



The Lawrence Massacre: The History of the Civil War's Most Notorious Guerrilla Attack

By Charles River Editors

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“Kansas should be laid waste at once.” – William Clarke Quantrill
“No more terrifying object ever came down a street than a mounted guerrilla wild for blood, the bridle-reins between his teeth or over the saddle-horn, the horse running recklessly, the rider yelling like a Comanche, his long unkempt hair flying wildly beyond the brim of his broad hat, and firing both to the right and left with deadly accuracy. When a town was filled with such men bent on death, terror ensued, reason and judgment fled, and hell yawned.” - William Elsey Connelley, author of *Quantrill and the Border Wars*
The Civil War is best remembered for the big battles and the legendary generals who fought on both sides, like Robert E. Lee facing off against Ulysses S. Grant in 1864. In kind, the Eastern theater has always drawn more interest and attention than the West. However, while massive armies marched around the country fighting each other, there were other small guerrilla groups that engaged in irregular warfare on the margins, and among these partisan bushwhackers, none are as infamous as William Quantrill and Quantrill’s Raiders. Quantrill’s Raiders operated along the border between Missouri and Kansas, which had been the scene of partisan fighting over a decade earlier during the debate over whether Kansas and Nebraska would enter the Union as free states or slave states. In “Bleeding Kansas”, zealous pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces fought each other, most notably John Brown, and the region became a breeding ground for individuals like Quantrill who shifted right back into similar fighting once the Civil War started. Rather than target military infrastructure or enemy soldiers, the bushwhackers rode in smaller numbers and targeted civilians on the other side of the conflict, making legends out of men like Bloody Bill Anderson and John Mosby. The reason Quantrill’s Raiders remain so notorious today is for the raid on Lawrence, Kansas in August 1863, during which they slaughtered nearly 200 boys and men between the ages of 14-90 under the pretext that they were capable of holding a gun and thus helping the Union cause. After that massacre, Union forces in the area retaliated in similar fashion, forcing Southern sympathizers out of several counties in the area and burning the property. Union forces also detained those accused of assisting Quantrill’s Raiders, including their relatives.

After raiding Lawrence, Quantrill's Raiders headed south, and they eventually split off into several groups. Quantrill himself was killed while fighting in June 1865, nearly two months after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, but his name was kept alive by the notorious deeds of his Raiders during the war and the criminal exploits of former Raiders like Jesse James and his brother, as well as the Younger brothers. These men, who had fought with Quantrill, became some of America's most famous outlaws, and they used guerrilla tactics to rob banks and trains while eluding capture. The Lawrence Massacre: The History of the Civil War's Most Notorious Guerrilla Attack chronicles the events that led up to the raid and its aftermath. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Lawrence Massacre like never before, in no time at all.

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