

# EYEWITNESS REPORTS OF QUANTRILL'S RAID

*Letters of  
Sophia Bissell &  
Sidney Clarke*

*edited by Fred N. Six*

**O**ne assertion can be made with absolute confidence about Kansas history: many scholars and history buffs have a nearly insatiable appetite and interest in Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War on the border. If one character, besides the abolitionist John Brown, or incident has continually intrigued amateur historians and scholars alike, it is William Clarke Quantrill and his infamous raid on Lawrence, Kansas.<sup>1</sup> The letters of Sophia L. Bissell and Sidney

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1. See Gunja SenGupta, "Bleeding Kansas. Review Essay," in *Territorial Kansas Reader*, ed. Virgil W. Dean (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 2005): 329–52; Barry A. Couch, "A 'Fiend in Human Shape'? William Clarke Quantrill and His Biographers," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 22 (Summer 1999): 142–56.

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*Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Summer 2005): 94–103.

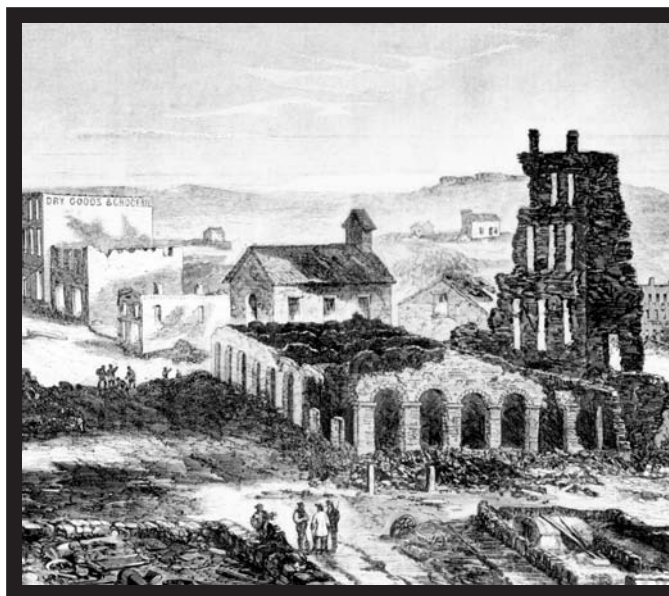




*Pen-and-ink sketch of Quantrill's 1863 raid on Lawrence.*

Clarke reprinted here permit the reader to revisit that terrible day, August 21, 1863, through eyes that differ in gender, frontier lifestyle, and perhaps motivation: Bissell, a single woman, living with her family, and Clarke, a husband, father, military officer, and a target of the raid.

Sophia Bissell, a native of Suffield, Hartford County, Connecticut, was thirty-three years old and living in Lawrence with her mother Arabell (or Arabella), a widow, and her older siblings, Henry and Arabell Bissell, when she recorded her eyewitness account of Quantrill's raid in a September 8, 1863, letter to "Dear Cousin" Henry C. Lawrence.<sup>2</sup> Sophia's letter and another eyewitness account composed by Sidney Clarke less than a week after the raid are at the core of this article. Clarke, who had been born in Southbridge, Massachusetts, in 1831, and later served Kansas in the U.S. Congress, was assistant provost marshal at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1863. Back in Leavenworth, Clarke recorded his vivid description of that fateful August morning in Lawrence for "My dear Friends."<sup>3</sup>



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Leavenworth,  
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2. Sophia Bissell was born in Suffield, Connecticut, February 9, 1830, where she lived most of her life and died at age eighty-two. Years after the massacre that she witnessed during her relatively brief sojourn in Kansas, while living in Suffield, Bissell set down her memories of the raid, which were published as "An Eyewitness at Lawrence: 'See those men! They have no flag!'" in *American Heritage* 11 (October 1960): 25. Her account accompanied an article by historian Albert Castel, "The Bloodiest Man in American History," *ibid.*, 22–24, 97.

See also obituary, "Sophia L. Bissell," news scrapbooks, Suffield Public Library, Suffield, Conn. According to Lester Smith, the Suffield town historian, the obituary would have come from the *Windsor Locks Journal*. At the time of Bissell's death, the *Journal* covered both Windsor Locks and Suffield. See Suffield Library to author, December 9, 2004, e-mail in possession of author.

3. The Bissell letter is typical of survivor accounts. The Clarke letter, however, almost seems to have been written with the historical record in mind, and it contains a few details that have not been independently substantiated. For additional eyewitness accounts, see Hovey E. Lowman, *Narrative of the Lawrence Massacre on the Morning of the 21st of August, 1863* (1864; reprint, Lawrence, Kans.: Watkins Community Museum, n.d.); Richard B. Sheridan, ed. and comp., "Quantrill and the Lawrence Massacre: A Reader," unpublished manuscript (Lawrence, Kans.: 1994); Alan Conway, "The Sacking of Lawrence," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 24 (Summer 1958): 144–50.

## *The Bissell Letter*

In 1858 Sophia Bissell accompanied her family to Kansas Territory and at the time of the raid lived in what is now the 900 block of Kentucky Street.<sup>4</sup> The copy of Bissell's "Dear Cousin" letter transcribed and reprinted here is the property of the Chicago Historical Society and is part of the Society's Henry Asbury Collection. Asbury received the original Bissell letter from a Henry Lawrence and made a handwritten copy, probably while he was living in Chica-

go; he then apparently returned the original, as the following appears on the reverse of Asbury's copy: "The original [sic] of this letter was sent to me by the gentleman to whom it was addressed Mr. Henry Lawrence—I carefully copied it myself and so it is thoroughly correct—the original I gave or sent to Mr. Lawrence the writer being a relative of his. [Signed] Henry Asbury." At another location on the reverse of the copy, Asbury writes, "Miss Bissels [sic] letter con[cerning] the Lawrence Massacre, date Sep 8 1863. If the original has been preserved perhaps Mr. Lawrence nephew & late partner of Judge Lawrence at

4. *Lawrence City Directory, 1860–61* (Indianapolis: James Sutherland, n.d.), 11; *Atlas of Douglas Co., Kansas 1873* (New York: F. W. Beers, 1873); Kansas State Census, 1865, Douglas County, Wakarusa Township. The family is enumerated as: Arabella, age seventy; Henry F. (or perhaps T.), age forty-five; Arabella J., age thirty-nine; and Sophia L., age thirty-seven. All are single. The elder Arabella (the mother) is listed first; her real estate is valued at five thousand dollars and her personal property at thirty thousand dollars, a tidy sum, if correct. Henry is a farmer with one thousand dollars in personal property, and the two sisters each had twenty-five hundred dollars.

Chicago can ??? it up—It is only important as showing the Quantrill raid as seen by the writer. [Signed] HA.”<sup>5</sup>

Lawrence Sept 8 1863

Dear Cousin, We were very happy to receive a letter from you last week and were grateful to think you felt such an interest in our welfare. The twenty first of August (1863), was an awful day in Lawrence and one never to be forgotten by her inhabitants. I presume you have read most of the mawkish circumstances of the day, and as you requested us to write the part we bore, I will endeavor to give you some idea. You may be aware that ever since this war began, every few weeks, it would be reported about town that Quantrell was coming, that he was so many miles off. Horsemen would come rushing in saying he was coming and sometimes it would be Price that was on the way.<sup>6</sup> Well we got accustomed to these reports and did not believe them. Last fall however after our return from the East one night the Militia were called out and a great many of the citizens packed their trunks and made various preparations for their coming, but that was a false alarm. Five or six weeks ago Genl Ewing or one of his Staff sent word to Mayor Collamore, that Quantrell was getting together a force eight hundred strong for some plan and we better be on our guard.<sup>7</sup> The Mayor sent to Leavenworth for troops and they came—a large number of citizens were placed on

5. Sophia Bissell letter, September 8, 1863, folder 1810–1896, Henry Asbury Collection, 1839–1883, Chicago Historical Society (CHS). Virgil W. Dean, editor of *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, first became aware of the Bissell letter in October 2000 thanks to noted Civil War-era historian Albert Castel, who had obtained a copy from the CHS in 1976. Castel thought Bissell’s letter would be of interest to the readers of *Kansas History* and encouraged its publication. We are grateful to him for that assistance and encouragement.

6. General Sterling Price, a former governor of Missouri, commanded Confederate troops in the region throughout the Civil War. On September 19, 1864, approximately a year after the August 1863 massacre at Lawrence, Price led an army of about twelve thousand northward from Arkansas into Missouri in a campaign that came to be known as the Price raid. The Confederates reached Westport, Missouri, before Price initiated his retreat south along the Missouri–Kansas border. Price’s army was “completely shattered” by Union regulars and the Kansas militia commanded by Major General Samuel R. Curtis. Militarily, the Price raid ended the Civil War in Kansas and the West. See Albert Castel, “War and Politics: The Price Raid of 1864,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 24 (Summer 1958): 129, 130, 132, 140, 143; Castel, *General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 238–55; Kip Lindberg, “Chaos Itself: The Battle of Mine Creek,” *North and South* 1 (1998): 74–85; Edgar Langsdorf, “Price’s Raid and the Battle of Mine Creek,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Autumn 1964): 281–306. Quantrill’s contemporaries frequently spelled his name “Quantrell.”

7. On August 25, 1863, two days after the Lawrence massacre, Union General Thomas Ewing Jr., commander of the District of the Border, issued Order No. 11 clearing certain Missouri border counties. The order embittered many Missourians because it required all inhabitants of Jackson, Cass, and Bates Counties, with certain exceptions, to evacuate by September 9, 1863. See Albert Castel, “Order No. 11 and the Civil War on the Border,” *Missouri Historical Quarterly* 57 (July 1963): 357–68.

guard every night for a week or more. A great deal of sport was made of our “big scare” and of our nervous Mayor both here and in Leavenworth, so much in fact that the troops were sent away and the guard given up. Quantrell had his spies here all the time then it seems and knew just what we were doing— We as a family laid it a little more to heart than most of the others: a great deal more than ever before— We arranged our money and papers and talked over what we should do, putting our papers in a safe place, there they remained several days unharmed, as we all did, and so it went on until the fright was entirely forgotten. Time passed on until that Friday morning Quantrell did indeed come to Lawrence.

Henry and Robert our black boy rose early that morning, as they were going up to the farm to work. It was between four & five: They were in the yard when Robert looked up on some rising ground just a little ways from us & says who are those! They are “Secesh” —<sup>8</sup> They have no flag. Arabella called to me to look out of the window at those men! I ran threw open the blinds & then I saw a large body of horsemen trotting quite briskly along—just then they turned a corner coming nearer us—and we heard them say— Rush on—rush on for the town—and they did rush on, but did not stop for us at that time. We hear pistols firing and looking back of us saw the Horsemen running from house to house & we knew who had come.

So we took in a faint sense of what it was to be surrounded by Guerrillas—we immediately buried our papers & money excepting a little which we left out to appease them—put our silver in the cistern & disposed of our watches and jewelry & waited for them to come. And oh to hear the yells & hear the firing and to see the people running black & white old and young and the Fiends chasing after them firing as fast as they possibly could. Oh it was perfectly awful! The only wonder is there were not more killed. The first ones that came to us drove up to the back door—two men—asked for the man of the house—Henry went to the door. Said they your name! Bissell! Do you belong to the Service? No Sir! If you had told me you did I would have shot you dead! Your money. Henry handed them ten dollars. They turned towards the barn. Where are your horses—they looked in and saw but one (we had

Lawrence mayor George W. Collamore was not as fortunate as Bissell’s brother Henry. Collamore lived in a two-story stone house at 646 Kentucky Street. Awakened by the shouts outside, he ran to the back of the house to hide in a dry well. The raiders set fire to the house, and Collamore suffocated in the well. See David Dary, *Lawrence, Douglas County Kansas: An Informal History* (Lawrence: Allen Books, 1982), 111, 112.

8. A slang term meaning “secessionist,” used mostly by pro-unionists and obsolete by the twentieth century.

given the black boy a pistol & sent him to the country with two other horses. He was chassed & fired upon was obliged to let one go but escaped with the other) then said they take everything out of the house! You are not going to burn us are you! Yes we are. They then left! We began in good earnest to take the things out. Another came & wanted water & said we were not going to be burned.

We took a little courage then & stopped to look towards town. We could see Mass. St. all in flames & the houses of our friends and acquaintances here & there all in a blaze. All the houses of the first settlers were burned & of course the Branscomb place went (our house on Kentucky St)<sup>9</sup> Then another came & wanted Henry—he went out to him. He wanted money—H gave him five dollars & he left. Then we saw the bands collecting as if to move off & soon they did—passing directly in front of our inclosure. We could hear them ask from time to time if they should come up. Something would be said & they would pass on. We began to take long breaths and think we were going to escape—when looking towards town we saw five coming rushing & yelling directly for us. Then we knew our time had come. In they came on horseback right up to the front door. The leader forcing his horse up on to the Piazza. Matches, matches said one & [marked out word] up stairs—The others ransacking the house up stairs & down. The leader called for the man of the house. Henry went out to him. Your name? Bissell? You from New York! So said I, from Ct. Worse yet. Worse yet. Our trunks we had got into the yard although they forbid our doing it. Then they began breaking these open—throwing them into the air & letting them come down & stomping on them but they did come open. I ran to the leader & begged him to spare the house, pleading and telling him we were just peaceable people! Will you not spare the house? At last he said he would for my sake. Said I it is now on fire. Oh then I can't save it.

But I took courage & ran up stairs & found they had torn open a husk mattress & it was all in a blaze. I got a feather bed & put out the blaze but not the fire. Up came one of them to see how the fire was progressing. He said to

9. Charles H. Branscomb and Charles Robinson, the first governor of the state of Kansas, were the initial New England Emigrant Aid Company agents responsible for locating the Lawrence townsite. Branscomb, one of Lawrence's prominent "founding fathers," also conducted the second and several later emigrant aid company parties. See Louise Barry, "The Emigrant Aid Company Parties of 1854," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (May 1943): 120, 124, 139. The *Lawrence City Directory, 1860–61*, 11, lists an H. T. Bissell residence at 73 Kentucky; this appears to be at the southwest corner of Ninth [Warren] and Kentucky Streets. The Bissell residence would have been immediately south of what is now the office building known as 901 Kentucky. See also *Atlas of Douglas Co., Kansas, 1873*.

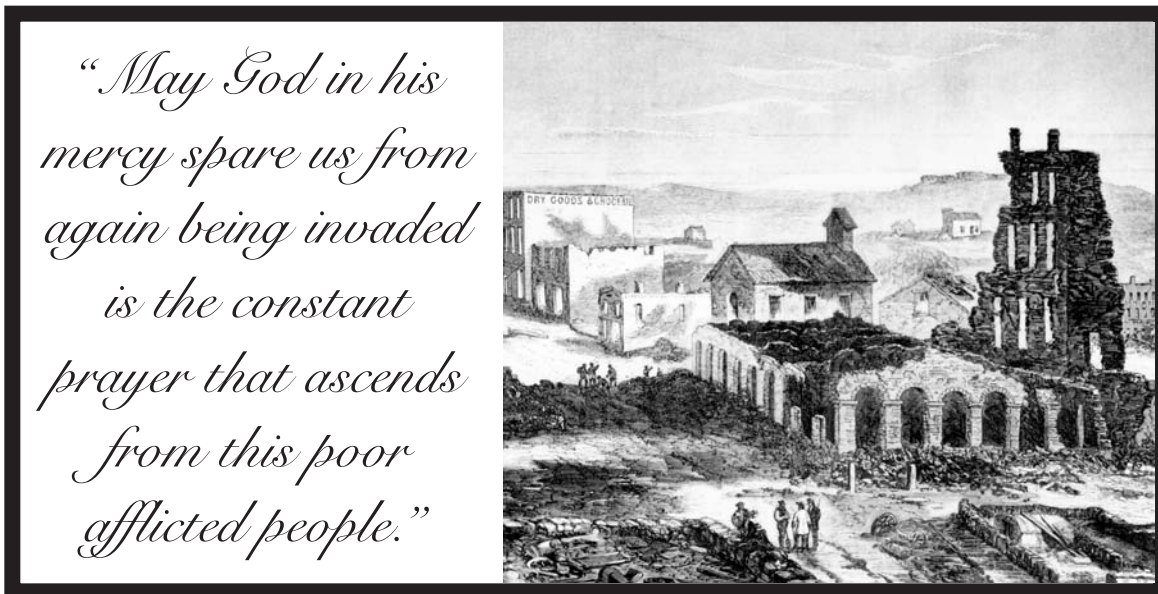
me did you put out that fire! To be sure I did. He gave me a horrid look & said I shall set it on fire again! Said I the leader said he would spare the house. He ran down stairs (I following him) and asked him if he said so. I caught him by the arm and held him while I plead with the leader—He did not go up again. While I was up stairs the most fiendish one attacked Henry, telling him he wanted more money. "They told him uptown we had money". He knocked him down with his pistol, pulled him up again striking him several times on the head—the blood running down his face. Then he fired or snapped his pistol all the rounds, but it was empty. He took his other & said—"Now I will fix you." Arabella was pleading all this time with him to spare her only brother, running from him to the leader & back again in agony. The leader relented & spoke to the man. He let go his hold & Henry ran for the corn. Then this fiendish one ran into the house set it on fire down stairs—turned us all out of the house shut the door & told us not to go in again.

The leader relented again, ordered them all on their horses & be off. They tipped their hats and bid us good morning. We returned the salutation, trying all the time they were here not to irritate them at all. We rushed into the house put out the fire down stairs & carried water up stairs time & time again, tried to throw the things out of the windows—nearly suffocated—left it to burn. We found the barn all on fire, got the carriage & harness out & sat down on the Piazza in despair—not saying a word—or shedding a tear. Just then a man from Franklin rushed into the house up stairs by a good deal of exertion put out the fire.<sup>10</sup> So we have a house to live in. Henry was not seriously injured. Mother had been sick all the week, sat up day before for the first time but she worked like a trojan. Mother lost about a thousand dollars by that raid. Arabella the next worse. They taking a good many things from her trunks, among other things her best silk dress. Henry next & I least. I cannot begin to tell you all that was said and done. Oh we fared so much better than a great many others. Some had their houses and stores burned & men killed leaving their poor wives widows & penniless. [Illegible] thought there were between seventy and eighty widows—& between two & three hundred made orphans that terrible day. Nearly every house has a story to tell, although some were not molested in the least. We have packed a trunk of linen which I think we shall send to you

10. Franklin was about two miles east of the current Lawrence city limits, south of Highway 10 where the Douglas County jail now stands. Adam B. Waits, *Map of Historic Douglas County, Kansas* (Logan, Utah: GEO/Graphics, 1985).

tomorrow for safekeeping. We do not feel secure yet. May God in his mercy spare us from again being invaded is the constant prayer that ascends from this poor afflicted people. Have just heard Charley Lawrence is in Prairie City, as it is very painful to think over & especially to write what occurred that dreadful day—will you please send him this letter. Send to Chas H. Lawrence Prairie City.<sup>11</sup> We have some troops here but not enough I think. Four days will decide whether we remain in this country or not. Yours affectionately.

Sophia L. Bissell



All send love to all  
 Hope Charley will write his Father the particulars—we shall write Charley soon to Prairie City.

Sophia Bissell returned to Connecticut within two or three years of this horrific experience but continued to own property in Lawrence and Douglas County. The House Building on Massachusetts Street, probably the only downtown business building left standing after Quantrill’s raid, was conveyed to Bissell in 1873 by Shalor W. Eldridge, trustee of the estate of Mary R. Eldridge. Sophia, unmarried, and Henry, her brother, conveyed the property to Jacob

11. Charles H. Lawrence likely is the grandson of Arabella Bissell, the son of her deceased daughter Elizabeth Amelia. Arabella’s will states that Charles, in 1868, lived in Vergennes, Vermont. Prairie City was just south and west of Baldwin City. See William G. Cutler and Alfred T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1: 308, 355; Last Will and Testament of Arabella Bissell of Douglas County, Kansas, December 14, 1868, Book G, 98, 99, 100, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence.

House in 1886.<sup>12</sup> The Bissell family also owned rural property south of Lawrence. The property today is part of the tract on which the house of the author and his wife is located.<sup>13</sup>

Back in Suffield, Bissell became a longtime and active member of the Suffield First Congregational Church. She also was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her obituary noted that she was “one of the best known women in town and leaves a host of friends in whom she was always interested and by whom she was greatly admired.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Clarke Letter

As Sophia Bissell was burying her papers and money on the morning of August 21, 1863, Sidney Clarke was hurriedly throwing on old clothes and heading to the west side of Lawrence to James Lane’s cornfield. Clarke, who was living in the

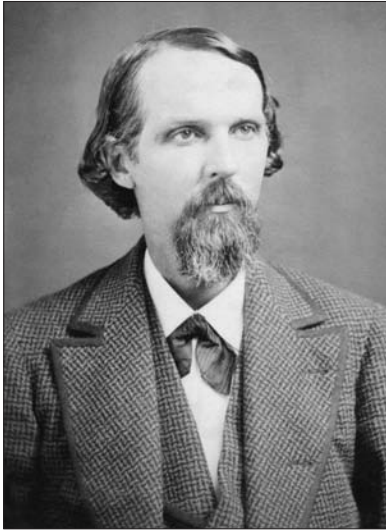
1000 block of Tennessee Street with his wife, Henrietta, and two small sons on the morning of the raid, was born in 1831 in Southbridge, Massachusetts, and became editor of the *Southbridge Press* in 1854. Clarke took an active interest in the Free Soil Party, supporting General John Frémont for president in 1856. That interest in politics continued after his move to Lawrence, Kansas Territory, in the spring of 1859, one year after the Bissell family arrived. Clarke immediately joined the radical wing of the Free

12. The Eldridge name survives today in the historic Eldridge Hotel at the southwest corner of Seventh and Massachusetts Streets. The House Building occupies 729–731 Massachusetts Street and is the current home of Francis Sporting Goods. See Carol Buhler Francis, *The House Building: My Search for Its’ Foundations* (Lawrence, Kans.: Transom Works Press, 1990), 3, 173, 177.

13. Henry Bissell took an assignment of a mortgage on a portion of section 19, township 13, and range 20, in Douglas County (approximately one mile south of the current southern Lawrence city limits on Louisiana Street). Sophia received a sheriff’s deed to the property in 1888 and conveyed the property the same year. Deed book 46, 141, 398, Douglas County Register of Deeds, Lawrence, Kans.

14. Obituary, “Sophia L. Bissell,”

State (later Republican) Party and was elected to the Kansas legislature in 1862. President Abraham Lincoln appointed



*Sidney Clarke*

Clarke assistant adjutant general of volunteers in February 1863 and then to the post of assistant provost marshal general. Clarke was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1864 and twice won reelection before losing the Republican nomination in 1870. He returned to the Kansas legislature and later moved to present Oklahoma where he died in 1909.<sup>15</sup>

Clarke's congressional career was controversial. By the end of his third term his political allies had fallen out of favor, and Clarke was suspected of corruption, lost his bid for a fourth term in 1870, and subsequently faded into relative obscurity in Kansas. His public life revived with the move to Oklahoma in the 1880s. Clarke was president of the Oklahoma City Council and acting mayor during the first year of the city's existence. His repeated efforts in support of statehood were successful when Oklahoma became the forty-sixth state in 1907.<sup>16</sup>

Two August 26, 1863, Clarke letters exist. One is easily legible, the other is not. Barbara Bower Pulsford of Venice, Florida, Clarke's great-granddaughter, believes that the legible copy (eight pages) "appears to have been written by Henrietta Clarke," Sidney's wife, who copied Clarke's original. The other copy (twelve pages) apparently in Clarke's hand, is the property of the Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup>

15. *Congressional Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>; *Lawrence City Directory, 1871*; *ibid., 1877*; Kansas State Census, 1865, Douglas County, Lawrence; William E. Connelley, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), 3: 1278.

16. George L. McCoy, "The Congressional Career of Sidney Clarke" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1962); "Sidney Clarke" biographical sketch, Sidney Clarke Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman, [www.ou.edu/special/albertctr/archives/clarke.htm](http://www.ou.edu/special/albertctr/archives/clarke.htm). For a review of the Clarke Collection, see Todd J. Kosmerick, *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24 (Spring 2001): 79–80. Clarke's descendants donated the papers, which document the history of Kansas from the 1850s to the 1880s, to the University of Oklahoma.

17. Sidney Clarke to My dear friends, August 26, 1863, folder 44, box 1, Clarke Collection. The letter is published here with the permission of

Head Quarters, Act. Asst. Provost Marshal General (For Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado. Dakota.)

Leavenworth City, Aug. 26. 1863.

My dear friends:

I hope you got my telegram informing you that we escaped with our lives from the terrible massacre at Lawrence. I also sent you papers containing accounts of the massacre, but up to this time I have had no heart to write of this wholesale deed of blood. The papers contain the full details, which you must have read before this. I enclose slips from the papers of this city, and from the Missouri Democrat, which will give you a connected account of this horrible affair. You can well imagine how I feel, having but just returned from the scene where one hundred and fifty of my neighbors and friends were murdered, with a fiendish brutality without parallel in the history of civilized warfare. And this was done ~~almost~~ before my eyes, as I was more fortunate than the rest, and succeeded in escaping from the house and concealing myself in a cornfield on one side of the town, where I could look into the streets and see and hear the horrible scenes of that fatal morning.<sup>18</sup>

I arrived home from Leavenworth on Thursday night to attend a railroad meeting. The meeting was held in front of the Eldridge House, and lasted till a late hour. After the meeting I invited Genl. Lane, Mr. Speer of the Tribune,<sup>19</sup> and about a dozen other gentlemen into an Ice cream saloon to take some refreshments. We spent some time in this way and did not get to bed till near 12 o'clock.

The attack was made at Sunrise from the south. Quantrill had about 300 men. About 100 of them just returned from Price's army, and the rest were the most noto-

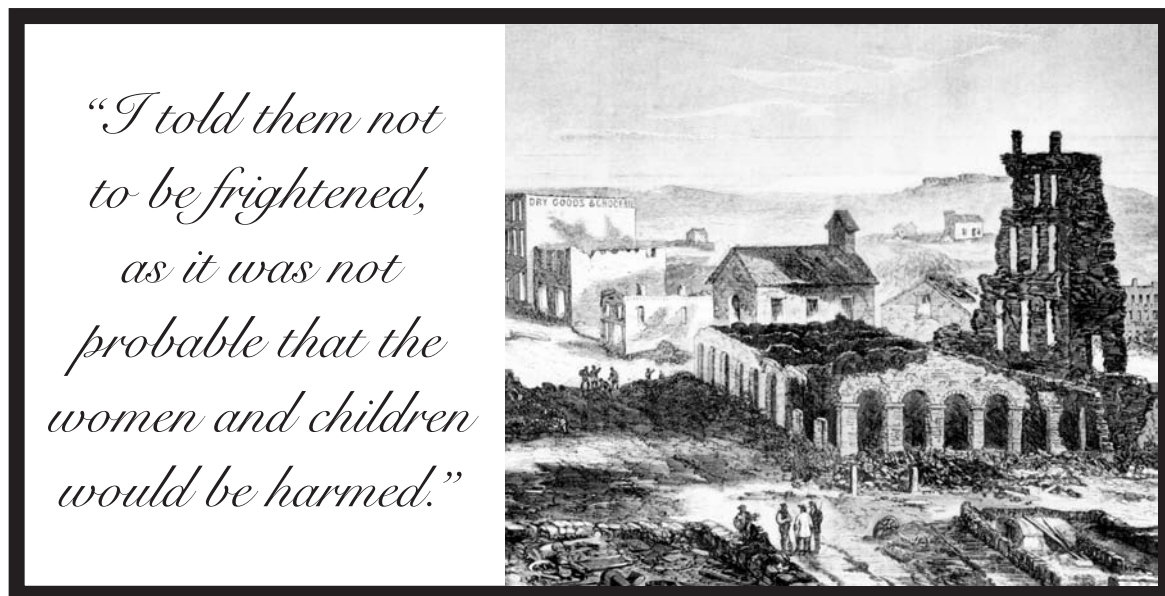
the Carl Albert Center, Marilyn Manley, and Barbara Pulsford. The eight-page copied letter (Henrietta Clarke's copy, the property of Marilyn Manley) is in box 8, *ibid.* Both versions were used for the transcription that appears here, but what follows mirrors Clarke's twelve-page original as closely as possible.

18. Lane owned considerable property on what was the west edge of Lawrence. The cornfield, which was the hiding place for many Lawrence men that morning, was north of present Ninth Street, between Illinois and Missouri Streets. See "Self Guided Tour Brochure, Quantrill's Raid: The Lawrence Massacre," (Lawrence, Kans.: Lawrence Convention and Visitors Bureau, n.d.).

19. The *Kansas Pioneer* is considered by most historians to be the first paper published in Douglas County. The first issue, dated Lawrence, October 18, 1854, was printed at Medina, Ohio. Publisher and editor John Speer had arrived in Kansas a few months earlier. He wrote editorials in Lawrence, hoping to have the first issue printed by a Kansas City newspaper. When the publisher learned of Speer's position against slavery, he refused to print the issue. Speer changed the name of his free-state newspaper to the *Kansas Tribune* after his return to Kansas Territory. See Dary, *Lawrence, Douglas County Kansas*, 29, 30 n. 7. For more on the "railroad meeting" and the many efforts of civic and business leaders to make Lawrence the regional rail center, see I. E. Quastler, "Charting a Course: Lawrence, Kansas, and Its Railroad Strategy, 1854–1872," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Spring 1995): 18–33; Quastler, *The Railroads of Lawrence, Kansas, 1854–1900* (Lawrence, Kans: Coronado Press, 1979).

rious and daring guerrillas of the Western border. They were mounted on fine horses, and doubly armed with revolvers, carbines, and knives.

The first notice I had was from Mr. Ross, who ~~shouted~~ called to us from the foot of the chamber stairs that the guerrillas were in town.<sup>20</sup> I jumped up, put on some old clothes, and ran down stairs. By this time my wife and Mrs. Ross, as well as the whole family were alarmed. I told them not to be frightened, as it was not probable that the women and children would be harmed. Just at this moment Mrs. Ross opened the front door, and I saw at a glance the dan-



ger I we were in. Two or three streets in front of the house, the rebels were charging in all directions, shouting like wild Indians, and shooting down every man who appeared in the streets or attempting to escape. A company of re-

20. Probably John Ross and family. Apparently the Clarkes either were staying with the Rosses the night of the raid, or the Clarke family was a close neighbor who came next door at the first sign of trouble. A few years before Clarke's death, a correspondent from the *Kansas City Journal* interviewed Clarke about the raid; Clarke said he "was living on the west side of Tennessee Street, immediately under the hill on which the old university building stands." When the pickets were drawn he emerged from Lane's cornfield, obtained a farmer's horse, and rode into town to find that his wife and two children were safe. However, Clarke reported that all he owned had gone up in flames. See "Quantrell's Raid, Hon. Sidney F. Clarke Tells of Lawrence Massacre," *Kansas City Journal*, September 30, 1905. The Kansas State Census, 1865, Douglas County, Lawrence, enumerated Sydney Clarke age thirty-three, M. C. [member of Congress]; his wife, Henrietta, twenty-eight; and two sons, Sydney Jr. and George L., residing with John and Nancy Ross [ages sixty-two and fifty-six] and their children. John Ross was listed as a "Mechanic." He had a house on lots 137 and 139 on Tennessee Street between Berkeley and Quincy. A photo of John Ross appears in Richard Cordley, *A History of Lawrence, Kansas from the First Settlement to the Close of the Rebellion* (Lawrence, Kans.: Lawrence Journal Press, 1895), 160.

cruits from the 14 Kansas Cavalry, which were encamped in front of the house, numbering 25, was all killed but 3 or 4 just at this time. I saw at once that it was an indiscriminate massacre, and that as I was probably known to be at home, that my only hope was to escape from the rear of the house. Telling my wife not to be alarmed, I ran out the back door, and passing through the hedge I ran up the hill in the direction of Gen'l. Lane's cornfield in the rear of the General's house, in the southwest part of the town.<sup>21</sup> By this time the fiends were charging up the hill, shooting down all who came in their way. Fortunately I escaped the ~~corn~~ shower of

bullets, and ~~passing~~ ~~over the point of the hill~~ succeeding in reaching the field before the rebels charged round the point of the hill to cut me off. By this time they had scattered in all parts of the city, and the work of blood was now fairly commenced. From the upper part of the field where I lay concealed, ~~with there~~ I could see into the streets, ~~but~~ God for-

bid that it should ever be my lot again to witness entirely defenseless, such terrible barbarities as were perpetrated for three long hours by these heartless wretches. My neighbors ~~and friends~~ were shot by scores in the presence of their wives and children, and then the murderers would rob and set fire to ~~their~~ the houses and burn up house and bodies together, refusing the entreaties of the women, ~~in many cases~~ to let them drag the bodies of their husbands from the burning buildings. In a short time the fires were set in nearly every house in all parts of the city, and the conflagration which ensued was awfully grand. More than 200 buildings were burned—96 of them stores and shops, and the rest of them the finest residences in the city. The fires were set as soon as the plundering was done, and by ten o'clock A.M. the old Citadel of Freedom, and the most beautiful city west

21. Although Clarke wrote that Jim Lane's house was "in the southwest part of town," it stood at what is now the corner of Eighth and Mississippi Streets, which in 1863 would be described more appropriately as west Lawrence.



of the Mississippi was a heap of smoldering ruins. By this time ~~the~~ Quantrill's men commenced to leave the city the same way they came in.<sup>22</sup>

But to return. I determined to get outside of the pickets if possible, thinking that I might be able to collect some mounted men from among the farmers outside, ~~and attack~~ to follow the rebels. I went out on the hill west of the field where I was secreted, and meeting a negro on horseback, took his horse, and borrowing an eight inch revolver from Capt. Twiss I rode into town by the California road.<sup>23</sup> By this time the ~~alarm~~ news of the attack had spread lightning through the country, and men were coming in on horseback in all directions.

I rode at once to see if my wife and children were safe. I found that our house and barn had been burned, and nearly everything they contained except some things which my wife and Mrs. Ross got out of the lower rooms. Part of my library was saved by Mrs.

Ross' children, but all my private papers, military and other clothing, and nearly all of my wife's clothing was burned. So you see we are for the time being reduced to a short allowance.

The rebels were particularly anxious to capture, Senator Lane, myself, and Rev. H. D. Fisher, Chaplain in one of the Kansas Regiments.<sup>24</sup> They searched for me in all parts

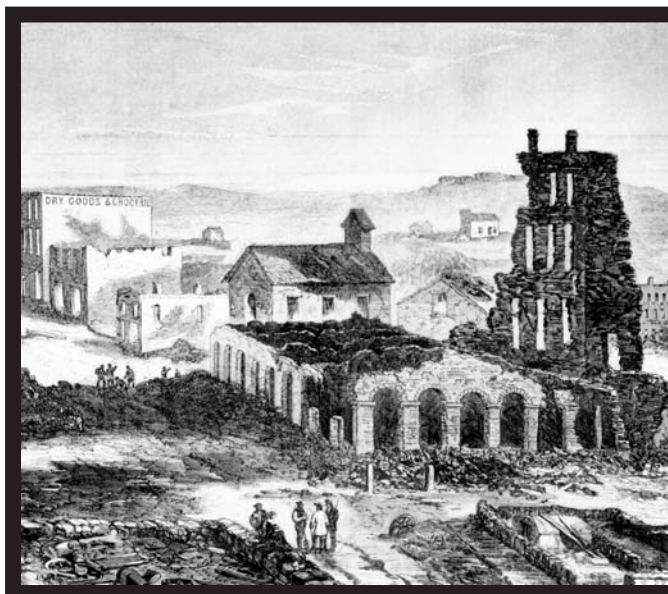
22. By most accounts the raiders were in Lawrence from shortly after 5:00 A.M. to about 9:00 A.M. When they left town, they actually did so via a different route, to the south, as opposed to the southeast, which is the direction from which they entered town.

23. Captain Twiss is likely Charles P. Twiss, a lawyer from Iola. He subsequently served in the Kansas senate. Twiss was captain of Co. I, Tenth Kansas Infantry and led his company from July 1861 until July 18, 1862, when he reportedly resigned his command. See Kansas State Adjutant General, *Report, 1861-1865* (Leavenworth: W. S. Burke, 1870), 368. The California Road refers to the Oregon-California Trail route south of the cornfield along the southern slopes of Mount Oread. See "Self Guided Tour Brochure, Quantrill's Raid."

24. Kansas State Adjutant General, *Report, 1861-1865*, 125. See biographical note in John Francis, "An Incident of the War, In 1862," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1901-1902* 7 (1902): 163; H. D. Fisher, *The Gun and the Gospel* (1891; reprint, Pacific Palisades, Calif.: 1987).

of the house, and insisted that I must be in the house. They treated my wife and Mrs. Ross very civilly, asked them why they had not got the things out of the house before, and took one of Singer's sewing machines, ~~and~~ which I had bought a few days before, and set it out doors themselves.

Mr. Ross escaped more narrowly than myself. He ran up towards Gov. Robinson's house, where he was joined by a Martin boy. Just as the two were getting over the fence into a cornfield they were overtaken and the Martin boy killed,<sup>25</sup> but Mr. Ross was not hit and got into the field and escaped.



*“Our people are intensely excited, and many of them are in arms. What the government will do I do not know.”*

Genl. Lane's escape was most miraculous. He did not get notice till they charged upon his house. He escaped through a shower of bullets and secreted himself in the corn field where I was.

Four of the rebels only were killed in town.<sup>26</sup>

As soon as Quantrill left town Genl. Lane at once organized the citizens who had horses, and with such arms and ammunition as could be caught up, ~~and with~~ commenced the pursuit. They could be easily followed, as they burned

25. R. Martin is listed in "Names of Citizens Killed," in Cordley, *A History of Lawrence*, 244 n. 20; Dary, *Lawrence, Douglas County Kansas*, 118 n. 7.

26. Here and on several other occasions throughout his report of the raid, Clarke seemed to embellish the role or actions of "Genl. Lane" and the defenders of Lawrence. No other account that we know of has Lane escaping "through a shower of bullets," and the only known raider fatality was Larkin Skaggs. In addition, Clarke greatly exaggerates the damage inflicted on the guerrillas by "Lane's party." See William E. Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1910), 378-420; Edward E. Leslie, *The Devil Knows How to Ride: The True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders* (New York: Random House, 1996), 231-34, 245-55.

every house on the line of their retreat for ten miles south of Lawrence, and killed many along the road.

Lane came up with them ~~about five miles off, and at Brooklyn,~~<sup>27</sup> while they were firing the town, and at once attacked them and drove them out. ~~Although~~ Although our force was far inferior to Quantrill's, Lane continued the pursuit for about ~~100~~ 75 miles driving ~~them~~ far into Missouri, where the ~~regiment~~ regular volunteers continued the pursuit. Lane's party killed about 20 of the villains, one of whom was a Lieutenant in Marmaduke's army.<sup>28</sup>

But I must close this letter, already too long, and written in great haste. I return to Lawrence today, and if my wife is able to undertake the journey, I shall bring her here, and perhaps send her East.

Our people are intensely excited, and many of them are in arms. What the government will do I do not know. The "milk and water" policy of Schofield and Gamble in Missouri is responsible for this terrible massacre. How much longer it will take the President to retrace ~~his steps~~ the fatal steps he has taken in removing Curtis and appointing Schofield, ~~and this gang~~<sup>29</sup> I do not know. I hope it will not

27. Brooklyn was approximately one mile east and two miles north of present Baldwin Junction at U.S. Highways 59 and 56. See Waits, *Map of Historic Douglas County, Kansas*. See also "Self Guided Tour Brochure, Quantrill's Raid."

28. General John Sappington Marmaduke, a native of Missouri, was an 1857 graduate of West Point. In 1861 he resigned his U. S. commission to join the Confederate army. He was captured during the Battle of Mine Creek, Linn County, Kansas, October 25, 1864. See Mark A. Plummer, "Missouri and Kansas and the Capture of General Marmaduke," *Missouri Historical Review* 59 (October 1964): 90-104.

29. At the time of Quantrill's raid General John M. Schofield commanded the Department of Missouri. Previously he had been subordinate to General Curtis, but organization and reorganization was constantly changing in the western theatre and along the Kansas-Missouri border. Obviously, in Clarke's opinion President Lincoln had made a mistake in removing Curtis and appointing Schofield. The president, Clarke believed, should "retrace the fatal steps" of the command change and remove Schofield. See Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

Clarke's reference to Gamble appears to be a criticism of Hamilton Rowan Gamble, the unionist governor of Missouri from 1861 to 1864. In July 1862 Gamble summoned the militia to defend the state against Confederate guerrillas. See "Hamilton Rowan Gamble," *Virtual American Biographies*, [www.famousamericans.net/hamiltonrowandgamble/](http://www.famousamericans.net/hamiltonrowandgamble/).

be long. The tried people of Kansas demand it. The true friends of the government in Missouri also unite in asking the removal of Schofield. Nothing but the most rigorous policy will save us from the continued repetition of the Lawrence Massacre.

I am as ever yours. Sidney Clarke."<sup>30</sup>

Sophia Bissell and Sidney Clarke, quite different individuals in many respects, both arose on that same August morning, witnessed a massacre, and recorded the events of that terrible and memorable morning in Lawrence, Kansas. Each described the ongoing destruction. For Bissell, it was awful "to hear the yells & hear the firing and to see the people running black & white old and young and the Fiends chasing after them firing as fast as they possibly could." Clarke, the military officer, was equally horrified by what he witnessed, reflecting on "the scene where one hundred and fifty of my neighbors and friends were murdered with a fiendish brutality without parallel in the history of civilized warfare."

Neither Sophia Bissell nor Sidney Clarke, linked in history by the August 1863 Lawrence massacre, chose to remain permanently in Kansas. Otherwise, they seem to have had little in common before or after their encounter with William Clarke Quantrill. Bissell returned to her native Connecticut to live out her life, and Clarke eventually embarked on a new journey that took him to Oklahoma Territory. There can be little doubt, however, that their shared Kansas experience remained the most remarkable event in either of their very different lives. [KH]

General Samuel Ryan Curtis was a West Point graduate. He won a seat in the U.S. Congress in 1856, which he resigned with the outbreak of the Civil War to become a colonel in the Iowa Volunteer Infantry. When Sterling Price invaded Missouri in September 1864, Curtis was in command of the Department of Kansas, which included Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Indian Territory. See [www.civilwarfamilyhistory.com/new\\_page\\_131.htm](http://www.civilwarfamilyhistory.com/new_page_131.htm).

30. The original twelve-page Clarke letter does not include the last sentence or the closing. It is transcribed here from the eight-page copy. See footnote 17.