

The Battle of Hickory Point by Topeka artist Samuel J. Reader depicts General James Henry Lane, on horseback, directing his troops during the September 1856 engagement in Jefferson County.

---

# JAMES H. LANE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE KANSAS JAYHAWK

*by Frank Baron*

The jayhawk is most widely known today as the mascot representing the University of Kansas and its sports teams, but a jayhawk or jayhawker is also often synonymous with the Kansan. Although there are frequent reminders of a longstanding rivalry between the states of Kansas and Missouri, mostly expressed these days on the court or gridiron, how that once political and martial rivalry originally shaped the features of the jayhawk is little known. The claim that a bird of that name actually existed has never been taken seriously. In response to an inquiry about the jayhawk of Ireland, a Dublin librarian suggested that the idea of such a bird might be the product of “an inventive turn of mind.” Another explanation suggests the earliest jayhawkers were gold seekers from Galesburg, Illinois, bound overland for California, who took on the name jayhawkers after observing hawks that, while hunting for mice and other small prey, were forced out of the way by jealous and vicious jays.<sup>1</sup> To truly appreciate the actual historical layers beneath today’s mascot, however, it is necessary to consider Kansas territorial history. The jayhawk emerged first at the time of the explosive guerilla warfare in the 1850s and became widely recognized in the early battles of the Civil War. The reconstruction of the mythical bird’s beginnings in Kansas reflects a wave of radicalism, conflict, and controversy that caught the attention of the entire nation.

---

Frank Baron is professor of German and director of the Max Kade Center for German-American Studies at the University of Kansas. His publications have treated the origins of the Faust legend, the artistic and literary achievements of Albert Bloch, the impact of the Vrba-Wetzler Auschwitz report, and the political significance of German immigration to Kansas.

1. The relevance of a concomitant existence of hawks and jays to the image of the Kansas jayhawk has not been established. Kirke Mechem, *The Mythical Jayhawk* (Topeka, Kans.: Kansas State Historical Society, 1944), 3; William A. Lyman, “Origin of the Name ‘Jayhawker,’ and How It Came to Be Applied to the People of Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Collections, 1915–1918* 14 (1918): 203–7; Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopaedia of State History. Two Volumes* (Chicago: Standard Publishing Co., 1912), 2:21; Richard B. Sheridan, “The Historic Jayhawkers and the Mythical Jayhawk,” in *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict and Community*, ed. Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins (Lawrence: University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001), 41–52. Sheridan failed to explain precisely when, how, and why the Jayhawk became a symbol of a mission in the border wars of Kansas and Missouri.

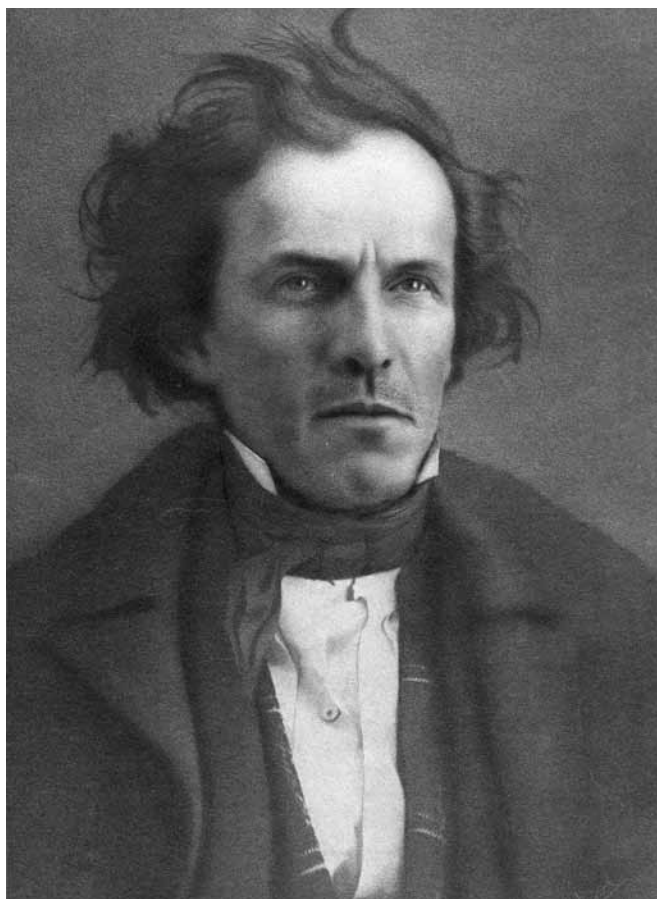
Without James H. Lane, one of the most prominent leaders of the movement to free Kansas and, in turn, the nation from slavery, the legendary bird might not have gained its current status as mascot and symbol. Lane's fame reached beyond any individual effort or action; he became the personification of the free-state movement through all its phases. Before arriving in Kansas Territory in 1855, Lane had practiced law in his native Indiana, volunteered for the Mexican War, served as a member of the Indiana State Legislature and as lieutenant governor, and won a seat in the United States Congress. After his arrival, Lane became a legendary leader contributing to the defeat of the proslavery forces and, as historian Stephen Z. Starr claimed, "to an important degree the history of the state is an extension of the biography of Lane."<sup>2</sup>

But Lane was also controversial, and on this Kansans could be divided into two camps: those for and those against the man and his politics. Lane waged his fight against slavery in very stark terms and his cause was colored by his sometimes pugnacious personality. He was a powerful magnet that drew the actions of his fellow fighters into his orbit, and the identification of his soldiers as jayhawkers was no exception. Because of the radicalism and the fierce antagonisms he provoked, naming someone a jayhawk came to serve as a mark of enthusiastic approval or intensive opposition. At first Lane engaged in driving the proslavery settlers out of Kansas, and in the 1860s he carried the fight against slavery into Missouri. The early story of the jayhawk reflects Lane's politics and the military actions of his soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

The influential role Lane played in shaping the jayhawk image comes to light in the autobiography of August Bondi, a veteran of the 1848 revolution in Vienna, who came to Kansas in 1855. Like other German revolutionaries who settled in the state at this time, including C. F. Kob, Charles Leonhardt, and Charles Kaiser, Bondi took a radical position in the slavery

2. Stephen Z. Starr, *Jennison's Jayhawkers: A Civil War Cavalry Regiment and Its Commander* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 11.

3. One of Lane's most consistent opponents was Charles Robinson, the first governor of Kansas. Robinson thought that the best way to keep Kansas safe from attack from Missouri was to relieve Lane of his military duties. *The Herald of Freedom* was also on the side against Lane. In contrast, John Speer, editor of the *Lawrence Republican*, considered him to be the liberator of Kansas. Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Donald L. Gilmore, *Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2008), 133; John Speer, *Life of Gen. James H. Lane, "The Liberator of Kansas"* (Garden City, Kans.: John Speer, 1896); Starr, *Jennison's Jayhawkers*, 14.



James H. Lane ended his political career as a U.S. Senator, but the "Grim Chieftain" gained notoriety as a fiery orator and pugnacious political and military leader in Bleeding Kansas. Lane's fame reached beyond any individual effort or action; he became the personification of the free-state movement through all its phases, and without him the legendary Jayhawk might not have gained its current status as mascot and symbol.

question. Bondi joined John Brown's fighters against the Border Ruffians. His autobiography, which is a firsthand account of the battles of Osawatimie and Black Jack, also describes the circumstances of the jayhawk's birth.<sup>4</sup>

The occasion was a meeting of the antislavery companies of James Montgomery, Charles R. "Doc" Jennison, and Oliver P. Bayne with General James H. Lane. If anyone in Kansas at this time could create the ideal conditions to promote a popular symbol, it was Lane. He was a flamboyant and powerful speaker. His oratory had a wild character. When Lane arrived in southeastern Kansas in December 1857 to protect free-state settlers with military force, Bondi observed him addressing

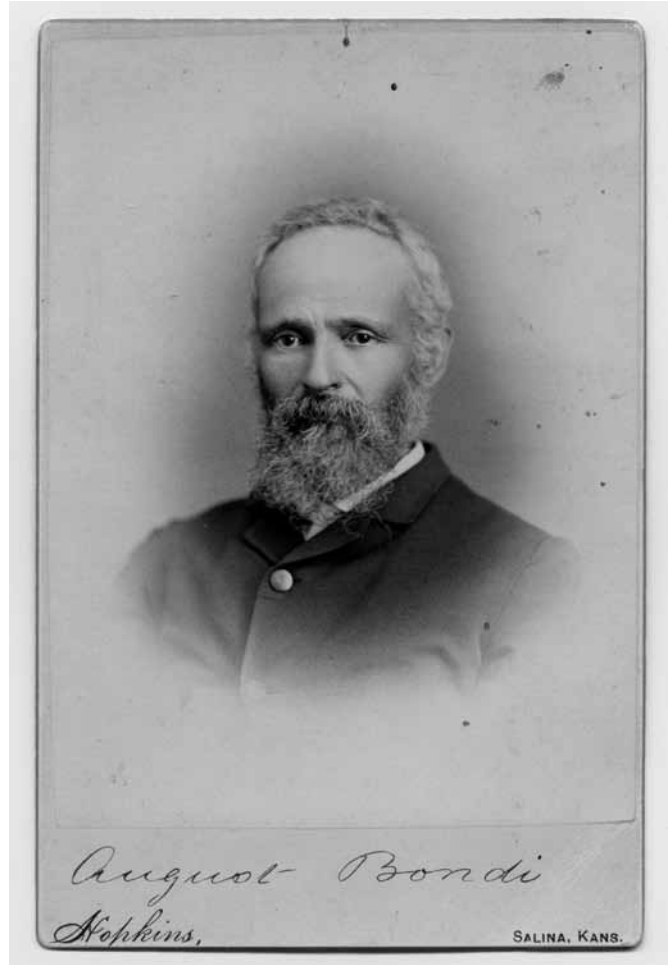
4. August Bondi, *Autobiography* (Galesberg, Ill.: Wagoner Printing Co., 1911), 33-34, 68.

a group of volunteer soldiers and was impressed. At Sugar Mound (later Mound City) in Linn County, Lane asked his audience to take on the role of jayhawks. Bondi described Lane's midnight appeal to his troops, when the general

enrolled all present (about 150) as the first members of the Kansas Jayhawkers. He explained the new name in this wise: As the Irish Jayhawk with a shrill cry announces his presence to his victims, so must you notify the pro-slavery hell-hounds to clear out or vengeance will overtake them. Jayhawks, remember, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," but we are his agents. So originated the name, Jayhawks (corrupted Jayhawkers), afterwards applied indiscriminately to all Kansas troops. Of all the 150 in and around the school house that night I am the only survivor.<sup>5</sup>

Lane's focus was military and political. During the first phase of settlements in Kansas the proslavery population held a distinct advantage. With the aid of an influx of temporary incursions from Missouri and fraudulent voting, it established a government in March 1855 that favored slavery. This victory of the pro-slavery party was short-lived. Immigration from Northern states began to turn the tide, and Lane could command the "pro-slavery hell-hounds to clear out." By early January 1858, the free-state population won a decisive victory at the polls. Lane's message to his men was to punish and eject those who had attempted to impose slavery on Kansas illegally. The mission for the jayhawks was loud and clear.

5. On this December 14 address see *ibid.*; Frank Baron, ed., "Excerpts from the Autobiography of August Bondi," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 40 (2005): 87–195, available online at [http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi\\_and\\_index.pdf](http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi_and_index.pdf); see also Todd Mildfelt, *The Secret Danites: Kansas' First Jayhawkers* (Richmond, Kans.: Todd Mildfelt Publishing, 2003), 24–27, 72; G. Murlin Welch, *Border Warfare in Southeastern Kansas, 1856–1859* (Pleasanton, Kans.: Linn County Publishers, 1977), 46; James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1942), 390–1, 678–79, 730. The presence of the Free-State militia at Sugar Mound (Mound City) is confirmed for the dates December 17 to 24, 1857. It is not certain on which date Lane spoke to the volunteers. There is no doubt, however, that Bondi's date of December 14 is too early. The eighteenth is the earliest date that may be considered. Given that it was written twenty-five years after the events described, the accuracy of details such as dates in Bondi's autobiography has been questioned, but his narration is generally accurate. Malin has been Bondi's most prominent critic, but Malin was harshly distrustful of all followers of John Brown.



A Jewish veteran of the 1848 revolution in Vienna, Austria, who reached Kansas Territory in 1855, August Bondi took a radical position on the slavery question. Bondi rode with John Brown, and his autobiography, which offers a firsthand account of the battles of Osawatimie and Black Jack, describes the circumstances of the jayhawk's birth and the influential role Lane played in shaping the jayhawk image. This portrait of Bondi was made in Salina, where he lived and worked from 1866 until his death in 1907.

Another narrative of the jayhawk's origins appears, at first glance, to compete with Bondi's recollections. In the late 1850s a young man named Patrick Devlin asserted that a bird called the jayhawk, renowned for ruthlessly attacking and then foraging off its enemies, existed in Ireland. A most detailed account about the circumstances of that claim and its relevance to Kansas affairs was recorded by T. F. Robley, who moved from Iowa to Linn County, Kansas, in 1859 and to Fort Scott, Bourbon County, in 1865. A lawyer and later a state legislator, Robley related events in his history of Bourbon County

that he learned directly from those who experienced them. He proved an able historian, writing precise narratives that included verifiable names and places.<sup>6</sup>

According to Robley, Devlin was involved in a campaign against proslavery settlers in Kansas. He took part in an attack planned and directed against Van Zumwalt, said to have perpetrated several murders of free-state men. The assault against the Zumwalt home on the Little Osage River, close to the boundary between Linn and Bourbon counties, took place on February 28, 1858. This event provides an early date in the chronology of the jayhawk. Zumwalt received a serious wound and surrendered. Although some wanted to kill the “varmin” (*sic*), as Pat Devlin called him, the troops practiced restraint, and “Doc” Jennison, who had medical experience, even treated the victim’s wound.<sup>7</sup> Zumwalt survived but was ordered to leave the state in twenty-four hours. Robley’s narrative about Devlin and the jayhawk follows immediately upon his description of the Zumwalt venture.

On this trip the word Jayhawker originated. Jennison had with him a regular all-around thief named Pat Devlin. After the boys went into camp north of the Osage, the next morning after visiting Van Zumwalt, they noticed Pat coming in riding a yellow mule loaded down with all sorts of plunder. In front of him were hanging from the horn of the saddle, a big turkey, three or four chickens and a string of red peppers, behind him a 50-pound shoat, a sheep-skin, a pair of boots and a bag of potatoes. “Hello, Pat, where have you been?” asked Doc.

“O’ive been over till Eph. Kepley’s a-jayhawking.”

“Jayhawking? What in thunder do you mean? What kind of hawking is that?” said Doc.

“Well, sor, in ould Oireland we have a birud we call the jayhawk, that whin it catches

another birud it takes deloight in bullyragin the loife out ov it, like a cat does a mouse, and, be jasus, Oi bethot me Oi was in about thot same business mesilf. You call it ‘foraging off the enemy,’ but, begobs, O’ill call it jayhawking.”

“All right,” laughed Jennison. “We’ll call it ‘Jayhawking’ from this on.”<sup>8</sup>

Robley’s precise rendering of names and retention of Devlin’s Irish voice patterns suggest that his recollection may be a bit closer to the original event than others. Especially noteworthy is the reference to a specific victim of Devlin’s “jayhawking,” Eph[raim] Kepley. Born in North Carolina, Kepley built the first cabin on the Little Osage River in 1854. The 1859 Kansas territorial census enumerated him as a resident of Timber Hill Township in Bourbon County.<sup>9</sup>

According to this report, Devlin and Jennison became the coauthors of the new jayhawker identity and created the verb *jayhawking*, or “foraging off the enemy,” that is, stealing property from the proslavery population. Like Lane, Jennison’s name became closely associated with the early history of jayhawking. Jennison, who welcomed the designation, led forays into Missouri during which he encouraged his followers “to pillage to their hearts’ content and to destroy what they could not carry away.”<sup>10</sup> For many in Missouri he became Jennison *the* jayhawker.

Robley closed his story about Devlin by adding information that seems consistent with this particular jayhawker’s roguish character. Devlin, he wrote, claimed property on the Osage River and built the foundation for a cabin. But his practice of jayhawking reportedly prevented him from acquiring the legal rights to the property. Because of his absence from the property, he eventually forfeited his claim.<sup>11</sup>

8. Robley, *History of Bourbon County Kansas*, 95; Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:878. Another version of the Devlin anecdote is found in William Anselm Mitchell, *Linn County, Kansas: A History* (Kansas City, Kans.: Campbell-Gates, 1928), 22; see also Daniel W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas: 1541–1885* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1875), 615–16; Starr, *Jennison’s Jayhawkers*, 29. Although Wilder refers vaguely to the fact that this explanation was “first published by McReynolds in 1858 or 1859,” his version of the text actually agrees precisely with one published in James Hanway’s article on “Osawatomie” in *Kansas Magazine* 3 (1873): 553. In light of reports by Bondi, Leonhardt, and Robley about the sequence of events, the date of 1856 for Devlin’s jayhawking is probably not accurate. Jennison, referred to in the conversation with Devlin, came to Kansas only in 1857.

9. Kansas Territorial Census 1859, Bourbon County.

10. Starr, *Jennison’s Jayhawkers*, 27–32, quotation 31.

11. For more details, see Robley, *History of Bourbon County Kansas*, 96.

6. T. F. Robley, *History of Bourbon County Kansas to the Close of 1865* (Fort Scott, Kans.: The Monitory Book & Printing Co., 1894), 94–95; William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: Andreas, 1883), 2:1086.

7. Frank Baron, “German Republicans and Radicals in the Struggle for a Slave-Free Kansas: Charles F. Kob and August Bondi,” *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 40 (2005): 3–26; Mildfelt, *The Secret Danites*, 34–35; J. N. Holloway, *History of Kansas from the First Exploration of the Mississippi Valley to Its Admission into the Union* (Lafayette, Ind.: James, Emmons & Co., 1868), 512; Welch, *Border Warfare in Southeastern Kansas*, 64.



Charles R. "Doc" Jennison was still in his early twenties when he reached Kansas Territory and settled at Osawatomie and then Mound City. According to one account, Jennison and a young Irish immigrant, Patrick Devlin, coauthored the new jayhawker identity and created the verb jayhawking, which came to mean "foraging off the enemy" or stealing property from the proslavery population on both sides of the border. Like Lane, Jennison's name became closely associated with the early history of jayhawking, and for many in Missouri he became Jennison, the jayhawker.

Even if Robley gave credit to Devlin for originating the term jayhawking, his low opinion of Devlin reflects his strong feelings against Devlin's actions and their justification. He considered jayhawking to be a purely criminal activity, devoid of ideals. Devlin and Jennison represented an extremist wing that contributed to a backlash against the entire range of such attacks. In early December, Sheriff Calvin C. McDaniel of Linn County undertook to capture the jayhawks, but instead Jennison

and Devlin captured him. On December 24, 1858, J. J. Williams, U.S. District Judge of the Territory of Kansas, sent out a warrant for the arrest of numerous jayhawks. They had to "answer the crime of murder and robbery with which they are charged." The many names listed included James Montgomery, Charles Jennison, Pat Devlin, and John Brown.<sup>12</sup>

The discovery of gold in Colorado in 1858 caused hundreds of Kansas citizens to travel to Pike's Peak in the hope of great fortune. In the eyes of George W. Brown, the editor of the Lawrence *Herald of Freedom*, the discovery was a divine gift in the sense that it might help to get rid of the jayhawkers. Brown hoped for tranquility, which he thought could be achieved if the young men who had engaged in jayhawking decided to go to Pike's Peak, "thus enabling the honest settlers in that region to recuperate." For Brown the enemies in this case were the jayhawkers, against whom the settlers had to defend themselves, not proslavery intruders. Devlin, one of the earliest, self-proclaimed jayhawkers, answered Brown's hope for some peace, dying as he did in Colorado, searching for gold.<sup>13</sup>

**R**obley believed that his account explained the origins of the jayhawk. If his version prevails, the jayhawker's early history is that of a thief, a reckless adventurer who took advantage of the political strife in Kansas. In this origin story Jennison represents a fanatical opposition to the proslavery population in Kansas; his reputation suffers by being linked to the unscrupulous Devlin and he shared a role in creating the image of the jayhawk as a thief. One may ask, however, whether Robley's account is, in fact, reliable.

Indeed, for the sake of historical precision, it is necessary to compare and evaluate both the narratives of Bondi and Robley. The dates in question are surprisingly close to each other: December 14, 1857, in Bondi's account versus February 29, 1858, in Robley's. In both

12. Welch, *Border Warfare in Southeastern Kansas*, 88, 181–83, 200–1.

13. *Herald of Freedom*, February 26, 1859; Calvin W. Gower, "Kansas Territory and the Pike's Peak Gold Rush" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1959), 259; Calvin W. Gower, "Gold Fever in Kansas Territory: Migration to the Pike's Peak Gold Fields, 1858–1860," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1973): 58–74; Hanway, "Osawatomie," 553; Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:878. Cutler gives the date of Devlin's death as 1860, but James Hanway, who knew him personally, supplies a later date. Hanway writes: "Pat Devlin was killed in the fall of the year 1869, in Aurora, Colorado Territory. He was on a drunken spree, and while riding through the streets, fired into the window of a house on Ferry Street. As he was returning, he was shot by the owner of the house and fell dead."



The Civil War helped legitimize jayhawking—for a short time at least, the “crime” of jayhawking had the potential to become a virtue of war—and caused Jennison to focus his efforts on the pro-secessionist elements of Missouri. Kansas Governor Charles Robinson commissioned Jennison captain of the Mound City Guards on February 19, 1861, and on September 4, 1861, he was commissioned lieutenant colonel of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry Regiment, headquartered at Kansas City and soon widely known as “Jennison’s Jayhawkers.” This 1864 depiction of a jayhawker raid, seen from the perspective of those who suffered it, shows Jennison’s men pillaging a Missouri town and making off with its spoils. Drawing by Adalbert Volck courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

cases the events are set near today’s Mound City. The texts display other striking similarities. Both versions agree about the nature of the bird in question: it is of Irish origin, and it kills and destroys its prey, the enemy, namely the proslavery intruders. The appearance of this distinctive common element is an unlikely coincidence that raises questions about how and why Lane invoked the imaginary bird to support his antislavery military campaign. Although Bondi does not mention Devlin in his account of Lane’s coining the term, he does mention Jennison and Montgomery, with whom Devlin was closely associated. Even if the documentation for a specific conversation between Devlin and Lane is lacking, it is difficult to construct a situation in which Devlin was not the initial inspiration for Lane. Devlin claimed to be, after all, the authority on all matters Ireland. Who could challenge him on a question of a bird species in that country?

Devlin had experienced Kansas history firsthand. He had come to the territory in the fall of 1855. He was in Osawatometie on August 30, 1856, when Captain John W. Reid and his proslavery force invaded from Missouri, defeated John Brown’s outmatched company, and burned the town down. Devlin later claimed to have lost a trunk

in the attack, the contents of which he estimated at \$40. Devlin joined the Free State Burlingame Company, and records indicate that when he mustered in the fall of 1857 he was twenty-three years old, five feet, eight and a half inches tall, and owned a horse, saddle, and a U.S. rifle.<sup>14</sup> As a free-state fighter who had experience going back to the battle of Osawatometie, Devlin had good credentials in Lane’s army.

It is conceivable that Robley was mistaken when he wrote that the encounter between Devlin and Jennison took place *after* the Zumwalt attack. If it had taken place earlier, Lane could have easily learned about it directly from either Devlin or Jennison. Both had been residents of Osawatometie earlier and were undoubtedly in Mound City to greet Lane when he arrived. However or whenever Lane learned about the Irish bird, Devlin had certainly provided the information about the jayhawk initially, and he left it to Lane and others to assign a serious mission for it.

The two earliest contemporary documents about the jayhawk’s origins—Lane’s admonition to his troops and the Devlin anecdote—did exactly that, indicating not only how the term was first used, but also how its meaning changed over time. The name jayhawk derived from the Irish bird, the terms jayhawk or jayhawker as given to an individual who attacked an enemy and the act of jayhawking defined as attacking or robbing proslavery enemies were understood as closely related concepts from the very beginning, though the latter two associations came to serve as the primary definitions of the term.

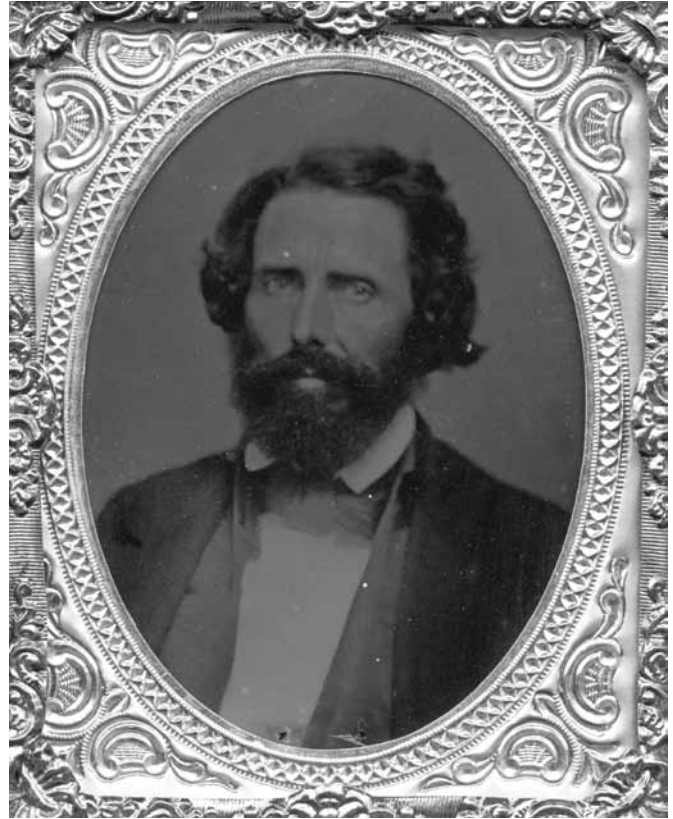
**L**ike Jennison, James Montgomery became a prominent leader following Lane’s call to clear out proslavery forces from Kansas. He also quickly gained fame as a jayhawk, but he rejected Jennison’s apparent lack of restraint. Albert Richardson, correspondent for the *Boston Journal*, the *Cincinnati Times*, and other eastern papers, described his encounter with Montgomery in a report of June 13, 1858. All settlers in the area called Montgomery’s men jayhawkers to indicate the “celerity of their movements

14. U.S. Congress, House Report 104, *Kansas Claims*, 36 Cong., 2nd Sess., 3 vols. (1861), 3:1239; see also Muster roll, Burlingame Rifles Company C, 1857, James Abbott Collection, Collection 252, box 2, folder 10; and Muster roll, Captain John Brown’s Company, Fifth Regiment, First Brigade, Kansas Volunteers, December 12, 1855, History Military Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, both also available online at <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/cgiwrap/imlskto/index.php>. Devlin was enumerated in the Kansas Territorial Census 1859, Lykins County, Osawatometie Township.

and their habit of suddenly pouncing upon an enemy.” Richardson reported his conversation with Montgomery, whom he admired for his daring and the purity of his motives. Montgomery was “a praying fighter.” The former schoolteacher and Methodist preacher justified his role as a guerilla leader to Richardson: “Now a guerilla company, to be effective, must be self-sustaining—must subsist on the enemy. Therefore we feed ourselves at pro-slavery larders and our horses at pro-slavery corn-cribs.”<sup>15</sup>

Richardson’s interview with Montgomery is also of interest here because Patrick Devlin was Montgomery’s companion. Richardson commented on Devlin, whom he characterized as a follower of Montgomery and a man “actuated partly by hatred of the Border Ruffians, partly by native recklessness.” Richardson’s interview provides a rare insight into the determined spirit of the early jayhawkers. They believed that the proslavery confrontations in Kansas represented a state of war. On account of his personal losses, Devlin evidently shared with Lane the need to take vengeance on the enemy.

In May 1858, according to a Missouri author’s 1923 article on the subject, Montgomery’s men invaded Missouri and began plundering.<sup>16</sup> John Brown also had a part in the intrusions into Missouri. When he returned to Kansas for a six-month period in 1858 and 1859, he met with Governor Charles Robinson, to whom he said: “You have succeeded in what you undertook. You aimed to make of Kansas a free state, and your plans were skillfully laid for that purpose. But I had another object in view. I meant to strike a blow at slavery.”<sup>17</sup> Brown also met Montgomery, but the two could not agree on joint enterprises against the proslavery enemy. On December 20, 1858, Brown conducted an expedition into Missouri and caused destruction of property, the liberation of eleven slaves, and the death of a slave owner. Although Brown acted independently and was not identified as a jayhawk, his abolitionist foray followed similar actions of the jayhawks and anticipated other attacks yet to come. Only a few days after Brown’s raid a company of Kansans, under the leadership of Eli Snyder, ransacked the home and store of Jeremiah Jackson in western



Like Doc Jennison, James Montgomery became a prominent leader following General Lane’s call to clear Kansas of proslavery partisans. He also quickly gained fame as a jayhawker, but he rejected Jennison’s apparent lack of restraint. Albert Richardson, a correspondent for several eastern newspapers, admired Montgomery for his daring and the purity of his motives. The former schoolteacher and Methodist preacher, pictured here in 1860, justified his role as a guerilla leader to Richardson: “Now a guerilla company, to be effective, must be self-sustaining—must subsist on the enemy. Therefore we feed ourselves at pro-slavery larders and our horses at pro-slavery corn-cribs.”

Missouri, reportedly as revenge for the May 1858 attack by Border Ruffians that came to be known as the Marais des Cygnes Massacre.<sup>18</sup>

The terms jayhawker and jayhawking had acquired widespread use by 1859 as a convenient label for those who fought against slavery through increasingly violent and other “illegal” or suspect means. A letter dated March 5 to Lawrence’s *Herald of Freedom*, a free-state paper founded by the New England Emigrant Aid Company, protested that these terms were used to denigrate honest

15. Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi, 1857–1867* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1873), 125–26; Starr, *Jennison’s Jayhawkers*, 31.

16. Hildegard Rose Herklotz, “Jayhawkers in Missouri, 1858–1863,” *Missouri Historical Review* 17 (April 1923): 271. Herklotz’s article was published in three parts; see also 17 (July 1923): 505–13; and 18 (October 1923): 64–101.

17. Leverett Wilson Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), 252.

18. Bryce D. Benedict, *Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 22; Edward E. Leslie, *Devil Knows How to Ride: The True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders* (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), 21.

citizens who rightly opposed the furtherance of slavery. The author of the letter, O. E. Morse, complained that those labeled jayhawkers in previous letters to the paper were instead opponents of the extension of slavery who employed legitimate tactics to advance their just cause, while their accusers, presumably, were proslavery men. Although editor George Brown did not agree, he published the letter.

Brown did not leave it at that, however. In the March 5 issue Brown announced plans to print a manuscript of nearly two hundred pages, a serialized novel of fifteen chapters titled *The Jay-Hawker: A Tale of Southern Kansas*. The narrative reflected the view that the jayhawkers were thieves and, what was worse, even assassins. Brown called the story “one of the most thrillingly interesting” he had ever read. It treated all the troubles in southern Kansas during 1858 and 1859 and brought to light the secret workings of the jayhawk movement. “It is a work of rare merit and artistic skill,” noted the editor. “Legendary in its character, its compass ranges from the ludicrous to the sublime, and blends the beautiful and the terrible, with startling and unrivaled power.” Brown expected this “lone star of Kansas literature” to gain national and even international fame. The work was “destined to shine forever.”<sup>19</sup>

Brown’s expectations did not materialize. Some later historians, however, saw *The Jay-Hawker* as an accurate account of events in southeast Kansas at the end of the Bleeding Kansas era. James C. Malin, as one example, took the book seriously, less as literature and more as history. He believed that the text was worthy of attention because it was “fictionalized history with very little fiction.” This roman a clef disguised its main characters only thinly, and these characters were the major players of Kansas history before the Civil War. They were shown plotting the southeastern border war designed to involve the whole country. Though written before the Harpers Ferry affair, Malin saw the work as a “forewarning of events to come.”<sup>20</sup>

*The Jay-Hawker’s* author, Phillip P. Fowler (1819–1887), hailed from New Hampshire. An ordained Universalist

Church minister, he abandoned his church because of a disagreement over a question of dogma. In 1854 he came to Kansas and was elected to the first territorial legislature by the free-state population of Lawrence, but the proslavery majority did not allow him to be seated. Later he resided and worked as a teacher in southern Kansas, in the immediate vicinity of the events he described in his narrative. He experienced those events and knew the people involved personally. Although he repeatedly insisted that he was unwilling to moralize, in the last analysis his narrative was a satirical treatment of the jayhawkers and jayhawking. Like the editor of the *Herald of Freedom*, Fowler represented a free-state opposition to the radicals. In this context it is not surprising to see the jayhawkers attacking the *Herald* as a serious enemy. They could rely only on the *Lawrence Republican* for support.<sup>21</sup>

The reader immediately recognizes behind the disguise of *The Jay-Hawker’s* “General Kane” the dominating figure of James H. Lane. He was seen as the leader of the jayhawkers, but before that he had been the founder of a secret society that the author saw as catalyst for the jayhawk movement. Kane was “the grand chief whose order require[d] absolute and unconditional obedience upon the forfeiture of life.”<sup>22</sup> Fowler saw Lane as stirring

*Herald of Freedom*, which can be found at the Kansas Historical Society and Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas, carries the handwritten notations of someone who claims to have been personally acquainted with Fowler. Those notations and others provide the key to the disguised characters in the novel: Argus = Phillip P. Fowler, author; Kane = James H. Lane; Corvus = James Montgomery; Sly = Augustus Wattles; Prey = Samuel L. Adair; Scribble = William A. Phillips; Gallinipper = T. D. Thacher, editor of the *Lawrence Republican* in 1859; Gun = Richard J. Hinton; Dr. Squill = Dr. Rufus Gilpatrick; New York donor to John Brown = Garrett Smith; and a person referred to as being in disagreement with Lane = James Redpath. Many names and events in the novel are found in histories that treat John Brown’s presence in Kansas. See, for example, Welch, *Border Warfare in Southeastern Kansas*.

21. Cutler, *History of Kansas*, 1:883. *Herald of Freedom*, March 26 and June 4, 1859; James Benedict Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century* (Boston, Mass.: Skinner House, 2004), 57–58. A few handwritten, biographical notations on Fowler appear below the printed text on the first page of the *Herald of Freedom*, April 23, 1859. Malin notes the Reverend Fowler’s involvement in the election of 1856. James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 68. *Herald of Freedom*, April 5, 1856. I am grateful to Rosy King at the Paola Public Library, who made available information from the Miami County Vital Records (1885–1911) about Fowler’s death, which occurred in the Osawatomie Insane Asylum (now Osawatomie State Hospital), where he had been a patient since 1880.

22. Chapter 12, *Herald of Freedom*, June 4, 1859. Fowler referred here to the Danites who devised a radical plan, which they later abandoned, to assassinate proslavery legislators. See his letter May 1, 1859, to his friend George W. Brown from Harrisonville, Missouri. *Herald of Freedom*, June 4, 1859. On the Danites and their rituals see Mildfelt, especially pp. 8–12.

19. *Herald of Freedom*, February 26 and March 5 and 19, 1859. I am indebted to my colleague William Keel for drawing my attention to Fowler’s *The Jay-Hawker*, which opened in the *Herald of Freedom*, March 26, 1859.

20. James C. Malin, “Notes on the Writing of General Histories of Kansas. Part One: The Setting of the Stage,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 21 (Autumn 1954): 184–223, quotation 214. Malin had plans to publish “an annotated edition” of *The Jay-Hawker*, “along with essays related to the theme.” I have been unable to locate such a manuscript or publication. The microfilm copy of the April 23, 1859, issue of the

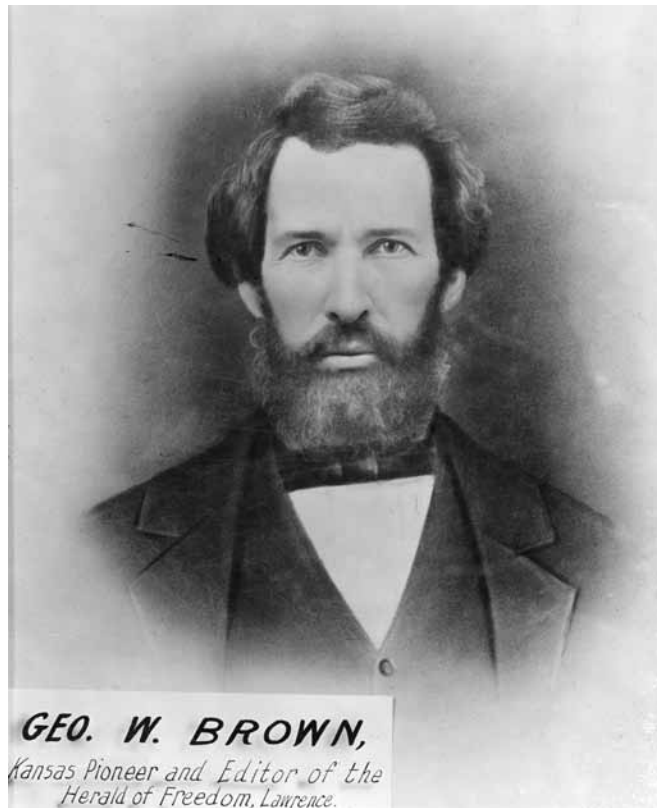
up excitement, fear, and civil unrest with the goal of driving out all proslavery settlers from Kansas. The author, who appears in the novel under guise of Argus, saw the reported danger of an imminent invasion from Missouri as nonsense, “infernal humbug.” He described the jayhawk robbing and pillaging in disturbing detail. He asked: “If such things are right, what is wrong? If such is freedom, what is slavery? If such are freemen and heroes, who are slaves, tyrants, despots, devils?”<sup>23</sup>

That Fowler presents Lane as an unscrupulous and dangerous jayhawk leader is perhaps less surprising than his juxtaposition of Lane and John Brown as intimate conspirators. Available historical sources do not reveal a relationship between Kane/Lane and Rook, a stand-in for Brown. Did Fowler just imagine such a relationship? In an amicable conversation Rook reveals to Kane and other jayhawkers his radical program: to create excitement that will pit North against South, which in turn will result in a deadly encounter and an insurrection of slaves. Thus, their liberation will be assured. This radical vision of the future had the full support of all jayhawkers present. It did not, however, have Fowler’s, though he was reportedly “an intimate associate of old John Brown.”<sup>24</sup> For the author Lane and Brown both suffered from the fatal flaw of believing that their ends justified any means. Their actions had real consequences, however, as Fowler showed in his depiction of a frightening nightmare that confronts Rook/Brown with the Pottawatomie massacre, for which he is held responsible. Fowler also characterized Rook as the “old Jayhawk apostle who received sanctions from the ‘highest’ power.”<sup>25</sup> The radical vision of liberating slaves in *The Jay-Hawker* had in it the seeds for Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry and for Lane’s later actions in the Civil War.

23. Chapter 5, *Herald of Freedom*, April 23, 1859; Chapter 9, *Herald of Freedom*, May 14, 1859.

24. Chapter 7, *Herald of Freedom*, April 30, 1859. Besides “Kane,” “Sly” (Augustus Wattles) and the “Rev. Capt. Corvus” (James Montgomery) were present at this conference, which reportedly took place in a stone house not more than a quarter mile from the Kansas River. On Fowler’s relationship to John Brown we have only the undocumented biographical statement by Cutler: “He was an intimate associate of old John Brown and concealed and defended that notorious champion of freedom on several occasions.” Cutler, *History of Kansas*, 1:883; see also *The United States Biographical Dictionary. Kansas Volume* (Chicago, Ill.: Lewis & Co., 1879), 486.

25. Chapters 5–7, *Herald of Freedom*, April 23 and 30, 1859.



George Washington Brown settled with a group of New England emigrants at Lawrence and became the editor of one of the first free-state newspapers in the territory, the *Herald of Freedom*, an organ of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Brown, shown here between 1856 and 1860, devoted the newspaper to the interests of the company and the free-state cause, and thus soon angered the territory’s proslavery forces. On May 21, 1856, a proslavery posse sacked and burned the newspaper office, arrested Brown, and jailed him for several months; subsequently, he was indicted for high treason. Brown’s case was dismissed without trial for want of cause for prosecution, and thereafter he returned to Lawrence to rebuild his business. The *Herald of Freedom* published its last issue on December 17, 1859.

When Kansas won statehood, the controversial Lane became one of its first two U.S. senators. President Abraham Lincoln valued Lane’s potential for aiding the Union cause in the Civil War. He wrote to Secretary of War Cameron on June 20, 1861: “We need the services of such men out there at once; that we better appoint [Lane] a brigadier-general of volunteers today, and send him off with such authority to raise a force . . . as you think you will get him into actual work quickest.”<sup>26</sup> Although Lane could not legally take on such a high military post

26. Ian Michael Spurgeon, *Man of Douglas, Man of Lincoln: The Political Odyssey of James Henry Lane* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 108–9.

and still retain his position as senator, he proceeded with the task of organizing new regiments. He avoided the formality of accepting the military rank, but he insisted, nevertheless, on becoming the military leader of Kansas. Governor Charles Robinson, Lane's rival, awarded Montgomery the commission to recruit soldiers for the Third Kansas Volunteers, but this did not prevent Montgomery from becoming Lane's trusted comrade. Montgomery set up his headquarters in Mound City. The leader of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry was Charles Jennison, and he gave his regiment the unofficial title of the "Independent Mounted Kansas Jayhawkers." In war the crime of jayhawking had the potential to become a virtue. When Lane returned to Kansas in August, he took command of several regiments, including those of Montgomery and Jennison. This armed force, preparing for action along the Kansas-Missouri border, was "Lane's Brigade."<sup>27</sup>

The campaign that took shape had the appearance to many, especially those in western Missouri, of a jayhawk military operation. Despite the apparently official sanction of the jayhawks, many free-state citizens were uncomfortable with the conduct of a jayhawk mission in Missouri. John Speer, editor of the *Lawrence Republican* and Lane's dedicated supporter, expressed his concerns on the basis of recent hostilities in which jayhawkers were said to be involved. Speer dedicated his editorial of October 3, 1861, to the controversy: "A system has sprung up in Kansas known as Jay-Hawking. We are not conversant with its origin, and the representations in regard to its extent are so contradictory, that we have been puzzled to know whether it was really an offense of great enormity. Col. Jennison, when commanding a small body of Free State men, was represented as a Jay-Hawker, and we believe the same offense was also charged to Col. Montgomery." Speer proceeded to argue, however, that the accusers in this case were enemies of the free-state leaders, namely proslavery men. The jayhawkers professed offence was stealing, but, maintained Speer, they stole in retaliation for plundering and robbing committed by their enemies.

27. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel R. Anthony, brother of the famous suffragist Susan B. Anthony, was second in command. In Anthony this regiment gained a dedicated adherent of the abolition cause. Albert Castel, "Kansas Jayhawking Raids into Western Missouri in 1861," *Missouri Historical Review* 54 (October 1959): 1-11. "During the summer and fall of 1861 bands of Kansas 'Jayhawkers' led by Montgomery, Jennison, and Anthony swept across the border into Missouri and 'liberated' hundreds of slaves in the name of suppressing rebellion." Albert Castel, "Civil War Kansas and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 51 (April 1966): 127.

The real problem, according to Speer, was that much plundering was going on without the necessary distinctions and justification. To confiscate property in certain situations was necessary. Speer evidently agreed with Montgomery that attacks on the enemy provided necessary subsistence to the antislavery guerilla force. The responsibility of the jayhawker was to attack the enemy, the Border Ruffians, and not innocent citizens. Speer's argument gave the necessary rationale for Jennison's and Montgomery's past actions, but he insisted that with the recent establishment of a proper legal administration, the capturing of enemy property now had to be justified. Personal gain was out of the question and any property acquired during antislavery attacks would have to be turned over to the government. Despite this restriction, the jayhawks differed widely in the extent to which they adhered to such considerations. In the same issue of his paper Speer defended Lane against the accusation that the senator had "jay-hawked" property.<sup>28</sup> The need to defend the reputations of all these prominent jayhawks indicates that their reputation had suffered.

Lane, who had once defined the mission of the jayhawks as the expulsion of proslavery men from Kansas, was aware of the deterioration of the image. His brigade was accused of jayhawking, and he had to defend the reputation of his soldiers. One of Lane's officers wrote in his diary "no Jay-hawking shall be allowed from a Union man & all property taken from a rebel however small, must be given over" to a responsible officer.<sup>29</sup> Lane wrote in a proclamation to the people of Missouri dated September 19, 1861: "We are soldiers, not thieves, or plunderers, or jayhawkers. We have entered the army to fight for a peace, to put down a rebellion." Lane condemned plundering for personal gain as treason.<sup>30</sup> In a speech at Lawrence he asked the rhetorical question: "What is the charge they make against the Kansas Brigade? We are Jayhawkers." In response to the accusation, Lane pointed to the strict requirement that confiscated property had to be handed over to the government. At the same time, Lane also reacted to the charge that his brigade was stealing slaves.

28. *Lawrence Republican*, October 3, 1861.

29. *Lawrence Republican*, September 17, 1861. Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, 88.

30. *Lawrence Republican*, September 26, 1861, referring to a proclamation of September 19, 1861. Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, 94; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, "The Political Career of General James H. Lane," in *Publications of the Kansas State Historical Society* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1930), 3:117; Spurgeon, *Man of Douglas, Man of Lincoln*, 184.

That was not true, he asserted. The fact was that slavery simply disappeared before the march of his brigade. One of Lane's officers, Lieutenant Joseph Trego wrote in his diary, however: "These men who have heretofore been so violently opposed to Jay Hawking are as a general rule if not more, the most unscrupulous of all Jay Hawkens when they have share of the profits."<sup>31</sup> The official policy now was against jayhawking, but that did not prevent the practice. Nor did it stop the residents of Missouri, who feared Lane greatly, from referring to him and his army as jayhawks or jayhawkers.

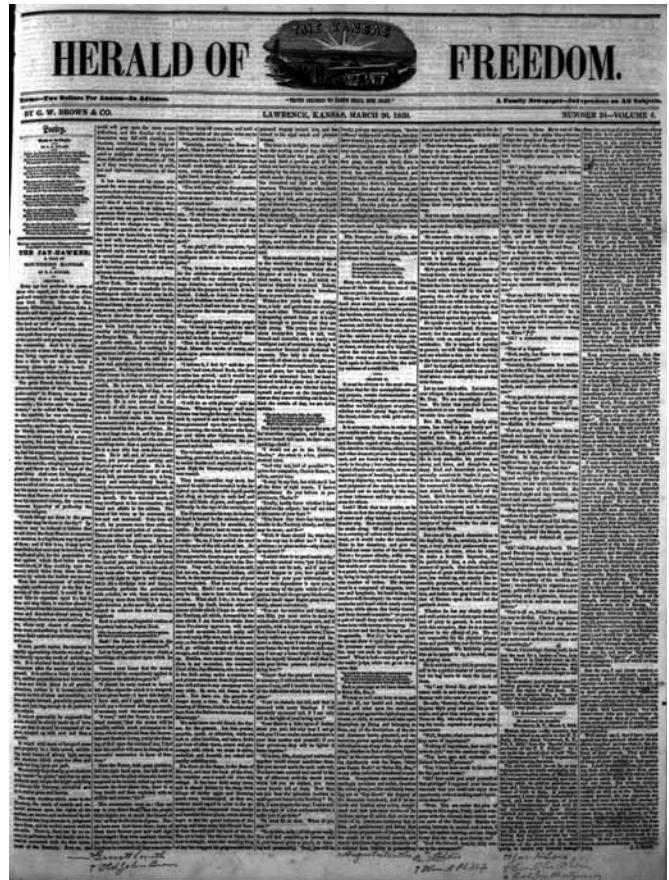
Others recognized Lane and his men as jayhawkers, too, at times in a positive light. When, at the outset of the Civil War, Lane and his company of Kansas soldiers arrived at the White House, their fame as jayhawkers preceded them. John Hay, assistant to Abraham Lincoln's secretary, John G. Nicolay, observed the arrival of Lane's Frontier Guard, which took residence in the East Room to protect the president. As Hay noted in his diary, these men were the jayhawkers and Lane was their leader.

[April 18, 1861] The White House is turned into barracks. Jim Lane marshaled his Kansas Warriors today. . . . the western Jayhawkers. . . .

[April 23, 1861] A gaunt, tattered, uncombed and unshorn figure appeared at the door and marched solemnly up to the table. He wore a rough [rusty?] overcoat, a torn shirt and suspenderless breeches. His neck was innocent of collar, guileless of necktie. His thin hair stood fretful-porcupine-quill-wise upon his crown. He sat down and gloomily charged upon his dinner. A couple of young exquisites were eating and chatting beside [and] opposite him. They were guessing when the road would be open through Baltimore. "Thursday" growled the grim apparition, "or Baltimore will be laid in ashes." It was the ally of Montgomery, the King of the Jayhawkers, and the friend of John Brown of Ossawatomie [sic]. It was Jim Lane.<sup>32</sup>

31. Lane's speech of October 18 was reported by the *Wisconsin State Register*, October 26, 1861; the Trego diary is quoted in Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, 95.

32. In preparing the edition of Hay's manuscript, the editors retained parts that Hay or his widow probably had intended to delete. A key passage from the diary entry about Lane was intended for deletion and crossed out: "It was the ally of Montgomery, the King of the Jayhawkers, and the friend of John Brown of Ossawatomie [sic]." Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettlenger, eds., *The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University



In 1859 G. W. Brown's *Herald of Freedom* serialized a novel titled *The Jay-Hawker: A Tale of Southern Kansas*, which portrayed the jayhawkers as thieves and assassins. Brown called the story "one of the most thrillingly interesting" he had ever read, and some later historians, most notably James C. Malin, found in *The Jay-Hawker* an accurate account of events in southeast Kansas at the end of the Bleeding Kansas era. The reader immediately recognizes behind the disguise of *The Jay-Hawker's* "General Kane" the dominating figure of James H. Lane. This microfilm copy of the March 26, 1859, issue of the *Herald of Freedom* carries handwritten notations that provide the key to a few of the novel's thinly disguised characters.

It seems appropriate that he who set the image of the jayhawk into motion during Bleeding Kansas should be recognized as its foremost representative during the national conflict that the Kansas crisis foreshadowed.

The question of slavery was still uppermost in Lane's mind, but with the prospect of invading Missouri a distinct possibility, he deliberated about new aims. The politics of war was open to radical positions, and Lane,

Press, 1997), xx, 1, 9. The question on the term "rough [rusty?]" is original to Burlingame and Ettlenger's edition. Cf. Erich Langsdorf, "Jim Lane and the Frontier Guard," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 9 (February 1940): 13–25.

as senator, articulated an aggressive strategy early in the war. In July 1861 Lane advised his colleagues in Congress: "the effect of marching an army on the soil of any slave state will be to instill into the slaves a determined purpose to free themselves. . . . there will be a colored army marching out of the slave states while the army of freedom was marching in. . . . I do not propose to make myself a slave catcher for traitors and return them to their masters."<sup>33</sup> Lane soon had the opportunity to show how an invading army in Missouri could lead to the freedom of slaves. On September 23, 1861, Lane's military campaign into Missouri culminated in an attack on Osceola, a town about ninety miles southeast of Kansas City. Lane and his troops took valuables, liquor, and other supplies of use, and set the entire town on fire. At the same time, over a hundred slaves were freed and sent toward Kansas City.

Whereas Lane's reputation was tarnished by events in Osceola, James Montgomery used the event to articulate the idealism that made the cost of freeing slaves in places such as Osceola more understandable. Interviewed by a *New York Times* reporter soon after the burning of the town, Montgomery declared: "If our boys thought that this war had any other object than to give freedom to the slaves, they would every one go home tomorrow." The freeing of slaves was consistent with Lane's view that emancipating the slaves was "a tool to end the war."<sup>34</sup>

John Speer, Lane's friend, was prepared to see the jayhawk's actions in the best possible light. In that spirit, a few weeks after the Osceola attack, Speer presented Lane as the liberator of slaves.

A few days ago, we met two wagons full of slaves this side of Kansas City, and naturally stopped to inquire where they came from. "Are you running away?" said we. "Oh, no," responded the old woman, "dey took us." "Who took you?" "Why, some of Lane's men! De blessed Kansas Jayhawkers. Dey Jayhawked us!" Then changing tone and almost bursting into tears, she continued: "All but one, a fine chunk of a boy, 'bout fifteen, dat de secesh [secessionists] hid in de brush wid de mules." They inquired how far it was to Lawrence, and marched onward to freedom. Five years ago, we passed over the

same ground, under charges of rebellion, with a great deal less safety than these Negroes now passed to a land of freedom. Blessed are the works of the Free State men.<sup>35</sup>

The former slave, "the old woman," was grateful to Lane as the leader of the jayhawks, who had liberated—had "jayhawked"—her, her family, and her neighbors. The *Lawrence Republican* had a history of strongly supporting Lane and the paper welcomed Lane's intention to recruit former slaves into his army, an act that Lane insisted was instrumental to winning the war.<sup>36</sup>

Reflecting on the pejorative meaning of jayhawking as an activity of horse thieves and villains, journalist John McReynolds also undertook to correct what he considered to be mistaken views. Writing in 1868 for a southern Kansas newspaper, McReynolds was willing to forgive acts committed in the efforts to save the Union. He complained that the "pro-slavery horde of the South" was engaged in an effort to "obliterate the word that has been made honorable in the name of liberty." For him jayhawking should have been recognized as a symbol of the hate for slavery. It designated, according to McReynolds, the most heroic and enduring struggle for freedom.<sup>37</sup>

The opposite view prevailed in many quarters of Missouri. For William Clarke Quantrill, who became notorious for sacking Lawrence in 1863, Lane and the jayhawkers were the hated enemy. In persuading his fellow guerillas to attack Lawrence, Quantrill claimed that Lane's jayhawkers had killed his older brother. When his gang rode into the Kansas town, they cried out "Osceola" and names that were reminders of incursions by Lane's Brigade into Missouri. Lane was at the top of Quantrill's list of those he wanted to kill in Lawrence. The attack on the free-state town was only the most dramatic in a long list of reciprocal, vengeful intrusions by guerillas from one state into the other. Quantrill's raiders searched for Lane in Lawrence. When they did not find him in his recently built home, they set fire to it and destroyed it.<sup>38</sup>

35. "Contrabands," *Lawrence Republican*, November 7, 1861.

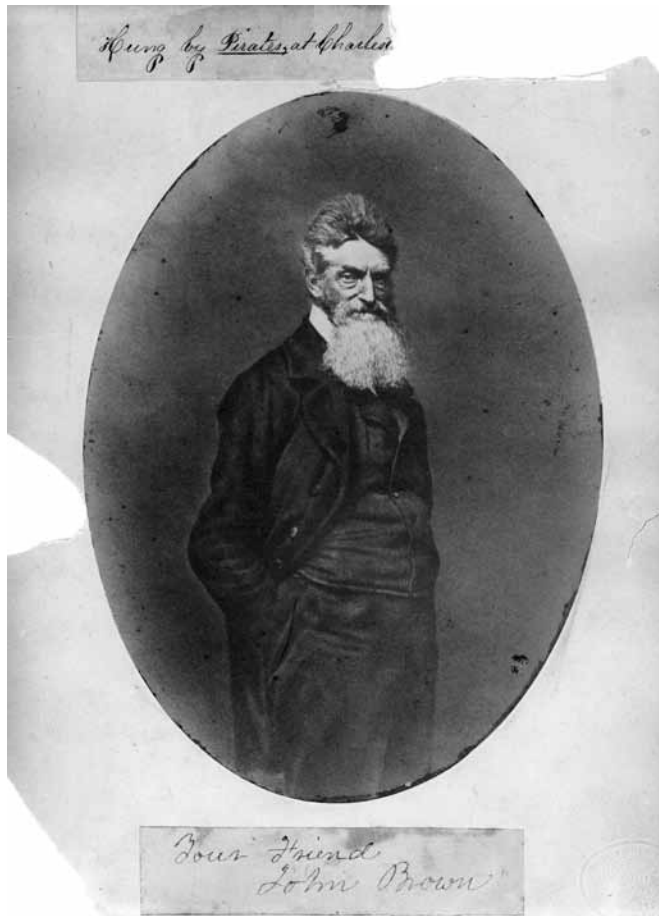
36. *Lawrence Republican*, January 2, 1862.

37. John McReynolds, "Origin of the Word Jayhawking: Its Application to the People of Kansas. Incidents in the Early History of the Territory," in the *Allen County Courant* (Iola, Kansas), May 23, 1868.

38. Quantrill, despite this claim, did not actually have a brother. Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 105, 136. Only a single structure belonging to

33. Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, 37.

34. *Ibid.*, 102, 126–28, 246.



*John Brown, pictured here in 1859, followed five of his sons and their families to Kansas in October 1855, and together they soon became actively involved in the struggle that was Bleeding Kansas. Brown played an active role in the hostilities that plunged Kansas into bloody turmoil during the year 1856 but spent much of 1857 in the East, raising funds for his antislavery crusade. On December 20, 1858, Brown conducted an expedition into Missouri and caused destruction of property, the liberation of eleven slaves, and the death of a slave owner. Although Brown acted independently and was not identified as a jayhawker, his abolitionist foray followed similar actions of the jayhawks and anticipated other attacks yet to come.*

Patrick Devlin undoubtedly created the first outlines of the jayhawk image, but Lane instinctively recognized its potential as a rhetorical and political instrument.

Lane survives today. It is a stable he had built at the time of his military campaign into Missouri. It was situated on the highest point of Lane's property, and perhaps because it was outside the city limits and too far to be taken seriously as an object of interest, it survived. Now on the campus of the University of Kansas, which still takes pride in the image of the jayhawk, this modest building (formerly used as the student radio station KJHK) is the oldest link to the origins of the symbol. Preemption Application by James H. Lane, Land Office, Topeka, Kansas, dated February 4, 1862, National Archives, Washington, DC.

Lane's December 1857 speech, in which he asked his volunteers to become jayhawks, was a powerful catalyst for the future. His speech defined the mission, and subsequently others, above all Jennison and Montgomery, implemented it. Without denying that Devlin, Jennison, and Montgomery all actively shaped and promoted the jayhawk legend, their acts of jayhawking, which followed Lane's dramatic speech, lacked the political power of Lane's nationwide reputation. Over time the image was used to tie together political, military, and even ethical motivations for the fight against slavery, and in doing so it gained its true force. Just as events on the ground during Bleeding Kansas changed quickly, so too the image of the jayhawk adapted and acquired new and at times contradictory features.

The image of the Kansas jayhawk evolved in at least two distinct stages. Because no one in Kansas is known to have heard of a bird named the jayhawk before 1857, it seemed all the more receptive to new identities. At first it served as an aggressive and uncompromising image for guerilla warfare against proslavery settlers. The radical mission to drive them out had to contend with a strong resistance and the label of purely criminal exploits, even within Kansas. The rapid successes in this effort led to jayhawking into Missouri. After 1858 the freeing of slaves added a new dimension to the potential of the jayhawk. It is no surprise that Missouri citizens feared and condemned any attacks from Kansas as criminal jayhawking. The jayhawk absorbed and then surpassed Lane's immediate political goals; it became controversial. In the Civil War Lane recognized the opportunity to repair the damaged image by linking it to the freeing of slaves. Thus, the jayhawk could represent contradictions: stealing, revenge, destruction, and emancipation. The shrill cry of the bird driving out "the pro-slavery hellhounds" only announced its initial impulse. Soon the unpredictable bird acquired a life of its own and took on controversial causes in neighboring Missouri. Its history is intertwined with the chain of historical events before and during the Civil War. [KH]