

Lanesfield School Podcast Transcript

Narrator: Lanesfield was one of two Kansas towns named after Jim Lane, who led a small force of Jayhawkers in a nearby pre-Civil War skirmish that came to be known as the Battle of Bull Creek.

James Henry Lane was an unlikely spokesman for the morally charged movement to admit Kansas to the Union as a free state. At the time of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Lane was a Democratic Congressman from Indiana who voted in favor of the controversial measure. By the late 1850s, Lane had cultivated a reputation as a fighter for the free-state cause.

Lane first gained recognition in Kansas during the Wakarusa War, a standoff that ensued after pro-slavery Sheriff Samuel Jones and a force of Missourians lay siege to Lawrence, Kansas, the free-state town Lane called home. Although open warfare was averted with a compromise agreement in December 1855, the violence continued. On May 21, 1856, Sheriff Jones returned and sacked Lawrence.

Lane was not averse to using violence to further the free-state cause and protect his adopted home. By 1856, at the peak of border violence, Lane had mustered a militia of 250 men.

On August 25, 1856, Governor Woodson, appointed proslavery advocate David Rice Atchison, a former Missouri Senator, to maintain order in Kansas. Atchison and his militia crossed into Kansas and set camp on the east bank of Bull Creek. From this jumping off point, they invaded the free-state town of Osawatomie, Kansas on August 30.

Lane and his militia were prepared to encounter Atchison's men, according to Stephanie Clayton, the site manager at the Lanesfield School Historic Site, where the Johnson County Museums interprets the battle:

Stephanie: There was a detachment of about 250 men who were led by John W. Reid. And they marched south to Osawatomie, where they fought John Brown's militia and Brown's son Frederick was killed in this battle. The camp at Bull Creek, the Santa Fe Trail did cross right by this. It had a very deep spring of good waters, so it was a very popular camping site for Atchison's men as well as people traveling on the trail.

Narrator: When Jim Lane heard about the movement of Atchison's militia, he mustered his own force to attack Atchison's camp.

Stephanie: He was able to get around between 300 and 400 men to march against Atchison's men, who were still camped out on this camp ... Jim Lane gathered these men and because Atchison had some foresight, he managed to or he decided to have several scouts out. So, an ambush was out of the question. And Lane's 300, even 400 men, at the highest number, were severely outnumbered by Atchison's men. So, Lane decided to devise a plan. There were some ridges just to the west of Bull Creek and what Lane did was he assembled his men, sort of in a circle and had them march, so that at times they were visible to the east and at times they weren't. So, he managed to deceive Atchison's men and have them think that Lane had more men than he actually

did. Now, according to legend, Lane also took a stovepipe and mounted it on the back of a wagon to make it appear that they had a cannon.

Narrator: Lane's scattering of Atchison's militia marked the end of a summer plagued by guerilla warfare and the end of large-scale attempts by pro-slavery militias to enter Kansas. Before Lane left the area, he and his men burned the cabin of a southern sympathizer named Richard McCamish. Undeterred by the raid, Richard McCamish later founded the proslavery town of McCamish.

Although many opposed Lane's approach, he became a kind of celebrity whose endorsement was sought by speculators. Two years after the Battle of Bull Creek, William Gans founded the town of Lanesfield, across the river from McCamish. Gans, who hailed from Lane's home state of Indiana, was apparently a friend of Lane's, accompanying Lane's estranged wife to Kansas in Spring 1858.

Although Lane himself never lived in Lanesfield, some evidence suggests that he was an investor in the town that bore his name.

Stephanie: There is a small bit of evidence that says that Lane helped to build a two-story hotel in the town with a Captain John Gordon. We have the records of the Presbyterian Church in the area that they, uh, they built a log cabin structure where they had their first church here in Lanesfield. But they did say that before that structure was built, that they held church quote, "over Jim Lane's store."

Narrator: According to historian and Lane biographer Robert Collins, Lane is believed to have been in Lanesfield at a key moment in territorial history:

Robert: in October of 1857 there was the next round of territorial elections. And for the first time the free-state party decided they would compete in these elections. And Lane, in order to make sure there was no fraud, had offered to organize a free-state militia and to protect the polls. And supposedly Lane came here to Lanesfield to protect this poll in particular. And a group of US Army soldiers shows up, along with his militia on election day. And the lieutenant in charge of the United States Army troopers comes up, looks over Lane. There's a lot of laughter at the whole scene. And then the scene passes and everybody here votes. And that's pretty much it. And it's, I believe, the only time we have documented that Lane is actually present in Lanesfield.

Narrator: Until Lane murdered his Lawrence* neighbor Gaius Jenkins over a land dispute in 1858, some believed he was a viable 1860 presidential candidate. Abraham Lincoln was elected president before Kansas was admitted to the Union. And Lane was named by the Kansas Legislature to serve as one of the state's first U.S. Senators. By the time Lane arrived in Washington to serve his first term, the Civil War broke out. Lane soon aligned with President Lincoln, organizing the frontier guard of 120 Kansas men to protect Lincoln during the early days of the War. Following the Battle of Wilson's Creek in August 1861, with Lincoln's blessing, Senator Lane organized his "Lane's Brigade" to defend the Kansas border. The result was an escalation of the border wars.

By September 1862, Lane had mustered 1,200 men. Lane's Brigade encountered Sterling Price and his confederate troops at the Battle of Dry Wood Creek near Deerfield, Missouri. After a short skirmish, Lane retreated and Price continued his campaign into Lexington, Missouri.

The events that followed were among Lane's most egregious acts of violence. Lane and his men attacked Price's troops from behind. In Osceola, a prominent Osage River town, the Jayhawkers murdered 10 citizens, burned more than 100 homes, stole \$8000 from the bank, and loaded wagons with plunder. Lane's personal share of the loot included \$1000 in gold, a piano, silk dresses and a carriage.

Despite Lane's fame, the town that bore his name never attained the status its storied beginnings appeared to foreshadow. The town's death knell came with the railroad's choice to bypass it in favor of nearby Edgerton in 1870.

Stephanie: The population of Lanesfield peaked at about a hundred people. There were several houses, I believe about twelve residences and three churches, several stores, a blacksmith shop, your basic trappings of any small trail town, post office, churches, school. Once the railroad bypassed the town, this is what did it. This what caused the population of the town to slowly go downhill. Although, both of the towns were really counting on it to come through and kind of mushroom them into prosperity. By 1872, two years later, all you have is a stone house north of the school, a few houses south of it, three houses across the street and then the hotel,

Narrator: By the time the railroad bypassed Lanesfield, its town's founder, William Gans had moved his family to Olathe. James Lane was dead – and his legacy was already in jeopardy.

Robert: Lane's problem began after Lincoln's assassination. He was a patronage politician. Which meant he aligned himself with more powerful politicians, in this case, of course, the President. The problem that Lane ran into was that he didn't foresee that President Johnson, who replaced Lincoln, would come into conflict with the radical Republicans in Congress so quickly after, um, 1865. And he became torn between them. At one point a civil rights law was, uh, passed through Congress by the radical Republicans. Johnson had vetoed it and there was a vote to sustain the veto. Lane initially agreed, uh, with Johnson, to uphold the veto. He then got word from Kansas that that would be an extremely unpopular thing to do. He finally came back to Kansas in late June of 1866. And then just one day decided that he would commit suicide. Uh, smuggled a weapon out of the house, they were out on a ride and he stepped out of the carriage and said, "Goodbye gentlemen", put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Ah, he was heavily eulogized as, at the time as being a very great Kansan. The man who had helped free Kansas from slavery. It was only much later, as the abolitionists who outlived him, began to write their own histories, especially his political rival, Charles Robinson. And began a, sort of, two pronged campaign of, diminishing John Brown and diminishing Jim Lane, so that, as I note in my book, by the beginning of the twentieth, actually, by the mid of the twentieth century, you would think Lane was just some crazy politician who people listened to for a little while but had absolutely no influence on state history, whatsoever. And in some histories of the era doesn't even appear at all.

Narrator: Today, Lanesfield School is the only remnant of the town of Lanesfield.