

# Augustus Wattles

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Augustus Wattles was born on August 25, 1807, in Lebanon, Connecticut, the son of Erastus and Sarah Tomas Wattles. He entered Lane Theological Seminary near Cincinnati, Ohio, where he studied for the Presbyterian ministry and organized schools for black boys. He traveled throughout Ohio and the country establishing more schools and working for the abolition of slavery.

He bought land in Mercer, Ohio, where he continued his ministry by giving freed slaves title to portions of the land. He also helped educate blacks to be self-supporting when they attained freedom. After years of working this work, with its long horseback journeys, lecture tours and missionary work among white and black. Wattles was compelled by failing health to give it up. Securing a teacher for the school, he turned the property over to a board of trustees and moved his family to a farm on the Ohio River, some forty miles above Cincinnati, where he could still be in touch with the work but gain a respite from the active labor.

Wattles' family moved to Lawrence on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1855. In a few days they had located on a claim seven miles to the southwest in the Bloomington precinct and on the same day they plowed and planted a garden, and staked out lines for a cornfield to be plowed the very next day. The family continued to occupy the wagons, which served as their dwelling place while forty acres of prairie were broken and corn planted, "so the corn could be growing while the cabin was building."

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of March preceding the family's arrival, the first territorial election had been held and made a mockery by Missouri border ruffians, who ejected the officials from the Bloomington precinct, confiscated the ballots, and illegally voted pro-slavery Missourian representatives to the Assembly. Protest reports were filed by Judges Harrison Burson and Nathaniel Ramsey to Governor Reeder. Augustus was called to testify to Mr. Reeder:

I came into the Territory about the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1855, and settled on Rock Creek, in the second district, nine or ten miles from Lawrence; and my family has resided there ever since, though I have been away on business some, in other parts of the Territory. I have examined the poll-list of the second district, for the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1854, in connection with the census returns. I find 25 of the census list of names in the poll-list, though some of them I never knew, and I do not think they ever lived in the district. I do not recognize in the poll-book any names of residents that were not in the census, but some I think I was acquainted with in Missouri.

And as cross-examined by Mr. Woodson:

I came here in May 1855, and was put up as a candidate at the second election, in May 1855, and traveled over the district, and in that way became acquainted with a great many in that district...

Augustus was elected (on May 22, 1855) to the Kansas Legislature, only to have his seat taken from him by Missourians when the legislature met at Ft. Riley on July 1<sup>st</sup>. During that summer he commuted to Ft. Riley to do contract work for the fort commander, a Major Ogden. A cholera epidemic, which supposedly had been brought in from Santa Fe, had broken out in a camp of Indians near the fort,

decimating the population and almost destroying the camp. It soon spread to the soldiers at the fort. This temporarily put a stop to Wattles' contract work, and at Ogden's request he assisted in the care of the sick until the epidemic ran its course. Then he finished his work.

In November of that year, while he was engaged in work for the government at Ft. Riley, two of his horses were taken and used to spread the alarm that the Missouri raiders were coming. During that winter, one of the coldest on record, he assisted in distribution of clothing and provisions to isolated farms and communities where residents had been robbed or had had their homes burned.

The spring of 1856 brought no abatement of the settlers' political woes. Augustus Wattles, in reduced circumstances, having lost his horses in the border ruffian raids, had first to look after the spring planting, work which was constantly interrupted by raids, calls for assistance from neighbors, and calls to beleaguered Lawrence. By the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1856, a large armed force had collected in the vicinity of Lawrence. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, Samuel J. Jones, who had been appointed Sheriff of Douglas County by the Shawnee Legislature, entered the town with armed followers. Under the auspices of writs from the First District Court of the United States for Kansas Territory, they burned and battered down the Free State Hotel and then destroyed the offices of the *Herald of Freedom* and the *Kansas Free State* newspapers. Colonel H. C. Titus commanded the cavalry and infantry, numbering 800 men, armed with four pieces of artillery. A considerable part of the force consisted of South Carolinians, under the command of Major Buford. There was planted on the walls of the *Herald of Freedom* office, before its destruction, a blood red flag, bearing a lone star and words "South Carolina and Southern Rights."

After this incident at Lawrence, Augustus Wattles brought from Pawnee a printing press and assisted in installing and getting it in running order. Although it was November 2<sup>nd</sup> before the first issue came out, it was Augustus Wattles who entered the office that day as assistant editor.

During the summer of 1856 the activities of Maj. Buford's forces, stationed in a two-story cabin or "blockhouse" called Ft. Saunders, became very aggressive. This fort was located about four miles south of the Wattles house, and a Mr. David Starr Hoyt, a free-state man, told Wattles that to his knowledge the commander of the fort was a Freemason. Hoyt, a Mason himself, thought that if he went and talked to the commander, he might persuade him to quit the night forays on other fellow Masons. He proposed to go under a flag of truce and talk to the commander. Augustus begged him not to go, but if he did, to go with a force large enough to take the fort.

A few days after this conversation, David again visited Augustus and his wife, Mary, accompanied by two of Mary's friends. After supper the ladies, Miss Gleason and Miss Bigalow, drove back to Lawrence by themselves. David told Augustus, "I will call again when I return."

"If you go there alone I shall never see you alive," Augustus replied.

When David did not return, a search was made, and in the middle of the road a few rods from the fort a shallow grave was found. David Hoyt had been thrown face down in the grave, dirt shoveled in, packed down and walked over until there were no distinguishing marks.

It has been persistently maintained that David Hoyt was mutilated after his death in order to prevent the identification of his body. His remains were deposited in a hand-made coffin, provided by his neighbor, Henry Hiatt, and he was temporarily buried in a beautiful grove on the banks of Rock Creek.

In late summer Augustus called a company together, going from house to house himself asking men to gather at his place for the purpose of going to the fort to put a stop to ravages. And so they came, some on horseback, some on foot, and many in wagons. The corn was in roasting ears. Augustus invited them to feed their horses from his field and themselves from his table. Mary served as many meals as she could; in the house the table could only seat six at a time, but was filled and cleared and refilled as fast as biscuits and corn bread could be baked and bacon fried, until after midnight.

In the darkness of 3 a.m. the company set out led by Jim Lane, reaching the fort at daybreak. There they found the horse of the murdered David Hoyt. But the pickets of the pro-slavers had seen the approaching company, and the army of Georgians under the command of Col. B.F. Treadwell fled without firing a shot, leaving provisions, arms and ammunition, being intent only on making their escape. They also left a smoking dinner on the table. The free-state men were about to partake of the meal but were prevented from doing so by Lane, who feared that it might have been poisoned. So they collected their supplies and burned the fort, feeling that one source of danger, at least, had been removed.

Among those who attacked Ft. Saunders that day was the already infamous John Brown, whose abolitionist fervor was actively played out in the Wakarusa Valley. Joseph Gardner and others, including John Armstrong, Henry Hiatt, Henry Baldwin and Ezekiel Colman, aided him in his efforts to transport slaves on the Underground Railroad and shared his fanatic zeal to defend the free-state forces from Missouri border ruffians. John Brown joined the forces of Jim Lane in early August of 1856. The following dispatch bore this "invitation" from Lane, alias Joe Cook:

Mr. Brown – General Joe Cook wants you to come to Lawrence this night, for we expect to have a fight on Washington Creek. Come to Topeka as soon as possible, and I will pilot you to the place.

Yours in haste,  
H. STRATTON  
Topeka, 7 o'clock, p.m.,  
Aug. 12, 1856

H. Stratton was an aid to Jim Lane and was "charged with his personal safety, as a price had been offered for his head." According to Stratton,

John Brown was with us when 'Fort Saunders', on a Wakarusa Creek (I think), was destroyed, and commanded the cavalry. General Lane drew up his forces in front . . . of the fort, Captain Brown occupying the right wing with his cavalry. A charge was ordered, and the fort taken; but the murderers had fled into the timber and escaped . . . Captain Brown, with his men, was among the first to reach the fort, which was surrounded by a high rail fence, inside of which heavy earth-works had been thrown up.

Augustus Wattles apparently befriended John Brown before moving from Bloomington in February 1857, Wattles' daughter Emma (Mrs. O. E. Morse) described one of Brown's narrow escapes:

One evening in, I think, early September [Sept. 15-22, 1856], Captain Brown left my father, Mr. Wattles' house, then in Douglas County, going southward on a trip to Miami and Linn counties. He learned on the road a little after midnight, that a company of dragoons was on the way to arrest him, so he returned to my father's just after daylight. Late in the afternoon, Lieut. (now General) Eugene A. Carr, First Cavalry, arrived at the Wattles house and asked Brown's whereabouts. On learning of his departure the night before, the soldiers sat down and were served with all the melons they could eat. As Brown lay on the floor of the attic, whither he had gone to sleep, he could look down between the roof boards and the top of the wall, hearing every word, seeing every movement, with his two loaded Colt's revolvers in his hands. The soldiers rode away in disgust, certain, however, that their fellow-troopers in the south would catch Brown.

The question of squatter sovereignty seemed to be settled for Douglas County, for the incoming immigration left no doubt that the free-state sentiment was so far in the majority that the proslavery element gave up the fight; and the killings and house-burnings were given up. Augustus, his resources depleted by three years of war, found it necessary to sell his improved claim and begin anew. In 1857 he resettled in Linn County where earlier free-state settlers had been driven out. He established a claim adjoining his brother John's, and together they were among the six incorporators of the town of Moneka in February 1857.

Here Augustus Wattles operated a station on the Underground Railroad in his home. In May of 1858, he was in Leavenworth on business when he encountered John Brown, just returning to Kansas from the East on a fund-raising tour, and convinced Brown to come back to Linn County with him, where Brown for a time made his headquarters at Augustus' home.

Early the following winter a Missouri slave came to Brown's camp with a plea for help, stating that his wife and children were to be taken within a day or two by their master to Texas, and asking Brown to rescue them and start them to Canada. Brown took four men and went with the slave to his master's home. There he took the master prisoner, ordered the man to load a wagon with his household goods and his family, and taking provisions and a yoke of oxen for a team, compelled the master to take a place in the wagon. At about one o'clock in the morning they started for Kansas. They traveled all night, turning off into a ravine at daylight and camping for the day. At nightfall they took off again, released the master, and came into Kansas Territory, stopping first at Augustus's home about midnight. Again they waited until dark, then loaded up and resumed their journey. Their next stop was the home of Dr. Gilpatrick at Greeley. Here they went into seclusion for a month, escaping the detection of a Missouri sheriff's posse scouring the country in search of the ox wagon and missing property. Meanwhile, John Brown came back to Augustus's home, and the four men stationed themselves at convenient points from which to watch the progress of the hunt. When at the end of a month the search was given up (the sheriff apparently believing that the earth had opened up and swallowed the whole party), the posse returned home to Missouri and the fugitive slaves resumed their journey to Canada, arriving there the following spring.

By 1859 the proslavery sympathizers had driven away the residents of Moneka and put a price of \$1,000 on Augustus's head. After John Brown's disastrous attack at Harper's Ferry, Virginia in October of 1859, Augustus joined Joseph Gardner and others in a party planning to rescue Brown from jail, a rescue unsanctioned by Brown and thus never attempted. Augustus was summoned before a Senate committee investigating those who may have financed or known about Brown's plans. He was detained

in Washington throughout the hearings, during which time he appeared for various matters concerning Kansas. He was sent by the Indian Department to inspect the condition and activities of different tribes. After the Emancipation Proclamation, Wattles was occupied in assisting the newly-freed to carry on as citizens, and in different ways to acquire the places in their states to which they were entitled.

Again due to failing health, Wattles returned home to renew his strength, but owing to his strenuous life, he died at the age of 69 at his home near Mound City, Kansas.

As for poor David Starr Hoyt, his remains rested in peace on Rock Creek for over ten months before he was moved to what was thought would be his final resting-place. Then in 1875, he was buried for the fourth and final time beside a fellow martyr, H. J. Shombre, in Oak Hill Cemetery. Shombre, an Englishman, had been killed in the Battle of Fort Titus.

At a Meeting of the Old Settlers on September 29, 1875, the following committee report was made:

Mr. Chairman:

Your committee to whom was referred the creating a monument to the memory of D. S. Hoyt and H. J. Shombre beg leave to report that the duty assigned to them has been completed, and the monument turned over to the Superintendent of the City Cemeteries who will place it in Oak Hill Cemetery where the bodies are to be removed.

Your committee would hastily thank all those who assisted and contributed to the object.

Your committee are charged with the following contributions:

C. W. Babcock	\$ 10.00
Gov. Robinson	10.00
Ridenour/Baker	10.00
W. A. Simpson	5.00
(not legible)	

Stone reads as follows:

D. S. Hoyt,            born Deerfield, Massachusetts February 17, 1821  
Killed August 12, 1856

H. J. Shombre,        born Liverpool, England July 2, 1821  
Died August 12, 1856