

From Allen T. Ward to My Dear Sister

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Paola Miami County Kansas

Oct. 27st 1861

My Dear Sister[.]

Expecting you feel some anxiety to hear from us during these war times, I shall try to write something tho' it may not amount to much. In the first place we all continue to enjoy good health, and the crops of all kinds being very good this year we would have no cause of complaint if we could only have peace, but alas, war with all its horrors is upon us, and of all wars that ever a country was cursed with a civil war is the worst.

It is probable you get accounts of the general progress of the war in this country in the papers, but no description can convey a correct idea of it as it exists here; to understand it fully it must be seen—The counties east of us in Missouri are almost entirely depopulated, towns burnt and the whole country laid waste—as the Secession army sweeps over it, the union party has to fly for their lives; then in turn comes the union forces under Jim Lane and Montgomery, and all the Secessionists have to leave in a hurry or be shot down as so many wolves, so between the two forces the people have nearly all been run off.

But the worst feature in this war is the predatory or guerrilla bands that infest the country—For instance a jayhawker (or robber) here in Kansas will get up a party and dash over into Missouri, and wherever they can find any property worth bringing away they appropriate it to themselves.

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Negro's, horses, cattle, sheep, & hogs are all driven off, stores robbed, and even the clothing of women & children has been frequently taken; this calls for revenge & retaliation of the other party: then in turn a party of Missourians will make a raid on some unprotected place in Kansas, plunder the stores, & take off whatever they can that is valuable. And so it goes, the parties are no ways particular who they rob. The object is plunder—I know men here who have become wealthy just by the horses & cattle they have stolen. If a man has an enemy, all he has to do to get rid of him is to say to a jawhawker that he is a secessionist, or he sympathizes with the South, and the man is robbed of all he has and either driven off or hung; (I speak here of Kansas) and in parts of Missouri where the Secessionists have a majority the same holds good as to union men—many of the union men who have been run off from the border counties in Missouri have come into Kansas for protection, our town is full to overflowing of poor miserable wretches begging for food to keep them alive—and many secessionists were driven from here who went to Missouri & are now in the rebel army—just think of the condition of things, when men who have lived neighbors, on the same section of land, and heretofore always been friendly, but when the war broke out they took different sides, they became enemies, and have watched an opportunity

to shoot each other down as dogs—this is the case all through this upper Missouri, and partly so in Kansas, & frequently the case that brothers take different sides in the war.

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The jayhawkers are a class of people that have always infested this country since its first settlement by the whites. They are the offscourings of the New England states who were sent on here by the assistance of the emigrant aid society; and no worse class of wretches ever disgraced a country than they are generally. Had it not been for them we would have had no difficulty here, and now we are in constant fear of being robbed & even life is not safe. Business is entirely prostrate, we are doing nothing to make a living; no sale for goods, & if we could sell them we could not bring them here, the river blockaded, and the railroad torn up half the time: neither is there any encouragement to improve our farms, as we don't know what hour it may all be destroyed. The soldiers go to our fields when they please and help themselves.

Every night before I go to bed I hide all valuable articles that I conveniently can, expecting to have a visit from the jayhawkers before morning, and every morning feel surprised that we have passed another night without being robbed. This far we have escaped any violence, but still I have lost a good deal by the war, in the way of having my crops stolen, and in having to feed soldiers; they will come into the store & make a demand of what they want, we dare not refuse their demand or be called a d__d secessionist—

If I thought such times would continue long I would try to get away from here; I expect to close up the store very soon; if I cant sell out the goods at wholesale I shall box them up & send them off to Westport—

about two months ago I sent cousin Allen out to Council Grove that

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he might be out of the danger that was threatening us here; He has had but poor health out there and seems dissatisfied, & I expect him back soon. I have not heard from brother William for a long time, & cannot tell how he is getting along—we had a letter from cousin Anthony Ward a few days ago, they were all well. I also had a letter from cousin Fleetwood Ward last week in which he describes an invention he is about to get patented for telegraphing by signals; they were all well, but his business almost ruined by the war. David sends me the "Sterling Gazette" frequently but does not write often.

Well I have scatched down the lines in a great hurry but if you can read it, it may answer to show you our situation here in this "singularly cursed Canaan" as some one calls Kansas.

A flock of negro's passed thro' here to day, they told us that Master Jim Lane had sent over three hundred in the gang they came in; at the rate he is sending his contrabands over here, in a very short time Kansas will have more darkies than Missouri—

Write soon & give us all the news, everything in the form of news is interesting these times. Why don't Frances write? Set her at it; tell her to write to "Coon" (Mary Elizabeth) & tho Coon is a poor hand at writing I will have her answer it—Ask Mother to amuse herself in writing

to me—hoping this may find you all in the enjoyment of health & happiness I remain your
affectionate brother --

A.T. Ward