

## John Brown

Finding objective information on the guerillas and abolitionists on the Missouri-Kansas border is quite difficult. It seems every writer slants his material in the direction of his/her beliefs and prejudices. Just a few short years ago I visited Harpers Ferry, West Virginia and Charles Town, West Virginia where John Brown was hanged. While there I acquired a 36-page booklet/pamphlet titled *John Brown Captain: A Brief History*. I do not know who is responsible for putting all the material together, but the listed sources were *The Life, Trial and Conviction of Capt. John Brown*, John M. Dewitt, Publisher—1859 and several other websites. If you google that title you will find the information was written by Robert DeWitt, not John and it is 124 pages. I don't believe I have read so much balderdash in my life. It makes John Brown out to be a God-fearing saint who committed no wrongs. He comes across as a super-human warrior who defeated his enemies regardless of the odds against him. The odds in four different battles were two to one, three to one, five to one and even ten to one and Brown was victorious every time with minimal loss to his men. Per this source he would not think of murdering someone and paroled every prisoner he took. Granted, he did win some battles against the pro-slavery Missourians.

Albert Castell recognized the bias in all the writers and attempted to write a fair and truthful biography of Quantrill, *William Clark Quantrill: His Life and Times*. I would give him far more credit for objectivity than the pamphlet. He said of John Brown:

- ❖ On May 24, 1856, Brown, three of his sons and three other men rode through the Pottawattamie Valley and at the home of three Missouri settlers and kidnapped the men. The next morning four bullet-riddled, sword-hacked bodies were found. John Brown, agent of the Lord had struck. This would become known as the Pottawattamie massacre.
- ❖ Brown had been on a sojourn to New England and returned with a small band of fanatics he was to train as guerillas. He joined forces with James Montgomery and Charles Jennison (these were the worst of the worst Jayhawkers) and prepared to attack Fort Scott and Rice, Missouri.
- ❖ December of 1856 found Brown and his forces plundering homes, destroying farm equipment and liberating slaves along the Little Osage River in Missouri. They returned to Kansas with eleven slaves, many horses and a lot of loot. They left behind in Missouri the body of David Cruise, "a plain and unoffending farmer," who dared to defend his property.
- ❖ The Missouri legislature offered a \$3,000 reward for Brown, dead or alive. When in Missouri again, a dragoon squadron chased him back into Kansas. From there he would go on to fulfill his destiny at Harpers Ferry.



Brown was born on May 9, 1800, in Torrington Connecticut and was the fourth of eight children of Owen and Ruth Mills Brown. When he was five-years-old his family moved to Hudson, Ohio, where Owen Brown opened a tannery and he once had Jesse R. Grant, father of Ulysses S. Grant, as an apprentice.

Brown married his first wife, Dianthe Lusk in 1820. She would produce seven children. Brown moved his family to a 200-acre tract of forest land he purchased in New Richmond, Pennsylvania in 1825. He

cleared about 25 acres of the woods and built a house, barn and a tannery. Before a year had past the tannery employed fifteen men. He was also making money raising cattle and surveying. He helped start a school and a post office.

Until 1855 when Brown joined five of his sons in Kansas, he and his family would be moving again and again. Living in Massachusetts, Ohio, New York and more than one town in these states.

John and Dianthe's last son was born and died on August 7, 1832 and three days later she was also dead. On June 14, 1833, the thirty-three-year-old man went to the cradle and came out with a sixteen-year-old bride by the name of Mary Ann Day from Washington County, New York. She would give Brown thirteen more children for a total of twenty and eleven of them reached maturity. Mary Ann would survive Brown by over 24 years.

On November 7 1837, he was deeply affected by the murder of a fellow named Elijah Parish Lovejoy. Lovejoy was a Presbyterian minister, journalist and newspaper editor in Alton, Illinois. The thing that bothered Brown was that Lovejoy was an ardent abolitionist and his murderers were a mob of pro-slavery men who were attacking his warehouse to destroy his printing press. Brown publicly vowed: "Here, before God, in the presence of these witnesses, from this time, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery!"

Five of Brown's sons had relocated to Kansas when that territory was opened for homesteading. By 1855 the pro-slavers and the abolitionists had turned the state into "Bleeding Kansas." They wrote their father that they had no way to protect themselves from an attack. Brown and a son-in-law armed themselves and headed for Kansas. As the pair moved west they attended anti-slavery meetings and received financial assistance and weapons.

Following the events in Kansas, Brown spent two and a half years traveling throughout New England, raising money to bring his anti-slavery war to the South. In 1859, John Brown, under the alias Isaac Smith rented the Kennedy Farmhouse four miles north of Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). He arrived in Harpers Ferry on July 3, 1859, and for the next three months trained his 21-man army and planned their capture of the Harpers Ferry Federal Arsenal. The twenty-one members did not include himself, a daughter and a daughter-in-law. It did include three of his sons, and there were sixteen were white and five black men in his little army, not even close to what he had planned.

Part of the plan included providing slaves in the area with weapons. Brown believed that these armed slaves would then join his army and free even more slaves as they fanned southward along the Appalachian Mountains. If the plan worked, it would strike terror in the hearts of slave owners. Brown began his ill-fated raid at about 10:30 at night on October 16, 1859 and it went very well at first. They entered the town without any problems, cut the telegraph wires and easily took possession of the armory. After that the carefully developed plan began to unravel. None of the local slaves joined his venture. Their next depredation occurred when a group led by a man named Cook appeared at the home of Colonel Lewis Washington, a great-grandnephew of George Washington and a large farmer and slave owner. Cook had been in the home earlier and knew that Washington had an antique sword given to George Washington by Frederick the Great and a pair of heirloom pistols given to his uncle by Lafayette. The gang took Washington as a prisoner and loaded his slaves into a wagon and proceeded down the road to the house of a

Mister Allstadt, another large farmer. They took Allstadt and his sixteen year -old son as prisoners and all the slaves they could find were forced to join the movement.

Then they made a big mistake. A mail train arrived as usual and a black assistant baggage master was mortally shot. The train was ordered not to leave town but after waiting until after daylight the train was underway again and at noon contacted authorities in Baltimore and Washington.

Colonel Robert W. Baylor crossed the bridge around noon with troops from Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia) and cleared Brown's people from the bridge, and they ran for the armory. The troops and armed locals kept the raiders pinned down in the armory by firing from the heights behind the town. Brown sent his son Watson and another man out under a flag of truce and the angry townfolks shot them. In the ensuing firing another son, Oliver, was mortally wounded.

At 11:00 on Monday, the night train with Baltimore military and Marines arrived in Sandy Hook, Virginia (now West Virginia) where they awaited the arrival of Colonel Robert E. Lee to take command. Immediately after arrival Colonel Lee stationed the Marines within the armory grounds.

Early the next morning another flag of truce came out of the armory. This time there was no shooting and the terms of surrender were presented to Lieutenant JEB Stuart acting as aide to Colonel Lee. Stuart demanded an unconditional surrender and promised only that they would be protected from violence and a fair trial by law. Brown refused any terms but those he proposed, which was that his people walk out with their arms taking their prisoners with them; that they proceed to the second tollgate without being pursued, and they would fight if they could not escape.

The Marines had been divided into two squads and were ready and willing to storm the door. Lieutenant Stuart, being unable to reach an agreement with Brown, turned and walked away from the door and gave the signal to attack. The Marines battered the door down and rushed into the armory. There was some resistance and one Marine in the front fell. Then all the Marines rushed in and the firing was quickly over. Another Marine suffered a flesh wound.

The insurgents were brought out, some dead, some wounded and they were greeted with execrations and were saved because of the precautions taken by the military. Brown was one of the wounded, but would survive.

Brown recovered enough to stand trial in a fairly short time. After going through several attorneys for Brown his trial, held in Charles Town, began on Wednesday, October 26 and lasted through Monday, October 31, 1859. Final arguments were made on Monday and the jury deliberated for one-half hour and found him guilty of treason and murder and was sentenced to hang.

Brown remained in the jail while the verdict was appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court. The appeal failed and on December 2, 1859, Brown and four of his men were hanged. Several future Confederate generals and John Wilkes Booth was on the platform.



The trap was sprung at 11:15 and he was pronounced dead at 11:50. The bodies of Brown and his two sons were transported to the John Brown Farm in North Elba, New York where they were buried.

