

The Morgan Walker Affair

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Early in December 1860, six heavily-armed residents of Lawrence, Kansas Territory walked and rode into Jackson County, Missouri on a mission to free the 30 slaves of Morgan Walker. Walker was a wealthy landowner of 2,000 acres just north of the tiny hamlet of Blue Springs, Missouri. The Kansans also planned to relieve Walker of a considerable supply of gold and his 100 horses and mules.

This Kansas expedition was led by William Clarke Quantrill (an ex-school teacher originally from Canal Dover, Ohio) and John Dean (an experienced slave stealer). They were joined by four young Quakers only recently relocated to Kansas from the abolitionist stronghold of Springdale, Iowa. They were Charles Ball, Edwin Morrison, C. T. Lipsey and Albert Southwick. Unbeknownst to the others, Quantrill had, recently and secretly, been indicted for arson and kidnapping after a barn was accidentally burned down as an escaped slave was recaptured for the purpose of selling him back into slavery in Missouri.

The Kansas party hid out in the woods near the Walker plantation. Quantrill secretly made arrangements with members of the Walker family to lead his traveling companions into an ambush if he was not harmed.

The Morgan Walker homestead was attacked by the Kansas raiders on the evening of December 10, 1860. The Walker family was reinforced by several of their neighbors armed with double-barreled shotguns and concealed in outbuildings and around the porch. Morgan Walker felt compelled to argue with the Kansans that any of his slaves who did not wish to be liberated should not be forced to go along, but his arguments were brushed aside. Quantrill stayed with the Walker family to “guard” them and, as the other Kansas raiders stepped off the porch, they were fired upon by the neighbors. Morrison was killed in the front yard with some 19 wounds to his body. Dean and Southwick escaped in the wagon in which they had planned to carry the liberated slaves.

Lipsey was badly shot in the thigh and drug off into the woods by Ball.

The next morning local residents gathered at the Walker house to view the dead Morrison and to discuss the situation. Quantrill was vigorously questioned about his role in the affair, and there was considerable sentiment that he should be shot or hung. Quantrill was finally lodged in the Jackson County Jail for his own safety. He was released the same evening after intervention by the Walker family.

Two days after the attack, a slave noticed Ball and the seriously-injured Lipsey in a thicket on a neighboring farm. Ball begged the slave not to reveal their whereabouts, but the slave did. A posse of neighbors was summoned. Ball took off running as he heard the posse approaching and was felled at long range by a rifle shot fired by Morgan Walker. Quantrill rushed in and silenced the prostrate and delirious Lipsey forever by placing his revolver in Lipsey’s mouth and firing.

The actions at and near the Morgan Walker farm had several long-standing legacies. Slave stealing in the counties along the Missouri-Kansas border became much less popular and any such transgression was treated much more harshly. Most improbably, William Clarke Quantrill evolves eventually into the very effective leader of the Jackson County, Missouri guerrillas and at least the nominal head of the western Missouri guerrillas.

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