

Bleeding Kansas Biographies

Judge Joseph Williams

Joseph Williams was born December 28, 1801, in Greensburg, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, and early in life removed to Iowa. He was appointed associate justice of the territory of Iowa in 1838 by President Van Buren, and remained in this office until 1847, when Iowa became a state. He then served as chief justice until 1848. In 1849, he was again called to the supreme bench and served until 1855. In 1857, President Buchanan appointed him as associate justice of Kansas Territory, serving from June 3, 1857, to January 1861. He was assigned to the southern district of Kansas, and resided at Fort Scott, where he acquired some property through the purchase of land in the vicinity. In 1863, President Lincoln appointed him to a seat on a judicial tribunal for the trial of civil crimes at Memphis, Tenn., on which he served until the close of the war, when he visited Iowa, and, returning to his home in Kansas, died at Fort Scott, March 31, 1870.

George W. Clarke

Pro-slavery advocate in Kansas Territory and Pottawatomie Indian Agent. Best known for organizing a force and making a raid through Linn and Bourbon counties mainly on September 1-3, 1856. The army or company that engaged in the raid was reported to have been made up of men from Missouri, pro-slavery men from Bourbon County, and a few from Linn County. The free-state settlers abandoned their claims and moved into Missouri or secreted themselves in the brush until the attacks subsided. In most cases the reported damages were crops destroyed, fences torn down, cattle, horses, and hogs driven off, household goods burned or stolen, guns stolen, and in a few instances the settlers' cabins burned. The reason for the Clarke raid seems to stem from political differences and land grabbing. Later Clarke served as register of the Land Office at Fort Scott.

John Little

Deputy Marshal from Fort Scott with pro-slavery leanings. In this capacity, he made various trips up to Northern Bourbon County-Southern Linn County in an attempt to disband the Squatters' Court. He believed the Squatters' Court—with Free State leanings—was bogus and in violation of the rebellion act. The rebellion act was legislation passed by the pro-slavery legislature in February 1857 that made it unlawful for two or more persons to combine for the purpose of resisting the enforcement of the law. In December 1858, former Deputy Marshal Little was killed by free-state raiders in Fort Scott who were in the process of rescuing a prisoner jailed by the pro-slavery legislature.

William Stone

Free-state farmer from Northern Bourbon County. In September 1856, he was forced to abandon his farm by the Clarke raid. When he was four miles across the Missouri line, he was stopped by some ruffians and "compelled" to sign a bill of sale for his claim, crops, and property left in the territory to a Mr. Jobe. He said, "through fear he signed the order." In June 1857, Stone, returning to his claim, found it occupied by a pro-slavery preacher by the name of Southwood. Stone and friends built another dwelling on the land to contest the right of Southwood at the land office. Mrs. Southwood attacked his wife at one point while obtaining water from a common well.

"Preacher" Southwood

Pro-slavery preacher who purchased Stone's farm from a distant relative, Mr. Jobe. After Mr. Stone returned to reclaim his land, he and Mr. Stone jointly occupied the land. When Mrs. Southwood beat Mrs. Stone at the well, Mr. and Mrs. Southwood were forced to remove themselves following a decision of the free-state Squatters' Court. "Preacher" Southwood traveled to Fort Scott, and before a grand jury, he succeeded in getting the citizens who had ordered him to leave indicted for rebellion and trespass.

Squatters' Court

Claiming that they were unable to secure justice in the regular pro-slavery leaning courts, free-state men instituted a squatters' court that took on the dignity of a regular court and issued impartial (though probably free-state leaning) justice to anyone who was tried before it. The main purpose of the squatters' court was to decide disputed claims in defiance of the Rebellion Act that was suffered to exist by the authorities at Fort Scott.