While Kansans reeled from the bloody raid on Lawrence in August 1863, nationally Northern spirits were still buoyed by the Union’s twin July victories at Gettysburg in the East and Vicksburg in the West. Nevertheless, it is only in retrospect that we know the Confederacy’s cause was all but lost by the autumn of 1863, and often desperate fighting continued for another year and a half.

Kansas regulars and militia units were engaged to the bitter end, as they had been since the outset of hostilities in 1861. The First and Second Volunteer Infantry regiments experienced their first engagement of consequence near Springfield, Missouri, on August 10, 1861. Although the Kansans performed well during the Battle of Wilson’s Creek, they suffered many casualties, the Union essentially lost the battle, and Confederate forces under General Sterling Price went on the offensive, threatening northern Missouri and eastern Kansas. Three years and many battles and casualties later, Kansas troops helped thwart the last serious threat to Kansas soil, when the same General Price, a former Missouri governor, met defeat at the battles of Westport (Kansas City, Missouri, October 23) and Mine Creek (October 25), near Mound City in Linn County, Kansas. By virtually any objective measure, Price’s Missouri Campaign (“Price’s Raid”)—which commenced with the movement of some twelve thousand Confederate troops into southeast Missouri in September 1864, covered over fourteen hundred miles, and ended when Price’s command left southwest Missouri and crossed the Arkansas River in early November—was an unmitigated disaster for the Southern cause in the western theater of operations. Thereafter, “the Trans-Mississippi waited supinely and impotently for the war to be decided in Virginia,” observed the historian Albert Castel. “Wilson’s Creek was the first great battle of the war west of the Mississippi, and Mine Creek the last. Between these is the story of a lost cause” (Castel, General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West [L.S.U. Press, 1968], 254).

The history of the cotton and wool “CSA” (Confederate States of America) flag depicted above is lost, but clearly its design was loosely based on the Confederacy’s first national pattern. The phrase, “Emblem of the Lost Cause,” which took on a variety of meanings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was added after the war. The flag was donated to the Kansas Historical Society by Alfred J. Diehl, a sergeant in Company B, Eighty-Sixth Illinois Infantry (see Kansas Memory, kansasmemory.org/item/211773).
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