

Western Hotel Incident-Background Material

After the Battle of Paint Creek, Montgomery returned to Linn County where he came in conflict with Charles Hamelton, brother to the aforementioned George Hamelton. Charles Hamelton had taken up residence near Trading Post, where he became a leader of the radical proslavery men in his neighborhood. Hamelton swore out threats against free state settlers and began compiling a list of men that he wanted dead.

Montgomery was apprised of the threat and began driving out pro slavery settlers from Linn County, raiding their farms in the process. Montgomery threatened to kill Hamelton at his house, but U.S. troops on their way to Fort Scott dispersed Montgomery's men. Hamelton left Kansas but awaited the moment of opportunity to return and exact his revenge. That opportunity arose when Montgomery and his men turned their attentions toward counties further north. With Montgomery temporarily out of the way, Hamelton crossed back into Kansas to carry out his plans of carnage.

Marais des Cygnes Massacre

The Marais des Cygnes Massacre occurred on the 19th of May 1858. According to one source "it was one of the most deliberate, inexcusable and atrocious massacres recorded in the annals of history."

"While the people of Linn County were quietly planting corn and unsuspecting of danger, a band of thirty Missourians, under command of Capt. Charles A. Hamilton slipped into Kansas. They arrived at Trading Post in the morning and then set out on the road back toward Missouri, capturing eleven free-state men along the way. None of these men was armed, and it was said that none had taken part in the fighting. Most were former neighbors of Hamilton and had no thought that he meant to do them serious harm. However, they were hurried along and into a defile surrounded by the mounds that characterize the area. There they were herded into line, and Hamilton's men formed another line on the side of the ravine.

Hamilton's men fired. Five of the men were killed, five were injured and one escaped injury by playing dead.

All the men who were captured were peaceable, conservative citizens, who had from design ever since they came into the Territory, held themselves aloof from participation in the troubles upon either side, hoping thereby to insure their safety by not incurring the displeasure of either party. The sequel proved the vanity of their hopes.

Hamilton and his gang departed swiftly for Missouri. Only one of them paid the official penalty for the crime; William Griffith of Bates County, Missouri, was arrested in the spring of 1863 and hanged October 30. Hamilton returned to Georgia, where he died in 1880.

Intense excitement followed the massacre. The nation was horrified, and John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a poem on the murder, "Le Marais du Cygne," which appeared in the September 1858 Atlantic Monthly.

A student reads a portion of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre poem.

Trouble in Fort Scott

Locally, wrathful indignation accompanied feelings of shock. Warrants were sworn out for Hamelton's and Montgomery's arrest. Many felt that Montgomery was as much to blame for the massacre as Hamelton.

However, Montgomery had the support of the people. Montgomery convinced Deputy Marshal Samuel Walker, one of the officers sent to arrest him, that instead of arresting him, that he should obtain writs for the arrest of three citizens of Fort Scott. According to Montgomery, these three: G.W. Clarke, B.F. Hill, and Doctor Carter had been coconspirators in the Marais des Cygnes Massacre.

Upon his arrival at Fort Scott, Walker served his writs on Carter and Clarke (*Hill had left town*). Carter and Clarke were placed in the custody of the Deputy Marshal at Fort Scott, who in turn also served a writ on Montgomery. Walker agreed to arrest Montgomery if Montgomery could be tried in LeCompton. Soon after their departure from Fort Scott, Walker received word that Clarke and Carter had been released without examination. Walker in turn, released Montgomery, telling him he could stay and fight it out.

Montgomery must have taken Walker at his word, because on June 6, Montgomery and his men swooped down on the town of Fort Scott and attempted to set fire to the Western Hotel. (*The Western Hotel was a headquarters of the proslavery movement in Fort Scott and it was rumored that the Marais des Cygnes Massacre had been plotted there.*) Using a wagon filled with straw, Montgomery's men set it ablaze and pushed it up against the hotel. When men came to fight the fire, Montgomery's men fired at them. It was also reported that several shots were fired into the homes of the citizens with two shots hitting the home of Epaphroditus Ransom, the receiver of the land office. The hotel was saved, though without too much damage. No one was actually injured, but the incident heightened the general sense of fear that enveloped the town of Fort Scott in the summer of 1858.

Western Hotel Incident-Narration

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Western Hotel-Historic Document

"Le Marais du Cygne"

By John Greenleaf Whittier

A BLUSH as of roses

Where rose never grew!

Great drops on the bunch-grass,

But not of the dew!

A taint in the sweet air

For wild bees to shun!

A stain that shall never

Bleach out in the sun!

--

Back, steed of the prairies!

Sweet song-bird, fly back!

Wheel hither, bald vulture!

Gray wolf, call thy pack!
The foul human vultures
Have feasted and fled;
The wolves of the Border
Have crept from the dead

--

Not in vain on the dial
The shade moves along
To point the great contrasts
Of right and wrong;
Free homes and free altars
And fields of ripe food;
The reeds of the Swan's Marsh,
Whose bloom is of blood.

--

On the lintels of Kansas
That blood shall not dry;
Henceforth the Bad Angel
Shall harmless go by;
Henceforth to the sunset,
Unchecked on her way,
Shall Liberty follow

Cast of Characters-Instructions for Placement-Props Needed

Western Hotel Incident

Setting

The setting for this scenario is the Free State Hotel although the actual incident would have taken place at the Western Hotel across the parade ground. We are using some poetic license here for the purposes of the program. Be sure to mention that the Free State Hotel is not the original location of this incident in your narration.

Cast of Characters

- James Montgomery-Stands behind raiders with wagon looking towards hotel-Wears hat.
- Raiders 1 and 2-.Pushing cart of hay up against hotel. Stands on right side of hotel/officers' quarters facing north with cart –Both wear hats, raider two carries log as if carrying a torch.
- Raider 3 –Carries gun and is stationed in front of hotel facing toward hotel with gun raised as if firing toward occupants of hotel-Gun and hat
- E. Ransom –Standing up on porch of hotel in night cap facing parade ground-Night Cap
- Townsperson-Coming to fight fire, walking in from north side of hotel with wooden bucket-Wears hat and carries wooden bucket.
- Raider 4-Stands back about 100 feet from northwest side of hotel with gun raised as if firing toward person attempting to fight fire.-Has gun and hat.
- Townsperson 2-Also fighting fire, has wooden bucket-Bucket and hat
- Raiders 5-8 situated with guns pointed to various buildings in town of Fort Scott.-Wear guns and hats.

Reader

- Whittier- A student reads portions of the poem written by Whittier about the Marais des Cygnes Massacre.

Props Needed

- Nine Civilian Hats
- Three Night Caps
- Nine Guns
- Wooden Wheelbarrow
- Two Wooden Buckets

Materials Needed

- Historic Document
- Placement Map
- Narration