Why, Maj. Bridgewater?

By

Eric James

On June 16, 2007 in Stanford, Kentucky, the Maj. James H. Bridgewater Camp 7, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, gathered to honor their namesake. A monument to Maj. Bridgewater was dedicated at Logan’s Creek Cemetery. Conducting the service were Chaplain David Gambrell, Commander Timothy Downey, & Gaye Clark of Bridgewater Camp 7. The salute was given by the Bridgewater Scouts. Also attending were Bridgewater’s 2nd great grandson Wayne Bennett of Michigan, former Stanford mayor Eddie Carter, 76 year’s old Jack Farmer whose great-grandfather under Maj. Bridgewater almost killed Frank James, and Eric James who sought an answer from everyone to the question, “Why, Maj. Bridgewater?”

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“They gutted my office pretty effectually.” So telegraphed Capt. William R. Gross to his Union superiors from the train depot in Danville, Kentucky. By January 29, 1865, all hostilities of the war had ceased. Yet, Capt. Gross telegraphed that 35 guerillas, dressed in Union uniform, sacked his Union telegraph office that morning, and plundered the town’s boot store.¹ Their horses were refreshed, probably from William Sallee’s Livery at Fourth and Walnut Streets, a block south of the courthouse. Oddly, one of the band also robbed a book store.² Gross reported the guerillas were under the command of a Capt. Clark, who identified his band as the Fourth Cavalry from Missouri, on their way to Washington to have a personal meeting with President Lincoln. Capt. Gross broadcast that Clarke’s band headed west for Perryville at 11:15 a.m.

Judge Speed Smith Fry of Danville didn’t cotton to the idea of guerillas masquerading in Union uniform. Fry had earned his rank of Brigadier General at the Battle of Perryville, but still retained his command of Danville’s Home Guards. Outside Somerset earlier at the Battle of Mill Springs, Fry killed General Felix Kirk Zollicoffer of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, when the hapless General Zolly rode up to Fry out of a foggy early morning rain, wearing a “light drab overcoat, buttoned to the chin.” Fry, who was “in undress uniform,” presumed the rider to be a Union officer like himself. Zolly ordered Fry to cease fire. Both clustered together, riding several paces so closely that their knees touched. Then Fry was heard to object indignantly, “I do not intend to fire upon our men.” Out of the misty drizzle, Capt. Henry M. R. Fogg of Zollicoffer’s staff suddenly rode forward and fired at Fry, killing his horse. “Sir, these are the enemy!” Fry


 instantly drew his revolver and shot Gen. Zollicoffer in the breast. Zollicoffer’s horse was secured by his rebels, but Fry seized the dead man’s sabre. A letter in Zolly’s pocket revealed his identity. “You sneaking cowardly, infernal scoundrels, why do you not come up and fight us like men?” His ire raised again, Fry now suspected Gen. Clarke to be William Clark Quantrill. With Danville’s Home Guards, Judge Fry gave chase from his home at Spring House Farm, down the pike 8 miles to Perryville.

Opposite Danville 4 miles to the southeast, Maj. James H. Bridgewater received the telegraph message in Stanford. Bridgewater had been in the Union Secret Service, commanding scouts who chased Confederate guerillas in central Kentucky. Only recently, Maj. Bridgewater had organized the Hall’s Gap Battalion of Home Guards. Most everyone in Stanford were Southern sympathizers, who considered Bridgewater’s guards as guerillas themselves, not of their South but of the Union.

None was more nefarious than Maj. Bridgewater’s older brother Augden. His Home Guard was captured in 1862 by a retreating Confederate army after the Battle of Perryville. Augden Bridgewater escaped; but his captain, Harbert King, and King’s two sons John Franklin and William Alexander King, were hanged. As a Union Home Guard since then, Augden “terrorized

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4 Interview with Col. Speed S. Fry, 4th Kentucky Infantry, to the editors of the *Louisville Journal*. Danville, Kentucky, Feb. 23, 1862.

5 A year before the battle, King had written to his neighbor Capt. Isaac Singleton, whose own son was hanged with King’s two sons. Letter of Capt. Harbert King to Capt. Isaac Singleton, dated, “Camp Robinson, Kentucky, Oct. 16, 1861,” in possession of King descendant Madelene Henley.
Lincoln County and robbed indiscriminately.” Finally, Augden was hunted and captured in Harrodsburg with a wagon load of loot. He was shot in the face, leaving his entire jaw dangling. His jaw was wired to his tongue, and he was jailed in Stanford, where he subsisted on liquids sipped through a quill, until later he got religion, repented, and was released from the Kentucky penitentiary.6

Upon the telegraph news, Maj. Bridgewater mobilized the Hall’s Gap Battalion, and headed directly up the old buffalo trace for Harrodsburg, north of Perryville. If Clarke’s band was driven from Perryville by Fry, Harrodsburg would be their nearest destination. Late that night, Maj. Bridgewater found a detachment of the guerillas 4 miles west of Harrodsburg. The band, including Frank James and Bob Younger, was concealed in the home of Sallie Van Arsdale.7 Maj. Bridgewater would not wait for the break of dawn to commence slaughter.

Frank James long since had learned how to protect himself before taking refuge for the night. Even when called to dinner at the home of his Samuels kin in Nelson County, Frank waited until all others were seated. He then walked the exterior perimeter of the home, surveying the horizon, before taking his customary seat at the table. Frank performed the same ritual before retiring for the night.8 When Maj Bridgewater assaulted the Van Arsdale farm house full bore with Kentucky rifles and marksmanship famed since the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the unforeseen force against Frank James was deadly.


7 Sanders, Stuart S.

Elisha Farmer of Bridgewater’s guard held position behind a field fence. Holding only a pistol, Farmer held his fire for a reachable target. Bridgewater’s assault raged for ten or fifteen minutes, Farmer recollected. In a lull, two riders emerged in the field before him. Farmer aimed between two fence rails and shot. Down and dead fell the first rider. The second rider, who later was identified as Frank James, escaped death by a hair second.⁹

Escaping with Frank was Allen Farmer. Quantrill had partitioned his original band of 42 into three squads that night. Parmer reported, “Quantrill flew into a terrible rage when we told him about it and he wouldn’t believe it. He sent Chat Rennick, Frank James, Peyton Long, and myself back to see if we could get any of the wounded boys out. They killed Chat Rennick on the way back.”¹⁰

Quantrill lost nine of his 41 men that night. Four more were captured, including Jim Younger. The captured were ordered to bury their dead in the cemetery of the Oakland Methodist Church. Frank James returned to the scene later in 1889. With the help of Col. Jack Chinn and his son Kit, Quantrill’s fallen were exhumed and re-interred at Spring Hill Cemetery in Harrodsburg, by then dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the Confederacy.

Ten days later, Maj. Bridgewater struck again at 2:00 a.m. west of Hustonville. Four more of Quantrill’s band were killed, and the balance sent fleeing barefoot in the snow, their horses first having been captured. Quantrill never gained more distance on President Lincoln in Kentucky than Georgetown. Lincoln soon was killed on April 15th. On May 10th, Quantrill was


¹⁰ Hale, Donald R. We Rode with Quantrill Self published 1975. ed. 1982, p.147.
shot up and left for dead in the field of Dr. James Heady Wakefield’s farm in Nelson County, where he had taken refuge. When alerted to Quantrill’s shooting, Frank James was found reading a book he had picked up while in Danville. In a Louisville hospital Quantrill got religion, was baptized a Catholic like the Youngers, and died on June 6. Frank James retreated to a home on the railroad tracks not too far from Samuel’s Depot, where he and Quantrill’s band surrendered on September 26, and were paroled.

On July 17, 1867, Maj. James Bridgewater was assassinated. Since 1858, Bridgewater and his brother Augden had been members of the Lincoln Lodge No. 60 of the Free & Accepted Masons in Stanford. Bridgewater was elected Sheriff. When he ran for election to the state legislature, he was not successful. Settling into a position with the Freedman’s Bureau, he sought protections for the formerly enslaved. In May at Louisville, Bridgewater turned in a list of “regulators” he believed were terrorizing Stanford’s former slaves and staunch Unionists. In “A Murderous Affair in Lincoln County,” historian J. Michael Rhyne of Northern Kentucky University writes, “Regulators used terror tactics both to stymie political competition for the building blocks of state power, including the offices of sheriff and magistrate, and to impose a white supremacist social order after the form abolition of slavery.” An attempt on Bridgewater’s life already had been made by 27 year old Walter G. Saunders, but was repelled by Bridgewater’s brothers and nephews who appeared in the street with Spencer carbines. A

11 Records of Lincoln Lodge No. 60 of the Free & Accepted Masons, confirmed by Chaplain David Gambrell in preparation for the Bridgewater dedication service.

subsequent attempt on Bridgewater was made on Danville Ave. at the crossing of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. On July 17, however, as Bridgewater played cards in a saloon, Saunders and four men appeared again. Bridgewater was chased to a stairwell and killed. At Saunders’ trial in Crab Orchard, no prosecution witnesses showed up to testify. Walter G. Saunders was elected Sheriff of Stanford, but he only lived another ten years.\(^{13}\) Ever since the assassination of James H. Bridgewater, candidates for Sheriff’s office in Stanford customarily demonstrate their Southern sympathy.

Maj. Bridgewater was buried with Masonic Rites.\(^{14}\) He is presumed buried in an unmarked grave near his father-in-law Abraham Dawes outside Stanford on Howell Lane, off Route 127 at the foot of Hall’s Gap. Immediately adjacent and across Howell Lane lay buried the enslaved of the Dawes family.

One issue remains unresolved in the saga of Maj. James H. Bridgewater. Following his murder, Bridgewater’s mother-in-law, widow, and his children, moved first to Warrensburg in Johnson County, Missouri, about 20 miles southeast of Kansas City; then subsequently to Nevada in Vernon County.\(^{15}\) One of Bridgewater’s sons settled in Kansas City. Also in Missouri’s Pettis County lived Rebecca Younger, a first cousin of Bob Younger whom Bridgewater captured. Among Rebecca Younger’s nieces and nephews lived the Bridgewater

\(^{13}\) The Advocate Messenger, June 14, 2007. Danville, Ky. Also, David Gambrell, Vice-President, Lincoln County Historical Society. Saunders tombstone in Crab Orchard cemetery identified him as born in 1840 and died in 1877. His epitaph reads, “A kind husband and affectionate father and a friend to all.”

\(^{14}\) Records of Lincoln Lodge 60.

\(^{15}\) 1870 Census. Johnson County, Hazel Twp. Missouri. Also, 1900 Census. Vernon County, Richland Twp., Missouri.


PHOTOS attached

Maj. James H. Bridgewater
abt. 1835 - July 18, 1867

Photo courtesy of Maj. Bridgewater’s
2nd great grandson, Wayne Bennett.

All other photos by Eric James

The chase routes:
Quantrill from Danville west to Perryville on 150
Quantrill from Perryville north on 68
Fry from Danville west to Perryville on 150
Bridgewater from Stanford to Danville on 150
Bridgewater from Danville to Harrodsburg on 127

Below Stanford at Cedar Creek is the first land owned by
John M. James, grandfather of Frank & Jesse, purchased
from William Menefee Sept. 15, 1789 (Lincoln County,
Virginia - Kentucky Deeds, Vol I, p.416) His first arrival
in Kentucky was at Gilbert’s Creek, outside of Lancaster

Spring House Farm
of Gen. Speed Smith Fry 1817-1892

The home is now a ruin.

First burial site for Quantrill’s fallen
Oakland Methodist Church at the time
Oakland Christian Church today

Numerous members of the Van Arsdale and
Sallee families are buried in this cemetery
Spring Hill Cemetery, Harrodsburg, Kentucky
Dedicated to the fallen soldiers
of the Confederacy

This cemetery is the final resting place of
many among the James, Sallee, Younger,
and Chinn families

Burial site in Spring Hill Cemetery where
Quantrill’s fallen were re-interred by
Frank James, Col. Jack Chinn, & his son
Christopher “Kit” Chinn

Most all of the individual tombstones are
marked as “Unknown”

Memorial to Maj. James H. Bridgewater

Conducted by Chaplain David Gambrell (L)
Assisted by Commander Timothy Downing (R)
Laying of the memorial wreath by Bridgewater’s 2nd great grandson, Wayne Bennett of Michigan

Laying of the memorial wreath by Maj. Bridgewater’s widow, Susan Dawes-Bridgewater 1837-1920, daughter of Abraham Dawes & Sarah Pence

Re-enacted by Gaye Clark

Salute
by the Bridgewater Scouts
Attendees:
Wayne Bennett, 2nd great grandson of Maj. Bridgewater, and
Eric James

Jack Farmer, age 76,
Great grandson of Elisha Farmer,
who almost killed Frank James.

New memorial tombstone to
Maj. James H. Bridgewater
Tombstone of Abraham Dawes 1800-1859
father-in-law of Maj. Bridgewater

Bridgewater assassination site
Saloon & exterior stairwell
Main St., Stanford, Kentucky

The building now is owned by
Stanford Mayor Bill Miracle
and is used as a real estate office

Initial assassination attempt site
Stanford Depot of the
Louisville & Nashville (L&N) Railroad

Currently the site of the
Lincoln County Historical Society
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ERIC JAMES is president of The James Preservation Trust. He also writes and publishes the official web site of the family of Frank & Jesse James. *STRAY LEAVES, A James Family in America since 1650*  www.ericjames.org