

# Cyrus Leland, Jr., and the Lawrence Massacre: A Note and Document

by Robert S. LaForte

CYRUS LELAND, JR., of Troy, Kansas, the man Bliss Isely described as the state's only political "big boss,"<sup>1</sup> lived one of those varied lives common to men of accomplishment. A small town merchant-investor and a pioneer in Doniphan County, Leland rose to prominence in Republican party ranks during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Among his many colorful exploits none has left as much non-newspaper documentation for scholars as his Civil War career. A lieutenant in Company F of the Tenth Kansas Volunteer Infantry Regiment, he was among the handful of men who actually fought William C. Quantrill's guerrilla force as it retreated across the Kansas prairie following the sack of Lawrence on August 21, 1863.

Before Quantrill's raid, Leland had participated in several skirmishes and battles with Confederate troops and Oklahoma Indians who supported the Southern cause. He entered the Union army on August 6, 1861, as part of Lane's Brigade<sup>2</sup> and was with that wretched force as it marched and counter-marched around eastern Kansas and western Missouri. He took part in Gen. James H.

Lane's burning of Osceola, Missouri, although his regimental commander, Col. William Weer, opposed the "Grim Chieftain's" decision to destroy the town.<sup>3</sup>

After the brigade was mercifully disbanded in early 1862, Leland became part of the army led by Weer. They went into the Indian country to protect loyal tribes and to reassert federal leadership there. Leland appears not to have been in the first fighting of Kansas troops, the engagements at Cabin Creek and Locust Grove. He was acting regimental adjutant and ordinance officer of the Tenth Kansas and was away from the skirmishes.<sup>4</sup>

His first taste of battle came after the campaign in Indian Territory when, in late 1862, his unit accompanied others into southwest Missouri to confront Confederate troops near Newtonia. The battle that ensued there was meager—several hours of long range artillery bombardment and then retreat to Sarcosie.<sup>5</sup> Soon, however, Maj. Gen. James M. Blunt took command of Union forces and marched south fighting engagements at Old Fort Wayne, Indian Territory, and Cane Hill, Arkansas.

Blunt's mistake after the battle of Cane Hill, when he allowed Gen. Thomas Hindman to flank him and attack Union troops coming to his support, caused Leland to be engaged in the bloodiest fighting he would see. On December 7, the Tenth Kansas led the charge against Hindman's center near Prairie Grove, Arkansas. As a

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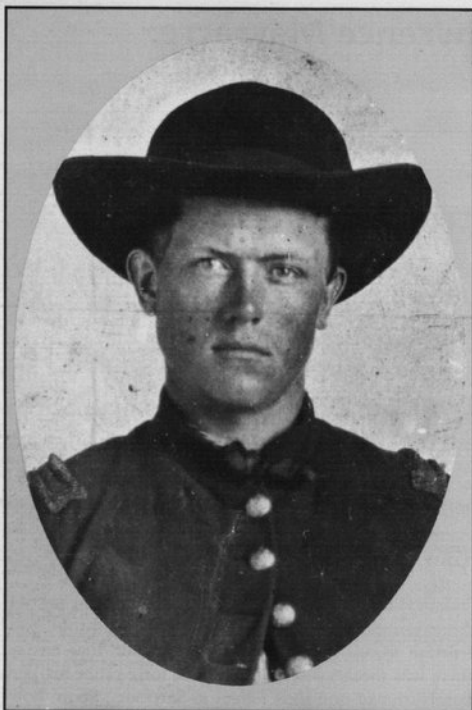
1. Bliss Isely, "The Big Boss and the Boss Busters," *Kansas Teacher* 66 (February 1958): 20-22, 47. Among the several governmental and political offices Leland held were: Doniphan County Republican party chairman, 1876-1906; Kansas Republican party chairman, 1878-1880, 1894-1896; Republican national committeeman, Kansas, 1884-1900; co-chairman, Republican presidential campaign committee, western states, 1896; county commissioner, Doniphan, 1875-1900; Kansas House of Representatives, 1865-1866, 1903-1907; U.S. collector of internal revenues, Kansas, 1889-1893; Missouri Valley pension agent, 1897-1901. He was variously an unsuccessful candidate for a congressional seat, the U.S. Senate, and Kansas governor.

2. *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, July 4, 11, August 15, 1861; Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), 97-98; Edwin C. Manning, "A Kansas Soldier," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1907-1908 10 (1908): 427.

3. *The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), 162-64, 184-85, 196, 482, 500, 506, 515, 529, 533; Castel, *A Frontier State at War*, 54.

4. "Company Muster Rolls, 10th Kansas, Cyrus Leland, Jr., May-June, 1862," General Service Administration, National Archives Record Service, photocopies Vets (hereafter cited as GSA, NARS); *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 13, (1885), 137, 371-72, 397, 418-19, 430, 434, 444, 459, 475-76, 483, 487; Cyrus Leland to Parents, August 3, 1862, and a note, which appears to be a postscript in the same letter, Cyrus Leland, Jr. Collection, Manuscripts Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

5. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 13, 287; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-65* 1, pt. 2 (Topeka: State Printer, 1896), 181.



Cyrus Leland, Jr., was part of the small force which pursued Quantrill and his men after the Lawrence massacre.

result, eight members of Company F were wounded, including Leland.<sup>6</sup>

The only account of Leland's role in the one-day battle is an exaggerated report of his wounding given by an early biographer of David L. Payne, Oklahoma's first "Sooner" and the so-called "Father" of the state. Payne, an enlisted man in Company F, was from Doniphan County and a companion of Leland. His biographer described Leland's wounding, but the telling was more concerned with Payne's role in "saving" his wounded "comrade":

In the hottest [*sic*] of the fight his First Lieutenant, Cyrus Leland, was shot through the arm and then through the right shoulder. The enemy, having recovered from the charge, and re-inforced, poured a deadly fire into the

6. Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 1:396-429; Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1911), 80-81; *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1 (1888), 10, 75, 77, 84-86, 91; *Report of the Adjutant General*, 183.

ranks of Capt. Payne's company. The commanding officer ordered his men to fall back. Capt. Payne, seeing his brave comrade lying upon the ground, while the maddened enemy was charging and ready to trample him under, stepped out of ranks and lifted up the almost lifeless lieutenant and bore him upon his shoulders for fully one-half mile to his own tent, where surgical attendance saved the life of his friend.<sup>7</sup>

The official casualty report on Leland, which was filed at the time, reads laconically, "slight wound of shoulder."<sup>8</sup>

After an extended furlough in Troy, Leland rejoined the Tenth near Springfield, Missouri, where it had been fighting the troops of Col. Joseph Shelby. In May 1863 he managed an assignment to Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr.'s staff. Ewing, who resigned from the Kansas Supreme Court in October 1862 to establish the Eleventh Kansas Cavalry Regiment, had, through astute maneuvering, managed to be placed in command of the brigade in which Leland was serving.<sup>9</sup>

When the military in Kansas was divided, in June 1863, into the District of the Frontier and the District of the Border, Ewing took command of the latter with headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. Leland was made an aide-de-camp and assistant provost marshal under Ewing's chief of staff, Maj. Preston B. Plumb who was later a United States senator from Kansas, 1877-1891. With increased "bushwhacker" activity along the border, Ewing and his command, because of their "fitness for that special service," were chosen to suppress the guerrillas.<sup>10</sup>

In his new assignment, Leland, on August 16, wrote his mother from Kansas City stating that he expected "to start out into Kansas tomorrow" and would "probably go near Lawrence." He anticipated being gone no more than two or three days, having been detailed to inspect a company of militia at Black Jack.<sup>11</sup> In fact he

7. A. P. Jackson and E. C. Cole, *Oklahoma: Politically and Topographically Described, History and Guide to the Indian Territory. Biographical Sketches of Capt. David L. Payne* (Kansas City, Mo.: Ramsey, Millett and Hudson, 1885), 10-11.

8. "Casualty Sheet, 10th Kansas Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, Army of the Frontier, Battle Book, Dept. of the Missouri, Oct. 28, 1862, to Oct. 13, 1863," 54, GSA, NARS.

9. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1, 178-79, 197-98, 200; *Report of the Adjutant General*, 187-88; Leland to Mother, April 22, 25, 29, May 24, June 10, 18, 1863, Leland Collection; "Muster Rolls and Payrolls, Tenth Kansas Volunteer Infantry, Co. F, Muster-In Roll, June 1863, and Muster-Out Roll, August 1864," Records of the Kansas Adjutant General's Office, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society, (hereinafter cited as KAG).

10. *Western Journal of Commerce*, Kansas City, Mo., July 11, November 14, 1863; *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1, 15; Leland to Mother, June 10, July 8, August 5, 10, 1863, Leland Collection.

11. Leland to Mother, August 16, 1863, Leland Collection; William Elsey Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars* (Cedar Rapids, Ia.: Torch Press, 1910), 397.

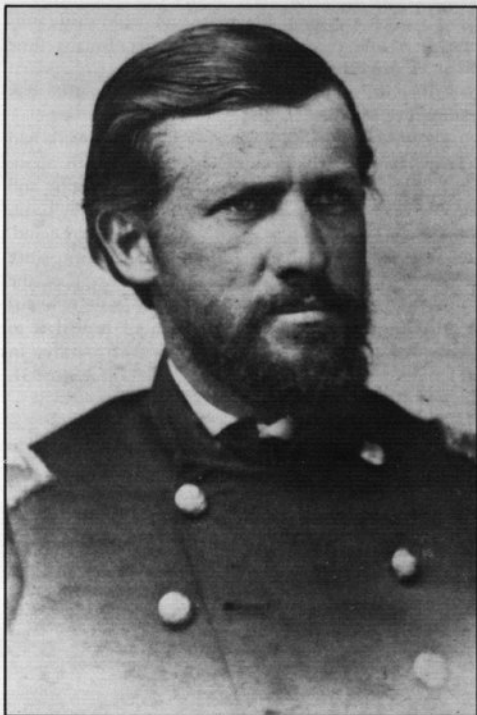
was away slightly longer and as a result became involved in the most important event of his military career and possibly the most important happening of the frontier war in Kansas—the Lawrence massacre.

Despite rumors in mid-August about Missouri guerrillas massing near the border, and in spite of efforts to disperse them, federal officials failed to detect or deter what was happening. Unknown to them, William C. Quantrill, a renegade Kansan, had raised a party of between four hundred and four hundred fifty men by August 20, and late on that day they crossed the state line near Aubrey, heading west for Lawrence. Through a combination of his skill, the incompetence of Union officers, and considerable luck on the morning of August 21, he fell on the unsuspecting town of Lawrence.<sup>12</sup> In his official report, General Ewing described what happened:

The guerrillas, reaching the town at sunrise, caught most of the inhabitants asleep, and scattered to the various houses so promptly as to prevent the concentration of any considerable...number of men. They robbed most of the stores and banks, and burned...private residences and nearly all of the business houses of the town, and, with circumstances of the most fiendish atrocity, murdered 140 unarmed men, among them 14 recruits of the Fourteenth Regiment and 20 of the Second Kansas Colored Volunteers. About 24 persons were wounded.<sup>13</sup>

A great deal has been written about the raid and need not be repeated here. Most historians now believe that the cause of the massacre was the fact that Lawrence was associated in Missourian minds with abolitionism and had frequently been used as the base of operation for numerous Jayhawker and Redleg forays into the Missouri countryside. It was also the home of Gov. Charles Robinson and Sen. James H. Lane, the latter having been earmarked for a heinous execution had he been captured.

After spending most of the morning burning, looting and murdering, Quantrill reassembled his group and headed south from Lawrence to Brooklyn, a hamlet twelve miles away. It was then that United States troops under the command of Major Plumb sighted the rebel column and moved to intercept it. Obviously Quantrill had no intention of fighting Plumb's troops, even though he probably outnumbered them two to one. If he delayed, more Union soldiers would begin arriving, as would



In May 1863, Leland was assigned to the staff of Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr.

armed citizens from Lawrence who were already in the process of joining Plumb. Thus, at the approach of the Union cavalry, Quantrill moved from Brooklyn on a circuitous route that took him near Paola and eventually out of the state. Except for rearguard actions, he escaped virtually untouched.<sup>14</sup>

One of the biggest controversies about the raid rests on what occurred during Quantrill's withdrawal. Major Plumb closed on the guerrillas but failed to attack, and while many accepted his explanation for not fighting, others, for sundry reasons, charged him with cowardice. On September 2, Leland wrote his mother that "It is all wrong about him [Major Plumb] showing cowardice on that Quantrill chase for I was with him and saw all."<sup>15</sup> The jaded condition of the troops' mounts made it impossible for them to strike Quantrill's men, who had

12. Britton, *The Civil War on the Border* (1904), 2: 136-47; Castel, *Frontier State at War*, 124-41; Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, 314, 323; *Daily Times*, Leavenworth, August 30, 1863.

13. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1, 583.

14. *Ibid.*, 590; Castel, *Frontier State at War*, 134-35.

15. Leland to Mother, September 2, 1863, Leland Collection.



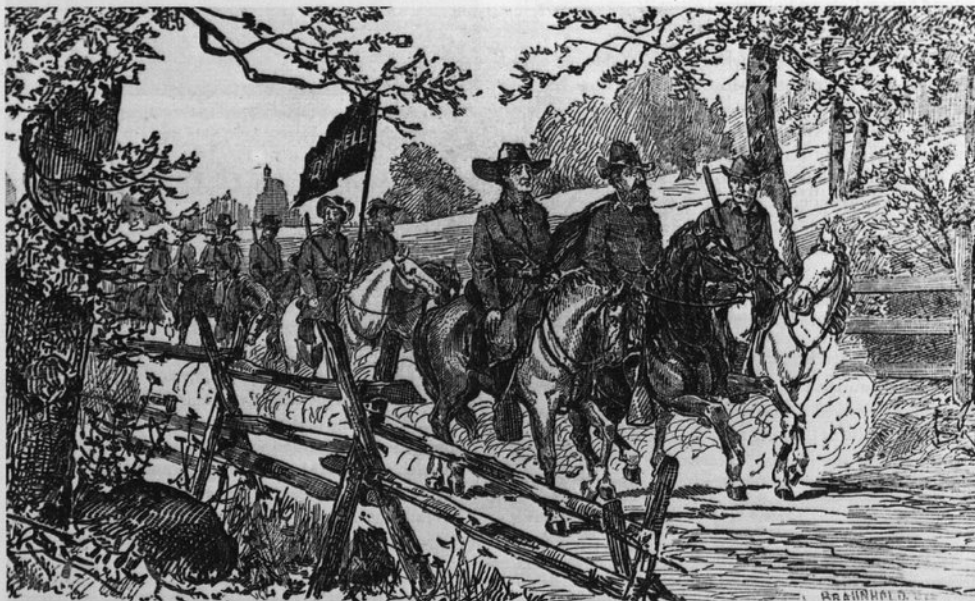
taken fresh horses from Lawrence and could easily outmaneuver and outdistance the Kansans. By the time Plumb's soldiers reached Brooklyn they had ridden over fifty miles; they had spent nearly the entire day of August 21 in their saddles.<sup>16</sup>

Leland had joined Plumb at Olathe. The major had left Ewing's headquarters in Kansas City with about thirty men, and he augmented his force at Olathe and later when he met up with units commanded by Capt. Charles F. Coleman and Lt. John H. Singer. Leland, whose horse was in better condition than most, since it had been ridden less distance, took charge of the Lawrence citizens and pressed Quantrill as he retreated across the rolling prairie from south of Brooklyn to Paola, a distance of approximately twenty-five miles. In a straightforward report filed with Ewing on August 31, Leland described the pursuit as follows:

I joined Major Plumb, at Olathe, Kans., about sunrise on the morning of the 21st instant. He had about 50 men. We started out on the road to Gardner, but soon learned that Quantrill had passed through Gardner the

evening previous, in the direction of Lawrence. We then struck across the country direct for Lawrence. When nearly 3 miles north of Gardner, we found Quantrill's trail, and learned that Captain Coleman, of the Ninth Kansas, was but 4 or 5 miles ahead of us. Major Plumb knew before this that Captain Coleman was ahead of us, and that he was on the trail. We overtook Captain Coleman about 4 miles southeast of Franklin about 9 a.m. Long before this we could see the smoke over the city of Lawrence. Here we moved in a southwesterly direction. We had gone but a short distance when we could see the smoke and dust on the Lawrence and Fort Scott road. Then we knew about where the enemy were. As we moved along we could see the dust and fresh smoke, and could see by this which way they were moving. Along here I asked Major Plumb to give me charge of the militia (the citizens that had and would join us). He did so. Near Brooklyn we made a halt of a few minutes; I suppose it was to find out where the enemy were. While here, a good many of the citizens joined us, and I formed them into companies. I assigned about 50 to a company; had enough to form three companies. Near here we had a skirmish with the enemy; this was about 11 a.m.; the cavalry doing about all of it. Just before this skirmish, General Lane joined us with about 30 men. After this skirmish, Major Plumb ordered me to take the advance with all the militia that I could get. At the first skirmish

16. Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, 400-8; *Western Journal of Commerce*, September 26, 1863.



"On to Lawrence" was the caption for this drawing of Quantrill and his guerrilla force crossing into Kansas.

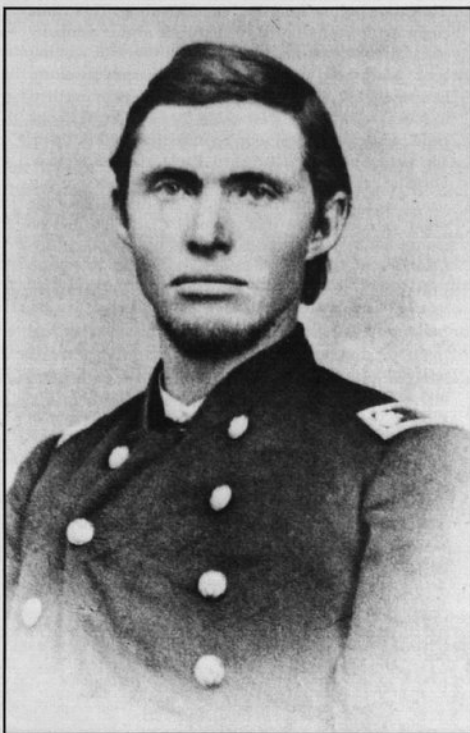
all the militia, with the one exception of one company, broke ranks, some to go farther in the advance, while others would keep away in the rear. I took the advance with the militia; had from 50 to 200 men, but they were strung out in squads away back to our cavalry. There were from 20 to 50 of the militia that would fight very well. Whenever we would press up pretty close and commence firing on the enemy, they would halt and form line of battle, and fight us until our cavalry would come in sight, or come pretty near their range, when they would commence their retreat again. Our cavalry horses were very much worn out, and could not catch up with the advance militia. During the day after the first skirmish, our cavalry, with the exception of one company of the Ninth Kansas, was from 1 to 3 miles in our rear. This company of the Ninth succeeded near sundown in getting near enough to give the enemy a few shots. Along in the afternoon, Major Plumb came up in the advance. He told me that the cavalry horses were completely tired out. The rest of the day Major Plumb was in the advance with the militia, or with this company of the Ninth Kansas, which was then from a quarter to a half of a mile in rear of the advance militia. Just about dark I was in advance with about 40 of the militia. We had just driven the rear guard of the enemy over the brow of a hill when we heard yelling just over this hill. Soon we saw the enemy come up on the hill.

They were in line, I think, about 200 strong. They came charging down upon us. We fell back to this company of cavalry. They formed in line as they saw us coming back. We formed on their right. The enemy came up near enough to fire a few shots, when they commenced to retreat again. This was within 2 or 3 miles of Paola, right west of it. It was soon so dark that we lost them. We went into Paola. Reached Paola about 8 o'clock. Found Colonel [C. S.] Clark there. He soon sent out scouts to find Quantrill's trail. Some time during the night they found the trail. Colonel Clark said that he would start out at 3 o'clock in the morning with all the force that he could get. I staid [sic] with Major Plumb Friday night at Paola. Saturday morning we started on the trail with a few citizens. Near the line we fell in with Majors [W. C.] Ransom and [L. K.] Thacher; they had three companies of cavalry. At Williams' place, some 12 miles in Missouri, we found Colonel Clark. We stopped and fed here. Before we left Williams', Major Phillips came in with a command. Here the command separated. Majors Plumb, Ransom, and Thacher, with their companies, started out in a northeast direction; I kept with them. They scouted the country as they moved.

Sunday we scouted country in toward Lone Jack. Twice we fell in with some Missouri troops. They were scouting the country in every direction. Sunday night we reached Lone Jack, and sent out detachments to guard



*In many artistic portrayals of the Lawrence massacre, the burning buildings dominate the scene. This drawing by Sherman Enderton who served in Company E, Eleventh Kansas, is no exception with its flame and smoke filled sky.*



Major Preston Plumb was criticized for not pursuing Quantrill more aggressively, but Leland wrote that Plumb was no coward, "for I was with him and saw all."

all the crossings. We could see by the enemy's trail that they had disbanded, nearly all of them leaving the direct trail. Monday we scouted the Sni Bottom. Tuesday morning I left Majors Plumb and Thacher near Blue Springs, and came into Independence with Major Ransom, with one company of cavalry. I came into Kansas City in the afternoon with 6 or 8 scouts.

Through the whole of the expedition I do not know of any of our command being killed or wounded. In the chase from Brooklyn to Paola we killed 4 of Quantrill's gang. They were left where they were killed. During the chase in Missouri we killed several men, but I do not know just what number.<sup>17</sup>

Something Leland did not explain in the report but later told William E. Connelley, Quantrill's biographer, was that they hanged one bushwhacker who had been cap-

tured at his home in Missouri. They executed the man, without any semblance of a hearing, at his log cabin and in front of his wife. Likewise, they captured three more "guerrillas" near Lone Jack, hanging them "so high their feet could not be touched by a man riding under them." As warning they nailed a notice to the hanging tree: "'Don't Cut Them Down!'"<sup>18</sup>

Relying on his and other reports given by officers involved, Leland appears to have been one of the few regular army men to have fought Quantrill in Kansas. When news of the raid was reported in the state's newspapers, Lane took credit for doing much of what Leland described. Sol Miller, editor of the *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, was skeptical of Lane's role and decided that the senator accomplished nothing in the chase but later "fabricated accounts of deeds of prowess."<sup>19</sup>

Years afterwards Edwin C. Manning, of the Second Kansas Cavalry, recalled the massacre in the *Kansas Historical Collections* and said that Leland deserved the Medal of Honor for what he did. He described the young lieutenant as being "modest as a school girl, . . . brave as a lion." He claimed that Leland's actions kept Quantrill "from murdering the farmers and burning their houses and barns. . . . For six long hours he fought with a handful of men against tremendous odds, and saved the lives and property of many people."<sup>20</sup> Connelley in his book, *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, says, "No more heroic effort to overhaul an enemy was ever made than that made by Leland that day."<sup>21</sup>

Following his return to Kansas City, Leland was kept busy escorting Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield, who had come to Kansas to investigate the massacre, and later by helping implement Ewing's General Orders No. 11. The effectiveness of General Orders No. 11, which called for the removal of rebel families from the Missouri counties of Jackson, Cass, Bates and part of Vernon, is dramatized in Thomas Hart Benton, Jr.'s, famous painting, but it is attested to by Leland's experience. Responding to his mother's plea for peaches to preserve, he noted, "there are no country people back in this country to bring any to market."<sup>22</sup>

18. Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, 419.

19. *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, September 10, 1863.

20. Manning, "A Kansas Soldier," 427.

21. Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, 405. Some of the data on the pursuit are from William Elsey Connelley, *The Life of Preston B. Plumb, 1837-1891* (Chicago: Browne and Howell Co., 1913), 158-67.

22. Leland to Mother, August 31, September 2, 5, 16, 23, 1863, and Leland to Brother, September 18, 1863, Leland Collection; *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 2, General Orders No. 11, 473, 485-86, 589, 591; Castel, *Frontier State at War*, 146-49, 152; *Emporia News*, September 12, 1863; *Western Journal of Commerce*, September 12, 1863; *State Record*, Topeka, September 30, 1863.

17. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1, 591-93.



Much of what Leland did as part of Ewing's staff after the Lawrence raid is anticlimactic. He was with troops who fought Shelby again in October and November 1863. He wounded a Union army scout who on a drunken spree fired upon Ewing and his staff at a dance hall. He was with Ewing during the Centralia, Missouri, station and fought his way to safety in the town. He was not with Ewing when the general confronted Sterling Price's army in southeast Missouri at Pilot Knob, the opening battle of Price's raid on Kansas City. Leland may have been at the battle of Westport, which climaxed

the raid. The *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* show him in Kansas City serving as a quartermaster. This, however, may have been his father who had the same name and was a quartermaster for the Third Brigade, Army of the Frontier.<sup>24</sup>

Leland ended his army career as a recruitment officer enlisting black troops at St. Joseph, Missouri. In fact, he spent most of this time campaigning across the Missouri River in Doniphan County for the Kansas House of Representatives. He won election in November, and on December 29, 1864, resigned his commission.<sup>25</sup> Leland, thus, began in January 1865, the career which would make his name possibly the most important in late nineteenth-century Kansas politics. KH

23. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1, 16, 662, 675; pt. 2, 671; ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2 (1891), 42, 49, 81, 89, 464, 632-33, 648, 656, 682; pt. 3 (1891), 43, 136-37; ser. 1, vol. 41, pt. 1 (1893), 77, 893-94; pt. 2 (1893), 24-25, 36, 687; Leland to Mother, September 30, October 8, 12, 16, 18, 21, November 4, 6, 14, 1863, January 7, 10, 19, 20, 24, 1864, and Leland to Brother, January 3, 1864, Leland Collection; *Report of the Adjutant General*, 189-90; "Letter, Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr. to Maj. O. C. Green, AAG, Hqs., St. Louis District, July 26, 1864," GSA, NARS.

24. *Weekly Kansas Chief*, Troy, August 7, 1902; *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 41, pt. 1, 417, 445-52, 629; pt. 4 (1893), 94, 1242; Castel, *Frontier State at War*, 184-202; "Field and Staff Muster Rolls, 13th Kansas, Sept. to Nov., 1864, Cyrus Leland," GSA, NARS, "Muster Rolls and Payrolls, Thirteenth Kansas Volunteer Infantry, Field and Staff, Muster-In Roll, September 1862, and Muster-Out Roll, June 1865," KAG. The June 1865 Muster-Out Roll lists Cyrus Leland as being fifty years old, and this, therefore, would have been his father.

25. "Ltr., Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr. to Capt. Frank Eno, AAG, Hqs., St. Louis District, Oct. 29, 1864," GSA, NARS; *Kansas City Star*, January 26, 1913; "Ltr., Lt. Cyrus Leland, Jr. to Maj. J. W. Barnes, AAG, Dept. of the Frontier, Dec. 29, 1864," GSA, NARS.