

The Origin of "Jayhawker"

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From the Osawatomie Journal

In the early days "befo' de wah," when John Brown was a familiar sight on the streets of Osawatomie, there stood an old school house where the town well is located back of the Chinese laundry opposite the JOURNAL office. The building was afterwards used as a place of worship by various religious denominations and although it is no more it deserves a place in Kansas history; for it was here that the famous secret organization known as the Jayhawkers was organized and held their meetings.

In those days every man looked with suspicion upon his neighbor and a few trusted men met and formed an organization whose object was the protection of their lives, families and property against the border ruffians of Missouri.

The little company of patriots were known as the "Free Sons of Liberty," and no one on the outside knew who were the members. They met on dark nights over the school room, climbing up a ladder into the one small window and pulling the ladder in after them. Several of the members are still residents of this place.

Each night a guard or picket was sent out in each direction from town to "keep an eye peeled," all returning before daylight. One morning one of these pickets, Pat Devlin by name, did not get into town till after daybreak and a citizen, viewing his early morning pilgrimage, with suspicion asked him what he had been doing.

"O, I've just been out there jayhawking," said Pat.

"Wat is jayhawking?" asked the citizen.

"Why, don't you know what a jayhawk is?" said Pat. "Over in old Ireland there is a bird that lives on the young and eggs of other birds who are its enemies, and they call this bird a jayhawk."

The citizen, who had lately come from Missouri and was supposed to give information to his former neighbors, got no further satisfaction from Pat Devlin, but Pat unconsciously coined a new word that stuck to the "Free Sons of Liberty" during the war and to Kansas to the present time.