In August, 1872, the Jordan hunting party was massacred in western Kansas and the wife of one of the men carried off by the Indians. The above map shows two possible sites for the location of the massacre. The dotted line is the route of Sgt. Daniel Ahern's cavalry detachment from Fort Hays which found the bodies of Dick and George Jordan and the hired man, Fred Nelson. Dick's wife, Mary was believed "carried off to a fate worse than death" and was never found, though the government kept up the search for 10 years. The only Indian atrocity in the area, the Jordan massacre was an oft told tale by old buffalo hunters who settled in Ness county later. The sister of Mary Jordan, Jennie Martin, also included an account of the tragedy in her A Brief History of the Early Days of Ellis, Kansas. Map drawn by Julie R. Dubbs.
ELLIS was denominated a town in Kansas, when the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, built its track through that location in the fall of 1868. For two years it was little more than a pumping station where the steam engines stopped for water. Railroads often were built to serve communities already established, but in the West the railroad quite frequently came first, its builders convinced that given a little time the whistle stops it had set up would become the nuclei of thriving towns that would support the railroad. Ellis was well out—perhaps a hundred miles—beyond the frontier line of settlement in eastern Kansas and had little visible future until in 1870 the railroad, now the Kansas Pacific, decided to transfer its shops and division point from Ellsworth to Ellis. Job seekers and town builders saw opportunities and the town began to grow.

The first woman resident was widow Martha A. Smith, who arrived on August 10, 1870, with her brood of children—five girls and two boys. She expected to be made manager of a bunkhouse for the railroad workers but when she arrived there was not a roof in town under which she might take shelter with her family. As one of her daughters wrote, “We sat on a pile of ties and began to cry. . . . There were about a hundred men here then and I think they all came to meet us.” Out towards Big Creek the railroad had built a side track and set out a line of box cars to accommodate the men building the roundhouse and shops. The Smith family moved down into one of these cars and lived there until the bunkhouse was finished. It was a long two-storied building containing 24 rooms, “a large window in each room,” all rented within two days after its completion.¹

Early in 1871, John H. Edwards came to Ellis to establish a hotel for tourists, travelers and prospective settlers. His hotel became famous for its food and service though at first it was housed in discarded cars and adjoining shacks. The place was a civilized oasis in the rude Western town. “His table linen and dishes were white. . . . He kept the best help he could get and paid good wages. All eatables were shipped from Kansas City. . . .” Two of the Smith girls found employment there as waitresses and one of the still enduring jokes of the place and period is Josie Smith’s story of what she told the tourists from the East about the reconstituted dried milk that was served in the dining room. She said the unfamiliar concoction was buffalo milk and they believed her. Mother Smith’s girls—Mary, Angeline, Laura, Josephine, and Jennie—did not remain waitresses long. Young ladies were scarce in the West and within three years all five of the girls were married.²

As Ellis grew, other enterprising folk came in to find opportunity in the rapidly growing town. Among them was the A. J. Jordan family from Kentucky which arrived early in 1871 and bought the Western Hotel just completed by builders from Ellsworth. However, it was said the management of the hotel was beyond the strength of Mrs. Jordan, and the family moved on out to a homestead a mile west of town. The hotel was sold to Thomas K.

¹ The story of the Smith family has been written several times. The main sources used here have been: Jennie Martin, A Brief History of the Early Days of Ellis, Kansas; Joseph H. Reisch, Mother Smith, of Ellis, Kansas Historical Collections, v. 12, pp. 347-352. The children were all born in Texas where the father, W. H. Smith, died in 1858. The family returned to Illinois where several Smith uncles lived. John McGinnis or Col. P. A. McGinnis, master mechanic on the railroad, was chosen by the company to homestead the quarter of land on which Ellis was situated, he selling it to the railroad. A relative of the Smiths, McGinnis was said to have arranged for the family to come to Kansas and promised to find employment for Mrs. Smith. The Smith children were: Mary, Angeline, Laura, Josephine, Jennie, William, and John.

² Jan. H. Edwards came to Kansas as general ticket agent of the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, railroad before 1867. Gov. Samuel Crawford appointed Edwards justice of peace for Ellis county and on June 22, 1867, one of the county commissioners. In that year he was proprietor of the Anderson House of Ellsworth. He was elected as state representative from Ellis county, 1870-1872. In 1873-1874 he was a member of the state senate.—Kansas Historical Collections, v. 12, p. 349.

³ Mary Smith, 25, married Richard Jordan, 25, November 17, 1971, record not found. Angeline Smith, 20, married W. Harry Litchgow, 20, on December 30, 1970, county record. Laura A. Smith, 20, married Thomas K. Hamilton, 28, on August 22, 1972, county record, Josephine Smith, married Joseph Harvey, marriage record not found. Jennie Smith, 19, married Summer Martin, 27, on May 27, 1973, county record, According to the state census of 1875 William Smith was 18 years old and John 17 at that time.
Hamilton and Joseph Harvey. There were six sons in the Jordan family: Richard, 25 years, was the oldest, followed by Curtis, called Kirt or Kirk; then A. J. or Jack and the three younger boys, Nicholas, George, and Jefferson or Jep. Three girls, still younger, completed the family. The two oldest boys became buffalo hunters and Jack found a job as conductor on the railroad.

In November, 1871, Richard, or Dick, Jordan married Mary Smith and took her to live at Parks Fort (now WaKeeney) where he had established the headquarters of his buffalo business. He had built a small frame house adjacent to two large dugouts abandoned by construction workmen after the railroad had built through. He used the dugouts for drying the meat and curing the hides of the buffalo he shot on his hunting trips. The hides and meat were shipped to the East. The only other resident of Parks Fort was the telegrapher installed in a box car near the railroad track.

In July, 1872, Mary Smith Jordan was in low spirits after losing a baby and decided to go with her husband on his next hunting trip. Before leaving she went to Ellis to visit her family. Her mother tried to dissuade her from going so far away from home but Mary insisted it would do her good. She had gone along before and there was no danger. The Indians were now on reservations in Indian territory and Dick was master of all the perils of the plains.

The Jordans took off on their hunt August 1, 1872, in two mule-drawn, covered wagons, well-equipped and well-provisioned. They were accompanied by Dick’s younger brother, George, and a hired hand, Fred Nelson. Queen, the Jordans’ Newfoundland dog, also went with them. They were to be gone about six weeks and would be unable to communicate with anyone, unless in their search for buffalo they should get as far south as Dodge City. They would hunt the country to the south and west, possibly as far west as Granada, Colo. No one was to worry as they might be gone six weeks.

THREE weeks after their departure, the elder Jordans on their farm near Ellis were awakened one night by the dog Queen, whining at their door. The return of the dog made them slightly uneasy though they reminded themselves that the dog had been sent home before because she interfered with the hunting. Still as time lengthened and the hunters were more than six weeks gone, their families began to worry. Jack inquired of chance hunters he met along the line, had they heard or seen anything of the Jordans?

Late in the evening of September 30, a

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4. Besides operating this hotel for a time, Hamilton and Harvey built a little store and express office, which Harvey operated. One night the railroad payroll of $22,000 was stolen from the express office and Joe Harvey was missing. There are several stories as to his apprehension, threatened hanging, and escape but none that can be verified. He never came back to Ellis and his wife, Angelina Smith, also quietly left town and disappeared.—Kittie Dale, Echoes and Etchings of Early Ellis (Denver, Big Mountain Press, 1964), p. 27.

5. The Jordan family has been difficult to reconstruct. The census records usually so helpful in this respect have been useless since the Jordans came to Ellis in 1871 and by 1875 (Kansas census) the father was dead and all the sons gone from Ellis except Jack. Howard Raynesford, Ellis historian, left his findings on the family. Letter to this writer in July and August, 1949, from Marian S. Morell (Mrs. J. R.), daughter of Ann Jordan Sperry (Mrs. Frank D.) gave some family information. The three Jordan girls were Kate, Ann, and Jennie. Kate died on the farm west of Ellis while a schoolgirl. Jennie married a Mr. Terry and Ann married Frank D. Sperry and lived near Ellisworth. Ann was nine years old when her family came to Kansas; she was 87 years old when she related her memories to her daughter to put in the letters.

6. This story of the beginning of the hunt is the one used and agreed upon by the many tellers of this tale. See footnote 1 for sources.
A party of four, three men and one woman, left Park's Fort on line of K.P.R.R. about seven weeks since; nothing heard from them until today a hunter and a red man came into Buffalo Station and reports having found their wagons on Pawnee Creek, forty miles south of Buffalo Station, with horses standing around and harness cut up, apparently done by Indians from all appearance, no one had been near the camp for some time.  

John Edwards repeated much the same information in a dispatch to the Kansas Commonwealth: “On Tuesday of last week a hunter by the name of Rent came into Buffalo station and reported having found two wagons . . . with the harness lying around and cut up, all having the appearance of having been deserted some weeks. He saw in the wagon a sack with the name R. Jordan, Park’s Fort on it and came in without making further search. . . .”

Lt. Col. Thomas H. Neill of the Sixth cavalry, commanding at Fort Hays, responded

8. Records of the War Department, United States Army Commands, Department of the Platte, “Letters Received,” File 51935-M-1872, National Archives. While the massacre of the Jordans took place in the army Department of the Missouri, the records pertaining to the case were sent to nearby states in the effort to find the Indians involved. Unless otherwise indicated all the army records cited in this case were from this source. These records were lent to Howard C. Raynesford who incorporated them into a 26-page manuscript, “Jordan Massacre, N.E. Co., 1872,” dated 1950.

9. Kansas Daily Commonwealth, Topeka, October 10, 1872. Although this letter or dispatch was dated October 1, it was evidently written after October 5, since it gave the location of the Jordan camp as on the Middle fork of the Walnut, a fact that was not known to Edwards until October 5. This letter also appeared in the weekly Commonwealth on October 17 and in the Junction City Union on October 12.
quickly to this call for help and on October 1, sent a detachment of one non-commissioned officer and ten (10) privates of the 6th Cavv. to Buffalo, there to take along with them as guide the man who on Sept. 30 had seen the wagon." 10 Sgt. Daniel Ahern with his 10 men left Hays City at 2:45 A.M. on October 2 on a train which apparently stopped at Ellis where Nicholas Jordan, brother of Dick, and Thomas K. Hamilton, brother-in-law of Mary Smith Jordan, joined the expedition. At Buffalo presumably the hunter, Kent, joined the party, though this is not mentioned in any of the accounts.

Since history buffs may be interested in tracing the route of this journey to a spot now in dispute, the log kept by Sergeant Ahern on that part of the journey is reproduced here. It will be remembered that the direction was generally south although the sergeant veered to the west or the east at times.


October 2, 1872. Left Hays City at 2:45 A.M. proceeded by rail to Buffalo Station a distance of 70 miles, arrived at Buffalo Station at 10 o'clock A.M. took off our horses and fed them and the detail had dinner; left Buffalo Station at half past twelve P.M. and marched in a southwesterly direction; crossed Big Creek at its head a distance of 4 miles from the R. R., crossed Hackberry Creek at 3:30 a distance of 15 miles from the R. Road changed the direction then and proceeded in a southeasterly direction for about 2 miles passing and leaving to our left a large sandstone rock and cave, a distance of 6 miles from Castle Rock and arrived at camp at 5:30 having marched 21 miles. Camped in a ravine with very little water to be found in holes and stagnant; got water for use and drinking out of small spring with a box in it on the right of the road; the spring was not known by any of the party; grass very poor; wood none.

October 3rd, Left Camp at 7 o'clock; went in a north [south?] westerly direction for about 4 miles crossing the Butterfield trail and at 8 o'clock moved in an easterly direction for 5 miles and crossed the Smokey River, traveling southeast for 30 miles; met a party of hunters on the middle fork of the Walnut a mile east of the place where the wagons were last seen on this creek we found the bodies of the Jordan boys and the Swede who accompa-
nied them; the first body was recognized by his brother as Richard Jordan he knowing him by clothing he had on. The second was recognized as the Swede. It getting too late for us to continue the search we broke camp again at 5 o'clock and crossed the middle fork of the Walnut and marched about S.S.E. for 5 miles, went to the hunting camp about 6:30 P.M. Wood plentiful, water scarce and grass poor distance traveled about 44 miles.11

As to the finding of the bodies, we have several accounts, one given Colonel Neill at Fort Hays, who reported in turn to his superior:

He found Jordan's body ... with a bullet hole in the breast and another in the left shoulder, the head was scalped all round, it was covered with a blanket; his wife's sunbonnet underneath her cheek apron was found elsewhere.

The body of the Swede hired Servant was found ... about 300 yards from R. Jordan's body, he had been shot in the hip in front and the ball is supposed to have passed through the spine, he was scalped twice, both of these bodies were much dried up as if death had taken place several weeks ago.

A leather bag was found containing trinkets which will be sent in—and a bag made of blue jean sewed up with buffalo sinews containing sugar. The scalping would seem to confirm the belief that the killing was done by Indians.12

Edwards in his dispatch to the Kansas Commonwealth wrote thus:

On arriving at the place the wagons were found to have been taken, and no trace of any one seen until one of the soldiers who was hunting for a lost knife, discovered a blanket and upon the removal of it was horrified at discovering the body of a man, which proved to be that of Richard Jordan, shot through the shoulder and breast. On further search the body of the Swede was found about two hundred yards off across the creek, lying on his face and shot directly through the body; both were scalped.13

As to the exact location of the Jordan camp, Sergeant Ahern gives little information except to state that he had traveled 65 miles from Buffalo Station and found the bodies on the Middle fork of the Walnut instead of the Pawnee as had first been reported. But he does give a more specific clue to the location in his final entry of the day, October 3, when he “marched S.S.E. for 5 miles, went to the hunting camp.”

12. Col. Thos. H. Neill, Sixth cavalry, to Asst. Adj. Genl., Dept. of the Missouri, Ft. Leavenworth, October 7, 1872. This is puzzling indeed for Neill wrote: "A few moments since I had an interview with a Mr. Mckenny—brother of Mrs. Jordan—who guided my detachment of 6th Cavalry (which has not yet returned) from Buffalo Station to the point where the massacre took place." Surely this person was T. K. Hamilton and not Mr. Mckenny whose name appears nowhere else in this case and who is not either a brother of Dick Jordan or Mary Smith. In a letter of October 8, Neill writes, "A Mr. Hamilton from Ellis called on me yesterday." Perhaps a clerk misspelled the name in the letter of October 7.

... Undoubtedly the hunting camp to which he went was Big Nick's, a meat ranch where buffalo meat and hides were cured. This camp was located on the north side of the South fork of the Walnut in a grove of trees where the town of Alamota now stands, a few miles west of the Lane-Ness county line. In this vicinity the Middle and South forks of the Walnut are about five miles apart. Though there is little written record of this camp and its brief existence, the story of it and the nearby massacre of a family by the Indians, came down by word of mouth through a number of the old buffalo hunters who settled in Ness county later. The names and dates were garbled but as it was the only Indian atrocity that happened in that area, it was a prized and oft-told tale of their hunting days.14 Sergeant Ahern perhaps partially confirmed his night at Big Nick's when he wrote as to the evening of October 3, "Wood plentiful."15 On all the other nights of that trip he had written, "Wood none."

It is the known location of Big Nick's camp and the trees that fix the location of the massacre, several miles into Lane county where a large draw comes from the north into the Middle Walnut. In Lane county this draw or drain is called the North fork of the Walnut and at its juncture with the Middle fork there is some swampy ground and bluffs to the south.

14. Some of the old buffalo hunters who told this story were Noah Chenoweth, Doc and James Litton, and Thad Levan. James Litton was an early settler on the Walnut in Ness county where he lived seven or eight years before moving on to Washington territory. He wrote his reminiscences for the Ness County News, Ness City, February 3, 1923. "There were other dugouts near the west line of the county built by old hunters. Also one of the longest, if not the longest, dry house to be found on the western buffalo range was located on the creek just across the Ness County line. It was built by C. A. Nichols, better known as 'Big Nick,' an old government (sic) buffalo hunter, who was making the South Fork his headquarters at that time. These dry houses were used for the drying of buffalo meat. The hides were stretched in the sun to dry.

Going on, Litton describes the massacre itself through he gets the name, dates, and some details wrong. "It was in the latter part of the summer of 1870, as afterwards related by C. A. Nichols or 'Big Nick,' that a hunting party of the Allison family left Ellis for the South Fork on their honeymoon. "We found the bodies of the two men and the brother lying on the bank of the South Fork after the three had been killed near where the old trail crossed the creek and about a half mile above it," Big Nick said. The men were murdered by small band of Indians and the two young women were undoubtedly taken into captivity.

There was a trail running from Big Nick's camp to Fort Hays which endured for some years after Nick had dismantled his camp. This trail entered Ness county at slightly east of the camp and angled north and east leaving the county at Page creek on the northern border. An item in the Ness County Times, May 20, 1880, reads: "Last Friday two men came from the east via the Nick trail."

15. Confirming the existence of trees in this vicinity are the field notes of the surveyor, who, going east, north of the South fork in July, 1871, wrote, "Water in pools, timber on creek, elm, ash and cottonwood."
Sergeant Ahern’s report continues:

October 4, 1872. Left camp at 8:30 procured a tool for the purpose of burying the body found, on arriving at the vicinity of the murder we found the body of the Swede about 500 yards S.E. of the first body and lying upon his face and being like the first one scalped, the former being wholly scalped that is all the skin taken off his head, the latter having part removed; we then made a thorough search for the missing body but finding it to be in vain and having found a hat supposed to be his in the Creek his brother and brother-in-law arrived at the conclusion that the body was concealed in the Creek. So after a fruitless search we dug a grave and buried the bodies side by side on a small elevation about 20 or 30 yards from the Creek. The place was selected by the brother and is on the north bank of the stream. Having accomplished our mission the relations of the deceased left us and proceeded to return home leaving us.

It must have been at midmorning when Thos. Hamilton and Nicholas Jordan left the burial spot on the Walnut to ride the 65 or 68 miles back to Buffalo Station. There is no story of this ride though it was accomplished in rather notable time. On October 5, a telegram went out to Edwards from Buffalo Station.

We found the remains of R. Jordan and servant and appear to have been dead 5 or 6 weeks—failed to find the body of George—but suppose it to be in a swamp near where the others lay—from signs we found—Mary is alive and carried off by the Indians—whom we suppose to be a band of Kiowas."

When this telegram came in to Ellis there was hesitation as to who should take the dreadful news to Mother Smith. A neighbor finally volunteered but she collapsed just inside the door, wordlessly holding out the message to Jennie, the daughter. "Read it," screamed Mother Smith and when she heard that Mary had been captured she fainted dead away. They had all been in Ellis long enough to have heard how Indians abused their woman captives. It was a fate worse than death. But the story was not yet complete. Sergeant Ahern’s narrative of October 4 continued:

We fed or rather let our horses graze for an hour longer. A party of hunters now coming up and traveling in the direction of Hays and wishing our company we went with them to find a good crossing for their heavily laden wagons. In doing so we found the remaining body. This one was also scalped and horribly mutilated having 5 arrows in his body one of them being in his mouth. As the other party had taken the tools we were unable to bury him so we marked the place well and started for Hays marching in a N.E. direction for about 8 miles when we camped for the night on a small ravine with barely water enough for the horses, arriving about 3 o'clock, grass fair, wood none, 15 miles.

Colonel Neill in his report wrote of the body of George Jordan filled with arrows, “the latter will serve to fix the tribe.” And then again later after Sergeant Ahern had returned to Fort Hays, bringing two of the arrows, “one he drew embedded in George Jordan’s heart about five inches, the two arrows are said to be Kiowa arrows, they have a blue band around the notched end, and three grooves down the side.”

T. K. Hamilton visited Colonel Neill at Fort Hays on October 7 asking further help from the army and Neill sent a detachment of one non-commissioned officer and two men with a wagon “to accompany Mr. Hamilton from Ellis to Walnut Creek and assist him in the procuration of the remains, and in the further search of his sister in law.” At that time Hamilton gave Neill a description of Mary Smith Jordan—“five feet high, dark hair, dark complexion, dark grey eyes, the sinew of her left leg was cut in the calf which caused her to limp slightly.”

In Ellis in October, 1872, there were no coffins to be had but the carpenters at the railroad shops turned to and out of such wood as was available made three coffins, that were ready to be taken by the soldiers and relatives on this second trip to bring the bodies home. John Edwards described the return of the party.

19. Neill’s letter to the Department of the Missouri, October 7, 1872.
20. Neill’s letters of October 7 and 8, 1872. Sergeant Ahern had returned to Fort Hays on October 8. Since the route of his homeward journey may be of interest to some historians it is given below.

"October 5. Broke camp at 8:45 A.M. marched N.E. until we reached the Smoky River which we crossed about 65 miles S.W. from Fort Hays; went into camp on the north bank of the Smoky having marched about 20 miles. Wood none, water plentiful, grass poor. Arrived in camp 4:30 P.M.

"October 6. Left camp at 7 o’clock A.M. Marched in northwesterly direction for 5 miles passing to the S.W. of Castle Rock; arriving at Stage road to Hays at 8:30 o’clock; marched N.E. for about 20 miles camping for the night (at) Downing; good grass, water excellent and plentiful, wood none. Distance marched 25 miles.

"October 7. Left camp at 7 o’clock arrived at the N.N.E. Easterly direction for about 30 miles when we reached the line of the Kansas Pacific R.R. about 10 miles west of Ellis. Marched east for 10 miles and the horses being so tired I had to stay there as they were unable to proceed further; procured oats and fed the animals the first they had since we started from Buffalo Station. Stopped for the night at Ellis having marched 30 miles. Arrived at Camp at 2:30 P.M.

"October 8. Left camp at 7 o’clock marched in an easterly direction reached Camp at Fort Hays Kansas."
The troops and citizens that went on the second expedition returned on Sunday last but without any clue as to the fate of Mrs. Jordan. A trail was found going south, but from the lapse of time since the occurrence took place it was too indistinct to follow more than a mile or two, so the party giving up all hope in that direction, took up the bodies of the three men and returned to this place. Notice of the time of arrival was brought in by one of the party, Mr. Hamilton, the night before, and Chaplin Collins from Fort Hays, came up with quite a number of citizens to attend the funeral, which was the most solemn scene witnessed in this section of the country for years. The services were impressive, and if sympathy could relieve the sorrowing relatives, they would have received the sympathy of the entire community.

And here again since the Topeka paper had a wide circulation on the frontier and someone just might see Mary Jordan in some far-off place, another description of her was given: "black hair and eyes, rather pleasing in manners and looks; was slightly lame in the left hip or knee, caused by white swelling, and one of her limbs was shorter than the other." 21

About a week after the funeral a search party of eight persons composed entirely of citizens without the aid of the military, left Ellis "to take up the trail of the Jordans to try to find and rescue Mrs. Jordan." According to Howard Raynesford, Ellis historian, this party consisted of Matt Gibbs, chief scout at Hays, Jim Campbell, ass't. scout, Harry Constock, another scout, Hill Peach, a hunter, Wheeler, a teamster, Pat McKenna and Frank Augustine, neighbors of the Smith's, and finally John Smith, 15-year-old brother of Mary Jordan. 22

From the Jordan camp site this scouting party followed the Indian trail over the slope to the southwest at a gallop it was so plain. They crossed the Walnut after riding a mile or so, crossed the Arkansas about six miles west of Fort Dodge and camped on the Cimarron just over the Kansas Line in Indian Territory, at the same camp, so John said, where the Indians had camped.

21. Jennie Martin in A Brief History, pp. 16-17, wrote: "My sister had a storm cloak that was as long as her dress and fastened down the front with little straps of the same material as the cloak. The soldiers found a few pieces torn in strips, from the strips of this coat. They thought they had a trail, but it only lasted a short way."


John H. Edwards, who came to Kansas as general ticket agent for the Union Pacific railroad, Eastern division, before 1867, later was a social and political leader in Ellis where he was manager of the Ellis House, a famous hotel in the town. He was elected to the house of representatives from Ellis county in 1870 and 1872, and later served in the state senate. When word came of the Jordan massacre, he telegraphed Fort Hays asking for troops and sent a dispatch to the Kansas Daily Commonwealth, Topeka, reporting the news.

While eating supper the whole party was arrested by soldiers from Fort Dodge, it being against the law for citizens to carry arms in Indian Territory. The boy, John Smith, brother of the woman the Indians had captured, was determined to push on after the Indians, and when the soldiers started to take them back to Fort Dodge became very wrathful and cursed the soldiers for not only not trying themselves to rescue the girl but actually preventing anyone else from trying to. The result was that he was put in irons and taken to Fort Dodge in an ambulance while the others were allowed to ride their horses. And it took the combined efforts of his brother-in-law, T. K. Hamilton, Rep. J. H. Edwards, and Governor Harvey to secure his release from the Military authorities. 22

Though the army itself did not make an attempt to follow the Indian trail, letters were sent at once to the various army departments as well as to the superintendents of the Indian agencies, whose wards might have been involved. As early as October 11, Gen. John Pope, commander of the Department of the Missouri, in which department the massacre and abduction had occurred, wrote that he didn't think the Kiowas could possibly be involved as none of them had been north of the
Arkansas for two years. "The laborers of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Rail-Road are scattered along the Arkansas from Fort Dodge to the western line of the State, and companies of cavalry are patrolling the river on both sides along that whole distance. It is impossible for any of the southern Indians to have crossed the Arkansas without the knowledge of these parties." He thought that the murders must have been committed by Osages, hunting along Walnut Creek, or by Indians from the north who had been hunting along the Republican, Solomon, and Saline. He voiced again the repeated complaint that the Indian bureau gave Indians permission to hunt over lands ceded by them to the government and open to settlement by the whites, and then when trouble occurred, blamed the army for not protecting the citizens.  

From Camp Supply down near the Cheyenne Indian reservation, Col. John W. Davidson wrote on October 20:

I have seen Medicine Arrow and Little Raven the principal men of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes and they assure me that none of their people were engaged in this act. The story I learn is about this. A party of Northern Cheyennes and Sioux were coming down to visit the Southern Indians. Near the head of Walnut Creek they came across a party of Buffalo Hunters, and one of the Indians approached them and was warned off. He then laid down his gun to show he was friendly and still approached the Camp—when he was shot dead by the hunters. Being too large a party to attack, the Indians left, and coming down Walnut Creek met the Jordans and killed the men, took away the woman, and left the horses in the camp to show they were not a marauding party but committed the act in revenge. This is the Indian story and I merely mention it here that inquiry may be prosecuted among the Northern Indians for the person of Mrs. Jordan.  

This letter with all the enclosures and correspondence relating to the case were therefore sent to Gen. E. O. C. Ord, commanding the Department of the Platte, who in turn sent them out to Fort McPherson, Fort Laramie, and Fort Fetterman with the suggestion that a reward of five or 10 ponies be offered to the chiefs of the bands for the recovery of Mary Jordan. Then General Ord wrote asking the approval of the reward from his superior officers. His letter ascended upward through the levels of army command, each officer indicating his opinion on the back of the letter. Gen. Phil H. Sheridan wrote, "After having her husband and friends murdered, and her own person subjected to the fearful bestiality of perhaps the whole tribe, it is mock humanity to secure what is left of her for the consideration of five ponies." General Sherman concurred, "so long as ransoms are paid to Indians, so long will they steal women, to use, and sell." William Belknap, secretary of war agreed with his generals and sent notice of the decision to the Indian bureau. General Sherman sent orders "forbidding the practice of ransom in future cases."  

But still there came no positive news of Mary Jordan. The governor of Kansas wrote urgent letters to the military authorities, the Kansas state legislature urged by John Edwards, passed a resolution. From General Davidson at Camp Supply came another letter dated November 24. "The last information I get is that the Jordan party was murdered by Cheyennes or Arapahoes from the North, on their way back from a visit to these Southern Indians, and that they also Murdered Mrs. Jordan on the road."  

Meanwhile the Indian bureau worked on the case, trying to find out just who the guilty individuals might be; the tribesmen loath to give information on their fellows. Though their superintendent finally ferreted out the matter to his own satisfaction still he
The Kansas Daily Commonwealth, Topeka, October 18, 1872, published a letter from John H. Edwards reporting on the Jordan massacre and asking the paper's readers on the frontier to help in the search for Mrs. Jordan.

Governor Harvey has promised that he will do all that he can to recover the person of Mrs. Jordan, and to bring to speedy punishment the perpetrators of the outrage, and gentlemen connected with the army have been given assurances that no effort will be spared to find her. Your paper having so large a circulation on the frontier, can aid much in this matter and in view of this fact, I will give as accurate a description of Mrs. Jordan as I can from memory. She is about twenty-six or seven years old, medium height, dark complexion, black hair and eyes, rather pleasing in manners and looks; was slightly lame in the left hip or knee, caused by physical swelling, and one of her limbs was shorter than the other; her full name is Mary Jordan. Should any of your readers at the several outposts become interested in the matter, they can give any information they obtain, forward the news through your office to me at this place, and receive the thanks of her afflicted friends.

Yours truly, John H. Edwards.
had no direct witnesses or anyone willing to testify against the culprits. John D. Miles, superintendent of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Agency, Indian territory, wrote on the 29th of September, 1873, a year after the tragedy, to Edward A. P. Smith, commissioner of Indian affairs in Washington:

I have to report that I have made every effort that prudence would seem to dictate to ferret out the matter, if possible ascertain who the guilty parties were.

From the first information on the subject I was satisfied that there was one or two young men (Cheyennes) attached to this Agency that were implicated in the murder, but it has been very difficult to get an expression from any one in the tribe. On my last visit in last month (Aug) I learned from a reliable source the following particulars.

"Old Bear" a northern Cheyenne left the main Cheyenne camp near Camp Supply in August 1872 in company with three (3) other Cheyennes named as follows: "Buffalo Meat," "Coon" and "Broen-hi-o," two of whom I believe belonged to this Agency. On reaching the Walnut country in the western portion of Kansas, they run on the Jordans, murdering the men and taking captive the Mrs. Jordan whom I believe they kept a day or two for the purpose of gratifying their fiendish desires and after having exhausted their animal desires in outraging her person, killed her.

There can be little doubt but the above is something near a correct account of the fate of the unfortunate family. "Old Bear" and "buffalo Meat," I believe are up north. "Coon" was during the past summer promoted to the position of a Chief, and was accidentally shot and instantly killed on 14th day of last mo. (Aug) by one of his own people (named "Man-Walking-Under-a-Cloud") in a drunken spree from whiskey furnished Cheyennes by Mexican "outriders" while they were drunk.

The other young man "Broen-hi-o" is the brother of the "Young Medicine Man" attached to this Agency—which could not learn of his whereabouts.

"... the funeral, which was the most solemn scene witnessed in this section of the county for years."

It is possible I may have got some of the names wrong & perhaps some of the particulars, but there is no doubt but that the murder was committed by Southern and Northern Cheyennes jointly on their way up north.

One of the Cheyenne Chiefs was quite anxious to know why this matter was continually being inquired after. Should any further information come to my knowledge on this subject I will forward at once."

Drunkenness among the Indians was a great problem at this time but the Indians would not reveal the names of the men who sold them the whiskey. Some of the chiefs were taken to Washington and lectured on the importance of cooperating with their agent in regard to known criminals in the tribe, but the scolding was without result.

Other details were added to the story of the Jordan massacre. In March, 1873, a hunter came to Ellis and the Smiths to tell them that when out hunting the year before he had visited the Jordans in their camp on August 16, saw the dog and was told their hunt had been successful and they were about to go on home. It was estimated thereafter that the Jordans had been killed about August 19.30

Also there was later testimony as to the event that triggered the attack of the Indians on the Jordans. A buffalo hunter, George Brown, wrote of it in his memoirs:

Bob and Jim Carter met these Indians between the Arkansas river and the Pawnee before they murdered the Jordan family. ... When they saw the Indians coming Bob Carter got upon his wagon and motioned the Indians not to come, but they kept coming as fast as their horses would bring them. Then the men fired a volley into them and killed one Indian. Then the Indians drew off and were seen no more. The Jordan family were the next whites they met up with.31

Strangely enough the Smith family seems never to have known or accepted the government’s final version of the capture and killing of Mary Jordan. Jennie Martin wrote that the government had "ordered a big reward and called a number of chiefs to Washington. There was only one tribe that knew of this massacre and it was not going to tell anything. ... The government ... kept up the search among the Indians for ten years, but never saw or heard a word of her [Mary]."32

30. Jno. D. Miles, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indian Agency, Indian territory, to Edward P. Smith, commissioner of Indian affairs, September 9, 1873, Records of Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Letters Received—Upper Arkansas Agency," H958-1873, Record Group No. 75, National Archives.
31. J. D. Miles to Enoch Hoag, Lawrence, November 4, 1873, Records of Bureau of Indian Affairs, Central Superintendency, "Letters Received," Record Group No. 75, National Archives.
32. Martin, A Brief History of the Indian Tribes, pp. 117.
34. Martin, A Brief History, p. 18.
Altogether the frontier took a heavy toll of the Jordan family. In 1874 the father, A. J. Jordan, died. The second son, Curtis, Kirk or Kirt, in 1872 was a big buffalo hunter out of Dodge City, working “three four-horse wagons and 20 men” as well as being called “a leader among the rougher element of the hide men.” His reaction to the murder of his brother and Mary Smith Jordan was violent and he was said to be ready to kill any Indian he ran across. Later he seems to have gone into the business of stealing horses and early in 1874 was captured by a military detachment out of Fort Wallace. However, some hours later he was able to slug his guard and escape. According to the family record Kirt was killed “while he and a cousin were hunting in the south.” In 1876 Jack was killed by a stroke of lightning while driving a team to a ranch owned by the Jordans north of Grinnell. Jefferson was crippled by a fall from a horse but was still living in Denver in 1937. That left only Nicholas who was said to have died in Arkansas though he lived for some years south of Fort Wallace.

John, then a lad of 15 years had gone out with a group of civilians, who had tried to follow the track of the murdering Indians into Indian territory. Following hopefully in the footsteps of that expedition, the 1929 party traveled across country to Downer, then west until south and west of Castle Rock, they dropped directly south until they came to the Middle fork of the Walnut. “The long gradual slope to the north, the course of the little stream, the little bend in which the wagons were, the marshy slough in which the body of George was found, the rocky bluff to the south, and the slope to the southwest over which went the trail of the departing Indians,” were all found and recognized by Mr. Smith.

This spot where the Ness county North fork of the Walnut comes into the Middle fork has much the same aspect as the similar junction of the Lane county North fork and the Middle fork of the Walnut some 10 miles to the west. John Smith and the local historians reported no milestones of the trip in search of the massacre site. Sergeant Ahern on his way back to Hays did. He marched 28 miles from the site northeast to the Smoky Hill river and then five miles due north to the old “stage road.” After camping all night there he marched the next day 20 miles to Downing (Downer). Distances on the old Butterfield trail were and are well-known. If Sergeant Ahern was 20 miles west of Downer when he came out on the stage road he was about 10 miles west of Castle Rock Station on the old trail and still well west of the John Smith location of the massacre to the south, and this though he claimed to have marched northeast towards the river and the stage road. If the hunter Kent who brought the news of the massacre to the railroad, had come north from the John Smith location, he would have come out on the railroad somewhere between Coyote (Colyer) and Antelope (Quinter) and not at Buffalo (Park), 10 miles to the west.

38. Marian S. Moore, and M. D. Millbrook, August 7, 1949; Howard Raynesford stated Curtis Jordan was killed while hunting in enferbrakes in Mississippi.
39. Ellis County Star, Hays City, July 15, 1876. “At the time the lightning struck him he was standing up in his wagon, laughing and talking to [ep when all of a sudden, the horses stopped and the deceased fell forward to the ground, holding on to the lines. The horses started when he fell and dragged the body some ten feet before Jep succeeded in stopping them. Being a cripple, and unable to get the body in the wagon, he returned to the station for assistance.”
40. Raynesford, “Jordan Massacre, Ness Co.” Also see Ellis Review-Headlight, September 5, 1925.
41. In that plains country there are few landmarks except the creeks and Castle Rock. It is not Castle Rock itself but rather the high bluff or escarpment behind it which can be seen as much as 35 miles in all directions. All early day travelers in that region mention Castle Rock.