

Abe Lincoln and the Massacre at Kellogg's Grove



This peaceful and beautiful stretch along the Galena Trail in Stephenson County was the site of a shocking and bloody fight between Black Hawk's warriors and Illinois militia on June 15 and 25, 1832, during the Black Hawk War. Eight militia men and an unknown number of warriors lost their lives. Although the skirmishes were well known in their day, today they are remembered primarily because Abe Lincoln was here and buried the dead shortly after the final assaults took place.

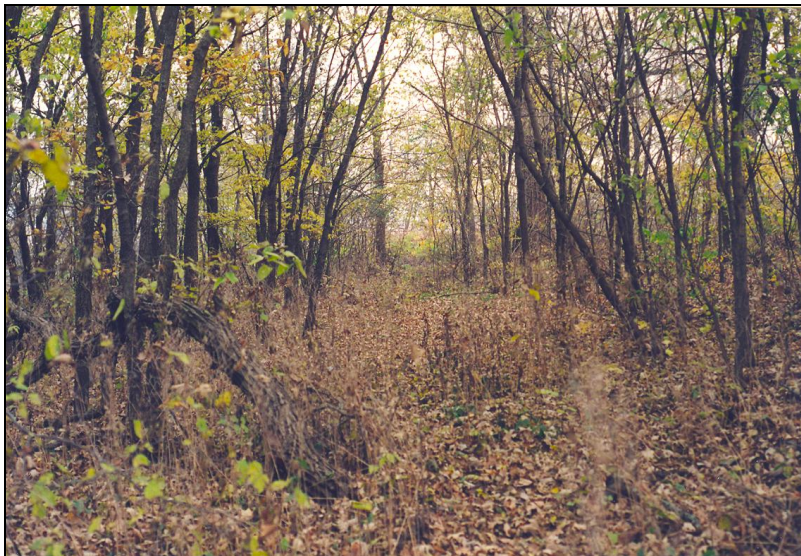
Upon learning of sharp combat in the area of Kellogg's Grove, Col. Zachary Taylor ordered Illinois state treasurer and militia major Jack Dement to take a battalion to the Grove. According to Lincoln's messmate, George Harrison, Dement's men "'stopped at the grove at noon for refreshment,' a turn of phrase suggesting they got liquored up. On receiving a report of Indians in the vicinity, Major Dement and four dozen men decided to see if they could make contact, leaving a token force behind in a log blockhouse. Just as Dement and his private, Zadoc Casey, who was then Illinois's lieutenant governor, were preparing to leave on the mission, a messenger arrived with word that Indian spies were nearby. Disobeying orders, many of the battalion, as explained by George Harrison, 'broke after them, some on horseback, some on foot in great disorder and confusion, thinking to have much sport with their prisoners.'"

"When they reached the ravine, three hundred warriors – screaming, naked, and carrying spears, tomahawks, and knives – charged toward Dement's men, who instantly panicked. According to Harrison, they ran like sheep chased by a gang of wolves." Four or five on foot died as the mob proceeded back along the Trail toward the blockhouse where, again according to Harrison, the rest of Dement's men were fortified up, "terrified by the screams of the whites and the yells of the savages." Black Hawk's men, who were well armed with guns, tomahawks, and knives, maintained a heavy fire, their bullets whizzing through the cracks in the log blockhouse, and keeping the militia men pinned down. The Indians then killed or stole the militia's horses before retreating.

Abraham Lincoln and messmate George Harrison arrived at the Grove the following day, along with a group of reinforcements that had traveled the Galena Trail from Dixon's Ferry. Harrison recalled that "The dead still lay unburied until after we arrived at sunrise the next day. The fortified men, fifty strong, had not ventured to go out until they saw us; when they rejoiced greatly that friends, and not their dreaded enemies, had come. They looked like men just out of cholera, having passed through the cramping stage. The only part we could then act was to seek the lost men, and with hatchets and hands to bury them." Harrison, Lincoln and others buried the dead soldiers where they found them. Lincoln later recalled seeing the dead as he followed the Trail up the hill to Kellogg's Grove. "I remember just how those men looked as we rode up the little hill....The red light of the morning sun was streaming upon them as they lay, heads toward us, on the ground. And every man had a round red spot on the top of his head, about as big as a dollar, where the redskins had taken his scalp. It was frightful, but it was grotesque, and the red sunlight seemed to paint everything all over." I remember that one man had on buckskin breeches."



Stephenson County's Black Hawk Monument at Kellogg's Grove was erected in 1887, when the soldiers killed in the battle were reburied at the monument. According to Sherman Virtue, monument guardian and historian, only the drummer boy was left beneath the tree where he fell and had been buried by Lincoln and militia reinforcements. The battlefield was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Stephenson County plans to enlarge and upgrade the monument site.



Ruts from the old Kellogg/Galena Trail are preserved in the battlefield site and are also listed on the National Register. Even after over 170 years, the characteristic swale of the Trail is still discernable.

Sources: Miller, Richard Lawrence, **Lincoln and his World**, *The Early Years*, Stockpole Press, c, 2006, pp 175-176.

Beveridge, Albert J., **Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858**, Vol. 1, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 1928, pg. 123.

References to the Galena Trail per National Register documentation, Black Hawk Monument, Stephenson County (see above photo).

Editor's Note: The Galena Trail was also known as the Kellogg Trail prior to the Black Hawk War. It was opened in 1825 by Oliver Kellogg, and linked Peoria and southern Illinois with Galena and the Lead Mine Region northwestern Illinois and SW Michigan Territory, later the state of Wisconsin. Prior to the war, Oliver Kellogg maintained a tavern and trading post at Kellogg's Grove.

Photographs, Patricia L. Goitein, Fall, 2000.