

Adair Cabin Podcast Transcription

Narrator: John Brown is one of the most controversial figures in U. S. history. To some, he was a liberator. To others, he was a murderous outlaw. Born to abolitionists in Connecticut in 1800, Brown held onto his anti-slavery views through a lifetime of trials, which included several failed business attempts. In 1855, Brown came to Kansas to take up arms for his cause, making his part-time headquarters in the free-state town of Osawatomie. It was there that he first gained national attention and earned the moniker "Osawatomie Brown." The town's free-state population made it a target for pro-slavery attacks. Among the attacks was the Battle of Osawatomie, the largest battle of the border wars in the pre-Civil War period known as Bleeding Kansas.

John Brown's story is interpreted on the site of the Battle of Osawatomie and in the cabin that was later moved to the site – a cabin that belonged to Brown's half-sister and brother-in-law, Florella and Samuel Adair. Samuel Adair, a Congregational minister, was commissioned in 1851 by the American Missionary Association, an organization that believed that slavery was inconsistent with Christian teachings. In October 1854, the AMA sent Samuel Adair and his wife Florella to Kansas, where they ministered to congregants in the free-state New England Emigrant Aid Company town of Osawatomie.

Because ministers were leaders in free-state communities, they were targets for violence, according to Adair Cabin site curator Grady Atwater:

Grady: Now, one of the things about ministers was they were the ideological leaders of the Free State cause. And they were targets. If you had Reverend in front of your name and you were an abolitionist, you were absolutely, there was a bulls-eye on you.

Narrator: The Adairs shared Brown's disdain for slavery and belief that all men were created equal.

Grady: Reverend Samuel and his wife Florella came to Kansas. Florella Adair was the half sister of John Brown. Now, both the Adairs and John Brown believed all people were equal in the eyes of God. Therefore, Racism and slavery was a sin that had to be eradicated from American society.

Narrator: But unlike John Brown, the Adairs hoped to achieve free-state status for Kansas through non-violent political means.

Grady: They didn't believe in violence, but they were going to dig their heels in and not leave regardless of whatever threats were thrown at them. John Brown came out in October of 1855. And he came out here purely to fight. Samuel Adair, in a letter in 1856, said, "There's a brother in law of mine who's likely arrived from New York." Brother in law and son in law. "He has, very much, the warlike spirit. My hope that he will only use in the defense of suffrage." The problem was, of course, he was not just going to use it in the defense of suffrage. He was here to, for an offensive war. So the Adairs had this, kind of, they agreed with his cause. They disagreed with his means.

Now, one thing to understand is that nobody was innocent of committing violence during this time. The pro-slavery people did it. The Free State people did it. So therefore, realistically we, it was a situation that was very complex.

- Narrator: John Brown's sons had settled east of Osawatomie, Kansas in early 1855. When he arrived in late 1855, Brown first set about constructing a cabin and helping his sons. Still, the Adairs were torn over whether or not to welcome the divisive figure into their home.
- Grady: But none-the-less, when he showed up they were put in this quandary. Do we let him in? Do we not let him in? And they chose to let him in. But their debates flew in this cabin, as to tactics. So therefore, the Adairs had this kind of, "What do we do?" "How do we relate to John Brown?" And they chose to disagree with his tactics. And disavow his tactics. But still because "A," he was family and "B," they agreed with his cause, when he did come and he was ill or needed to stay here, he could stay here. Thus, it became kind of an informal headquarters for him. Much to consternation of the peaceful Adairs.
- Narrator: The Adairs worst fears were realized on August 30, 1856 when pro-slavery militia came to find Brown after his victory at the Battle of Black Jack. The events that ensued, what came to be known as the Battle of Osawatomie, began with the murder of Brown's son Frederick.
- Grady: So, David Rice Atchison had brought 1,500 men into Kansas territory. They found out John Brown was here at Osawatomie. So, he set, he dispatched John Reid, who was in the Mexican-American War, to capture John Brown. Well, Brown expected, he knew he was going to be attacked. So, he was looking to the east. Common sense, that's where they're coming from. Reid is smart. He came in from the west. He looped around.
- Now Frederick Brown was walking up to this cabin and he came upon Reverend Martin White, who was a pro-slavery version of Brown. Now the Brown's had run him out of the territory and upon seeing him Reverend Martin White, shot him dead. Emma Adair, inside this cabin, heard the shot. She looked out, nine years old, went and got her father.
- Narrator: Reverend Adair sent his 13-year-old son Charles to warn Brown, who enlisted a number of men to fight.
- Grady: But John Brown had rounded up about around 30, 31 to 40 men, depending on the source you use. They fought a running battle roughly from about a mile outside of town to here. But this is where the heat of the battle was. John Brown's men took a stand in the trees down at the foot of this hill. Which is on the battle site. They were armed with Sharp's Carbines. They could shoot eleven rounds in the time that the pro-slavery's muzzle loaders could shoot three rounds. So, the pro-slavery forces lined up at, in an arc at the top of this hill. They charged on horseback thinking that John Brown's men would be impressed by this. Well, John Brown was not terribly impressed and he had ordered his men to open fire, knocked several, shot several pro-slavery men off their saddles. They decided to take John Brown a bit more seriously. They dismounted, they regrouped and dismounted. And they snuck forward with bayonets, affixed. They put a cannon on Brown's flank and began firing into the trees, above Brown's head. Now, after about forty five minutes of fighting, and John Brown being attacked on his flank, Brown realized he couldn't win this one. But, he was using guerrilla tactics. So, what he did was he retreated in such a way, hoping that they

would follow him. And they did, to the river. But John Reid was trying to get the men to follow John Brown. Well, the guerrillas, the pro-slavery people were also guerrillas and they knew the trick. Get them scattered out in the woods, so they can get picked off. I'm not going for that. So, they rode in and burned Osawatomie, leaving three buildings standing.

Narrator: Among the buildings threatened by the post-battle attack was Samuel and Florella Adair's cabin.

Grady: Now, following the Battle of Osawatomie, this cabin became involved because twenty-four pro-slavery surrounded the cabin. They pointed a cannon at the door. Now, Florella Adair, during the battle had taken in a house full of sick people. Her husband, she didn't know whether her husband and son was dead or alive, she was eight months pregnant. And here she is confronted by this, on top of everything. Now, contrary to panicking, she was in no mood to be trifled with. So, she opened the door, crossed her arms, looked the pro-slavery leader in the eye and looked at the cannon and, very calmly said, "Gentlemen, you may have anything you want in the place, but spare the house. I'm taking care of sick people" and turned around and walked back in. Well, everybody was got. Well...Ok? So, they got off their horse, one of the pro-slavery guerrillas got off her horse and checked out the cabin and found no body was, it was nothing but sick people. Got up and said, "Ma'am. We're gentlemen, we don't harm women or children. But if we find your men, we'll hang them." And they stole some horses and some items from the grounds and rode off. And this is why the cabin sits here. Because, Florella had the calm nature and the courage to stand and stare in the face of the ...stare in the face of twenty four armed men and their artillery and not back down. So, the Battle of Osawatomie was the largest battle during the Bleeding Kansas period and it was fought here on this site.

Narrator: Although the Adairs scolded the Browns for endangering their lives, they continued to play a role in John Brown's crusades. When Brown took eleven slaves from Vernon County, Missouri in December 1858, he hid them in the Adair Cabin before ushering them to freedom in Canada. The raid was seen by some as a dress rehearsal for Brown's famous attack on Harpers Ferry, for which he was hanged in 1859. During the Civil War, Samuel Adair served as a chaplain for the Union army at Fort Leavenworth. The couple was in Leavenworth when Florella died in 1865. Samuel Adair was living in the cabin when he died in 1898.

Soon after Samuel Adair's death, his children devoted themselves to preserving the site of the Battle of Osawatomie and the Adair Cabin.

Grady: So what had happened was, Emma Adair, who had married J.B. Remington, who was a Civil War officer, prevailed upon her husband to purchase the land, that the battlefield was on because it was coming up for sale. Bought it, preserved it, and more or less deeded it to the state also to preserve the battle field.

In 1910, the cabin used to be a mile west of where it is right now. In 1910 Charles Adair, the son of the Adair's, bought it. So the Adairs wanted to make absolutely sure that it was taken care of and preserve and make sure the public could see it. So, they and the state, it was a state, community partnership, moved it here into, moved it here in 1912. And when they took it apart literally put roman numerals in the walls and assembled it *exactly* like it was when they found it. So, when you're walking into this cabin, visitors walk into this cabin, they're walking into the cabin like it was in the 1850s. They did the best they could to return it to the way it was when the Adairs lived here in the 1850s. Now, that's, that makes

this a jewel because there's nothing re-created here, in the John Brown, the Adair Cabin. Nothing re-created, it's all the original furniture. And we can tell that because, what happened was, in 1898, Reverend Adair died. And the Adair family literally took the furniture into the Adair home, which Charles Adair built the home right beside it. And when they moved it here they just put it all right back. So therefore you can see the authentic, it is the authentic cabin with the authentic furniture. And we have many of John Brown's items, his rifle, many and other items that John Brown used when he was in Kansas Territory.

Narrator: The Adair Cabin in Osawatomie is one of the rare remaining places where Bleeding Kansas events are interpreted in their authentic setting. The site helps to tell the story of the lives of the Adairs and the activities of the controversial character John Brown.