

"Death to All Yankees and Traitors in Kansas"

The Squatter Sovereign and the Defense of Slavery in Kansas

by Bill Cecil-Fronsman



The slavery issue was pushed westward as southerners sought new territories in which to further their cause.

When Kansas bled during its tumultuous territorial years, no newspaper defended slavery or condemned free-soil settlers with more force or more venom than the *Squatter Sovereign*. Published out of Atchison, the *Squatter Sovereign* never minced words as it led proslavery forces in their struggle for Kansas: "Let us begin to purge ourselves of all Abolition emissaries who occupy our dominion, and give distinct notice that all who do not leave immediately, for the East, WILL LEAVE FOR ETERNITY!"¹

Free-state contemporaries were quick to condemn the paper. In 1855 Julia Louisa Lovejoy wrote back to her New Hampshire readers that the paper was "one of the vilest

John H. Stringfellow, senior editor of the *Squatter Sovereign*.

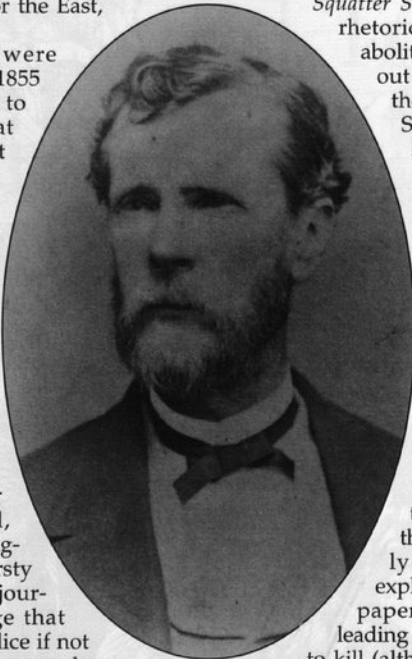
pro-slavery sheets that have ever disgraced the American press." Historians, who generally have been sympathetic with the free-state cause, have not dissented from that assessment. The most thorough historian of territorial newspapers, Herbert Flint, called the *Squatter Sovereign* "the real red-blooded, murder-seeking, Abolitionist-hanging, murder-condoning, bloodthirsty pro-slavery paper of all Kansas journalism." Flint went on to charge that "this paper was a vicious accomplice if not an instigator of crime and violence as perhaps few papers have ever been."²

Even those relatively few historians who have been sympathetic with the Southern cause have blanched at the paper's reckless utterances. Elmer Craik called it "the most outspoken and enthusiastic

champion of southern institutions. Perhaps it did more than any other agency to stir up enmity between the two sections." Floyd Shoemaker described its senior editor as "perhaps the most virulent proslavery writer and speaker in Kansas."³

Kansas proslavery newspapers did not acquire a reputation for evenhanded discussions of the controversial issues of the day. But among them was a wide variety of opinions and approaches. The *Squatter Sovereign* stood out for its vitriolic rhetoric. The tone was incendiary: "The abolitionists shoot down our men without provocation, whenever they meet them. LET US RETALIATE IN THE SAME MANNER—A FREE FIGHT IS ALL WE DESIRE. . . . DEATH TO ALL YANKEES/AND TRAITORS IN KANSAS." For those needing more specific guidance, it suggested: "Scourge the country of abolitionism, free soilism, and every other damnable ism that exists. Destroy their property, crops and every article that would conduce to the support of any or every person who is known or suspected of acting, co-operating or sympathizing with abolitionism."⁴

But there is a great deal more to the issue. Merely knowing that the *Squatter Sovereign* was a virulently proslavery newspaper does not explain why it was a proslavery newspaper. The *Squatter Sovereign* was the leading voice of Kansans who were willing to kill (although perhaps somewhat less willing to die) to make Kansas a slave state. Too often historians have been content to chronicle the incidents of violence and vote fraud that the proslavery group perpetrated. But if we are to understand why the proslavery group battled the Yankees so vigorously, we need to go beyond the hyperbole and start to understand how they viewed their free-state opponents and how they viewed themselves. Only then can we begin to comprehend why Kansas bled.



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1. *Squatter Sovereign*, Atchison, May 8, 1855.

2. Julia Louisa Lovejoy, "Letters From Kansas" *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 11 (February 1942): 43; Herbert Flint, "Journalism in Territorial Kansas" (Master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1916), 140, 142.

3. Elmer LeRoy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1919-1922 15 (1922): 348; Floyd C. Shoemaker, "Missouri's Proslavery Fight For Kansas, 1854-1855," *Missouri Historical Review* 48 (April 1954): 231.

4. *Squatter Sovereign*, June 10, September 9, 1856. On other newspapers, see Flint, "Journalism in Territorial Kansas."

Too often historians' sympathies have interfered with their abilities to understand the proslavery group. Free-staters had the twin advantages of being both the winners and the good guys. No large body of losers survived and remained in the state to create a Kansas version of the cult of the lost cause. Not surprisingly, it would take a Missourian to note that the Bleeding Kansas episode "is one of the few examples I know of of one side being simon-pure and the other side being simply poor, of one side having all the proof and the other side getting all the punishment, of one side receiving the bravos and the other side, the Bronx cheers."⁵ It is certainly not the intention here to rehabilitate the proslavery cause. It is rather the intention here to try to understand it.

This article will explore the *Squatter Sovereign*, the shrillest, most widely-read voice of Kansas proslavery opinion.⁶ In a fundamental sense, its defense of slavery was an attack on life as its contributors imagined it was lived in the North. The *Squatter Sovereign* did not defend slavery as the institution of the planter elite. Rather, the paper portrayed itself defending the common man against an aggressive, demoralizing industrial capitalism. The proslavery faction's Northern opponents were not free, independent men of the land, but hirelings, manipulated by their moneyed masters in the East. Such men had no legitimate rights in Kansas. By protecting slavery in Kansas against men like these, the *Squatter Sovereign* sought to preserve the territory as a new home for an independent,



Robert S. Kelley, junior editor of the *Squatter Sovereign*.

autonomous yeomanry that lived side-by-side with slaves and slaveholders.

The *Squatter Sovereign* began as a company paper. The Atchison Town Company, composed of "Southern pro-slavery people" awarded its editors \$400 to establish the paper.⁷ The editors in turn regularly boosted the area as a place with an unbridled future: "A number of large farms are being made in the vicinity of Atchison.

Some of our farmers are putting in from forty to eighty acres of prairie. The crops in this region never looked more promising."⁸

The senior editor was Dr. John H. Stringfellow. Born in Culpepper County, Virginia, Stringfellow was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. His fortunes took him to Missouri where his brother Benjamin F. Stringfellow served as attorney

general. He married Ophelia J. Simmons, niece of Gov. John C. Edwards, a connection that encouraged him to set up his practice in Missouri. He practiced medicine in Brunswick and Carrolton before moving to Platte City in 1852. When Kansas was opened, he helped to form a town company, encouraged it to name the town after Missouri's proslavery senator, David Rice Atchison, and selected a town lot for himself.⁹

Robert S. Kelley, born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, was the junior editor. Herbert Flint, who apparently interviewed him, wrote that as a boy Kelley ran away to Boston where he learned the printer's trade and "where he has said, he also

5. Shoemaker, "Missouri's Proslavery Fight," 221.

6. This was always the claim of the paper. The editor described the paper as "having the largest circulation of any Newspaper in Kansas," *Squatter Sovereign*, November 22, 1856. Allan Nevins called it "The proslavery organ in Kansas" in *Ordeal of the Union*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 2: 386. More recently, Kenneth Stampp called it "the leading proslavery newspaper" in *Kansas in America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 148. The paper's chief rival, Leavenworth's *Kansas Weekly Herald*, disputed the claim. See *Kansas Weekly Herald*, May 4, 1855.

7. The characterization of the town company was from Clem Rohr, "Early Recollections of Atchison and Its Business Men," *Atchison Daily Globe*, December 3, 1909. On the relationship of the paper and the town company, see *Atchison Daily Globe*, June 5, 1905.

8. *Squatter Sovereign*, June 5, 1855.

9. On Stringfellow, see "Biographical Sketch of Dr. J. H. Stringfellow, Speaker First Kansas Legislature," Misc. Stringfellow Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. See also William H. Coffin, "Settlement of the Friends in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1901-1902 7 (1902): 331-32.

learned to hate the Yankees." When a rumor surfaced that he was born in Massachusetts, Kelley responded, "We can stand anything but being called a Yankee and brand the author a coward, a base calumniator, and a willful liar." Prior to coming to Kansas, Kelley ran the *Democratic Platform*, a St. Joseph, Missouri, newspaper that regularly blasted slavery's opponents. In November of 1856 Stringfellow and Kelley sold a half interest in the paper to Peter H. Larey who joined the staff as coeditor. A native of South Carolina and "an uncompromising States Rights Democrat," Larey brought no changes in editorial policy or outlook.¹⁰

One can understand the *Squatter Sovereign* only within the context of the emerging national debate on slavery. Although several decades of abolitionist critics had condemned slavery as an institution that cruelly abused slaves, these

David R. Atchison, Missouri senator and slavery advocate for whom Atchison, Kansas, was named.

assaults had not generated a broad political consensus among a racist Northern population. Rather, Northerners were far more likely to condemn slavery as a retrogressive institution that created a backward and stagnant society. Whatever sympathy Northerners may have felt for slaves was overshadowed by their revulsion with the effects of slavery on whites. As Eric Foner wrote, "The Republican critique of southern society thus focused upon the degradation of labor—the slave's ignorance and lack of incentive, and the laboring white's poverty, degradation, and lack of social mobility." The result was a two-class society: "the slaveholding aristocracy and the very poor."¹¹

10. Flint, "Journalism in Territorial Kansas," 503; Kelley's comments are from the *Squatter Sovereign*, February 19, 1856. Kelley's career before coming to Kansas is discussed in James C. Malin, *The Nebraska Question, 1852-1854* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1953), 381-86; Larey is introduced in the *Squatter Sovereign*, November 22, 1856.

11. On Northern racial attitudes, see Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969); Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-*

The Southern response to Northern criticism likewise emphasized a variety of points. Some defenders directly responded to abolitionist charges that slavery cruelly abused slaves by claiming that the slaves were more humanely treated than their working-class counterparts in the free states. Others directly took on abolitionist charges that slavery was incompatible with Christianity by searching for biblical justifications for that peculiar institution. These lines of defense appeared in the pages of the *Squatter Sovereign*. Quoting an observer of slave life in Louisiana, it asserted that the slaves' "appearance contrasts brightly with the doleful accounts we daily receive [sic] from Northern towns and cities of the distress and forlorn condition of the poor miserable white slaves who drag out a wretched existence there."¹²

During the summer of 1855 the paper printed "A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery" written by editor Stringfellow's kinsman, Thornton Stringfellow of Culpepper County, Virginia. Anything but brief, the examination covered several columns on the front pages of two months worth of issues and rehearsed the standard defenses: slavery was a part of the Hebrew civilizations; St. Paul recognized slavery and told runaways to return to their masters; slaves owed obedience to their masters who in turn would treat them kindly. In another context, the paper suggested that it was abolitionists who were irreligious. It was they who wished to see Kansas "patterned after Massachusetts where . . . the Bible [is] denounced as humbug."¹³

Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967). On the free labor ideal, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Chapter 2 discusses the Republican critique of the South. The quotations are from p. 50, 47.

12. *Squatter Sovereign*, March 6, 1855. The classic (and still useful) work on this subject is William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935). See also Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

13. *Squatter Sovereign*, June 5, 1855-July 24, 1855. The quotation is from *ibid.*, June 12, 1855, and is part of a separate attack on abolitionists.



The bulk of the paper's proslavery argument, however, focused on other issues. The *Squatter Sovereign* attempted to stand the free labor argument on its head. Rather than producing a society dominated by a plutocratic planter class, slavery created a uniquely egalitarian social order, a social order that was the prerequisite for a republican society. It was Northern capitalism that created an exploitative elite class and a degraded working class.

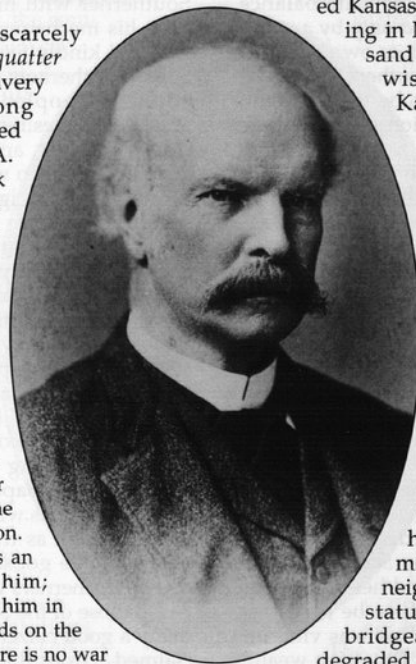
This type of reasoning was scarcely the exclusive property of the *Squatter Sovereign*. Many proponents of slavery maintained that equality among whites depended on a subordinated black population. Gov. Henry A. Wise of Virginia argued, "Break down slavery and you would with the same blow destroy the great democratic principle of equality among men." Georgia's Thomas R. R. Cobb advanced a similar position:

The mass of laborers not being recognized among citizens, every citizen feels that he belongs to an elevated class. It matters not that he is no slaveholder, he is not of the inferior race; he is a freeborn citizen; he engages in no menial occupation. The poorest meets the richest as an equal; sits at his table with him; salutes him as neighbor; meets him in every public assembly, and stands on the same social platform. Hence, there is no war of classes. There is truthfully republican equality in the ruling class.¹⁴

The editors of the *Squatter Sovereign* surely shared these sentiments. In a slave society, the paper proclaimed, "color, not money marks the class: black is the badge of slavery; white the color of the free man, and the white man, however poor [and] whatever his occupation, feels himself a sovereign." Like Cobb, the paper contended that this made slavery the basis

for republican equality. The white man in a slave society "looks upon liberty as the privilege of his color, the government peculiarly his own, himself its sovereign. He watches it with the jealous eye of a monarch." The free white man is "proud of his freedom" and "jealous of his privilege." Such a man "will resist every attempt to rob him of his dominion."¹⁵

Appeals like these resonated with the *Squatter Sovereign's* readership. The paper regularly boosted Kansas as a slaveholders' paradise, claiming in March of 1856 that over one thousand slaves were in the territory.¹⁶ But wishful thinking would not make Kansas a slave state. Proslavery



Benjamin F. Stringfellow, brother of John H. and a staunch defender of slavery in Kansas.

partisans needed the active support of nonslaveholding Southern whites. Missouri, the most likely source of proslavery Kansas emigrants, was dominated by small farmers. These common whites were the heirs to an egalitarian ethos that looked with suspicion upon any claims of social superiority over themselves. Racist in outlook, they had worked out a series of accommodations with their slaveholding neighbors. Slavery ensured that their status would be protected by an unbridgeable gulf between them and the degraded slaves. The *Squatter Sovereign* had to mobilize its supporters by appealing to their values, not the values of the planter class.¹⁷

The *Squatter Sovereign's* constituency translated its egalitarian values into political thought through the

15. *Squatter Sovereign*, February 20, 1855.

16. The claim was made in *ibid.*, March 4, 1856. The editors added: "The climate and soil of Kansas is peculiarly adapted to slave labor, and hemp, corn, wheat, tobacco and other staples can be as profitably produced here as in Kentucky or other Southern States."

17. On the economic situation of Missouri, see Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, chapter 2. See also David Thelen, *Paths of Resistance: Tradition and Democracy in Industrializing Missouri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chapter 1. On common-white values, see Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), especially chapters 2 and 3.

14. Wise is quoted in George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 62. Cobb is quoted in James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 132. Both works are essential to understanding the egalitarian racism found in the *Squatter Sovereign*.

medium of republicanism. Emerging as a political ideology in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, republicanism warned of what Harry Watson called the constant conflict between personal liberty and the power of the state. Liberty, Watson explained, "implied that no white man would be subject to the arbitrary rule of another and that the community of white men might rule themselves by means of majority rule." Power, in contrast, "was the threat of control by others." The delicate balance between the two could be preserved only by a virtuous citizenry that would safeguard its own interests without threatening the liberty of others. But to be truly virtuous, the citizenry had to be independent, a condition that required possession of productive property. "Control over their own property," wrote William L. Barney of eighteenth-century white Americans, "enabled them to withstand economic coercion and left them independent and fiercely self-assertive." It was this material basis that the *Squatter Sovereign* saw itself preserving.¹⁸

Juxtaposed against the image of the South as a white man's democracy came the image of the North as a land of class oppression. The *Squatter Sovereign* drew upon traditional republican suspicions to make its point. Quoting Thomas Jefferson, the paper declared that towns were "sores on the body politic." In the towns one finds "great wealth gathered in the hands of the few, the toiling millions struggling for bread; the one class is corrupted by luxury, the other debased by destitution." This was life in the North as the *Squatter Sovereign* imagined it. In the country, however, (and here the paper really meant in the rural South) "there be no excessive wealth, there is no poverty." This was vital for the survival of a virtuous republic. Excessive wealth "creates an improper distinction, corrupts the morals of the people." For a republic to survive, wealth must be "fairly distributed so that each of its members, easy and independent in his property, shall feel himself practically equal to his fellows." In the absence of the kind of equality found among whites in a slave

society, "of necessity money must distinguish the classes—mark the master, separate the servant."¹⁹

The *Squatter Sovereign's* outlook required that it distinguish between Northerners. The paper periodically claimed that it did not hate *all* persons from the free states. It suggested that unlike their opponents, proslavery men did not seek to exclude anyone. The victory of the proslavery side would mean that anyone could make a home in Kansas: "The Southerner with his slaves, the industrious yankee with his mechanic arts can side by side, with good will and kindly feeling push on our bright destiny." Some Northerners clearly were welcome: "If Kansas could be peopled by honest citizens of the free States, who desired to transfer their own, and children's property, and if it were made a free State by such people, who were always willing to protect the rights of their neighbors, the Country, would have nothing to fear."²⁰

Statements suggesting peaceful coexistence between proslavery forces and free-staters were rare. At times the *Squatter Sovereign* imagined a large mass of proslavery Northerners and contended that they "frankly admit they have their prejudice against negro slavery, but that experience has demonstrated to them that slaveholders and negro slaves suit them better than abolitionists." Naturally, to such men the editors "bid a hearty welcome to the shores of Kansas." In a column referring to the arrival of a group from Tennessee, the paper declared, "Companies coming from slave States will be heartily welcomed by our citizens, as well as those from free States who are all 'right on the goose.'" The editors knew well that many Northerners were from rural backgrounds similar to those of the Southern yeomanry. "There will be many a good citizen settle among us," the paper proclaimed, "from Illinois, Indian[a], and Ohio, whose notions of slavery are parallel with our own."²¹

The logic of the *Squatter Sovereign's* proslavery defense dictated that it draw distinctions between Northerners. "There are two classes of people who come from the free States," a correspondent claimed, "the independent and dependent. The first have some means and intelligence. They are observant and practical as well as theoretic." This group, the correspondent maintained, would become proslavery men

18. The enormous literature on republican thought and its evolution include Robert E. Shallope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 29 (1972): 49-80; and Shallope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 39 (1982): 334-56; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); William L. Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth Century America* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1987). Watson's quotations are from p. 43-44; Barney's quotation is from p. 122.

19. *Squatter Sovereign*, February 13, 20, 1855.

20. *Ibid.*, April 17, June 19, 1855.

21. *Ibid.*, June 19, September 4, April 10, 1855. The term "right on the goose" is a variation of the secret sign "Sound on the Goose" given by proslavery Missourians crossing the Kansas border to vote. See Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 24.

"If they find the country better suited to slave labor." But there were also dependent Northerners: "The other class are the subjects of the 'emigration Aid Society,' who come without means and with Utopian anticipations and are sadly disappointed and curse the men who sent them hither."²²

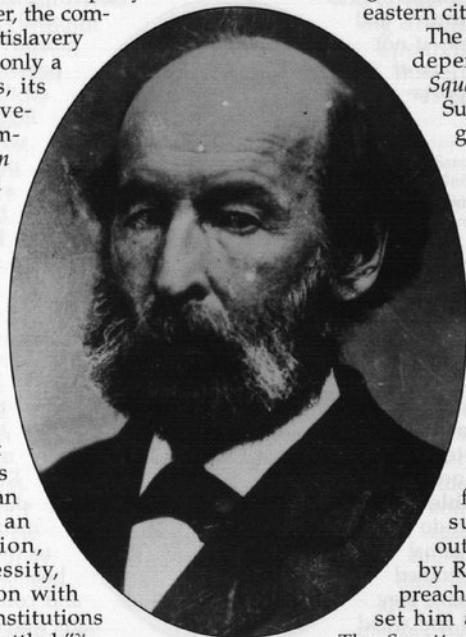
At times the paper drew a harsh distinction between the honest midwesterner searching for a better place to farm and the eastern recruit of the New England Emigrant Aid Company.

Established in 1854 by Eli Thayer, the company provided assistance to antislavery settlers. Although it supported only a relative handful of emigrants, its influence in the free-state movement went far beyond its numbers.²³ To the *Squatter Sovereign* the fact that settlers had received assistance made their presence fundamentally illegitimate. "We are not contending against the honest, but mistaken Free-Soiler, but with the scum and filth of the Northern cities; sent here as hired servants, to do the will of others; not to give their own free suffrage." The real enemies of slavery were not honest farmers seeking homes in a new territory. "No one can fail to distinguish between an honest, bona fide emigration, prompted by choice or necessity, and an organized colonization with offensive purpose upon the institutions of the country proposed to be settled."²⁴

Although on one level the *Squatter Sovereign* recognized the midwesterners' existence, it generally ignored them when considering the situation or else assumed that they could be won over once the eastern influences were eliminated. Despite making an occasional reference to these honest men of the North, the paper took it as an article of faith that the true enemies of slavery "are not free

men, but paupers, who have sold themselves to Eli Thayer & Co., to do their master's bidding." It mattered little to the paper that Southerners were organizing and subsidizing their countrymen's emigration to Kansas. It mattered little to the paper that many of the people helped by the New England Emigrant Aid Company were midwestern farmers. The paper made an implicit assumption that its opponents were "the hirelings of the Emigrant Aid Societies, the scruff[f] of the eastern cities."²⁵

The image of white men, reduced to dependency, surely shocked the *Squatter Sovereign's* constituency. Such men were not an independent group of free agents engaged



Eli Thayer became the *Squatter Sovereign's* target for extreme criticism.

in a legitimate dispute over the future of Kansas. They were "a Hessian band of mercenaries" who were presumably for sale to the highest bidder. Not only were they the slaves of Eli Thayer and company, but the free-state partisans were also subjects of other antislavery outsiders. A proslavery mob led by Robert Kelley put the abolition preacher Pardee Butler on a raft and set him adrift in the Missouri River.

The *Squatter Sovereign* then asked its supporters, "Will they allow the Greel[e]ys and Seward[s] of the Northern States to inundate our broad territory with the scruff[f] and scum, collected from their prisons, brothels, and sink-holes of iniquity?"²⁶

25. Ibid., February 3, 1855. On Southern support for emigration, see Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas." For the most celebrated proslavery emigration push, see Walter L. Fleming, "The Buford Expedition to Kansas," *American Historical Review* 6 (October 1900): 38-48. On the varieties of Northern recruits, see Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. The final comment from the *Squatter Sovereign* is from April 15, 1856.

26. *Squatter Sovereign*, October 16, August 21, 1855. The paper referred to Horace Greeley, antislavery editor of the *New York Tribune*, and to New York's Republican senator William Henry Seward. On Kelley's role in the incident, see Flint, "Journalism in Territorial Kansas," 500.

22. *Squatter Sovereign*, May 29, 1855.

23. On Eli Thayer and the New England Emigrant Aid Company, see Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1954).

24. *Squatter Sovereign*, March 6, October 16, 1855.

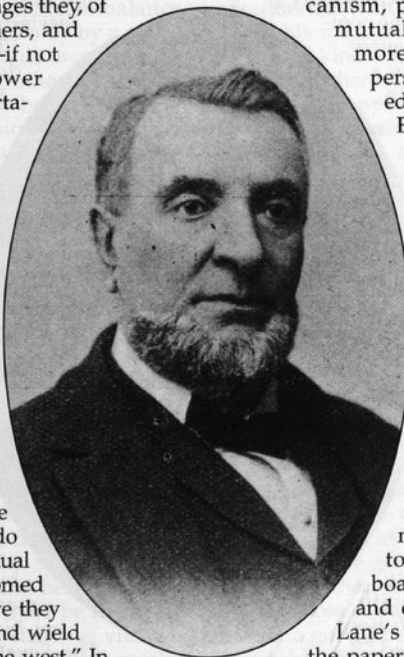
As men with no legitimate interest in Kansas, it is no surprise that this group would presumably be unwilling to engage in the hard work of transforming the territory into a land of prosperous farms. "They are not sent to cultivate the soil, to better their social condition, to add to their individual comforts, or the aggregate wealth of the nation" charged the paper. Instead, it viewed them as perpetually dependent on an outside force. "They are mostly ignorant of agriculture, picked up in cities and villages they, of course have no experience as farmers, and if left to their unaided resources—if not clothed and fed by the same power which has effected their transportation—they would starve."²⁷

Clem Rohr recalled that Atchison's proslavery forces became dominated by New England free-staters.

The Emigrant Aid men were inherently lazy! As Southern whites understood laziness, the concept meant refusing to do the work needed to maintain personal independence. Upon discovering that their benefactors were ready to abandon their New England hirelings, "As many as are able return. Those who are unable to do so, are obliged to labor—hard manual labor—such as they are unaccustomed to. They are not used to it, nor have they the physique, to handle the marl and wield the axe with the brawny sons of the west." In June of 1855 the paper published a letter urging that the territorial legislature make advocating abolition a felony. If passed, the author suggested, "We will soon rid ourselves of the most troublesome portion of the Emigrant Aid men. *They don't like work*, and if the legislature, will only make the penalty . . . a 6 or 12 month-service in a chain gang, these lazy meddlesome fellows will soon find their way back to some more congenial clime." Not only were the men lazy, so were the women. In that same issue the paper printed a joke that reported an alleged conversation between a father and son. "How could you marry an Irish girl?" the father asked. "Why father?" went the reply, "I am not able to

keep two women—if I'd married a Yankee girl, I'd had to have hired an Irish girl to take care of her."²⁸

The *Squatter Sovereign* portrayed its opponents as men without honor. Honor, as Southerners understood the concept, was sustained by the productive property required for republican virtue. Men without an independent position could scarcely uphold any legitimate claim to honor. Bertram Wyatt-Brown reminded us how Southerners viewed "republicanism, property, and personal honor as mutually supportive." Honor required, moreover, regular demonstrations of personal courage. The paper contrasted the current crop of "Gallant New England Free-Soil Abolition Braves" with their fathers, "the defenders of Bunker Hill." "Hold, they were slaveholders, traffic[k]ers in human flesh, aye men stealers. But they were men. They wrote no sickly sentimental novels, but were men who could go *alone* into the den of the savage wolf and make him captive." But the current crop of New Englanders lacked the metal of their ancestors. "Here is another instance of Northern Bravery! Forty-four men well armed with Rifles, Revolvers and Bowie-knives, were disarmed by about six Pro-Slavery men, and forced to return, *disgraced* to the State [of Massachusetts] that boasts so much of Northern chivalry and courage." During a clash with Jim Lane's free-state forces at Hickory Point, the paper alleged that a band of proslavery partisans "Charged with a yell that struck panic into the ranks of the white-livered Yankees" who "scattered like a flock of startled sheep without firing a gun." The coolness under fire demonstrated by the proslavery warriors proved to the Yankee commander that he "had met with men that were made of material he could not conquer."²⁹



28. Ibid., May 29, June 12, 1855. On Southern views of laziness, see Cecil-Francis, *Common Whites*, 107-10, and Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 72-73.

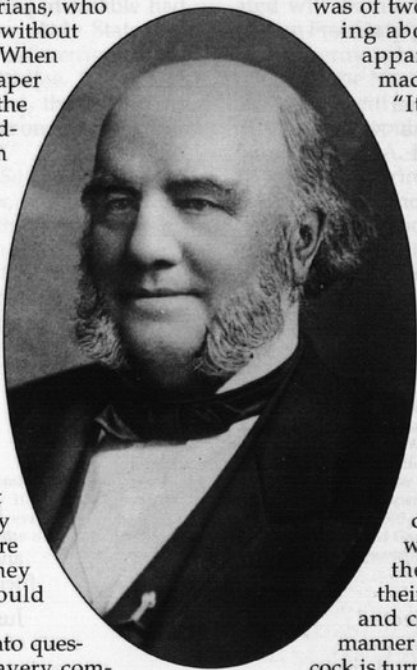
29. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 72-73, discusses the relationship of landownership and honor. On the relationship of courage and honor, see p. 36, 37, 43, 154, 459-60; *Squatter Sovereign*, June 12, 1855, July 8, September 16, 1855.

27. *Squatter Sovereign*, October 16, 1855.

The Yankees' lack of honor was further demonstrated by their stinginess. An honorable man was supposed to be generous, free with his possessions, and above all, personally honest. The Yankees were none of the above. When the antislavery *Kansas Herald of Freedom* urged its readership to boycott the town of Parkville, Missouri, the *Squatter Sovereign* responded: "We predict that for every skin-flint yankee who may withdraw his patronage from Parkville, twenty liberal Missourians, who can buy without 'jewling' and pay without 'grumbling' will take his place." When a Lowell, Massachusetts, newspaper criticized the town of Atchison, the *Squatter Sovereign* assured its readership, "The more that is written to the disadvantage of our town in the land of Puritanism, the better we shall be pleased. We would have no inducements held out to the grasping, skin-flint nigger stealing Yankees to show their tallow-faced countenances in the beautiful region of country around Atchison." Not only were the Yankees cheap, they were dishonorable thieves. The *Squatter Sovereign* suggested that Atchison merchants "have plenty of honest men to buy their goods, and they well know if the abolitionists were permitted to come among us, they would steal more than they would spend in our town."³⁰

Allegations like these called into question the New Englanders' antislavery commitments. "Abolition philanthropy is about the cheapest commodity the market affords," claimed an Illinois newspaper cited by the *Squatter Sovereign*. "An Abolitionist will be the most humane, benevolent kind hearted fellow in the world, if it isn't likely to cost him anything. But just ask him to fork over half a dollar to buy a beef-stake for one of the negroes he professes to pity so much, and he'll squeak out like a cart-wheel that hasn't seen tar for a month."³¹

The Yankees' miserliness made their support for abolition illegitimate. Early in the debate, the paper denied any interest in reopening the African slave trade, but added that "if this were done, abolitionists would give us no further troubles, they would as did their fathers, become slave-catchers, and thus being able to make a profit of slavery, would cease to hate slave-owners; would forget their mock love of the negro in their real love of money." The paper was of two minds when it came to evaluating abolitionist sincerity. Some were apparently sincere believers, which made them all the more dangerous. "It is useless to say that these



Samuel C. Pomeroy, a "well known Free State Yankee," purchased the *Squatter Sovereign* in 1857.

people are crazy theorists or impracticable zealots. If they are not honest themselves, they have certain tens of thousands of honest adherents." But the paper also claimed that the whole drive for abolition was "kept up by a few fanatical leaders" who presumably had no direct financial interest in the outcome. The rest of the followers were "the most despicable part of the population" who joined "for their own pecuniary benefit. Dollars and cents will at anytime and in any manner turn them as easily as a weathercock is turned by the gentle breeze."³²

As the Yankees' parsimony invalidated their abolitionism, so did it invalidate their support for free-soil emigration. All of the claims that border ruffians were invading Kansas were allegedly stories "merely got up to hide the cold-blooded speculation of [former governor Andrew] Reeder's land company. . . or of the New England Settlement Company to which the Boston and New York Abolition papers are partners." In sum, a conspiracy had emerged among the moneyed interests of the North to deprive honorable men of their lands. "A

30. See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 59, 60, 176, 327, 336, 434; *Squatter Sovereign*, May 1, April 10, 1855, February 5, 1856.

31. *Squatter Sovereign*, December 4, 1855.

32. *Ibid.*, February 5, 1855, December 16, 1856, October 9, 1855.

few weeks since we announced, that a conspiracy was on foot to force slavery and slaveholders out of Kansas. Day by day our mails arrive, evidences of this fact develop themselves." The battle in Kansas was not a struggle between competing ideologies or between two sets of men, each with legitimate claims on the land. It was a struggle to stop a takeover by a moneyed aristocracy at war with the hard-working, independent producers, "the bone and sinew" of the country.³³

The conspiracy was attempting to turn Kansas over to a group that had no scruples about the way it treated white men. Benjamin Stringfellow charged in his brother's paper that "the necessity for labor demands that slavery be brought here, else the people may be driven to seek

John A. Martin, an antislavery leader, became the owner of the once proslavery *Squatter Sovereign* in 1858.



white labor, not being able to get negroes, and from necessity be forced to exclude negro slavery, that white slaves may be induced to come." Another correspondent claimed, "It makes my ears tingle, and my heart beat with shame to think that a swarm of lousy, lazy, stinking, poor, miserable, pusillanimous, contemptible, God-forsaken, man-despised, devil-rejected fanatics . . . were taken from the poor-houses and jails of Yankee land and transported by a company of speculators to further their own interests." By controlling these sorts, the paper's enemies could seize control of the territory. "The abolitionists of the north intend, during the coming month, to introduce large numbers of their hired hands to put their treasonable, pretended government into operation by force." A takeover by these hirelings had to be stopped—by any means necessary!³⁴

33. Ibid., September 11, 1855, December 23, 1856. It should come as no surprise that a Democratic party paper like the *Squatter Sovereign* would use rhetoric like this. The notion of a struggle between a moneyed aristocracy and the independent producers is a common theme in Jacksonian rhetoric. See Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics & Belief* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), chapter 2. The phrase "bone and sinew" is from the *Squatter Sovereign*, April 3, 1855.

34. *Squatter Sovereign*, December 4, October 9, 1855, July 15, 1856.

Men such as these had no fundamental rights in Kansas. "How much longer are we to suffer from the atrocities of these unprincipled cowardly murdering villains?" the paper asked. It suggested that these "pests" needed to be "taught a summary lesson." Southern white culture maintained that communities had a right to unite to drive out those who deviated from accepted codes of conduct. "We as a general thing, disapprove of lynch law, and are the last to justify people in taking the law into their own hands. . . . But there are certain cases in which a community are [sic] justifiable in resorting to any means to protect themselves and punish offenders—they are in cases where the law makes no provisions for such punishment." The paper suggested that the current invasion by these dishonorable men was a case in point:

We proclaimed to the world that . . . although we preferred Kansas being made a Negro slave State, yet, we never dreamed making it so by the aid of bowie-knives, revolvers, and Sharp's Rifles, until we were threatened to be driven out of the Territory, by a band of hired abolitionists, bought up and sent here to control our elections, and steal our slaves and those of our friends in adjoining States.³⁵

Just as the paper's description of the roots of the Kansas conflict was disingenuous, so too was its account of the political situation by late 1856. Shortly after the 1856 elections, the *Squatter Sovereign* proclaimed that President-elect James Buchanan and the Democratic majority in Congress would ensure that Kansas would enter the Union as a slave state. It suggested in December of 1856 that Gov. John W. Geary should resign and be replaced by Missouri's proslavery senator David Rice Atchison. "Gen. Atchison would be, to-day, the

35. Ibid., August 5, 1856, April 24, 1855, June 17, 1856. On Southern white culture's view of community authority, see Cecil-Francis, *Common Whites*, 156-58.

choice of three-fourths of all the voters in the Territory for that office."³⁶

But reality was forcing its way into the paper. In November of 1856 the paper published an invitation to "All honest, orderly, law-abiding people . . . regardless of their political or religious opinions" to come and settle in Atchison. The circular was issued by thirty-seven individuals including senior editor Stringfellow and new co-owner Peter Larey. By February a further concession to the inevitable had been made. "Let us make Kansas a slave State and Democratic if possible," the *Squatter Sovereign* broadcast, following its familiar political line. But it then made an unusual departure. "If not, then next best we can, which is to make it a National Democratic State should slavery be abolished."³⁷

The last extant issue of the *Squatter Sovereign* under the editorship of Stringfellow, Kelley, and Larey was printed on March 3, 1857. Both Stringfellow and Kelley soon left the territory and eventually served in the Confederate army. The owners explained that they had no choice but to sell. They had "repeatedly called upon the South for aid, and the response has been a moneyless one." The paper did not die, however. The

town fathers found someone to take it over. Clem Rohr, an early resident of Atchison, recalled that by 1857 the town was "a new straggling village with some promise for the future." Business demands took precedence over politics. "The town company was composed of Southern pro-slavery people, but soon saw that Eastern immigration was desirable and necessary. They looked around for someone to cast that pro-slavery odium from the town's name, and negotiated with Samuel C. Pomeroy, a staunch and well known Free State Yankee from Massachusetts."³⁸

Pomeroy was a good deal more than that. An agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Company, Pomeroy went on to represent Kansas in the U.S. Senate as a Republican. Although Pomeroy sold the paper to John A. Martin in 1858, it did not abandon its newfound principles. Martin served as publisher and editor for more than twenty years. During his tenure, Martin chose to rename the paper, reflecting both his own antislavery principles and the new political realities of Kansas. The *Squatter Sovereign*, the once proud defender of slavery, took as its new name *Freedom's Champion*.³⁹

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36. *Squatter Sovereign*, November 22, December 2, 1856.

37. *Ibid.*, November 22, 1856, February 10, 1857. But note that Stringfellow continued to entertain hope for a revival of fortune. In the next issue he announced his candidacy for the office of delegate to Congress. See *ibid.*, February 17, 1857.

38. The final edition of the paper under its original editors is no longer extant. The explanation for selling the paper was reprinted in Leavenworth's *Kansas Weekly Herald*, May 23, 1857. Rohr's comments are from "Early Recollections of Atchison and Its Business Men." On Stringfellow's career, see "Biographical Sketch of Dr. J. H. Stringfellow," Misc. Stringfellow Papers. On Kelley's career, see Flint, "Journalism in Territorial Kansas," 503.

39. G. Raymond Gaedert, "First Newspapers in Kansas Counties," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 10 (February 1941): 10.