

Women in the Wakarusa War

*Harold Dellinger, Special Projects Editor
WindingRiver.com*

Women were very active in the abolitionist movement and, despite the dangers, among the earliest New England Emigrant Aid Company settlers to Kansas Territory. Females were also an important part of the defense of Lawrence during the Wakarusa War. Many spent hours making cartridges and some even took up revolver practice alongside their husbands.

A blockade of Lawrence, during the Wakarusa War, by troops from Missouri resulted in a shortage of supplies and ammunition. There were several unsuccessful attempts to “run the blockade,” which resulted in the deaths of several male would-be blockade runners. Almost nobody was successful until, on the day of December 6, 1855, when Mrs. George Brown (wife of the editor of the “Herald of Freedom”) and Mrs. Sam Wood set out from Lawrence in a horse and buggy to retrieve the needed supplies that were hidden on a land claim some 10 miles south of Lawrence. The supplies they were seeking included powder kegs, cartridges, bullet molds, gun wipes and bars of lead.

Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Wood encountered no trouble on their way to the land claim. When the supplies were located, they poured the contents of the powder kegs into pillow slips and tied them around their waists and elsewhere on their person. The caps, cartridges, bullet molds and gun wipes were placed into their pockets, sleeves and dress waists and some were sewed into their quilted petticoats. The bars of lead were stood up in their stockings. The women then had to be lifted back into their buggy for the return trip to Lawrence.

The women were stopped by the Missouri troops on their way back to Lawrence but were not searched or even detained. The polite Missourians even apologized for disturbing the ladies.

The women arrived back at Lawrence about nightfall and, of course, had to be lifted back out of their buggy. One of their fellow defenders observed that the ladies “were swelled out awful” and wondered if bustles had returned to fashion.

One writer, Issac Goodnow, characterized the women’s successful mission as a “most determined heroism.” As it was.

Return to www.WindingRiver.com

Return to <http://www.windingriver.com/CivilWar2011/CW2011.htm>