A month after General Sterling Price launched his 1864 campaign to “rally the loyal men of Missouri,” fill his ranks with fresh recruits, and capture much needed supplies, he approached the Kansas border with a secondary objective in mind. If compelled to withdraw from the Show-Me State, Price was to make his “retreat through Kansas and the Indian Territory, sweeping that country of its mules, horses, cattle, and military supplies of all kinds.” Turned back at Westport, the Confederate general moved his troops and booty laden wagon train south down the state line and crossed into Kansas at Trading Post in Linn County. The campaign’s final, decisive battle came on October 25 at Mine Creek. Price’s retreat had been slowed when his wagons became bogged down in the creek, and two of his division commanders were forced to make a stand and execute a rear guard action on the north side of Mine Creek. The Confederates numbered about 7,000 men and ten artillery pieces, but before they had fully prepared their position, Colonels Frederick W. Benteen and John F. Phillips attacked on the Union left; Colonels Samuel J. Crawford and William F. Cloud in the center; and Colonel Charles W. Blair on the right. A brief but by all accounts fierce fight ensued, and the Confederate troops broke in panic, fleeing across Mine Creek “in utter and indescribable confusion,” according to Price’s official report.

The artist, Samuel J. Reader, a private in the Second Regiment, Kansas State Militia, made this rendering of the victorious Union cavalry charge years later for his illustrated autobiography. Reader, who had been taken prisoner during the Battle of the Big Blue three days before, was well south of Mine Creek with the main body of the retreating Rebel army, so he did not personally witness the battle. Since the first reports that he received were those of his captors, Reader titled the watercolor, quote, “It Went Against Us.” The original as well as the complete autobiography can be found on Kansas Memory at http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/206900.
Fleeing Missouri Bloodhounds: 66
Pappy Carr’s Escape to Free Kansas
edited by Mark Chapin Scott

Price's Raid and the Battle of Mine Creek 78
by Edgar Langsdorf

“I was a prisoner of war.” 100
The Autobiography of SAMUEL J. READER
edited by Virgil W. Dean

Reviews 122

Book Notes 127
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