

## The Stone-Southwood Incident

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On December 12, 1857 members of the “Preacher” Southwood family threatened and/or physically assaulted the wife of William Stone at a well in Linn County, Kansas Territory (K.T.). One story has Mrs. Stone attacked by Mrs. Southwood at the well, who knocked her down with a handspike and dangerously beat her. Another account says the Reverend Southwood threatened Mrs. Stone in some manner. Perhaps there were several incidents.

The disputes between the two families were part of series of land claim confrontations in southeast Kansas Territory. The Stone family, usually identified as Free Staters, had occupied the land in question in 1856. There they had built a house, began farming and even dug a good well. In September, 1856 the Stone family was one of several settlers run out of southeast Kansas Territory by what became known as the Clarke Raids, under the direction of G. W. Clarke. On their exodus, some five miles into Missouri, Stone had been detained by persons he identified as Border Ruffians and forced to sign papers giving up his claim, crops and other property in Kansas Territory.

G.W. Clarke was, in 1857, the Registrar of the United States Land Office in Kansas Territory, although he did so under the name of William H. Doak because he was under possible indictment for the murder of Thomas Barber at Lawrence, Kansas Territory in 1856.

In June, 1857 the Stone family returned to their claim in Linn County to find it occupied by the Southwood family. The Reverend Southwood now claimed the land as result of the paperwork apparently executed by Stone on his previous departure from Kansas Territory. Stone was unable to force Southwood out of the house he had built, so Free State neighbors constructed a second house on the claim. An agreement was reached to share the well but, as we have seen, it became an uneasy situation.

After the incident or incidents at the well, the local Free Staters formed the “Wide-Awake Society” to physically protect the Stone family. They also formed an extralegal “Squatters Court” to adjudicate their claims. The “Wide-Awakes” apparently had little faith in the Territorial Legislature or its legal machinery. An armed party of pro-slavery men arrived from Ft. Scott to protect the Southwood interests, but they only stayed a short time. The Southwood family was quickly and finally ousted. The Stone family moved back into house they had originally constructed. They no longer had to share the well.

At least one member of the Southwood family was charged in the “Squatter Court” with the assault on Mrs. William Stone. The Reverend Mrs. Southwood made complaint at Fort Scott against the men convening the “Squatters Court,” and succeeded in having them indicted for violations of the Rebellion Act as enacted by the Kansas Territorial Legislature.

The Stone-Southwood incident marked the beginning of organized and armed resistance by Free Staters to the forces of the Kansas Territorial Legislature. James Montgomery, now in his ascendancy as a power in Kansas, said of the Stone-Southwood incident that it “may be considered as the commencement of a new era in the history of southern Kansas, ending in the expulsion of nearly all of the violent pro-slavery men in the troubled districts.”