

## Chapter 232– Pro-Slavery Forces Attack The Town Of Lawrence, Kansas



**Dates:**  
May 21, 1856

**Sections:**  
• Open Warfare Is Sparked By The Sack Of Lawrence

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### Open Warfare Is Sparked By The Sack Of Lawrence



A Typical Frontier Town

Sandwiched between Sumner’s “Crimes In Kansas” speech and his savage caning by Preston Brooks lies another turning point in the saga of Bloody Kansas, this time in the Free State capital of Lawrence.

At the center of this incident is Samuel Jones, the Sheriff of Douglas County. Jones is a Virginian by birth who emigrates to Westport, Missouri in 1854 at thirty-five years of age to become postmaster. He is soon drawn into opening up Kansas as a Slave State, and joins the Border Ruffians in stealing the congressional seat election on March 30, 1855. Along with Samuel Lecompte – President Pierce’s choice as Chief Justice of the territory’s Supreme Court -- Jones co-founds the town of Lecompton, and opens an initially prosperous lumber and saw milling operation there.

In September 1855, he is appointed Sheriff of Douglas County by the Pro-Slavery legislature. His domain includes Lawrence, where he is christened the “bogus Sheriff” by townspeople, who repeatedly threaten him, as in this message signed by the “Secret Twelve:”

*Sheriff Jones—You are notified that if you make one more arrest by the order of any magistrate appointed by the Kansas Bogus Legislature, that in so doing you will sign your own Death Warrant. Per order. SECRET TWELVE*

In turn a Free State posse abducts his prisoner on the way to jail, provoking the Wakarusa War incident in November 1855. In April 1856 he is twice pummeled by mobs and then shot in the back while trying to make arrests in Lawrence.

On May 15, 1856, tension rises when Free State Governor Charles Robinson is jailed in response to warrants issued by Judge Lecompte. On May 21, Jones returns to Lawrence to make additional arrests, only this time he arrives on the scene with a force of 700 men, some Federal militia and others pro-slavery marauders itching for a battle. To signal their determination, they haul four cannon to the scene.

Confronted with this overwhelming firepower, the residents of Lawrence allow U.S. Deputy Marshal Fain to enter the town and carry out his duties peacefully. Having completed his assignment, the head of the Federal militia dismisses his men from duty – which leaves Sheriff Jones and the remaining pro-slavery gang in place.

This is their chance to wreak havoc on Lawrence and they take it. They sweep into town and turn their attention first to the offices of the two leading opposition newspapers, the *Herald of Freedom* and the *Kansas Free State*. Both are torn apart, with their presses and type dumped in the Kansas River.

The Free State Hotel, headquarters of the resistance movement, is next, with the four cannon lined up facing the building and ex-U.S. Senator David Atchison directing the fire. When the structure walls survive, kegs of powder are piled inside and the building is burned to the ground.

General looting follows along with the destruction of the home of Charles and Sarah Robinson. Robinson himself is already in jail, having been arrested on May 10 and charged with treason for his role as the Free Stater’s chosen Governor of Kansas.

As the invaders depart, Sheriff Sam Jones is said to exclaim:

*This is the happiest day of my life, I assure you.*