

George W. Cosley

On the same date as the military dispatch of September 1, 1856, the following letter was written by George W. Cosley (whose claim was 2 miles south of the California Road, and a mile and a half east of David Peabody's claim) to his brother:

Lawrence, K. T.

Sept. 1, 1856

Dear Brother:

I wish it distinctly understood that what I write is fact. I speak of that which I know, and hold myself responsible for all that is found over my signature.

You at a distance can scarcely imagine what we are called upon to realize in our most painful situation. Oh, the heart rendering [*sic*] scenes that are constantly transpiring around us, while upon every breeze is borne the widow's piteous wail and the orphan's piercing cry – and from any part of our beloved land are heard lamentations and weeping and great mourning.

The warfare for Freedom waxes hotter and hotter – many of our good men and true are fallen, but others are filling their places and the battle is now being pushed to the gates of the enemy.

The Free-State men have endured the depredations of a company of God-dishonoring, Satan-serving, horse-stealing, house-burning, whiskey, wretches, rejoicing in the title of "Border Ruffians", or "Georgia Regulators," until forbearance had altogether ceased to be a virtue, and the determination now is to rid the Country of all such miserable nuisances.

Within two or three weeks, Major Hoyt, who had greatly endeared himself to the Free-State men of this Territory by his zealous labors for Freedom was most brutally murdered on the Santa Fe Road 12 miles S. W. of Lawrence.

A report was in circulation that the Pro-Slavery men were building a Fort, and he went to see if it was true; but he never returned alive. He fell a martyr to the cause of Freedom.

He was murdered on Tuesday, the 13th of August; on Thursday, his friends became alarmed at his continued absence and a search was made for him. He was found cut all to pieces and disfigured very much – I cannot say any more of this now.

Last Wednesday, several wagons went to Leavenworth for provisions; they were seized and not permitted to return. The Pro-Slavery rascals surrounded them, took possession of all the teams, and made prisoners of the men; one of our men was shot. Thus our provisions were taken from us and our children left to starve. What will be God only knows. Now, when we ought to be at our work on our farms, we are compelled to take up arms against our fellow men in defense of our rights as freemen and of our lives and property.

On Friday three of our men writ [*sic*] up to Lecompton to get the help of the Governor; but he says "nothing can be done for us." This was not all – four men immediately after leaving Lecompton, were all taken prisoners and are yet in confinement.

Saturday was a dark day for us – the ruffians were out burning down houses, murdering and plundering, they burnt Osawatomie clean out and killed a Mr. Brown – they had a camp of several hundred a short distance below, but when Col. Lane came upon them, they all fled. That’s the way they do, they will rob and murder the defenseless and unarmed, but will not fight on fair terms if they can run, and the next thing you will find them at some other plan, murdering the inhabitants and destroying their property. There are now at this time, tonight, four or five houses in; we can see the light very distinctly; and all these are within a mile-and-a-half of my own house and let it be remembered that all this is done in the full sight of some six or eight hundred troops.

I confidently expect my house will be burnt next, and all that we have taken from us. Some 25 Scoundrels “went up to Capt. Frice [sic] last night and robbed his house clean of everything he had; these ruffians will even rob the women of what little money they have, so you can see that we are in a dreadful condition at this time. But we are not without hope – these things cannot last forever.

Yours respectfully,

G.W. COSLEY

On the next day, his daughter, Ann Eliza, wrote to her Aunt Matilda:

Kansas Territory, Sept. 2, 1856

Mrs. Matilda Barber.

Dear Aunt – I sit down to inform you of our late difficulties and of the outrages which have been committed here with the three weeks past.

The Missourians are flocking in every day. Last Saturday 400 of them crossed the River at Lecompton; they are all around us and what we are to do we cannot tell. They are blocking up the roads so that we cannot get any provisions, there were teams sent from Lawrence to Leavenworth for provisions by our people, but as they were coming back the wagons, provisions and men were all taken, one of our men was killed and what they have done with the others we have not heard.

They have also taken the Rev. G. W. Hutchison at Lecompton, and we all suppose they have killed him and Mr. Hyatte (Henry Hiatt) one of the proprietors of the Steam Saw Mill at Bloomington. They are taking prisoners and murdering all the Free-State men they can come across.

On Sunday, they burnt Osawattomi [sic] to the ground and turned out all the women and children. There was a company of 400 Free-State men went out from Lawrence to retake it which they did. There were eight Free-State men killed and about the same number on the other side.

On Sunday morning Judge Wakefield got word that his house would be burnt in 48 hours, so the Judge moved his family to Lawrence, and on Sunday night the ruffians burnt Mr. Snider’s house to the ground with everything that was in it. Mr. Snider was son-in-law of Judge Wakefield.

Last night was the most distressing time we have ever had; a company of Ruffians came down from Lecompton and burnt the houses of Capt. Walker, Mr. Bush, Mr. Heath, and Judge Wakefield to the ground. We could see the flames from our house. It was a most dreadful time.

We are all alone and have been for a week past. Father has been at Lawrence and is still there, the crying and screaming of the children was dreadful; Mr. Pirsis’ [Pierison’s?] children came running down to our house, screaming to know what they should do and where they could go for safety, as we all expected our house would be burnt next. Badly frightened as we were, we went to work and gathered the children’s clothes and hid them in the cornfield, so

that if our house was burnt we could have a change. Fortunately they did not come to our house but we do not know how soon they may be around.

Robert Barber's house is threatened and so is Thomas Pierson's, to be burnt tonight, and then ours will surely go.

Oh! Aunt what shall we do? I would be willing for them to burn our house if they would only spare our lives.

The Missourians are building a Fort on top of the hill a little this side of Spencer's on the California road so that we cannot get to Lawrence.

There are a great many families leaving their houses and cornfields to take care of themselves; and running down to Lawrence, but we shall not leave our house as long as there is a neighbor around us.

I remain your affectionate Niece.

ANNA ELIZA COSLEY

George W. Cosley was born on August 4, 1805, near Martinsbury (Berkley County), Virginia, and later moved to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he met Miss Rebecca Maxwell, born Feb. 8, 1809. They were married on March 17, 1831 in Xenia, Ohio. Like other abolitionists, George was attracted to Kansas by the contest between the pro-slavers and free-staters taking place there. He started for Lawrence on the 12th of March in 1855, coming by water to Booneville, Missouri, where he was detained by the Missourians, who were afraid the men would get to Kansas in time to vote. In addition to George, Rebecca, and their 11 children, his party included the Samuel Walker family, the Thomas Pierson family, the Thomas and Robert Barber families and those of Kinsey, Duffy and the two Mr. Hazelton's. After arriving in Lawrence the delegation camped for ten days on Ohio Street. George and his family then moved to his claim on the southwest quarter of Section 1.

The Ohio delegation was a most interesting group of settlers. Notes taken from Harry Lewis Baldwin (son of Cosley's daughter, Ann Eliza, and Henry Lyman Baldwin) reveal the following information:

A delegation from Xenia, Ohio, comprising all my Mother's family (George W. Cosley with 5 sons and 3 daughters, Harvey Cosley with three sons and 2 daughters, Great Uncle Barber and one daughter, Oliver Barber with sons and 3 daughters, Thomas Pierson with four sons and 4 daughters, Oliver Barber, Jr. with 3 sons and 2 daughters – all interrelated), Maggie Duffy and husband, and I believe a couple of others, reached Lawrence about 10 days before my father and his brother Andrew arrived from Connecticut in 1855. The Ohio delegation represented considerable money for those days, over \$20,000 in gold being carried much of the time on the person of Thomas Barber in a belt. However, it was not on his person when he was murdered by a border ruffian (Dec. 5, 1855) and this money came into possession of Oliver instead of his widow, "Aunt Tillie Barber Blood" (as I knew her). The Ohio delegation came in two detachments, Uncle Thomas Barber and his wife Tillie, and my mother who was her niece. They arrived a few days before the larger half of the delegation. My mother, (Ann Eliza,) then 20 years of age, had been specially selected by Aunt Tillie to accompany her, being a special favorite. Had Thomas Barber not been murdered, my mother undoubtedly would have later been presented by him with a farm, and likely well-stocked, as such was his intention. He was well known in the vicinity of Xenia, Ohio, and was the man who introduced the Poland China hog into this country.

The entire delegation settled either in or near Lawrence, where my grandfather George W. Cosley started and operated for many years a woolen mill, after living on and developing a farm two miles from our home.

Two descendants of George W. and Rebecca Maxwell Cosley have provided the following information expressly related to the courage and resiliency of Rebecca, who, despite her small stature, was prepared to hold her own when it came to protecting her home and family. In a letter to Ruth Moriarty (great-great granddaughter of Rebecca), Mabel Bird (great granddaughter of Rebecca) writes the following:

The George Cosley family lived in sod huts their first year in Kansas. Great grandmother Rebecca kept a hot iron on the fire to chase curious Indians when they poked their heads in the window. She was four feet eight inches tall. Their first year was very cold and rainy, beriberi was prevalent in town, but Great grandmother Rebecca Cosley had preserved watermelon rind for fresh food to help the family avoid illness. She also brought in fresh prairie grass daily to make a floor mat so they wouldn't freeze their feet.

George and Rebecca lived on their claim for eleven years before moving to Lawrence, where George accepted a position as superintendent of the coloring department in John Studebaker's mill, later going into business for himself. He and Rebecca celebrated their golden wedding anniversary before her death a year later on March 11, 1892. He followed her in death on April 23, 1884 at the age of 78.