One hundred and fifty years ago this August 21, the Civil War came home in a tragically violent way for residents of Lawrence, Kansas. Like most Kansans elsewhere, they had supported the Union war effort through militia service, enlistment in one of more than a dozen volunteer infantry and cavalry regiments, and a variety of other ways for more than two years. But for the people of Kansas, the “war” had been going on for nearly a decade, and the Lawrence massacre of 1863 and the Civil War on the border in general were merely a continuation of “the same conflict on a larger scale. The same principles were at stake,” wrote the Reverend Richard Cordley in his History of Lawrence, “and the same parties confronted each other. The same feelings inspired either side. The same hate sought to gratify itself under the new condition. The border ruffians of 1856 became the bushwhackers of 1863.” These reflections by Cordley, a pioneer Congregational minister and himself a survivor of William Clarke Quantrill’s infamous Lawrence raid, say a great deal about the peculiar nature of the civil war on the Kansas-Missouri border. It was a highly charged, emotionally laden, repeatedly vengeful affair.

The war in Kansas and especially Missouri featured pitched battles between regular Union and Confederate armies, but more common were raids and counter-raids that visited death and destruction on the civilian populations of both states. Following the Union setback at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek near Springfield, Missouri, on August 10, 1861, the confident Confederates under General Sterling Price moved north, and Kansas troops under the overall command of General (and U.S. Senator) James H. Lane moved into western Missouri. They plundered and burned the pro-Southern town of Osceola, Missouri, on September 22, 1861, claiming, according to historian Albert Castel, “military necessity” and retribution for the September 8 Confederate raid on Humboldt, Kansas. In just over a month, Humboldt was raided again, and the back and forth bushwhacking and jayhawking continued along the border. Atrocities and the wanton destruction of property characterized both sides. Without question, however, the region’s most notorious guerrilla leader was Quantrill, who wreaked havoc on both sides of the border. He led raids on Aubrey, Olathe, and Shawnee, Kansas, in 1862, and most horrifically in August 1863 on Lawrence, where four hundred raiders murdered nearly two hundred citizens, destroyed the main business district, and burned scores of residences on both sides of Massachusetts Street.

The small flag pictured here—which measures seven by thirteen inches and is on display at the Kansas Museum of History and at kansasmemory.org/item/221178—reflects the design of the Confederacy’s first flag. Instead of stars, the canton features an image that has been described as either a fist or a crude representation of the South Carolina palmetto tree, stitched over with the first five letters of the guerrilla leader’s last name. It was discovered in Olathe after the September 7, 1862, raid.
Josiah Miller, an Antislavery Southerner: Letters to Father and Mother by Dennis M. Dailey

“Drunk and Disorderly”: The Origins and Consequences of Alcoholism at Fort Hays by Ryan M. Kennedy

From Projections of the Past to Fantasies of the Future: Kansas and the Great Plains in Recent Film edited and introduced by Thomas Prasch

Reviews

Book Notes

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