The Quantrell raid on Lawrence in the early morning of August 21, 1863, as depicted in water color by Mrs. Lueretta Louise Fox Fisk (1866-1919). She was the wife of Dr. D. M. Fisk, head of the sociological department of Washburn College, Topeka. Her scene possibly was based on Sherman Enderton's earlier sketch (reproduced on the cover of the Summer, 1960, issue of this magazine).
Erastus D. Ladd's Description of the Lawrence Massacre

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I. INTRODUCTION

The guerrilla raid on Lawrence by William C. Quantrill's band of Missouri ruffians is remembered as one of the most shocking episodes of the Civil War. Sweeping into the town of over 2,000 at dawn on August 21, 1863, a force of perhaps 450 bushwhackers obeyed their commander's order to "kill every man big enough to carry a gun." In the course of about four hours, some 150 male citizens of Lawrence were killed. This massacre and its aftermath give substance to the historian's claim that, of all human conflict, civil war is the most cruel.

Although to their dying day, most survivors remembered the Lawrence massacre as the most horrible four hours of their lives, relatively few eye-witness accounts have survived. While doing research recently among old Michigan newspapers, the present writer found such an account in the forgotten pages of a weekly called the Marshall Statesman of September 16, 1863. It is in the form of a letter written just nine days after the raid by Erastus D. Ladd who had migrated to Kansas in 1854 as a member of the Second party of the Emigrant Aid Company. The letter was written to Ladd's father in Marshall, Mich.

The name of Erastus D. Ladd is familiar to Kansas historians, for they have frequently quoted from a series of his letters which were published in the Milwaukee (Wis.) Sentinel during the 1850's. These letters describe his arrival in Kansas, the organization of the town of Lawrence, and the subsequent conflict which gave rise to the name "Bleeding Kansas." Similar letters written by Ladd and published in the Marshall Statesman, including the one describ-
ing the Lawrence raid, have been unknown to historians. Transcripts of these letters have been deposited in the Kansas State Historical Society by the present writer.

Erastus D. Ladd was born on September 10, 1815, in Otsego county, New York, and died at his home in Wakarusa township, Douglas county, Kansas, on August 24, 1872. His father was Samuel Ladd, a shoemaker by trade who was also something of an adventurer. About 1830 Samuel Ladd moved his family to Canada where he “engaged in trade and warehousing.” ¹ About 1840 he moved again, this time to the youthful town of Marshall, Mich., where he opened a leather store. A native of Vermont, Samuel Ladd was an active abolitionist and infused in his son a similar zeal for the destruction of the “peculiar institution.”

The formal education of Erastus Ladd was limited, although he did attend the Wesleyan Seminary at Laurens, N. Y., before the family moved to Canada. After coming to Marshall, young Ladd became a partner with his father in the leather business under the corporate name “S. and E. D. Ladd.” Not content to remain a shoemaker, however, Erastus set out to improve his status. He read extensively, studied law, and, in 1847, became an agent for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Included in his reading were the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, and he became a convert to the New Jerusalem Church. The telegraphic experiments of Samuel Morse intrigued him, and in 1848, while the line was being erected between Buffalo and Cleveland, Ladd went east, learned the telegraph business, and became the first manager of the telegraph office in Chicago. Later he was transferred to Milwaukee, but in 1854 he abandoned his new profession to join the New England Emigrant Aid Company in its settlement of Kansas.

Erastus Ladd, accompanied by a younger brother, John A. Ladd, joined the so-called Second party sent out by the Emigrant Aid Company. When it departed from Boston on August 29, 1854, this group comprised a total of 67 individuals, but as it moved westward additional emigrants boarded its train until the original number was doubled. The Ladd brothers joined the party at Chicago on September 1. In a letter written a week later, Erastus Ladd characterized the membership of the Second party as follows:

At Chicago . . . I met the Kansas party from the east, numbering about 100 men, 15 women and some score or more of children. They are of such an appearance, and a limited acquaintance has satisfied me of such a character, as shall make a conspicuous mark in the character of the institutions

which shall prevail in this "center of the world." They are hardy and industrious—intelligent and moral, with a determination never to admit, to the least extent, any application of the principle of Slavery in Kansas, at the same time they will not interfere with the business concerns of their neighbors in the slave states.2

On September 13 the party reached its destination in Kansas, at the site of present Lawrence—sometimes referred to as Waukarusa or Yankee Town in the early days. Writing to his father on the 17th, Ladd noted:

You must understand there is not a house here, with the exception of one log hut, about half a mile from us, and the next cabin is 6 miles East, and one 6 miles West. . . . As far as the country is concerned, there is nothing like it in the world. The city will be laid out very soon, 1½ miles wide back from the river, and 2 miles on the river. . . . We are scattered all over the prairie and wood land to keep claims from the Missourians.3

On September 19 the First party, which had arrived on August 1, joined with the Second party to form the "Lawrence Association of Kansas Territory," and a constitution was drawn up. On the following day officers were elected, Dr. Charles Robinson being chosen as president. Erastus Ladd was elected to the dual office of register of deeds and claims and clerk of the court. In a letter to Seth Lewis, editor of the Marshall Statesman, Ladd confided that his was "the best paying office in the association."4 A little later he was chosen as the town's postmaster, and at the election of May 22, 1855, he was elected a member of the first territorial legislature. Like other Free-State members, however, Ladd was expelled when the so-called "Bogus Legislature" met in July. At the first election in which Free-State men afterwards participated, in 1857, Ladd was elected a justice of the peace, an office which he still held, along with that of register of deeds and claims, at the time of the Lawrence massacre.

As Lawrence grew and and prospered, so also did the material possessions of Erastus Ladd. When the 1860 census was taken, he was credited with real estate valued at ten thousand dollars. When his name appeared in print, it was usually followed by "Esq.," and he owned a large house on Massachusetts street in the most fashionable part of town.

The Proslavery population of Kansas looked upon the town as a center of abolitionism and the particular stronghold of the hated Emigrant Aid Society. In 1856 occurred the so-called "sack of

4. Letter of E. D. Ladd to Seth Lewis, September 24, 1854, printed in ibid., October 11, 1854.
Lawrence,” and, in the years following, numerous other “incidents” which kept the town in a constant state of apprehension. Nor was Lawrence merely a passive victim. More than one antislavery raiding party had its origin in the town, and more than one Lawrence family possessed articles of dress, furniture, and livestock which could be characterized by but one word—loot. The blood of Bleeding Kansas was not shed altogether by one side.

On November 10, 1855, Erastus Ladd was married to Mary W. Tribou of Middleborough, Mass. Their only child, a son, died shortly after birth, and on January 22, 1857, Mrs. Ladd died of consumption. On October 24, 1858, Erastus Ladd was married to Eliza Jane Blackford. At the time of the Lawrence massacre there were three children of this latter union: Emma, Georgie, and Winnie.

As indicated in the letter to his father, Ladd returned to Lawrence shortly after the bushwhackers left. Within a few days, he and his family were able to set up housekeeping in three rooms of one of the houses that had escaped the torch. Shortly thereafter, however, Ladd became ill with what was described as a fever “owing to exposure.” Although he gradually recovered from the fever, his health was permanently damaged, and at the close of the war he retired to a farm near Lawrence. There he died on August 24, 1872, at the age of fifty-six. The following paragraph was contained in his obituary published in The Daily Kansas Tribune:

For the past few years, he has resided on a farm in Wakarusa township, respected and honored by all who knew him as one of the worthiest of the brave pioneers of freedom who established liberty and equal rights in Kansas. He was a worthy, intelligent, useful citizen, and his death will be lamented by all who knew him. He leaves a widow and several children to lament his loss, for whom the most earnest sympathy is felt by the entire community.5

II. THE LAWRENCE MASSACRE

DEAR FATHER:—

* * * It was five minutes past five o’clock, when I got up and went down stairs. I stepped out on the porch on the south side of my kitchen, and was standing there for a moment, when I heard, first, two or three scattering shots, followed immediately by a dozen or more in quick succession, in a south-easterly direction, but hidden from my view by houses. The shots were accompanied by cheers, or rather yells. In a few moments, as I stood looking, some three or

four negroes from the camp, which was some forty rods from where I stood, came rushing by, hallooing, "The secesh have come!" As I looked, the head of the column of fiends rushed down the street on which the camp was, full in my view, and commenced shooting down the boys in camp near by. There were twenty-five boys there at the time, of whom they shot down and killed nineteen. How the rest escaped I do not know. I estimated there were some two hundred of the devils. There were about three hundred altogether. I saw that, too truly, "the secesh had come!" I went to call Eliza, but she was already up. We commenced to get up and dress the children as fast as possible. We saw that every man was shot down at sight. When they had rode into the main street, and commenced their hellish work, they immediately broke into squads and rushed through all the streets, killing every man they saw, probably in order to prevent any concentration or organization on our part for defense. They rode up and down the streets seeking victims. As soon as all danger of opposition was over they commenced to rob and plunder the houses and barns, and fire them. Eliza at first insisted that I should stay with the family, which I proposed to do, at least for the time, but when she saw them shooting every man they found, she insisted that I should run and get out of town. I concluded, however, that it was better for me to stay until the first fury of the assault was passed; for, to be discovered in the street was certain death. I told her so, and remained. To this fact I probably owe my life.

When they came to plundering and burning, the streets were comparatively clear. When they were near my house, or along the street, I would go into my cellar; and when they were temporarily absent, I would come up and watch the progress of affairs from the windows or porches. The first fire I saw was a large barn, about one hundred feet from my house. They had taken the only horse in it, and then set it on fire. In the course of time it came our turn. I was in the cellar. A devil came to the door with a cocked revolver in his hand, and called Eliza out. He demanded if I was in the house. She told him I was not. He demanded her money, jewelry and arms. She gave him what she had. He then broke up some chairs, and tore up some books, piled them up in the dining room, and in the kitchen, and set them on fire. He was a perfect demon. She begged for five minutes time to get out some things. He would not give her a moment. I heard the flames crackling and roaring over my head. I expected, however, that I should be able to escape through the outside cellar door, which
I had fastened on the inside, after he should have left the house, and before I should suffer from the heat. He told Eliza if she put out the fire it would be a damned sight worse for her. He then went to the next house. Eliza got some water and put out the fire in the dining-room, and partially in the kitchen. I supposed she had done so altogether, but she, fearing if it was put out entirely that they would be there again, before I could get away, threw some paper on the kitchen fire, and let it burn.

When the fellow had gone, I came up from the cellar, took an observation, saw that the fellow was out of sight, in the next house, and that no one was passing on the street—although there were some in sight above and below, but they were not approaching, being otherwise engaged—took the children’s wagon, put Emma in it, and Georgie in her lap, took Winnie by the hand, and Eliza, a bundle of clothing for them and herself, and a change—a thin coat, vest, and pants—for me, in a pillow-slip, and we went boldly out into the street, crossed over it, went along the road out of town for about two miles, and were not disturbed. The road led out west, at right angles with the street. When we had gone a few rods, one of them crossed before us a few feet on another street, but he was walking his horse leisurely along, as though he was satisfied with what he had done. He had three or four muskets across the horn of his saddle, before him. He glanced at us, but said nothing, and I made no effort to attract his attention, I assure you. When we had gone about a mile, as we turned the corner of a fence, we saw two of their pickets some rods ahead of us. We turned to go in the opposite direction, and confronted two more that way. We turned back, and I told those with me—for there were at this time some ten or twelve women and children along—that I thought the first-mentioned were persons from the country, who had rode in so far to see what was going on, and we would go that way, as it was in the course of the place we were going to. As we approached them they turned and rode off towards some others, and left the road clear. I was told afterwards they were pickets.

Soon we passed along and out to our friends, Rev. Mr. Brown’s, of the Unitarian Church. Here we found a large number of persons already collected, among whom were several men, and as we were in full view of some six or seven horsemen who appeared to be pickets, we thought we had better disperse. So, leaving the women and children at the house, we scattered through the cornfield, and along a ravine in the rear of the house, and remained there secreted.
about an hour and a half, when word came that the devils had left
the town, or were leaving.

I then went back to town. I went away from my house hoping
that the devils would not go back to it again, after the fire was put
out, and so it would be saved, not knowing, till we had gone a long
ways, that we had left it burning. But I presume they would have
fired it again. Many houses were burnt after that, just as they
were leaving town. Many were set on fire several times, and the
women put them out, some of which were finally saved. I presume
half of the houses were saved by the women putting out the fires
after the devils had left them. Perhaps this is too large an estimate,
but a great many were thus saved, and among them some of our
best dwellings.

I will not attempt to describe the desolation which I saw on my
return to our town, which was just in the full tide of the greatest
prosperity it had ever seen. I could not describe it if I would.
I cannot do better than those have done who have written for
the papers, and still they have utterly failed. Many of our best
men were murdered. All, except one of our best blocks of buildings
have been consumed, a large portion of our town destroyed, and
all of it sacked and plundered. As to the amount of property
destroyed, the many horses and goods taken, &c., the papers have
informed you better than I can. Eliza and the children came in
towards night of that day, and, through the kindness of friends,
we have had a home, or rather several stopping places until yester-
day, when we moved into a part of a house. We have three small
rooms, blackened with smoke, and glass most all broken by the
heat, (for it was set on fire among the last, and put out after they
left the town) for which we pay nine dollars per month. By
buying, borrowing, and (not begging) donations, we have got a
few things to keep house with.

My office was saved in the only good block of buildings, not
destroyed. That block was on fire, and was put out after the
fiends had left. I have a great many small accounts on my dockets,
due me, but cannot collect much of them. My loss was from
$2,000 to $2,500 in my house and contents. My official business is
almost entirely suspended, as nearly all the liquor shops in town
are destroyed, and consequently there are no violations of law and
order. This is a great blessing, but it cuts off my principal source
of living. Civil suits are not brought on, as everybody has been
robbed, and there is no money to pay costs and judgments with.

I will mention one or two circumstances of that day that I
have omitted. I was frequently inquired for specially on that day by the devils, and I am informed they forced one of our men to point out my house to them. When they left town, one of them was cut off from the company and captured, about four miles east of town. After taking from him the money, said to be $1,000, and the plunder he had strapped to his saddle, they brought him to town to deliver him into the hands of the citizens, for summary punishment. When on the way here, he told his captors that he tried to kill me, and if a lady had not beckoned me in once, he should have done so. He had sworn vengeance against me before, because of some proceedings against him before me.

Now, father, why have we been so terribly punished? why so infinitely worse than any other place in all the history of this war? why beyond comparison and precedent, except in the war of the British and Sepoys, in India, or some of the wars with the savages in our own history? Our city has been a doomed city in the feelings and intentions of the rebels since 1854, when we came here. They have only awaited their opportunity. It has come, and they have had their revenge. Kansas was the first territory, and Lawrence the first place where this great strife and war between freedom and slavery took an active form—where this power of hell was first told, “Thus far, no farther, come.” As Lawrence was the representative of a principle in all that great revolution, so, as such representative, has the hellish hate of that infernal power been poured out upon her devoted head, and she feels to rejoice that she is counted worthy to receive such a baptism of blood, and fire, and desolation.

Quantrrell said here, after he had satiated his hate and revenge, the he was now “ready to die.” A universal shout will go up from every part of slavedom, and from the infernal regions, when this event shall have reached their ears.

Now what is the duty of the country, of the freedom-loving portion of the country, in this case? *Lawrence should never be permitted to be blotted out.* Her noble and lamented dead cannot be restored, but their memories can be cherished and honored, and her waste places can be built up and restored. Her pecuniary losses should be made up to her in full;—her other and more serious losses, and her sad and harrowing experiences should suffice for her share. Who would voluntarily endure the latter for all that was lost in the former? Good God! the recollection of it is overwhelming!

Our neighboring cities are doing well. Leavenworth has contributed some $15,000, Kansas City from $3,000 to $5,000, Atchison
a large amount, which has come here in clothing and provisions for the destitute—85 widows, and 240 orphans! only think of it, and other sufferers—and St. Louis and Chicago are taking hold, and other places will do so. But, as I said before, the relief of suffering and distress is not all the country owes to Lawrence. It should make up every farthing of the losses incurred in this raid. Nothing less will satisfy justice, and even then its indebtedness to Lawrence will scarcely have begun to be liquidated.

Should Marshall do her share in paying this just debt, I can assure you that we have a committee, (of whom I do not happen to be one, and hence can speak freely) who will see that your wishes are strictly and honestly carried out.

* * *

Yours &c.

Erastus.

[Editor's Note: The asterisks at the beginning and the end of this letter have been copied as they appear in the newspaper. They were doubtless used to show omissions of personal matters. This letter appeared in the Marshall (Mich.) Statesman of September 16, 1863.]