



#QR1863

A nomination for the 2014 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize
Kansas Humanities Council

The Kansas Humanities Council nominates the groundbreaking twitter history project #QR1863 for the 2014 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize. Supported through a Kansas Humanities Council grant, the project coordinated by the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area demonstrates the power of social media to engage citizens in the humanities. A \$2,300 grant from the Kansas Humanities Council resulted in 1.3 million people reached, 5 million impressions, a twitter feed that trended worldwide on August 21, 2013, and leveraged \$6,560 in cost share.

This project:

- Involves new audiences

- Is a model for successful collaborations

- Creatively used social media to engage the public with local history



Project Background

Between 1854-1861, Kansas and Missouri engaged in a bloody “border war” to determine whether the new Kansas Territory would allow slavery. This era of “Bleeding Kansas” subsided by 1861 with the admittance of Kansas into the Union. Yet, with the start of the Civil War occurring the same year, many living along the border feared renewed violence since Kansas was now a free state while Missouri permitted slavery. Soon enough, bands of unauthorized militia began roaming the border, raiding and destroying property. One of the most notorious of these raiders was William Quantrill, a confederate sympathizer from Missouri who had made a name for himself by sacking pro-Union border towns in Kansas.

By June 1863, uneasiness increased and the mayor of Lawrence KS requested Border Commander Thomas Ewing of the United States Army to send a temporary force to guard the town of 2,500. Residents knew Lawrence was a likely target since their town was the epicenter for abolitionist activity in Kansas and points farther west. Ewing sent 20 men. A month passed, nothing happened, and Ewing withdrew the protection.

Three weeks later, on August 21, 1863, Quantrill led 400 raiders in an early morning surprise attack on Lawrence. By the time it was over, nearly 200 Lawrence men had been murdered with at least 30 additional residents wounded. Property loss was estimated at \$1.5 million and 200 buildings ruined. It was the worst civilian casualty during the Civil War.



Project Description

On August 21, 2013, in recognition of the 150th anniversary of this event, community volunteers used Twitter to live-tweet Quantrill’s Raid on Lawrence, KS. To stage the reenactment, fifty-one historical first person accounts – raiders, survivors, and victims – were connected through hashtag #QR1863. These accounts provided multiple narratives posted in real time through simple social media. The project was coordinated by a team including the Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area, Lawrence Convention and Visitors Bureau, Watkins Museum of History, Lawrence Public Library, Commemorate Lawrence 1863, Lawrence Social Media Club, and the Kansas Humanities Council.

To work, the project needed to ensure that the content of the tweets was as historically accurate as possible. Since community members would be tweeting the material, it was critical that they had access to training in historical research and interpretation. Much has been written about Quantrill’s Raid over the past 150 years, so there was no lack of materials. Two academic historians with extensive knowledge of the period—Jeremy Neely from Missouri State University and Jonathan Earle from the University of Kansas—were recruited to help.

Next, the project depended on enthusiastic volunteers. The call went out to the public and project participants (tweeters) included a large group of self-proclaimed “history geeks”—including a National Park Service historian and an award-winning John Brown reenactor—as well as social media enthusiasts from the local social media club, which included a stay-at-home mom, county clerk, and professor of Italian at the University. It was a winning combination.

From there, the project team researched primary and secondary sources to create a bank of materials for volunteers to use in creating their tweets. The historians provided the community volunteers with a period map along the KS-MO border, a timeline of events from August 21, 1863 and access to digitized local and regional newspapers from August 1863. The team also organized two workshops led by historians. Participants worked together to understand the history and how to craft compelling tweets from the resources.

According to project scholar Jonathan Earle, “The intensity of the research and analysis into historical figures and events 150 years ago—by members of the general public—was more than I have witnessed in a decade and a half of doing public history.”

The headquarters of the Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area became the “war room” on August 21, 2013. The first tweets began around 5:00 AM with the first dispatch fired at 6:08 AM: “Reports coming in of a large group of men on horses spotted at the Miller farm southeast of Lawrence.”

Shortly after 7 AM, Bill Anderson, nicknamed Bloody Bill, posted “SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT! More houses up this way across the ravine” as he rode across town on horseback.



“A piece of the floor just burned and fell about a yard from me,” Hugh Fisher tweeted from his hiding place in his cellar.

“The villain fires,” Jetta Dix tweeted. “Ralph is shot.”

The tweets went on throughout the day and sporadically over the next few weeks, following Quantrill as he made his way back to Missouri. They even touched on Order #11, a retaliatory action by the Union Army (Union soldiers scoured the Missouri border counties, forcibly removed all residents and torched their homesteads).

But on the evening of the 21st, as the height of the event wound down, project historians, community volunteers, and others gathered for a concluding event at the local history museum. Most who tweeted were exhausted but filled with excitement for the project. All in the room were awed by the day’s emotional toll.

Exemplary Characteristics

The reach and online impact of #QR1863 was incredible, with the public serving as both the audience and the history-makers. The humanities scholars provided critical support, but the research and tweeting was done entirely by volunteers. *Citizen engagement with the humanities* doesn’t get much better than this.

HIGHLIGHTS

#QR1863 trended worldwide on 8/21/13, reached 1.3 million people and made 5 million impressions .

All tweets were embedded in the website www.1863Lawrence.com with nearly 4,600 hits.

The event was covered by the *Washington Post's* blog and the link was shared 1,500 times.

The Twitter community embraced the event:

David Ryan @davidorex, *"I'm finding #QR1863 haunting and moving. Didn't really expect to."*

Aaron @MostlyMexican, *"Um, #QR1863 is probably the best thing I've ever seen on Twitter."*

The innovative use of technology breathed new life into a story that is frequently told in Kansas. Residents of all ages – kids, teens, parents, and seniors – participated. People who weren't twitter users joined along, building capacity among individuals and their organizations. The project collaborations stretched across the city and even across the state line. The tweets are now archived online for teachers and others.

The Kansas Humanities Council's role in this project was as an early supporter and advisor. A meeting between KHC staff and Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area and the Convention and Visitors Bureau resulted in the use of Neely and Earle as consultants, the development of the scholar-led workshops, and the encouragement of the use of primary documents.

This meeting ultimately led to a \$2,300 grant from KHC that provided just the right amount of seed money and credentials to get the project off the ground. As the event progressed, KHC promoted the event extensively through our own social media network, retweeted all posts, and attended the public events. It was a remarkable experience and we hope that the committee will seriously consider this nomination.

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Mission: The Kansas Humanities Council connects communities with history, traditions, and ideas to strengthen civic life.