santa Fe in the fall of 1807 and that on December 12 they went on to Chihuahua to report to the commandant general.

I have found but two other references to Clamorgan's expedition, both of which are evidently inaccurate. Thomas James, writing in 1846, says: "Clem Morgan, a Portuguese and very wealthy, made his way thither [*i.e.* to Santa Fe] at a very early day, while Louisiana belonged to Spain, and returned in safety, making a good venture."² Although James had apparently received his information from hearsay, his statement is perhaps a fairly accurate account of the general features of the event except for its date. The other reference is by Walter B. Douglas, in his "Biographical sketch of Jacques Clamorgan." In it he says, "In 1807 he [Clamorgan] and Manuel Lisa sent a barge load of goods to New Mexico with a party commanded by Louison Baudoin."³ Douglas was evidently not acquainted with the fact that Clamorgan himself accompanied the expedition, and since he does not indicate the source of his information it is impossible to check accounts on other points.

The original of the document, the draft of a letter from Joa-

¹ I have seen both forms of the name used in a single document, for example, in the title papers of the Clamorgan grant of 1837 (New York).

² Thomas James, *Three years among the Indians and Mexicans*, edited by Walter B. Douglas (St. Louis, 1916), 96.

³ *Ibid.*, 214.