

The Legacy of Black Jack



Photo credit: Kansas Historical Society

After the surrender at Black Jack, Brown kept Henry Clay Pate's bowie knife as a battle trophy. Brown later showed the knife to a Connecticut blacksmith, to use as a pattern for making 1000 similar blades to be mounted on poles.

These were the famous pikes with which Brown hoped to arm a slave rebellion after his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry.

Jacob Lawrence, a 20th century artist, painted several series depicting people and events in African American history. This painting of the Battle of Black Jack was part of his John Brown series, completed in 1941.

The Battle of Black Jack, although forgotten by many, has lived on as a symbol of the conflict over slavery that led to the national civil war in 1861.

Photo credit: The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



The Battle of Black Jack and other events in Kansas Territory had brought John Brown to national attention as a fierce foe of slavery.

In 1857, Brown left Kansas to raise funds in the east. During this time, he worked on his plan to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, arm slaves from nearby southern plantations, and bring about a general slave insurrection.

On October 16, 1859, Brown and 21 other men—16 white and 5 black—raided the arsenal. Brown was wounded and captured and moved to Charles Town, Virginia. There, Brown was tried and convicted of treason and executed by hanging on December 2, 1859.

To some, he seemed a madman, to others a martyr. But John Brown's legacy lived on.