

Encountering John Brown

By Natalie Vondrak, Watkins Museum of History Summer Fellow

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What comes to mind when you hear the name John Brown? Perhaps his infamous stand at Harpers Ferry and his subsequent death as a martyr. Maybe his accurate prediction that the country would bleed before the issue of slavery was resolved. Possibly his time as a conductor on the Underground Railroad leading freedom seekers to safety. Or you might think of his murderous attack on five men near Pottawatomie Creek. With all things considered, who was John Brown? A martyr? Or a murderer?

You might be surprised to learn that Kansas played a significant role in Brown's activism and abolitionism. In 1855, Brown arrived in Kansas at the height of territorial tensions ready to fight for the free-state cause. But his efforts turned militant after the Sack of Lawrence in 1856. Three days after the raid, Brown responded by leading a small group of free staters to Pottawatomie Creek. There, the group brutally murdered five pro-slavery men with broadswords. Brown's violent attack shocked the nation but only foreshadowed the impending American Civil War. John Brown's complicated legacy continues to be remembered today because he was willing to use extreme measures—even murder—to carry out his mission of ending slavery.

This fall, you can learn more about John Brown's legacy in the national traveling exhibit, *Encountering John Brown*, which debuts at the Watkins Museum of History in Lawrence, Kansas on September 4th. The exhibit combines the expressive work of Kansas artist Brad Sneed with firsthand accounts of those who encountered John Brown, including Harriet Tubman, Robert E. Lee, and Frederick Douglass.

Encountering John Brown is on display from September 4th to November 6th at the Watkins Museum of History. Tickets are \$10. To purchase tickets, go to watkinsmuseum.org. Visit today and decide for yourself: was John Brown a martyr or a murderer?

This transcript of "Encountering John Brown" is part of the Humanities Kansas Humanities Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit humanitieskansas.org or call 1-888-416-2018.