

The Kansas “Battle of the Spurs”

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John Brown, was an energetic, direct-action type of Kansas abolitionist who made his mark in Kansas - and in history - with such actions as the “Potawatomie Massacre” in which five settlers of supposed Missouri origins, but owning property and living in Kansas, were hacked to death by Brown and his band. Brown was never accused of being of the “milk toast” variety of abolitionist, nor of advocating anything short of immediate and complete freedom for the enslaved blacks - at any cost.

In December 1858 Brown and his band made a foray into Missouri and stole or liberated 11 slaves. Slave stealing was a federal crime. Brown and his cargo traveled along the Underground Railroad to Topeka and then North along the old *Lane Trail* through Northeast Kansas toward anticipated freedom.

By January 29, 1859 Brown and his passengers had progressed to a point on Straight Creek, near Holton in present day Jackson County, Kansas, where they were slowed by the flood-creek. Brown paused for about two days at Fullers Station near Holton, Kansas. In the meantime a federal posse, led by Deputy U.S. Marshall John P. Wood of Lecompton, camped on the other side of Straight Creek and waited for Brown and his company to cross. Brown was reinforced by several members of a Topeka Church and a handful of residents of nearby Holton. The federal posse was similarly reinforced, and grew to about 40 armed men.

On January 31, 1859 Brown led a charge across the still-flooded Straight Creek and stampeded the federal posse. Only four members of the posse remained around long enough to be captured by Brown. Although they undoubtedly feared for their lives, they were not executed. Not a shot was fired. Brown and his party, now including a baby boy born along the way, continued north and probably entered Nebraska at Pony Creek near the old town of Albany, Kansas in Nemaha County, Kansas.

The name “Battle of the Spurs” for this confrontation is said to have been derisively applied by an eastern newspaperman because of its similarity to the more famous “Battle of the Spurs of 1302,” in which the “Burghers” of Courtrai surprised and bested the Knighthood of France and captured the spurs of 4,000 Knights.

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