

"A War of A Newly Uncovered Letter

by Michael D. Pierson

When Julia Louisa Lovejoy and her family moved from Manhattan, Kansas, to Lawrence in August 1856, they entered a free-soil city under siege. Lawrence had been sacked in May, and in June proslavery forces in Missouri had begun intercepting food, supplies, and settlers destined for the city. The tense atmosphere in Lawrence, however, stirred Julia Lovejoy to action. During her migration from her native New Hampshire to Kansas in 1855, she had written four strongly antislavery letters to the Concord, New Hampshire, *Independent Democrat* in an effort to encourage Northern migration to the territory. The last of these letters, however, was dated August 1, 1855.¹ Over a year later, when suddenly living in the middle of Bleeding Kansas, Lovejoy resumed her correspondence to the *Independent Democrat* with the letter that appears in this article.

Ever since her intense religious conversion at the age of nine, Julia Lovejoy had sought ways of translating her Methodism into public action. Throughout her early adulthood, Lovejoy, born Julia Hardy, believed that "if I have not done good, I have done evil."² Nor was she content to extend her religion only over her immediate family. Writing in her diary, the young Julia expressed her desire to publicly spread her faith, a goal that made her long to be a missionary, or even to "be a Quakeress, and preach."³ Hired as a public schoolteacher in New Hampshire, Lovejoy's religious devotion led her to insist on public prayer and religious conversations with her students despite strong protests from parents.⁴ Writing in Kansas in 1859 at the age of forty-six, Julia Lovejoy claimed that she still felt "the same Missionary ardor" she had felt as a youth.⁵

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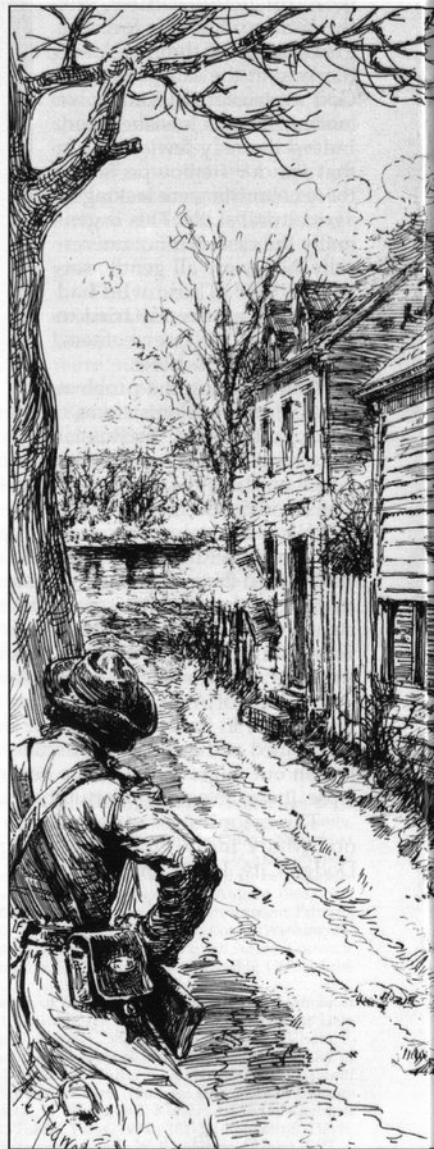
1. Michael Fellman, "Julia Louisa Lovejoy Goes West," *Western Humanities Review* 31 (Summer 1977): 227-42; Lovejoy's letters from 1855 are reprinted in "Letters from Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 11 (February 1942): 29-44.

2. Diary of Julia Louisa Lovejoy, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. Quotation from Lovejoy's twentieth birthday, 43. Starting in 1859, Lovejoy began copying excerpts from her personal diary, apparently with the intention of publishing it as an example of a Christian woman's life and thoughts. In the manuscript's first entry, Lovejoy notes that "I have no apology to offer to the reading christian public, as I send the following unpretending narrative to press—that good may be accomplished by the perusal of the same, is the desire of the authoress." *Ibid.*, December 2, 1859, 1.

3. *Ibid.*, 40. For her desire to be a missionary, 16, 41.

4. *Ibid.*, 50.

5. *Ibid.*, 1. Lovejoy had also married a Methodist minister, Charles H. Lovejoy.



Confederate guerrillas await in ambush.

Extermination"

by Julia Louisa Lovejoy, 1856



The conflict over slavery in Kansas offered Lovejoy an opportunity to extend her sharp moral judgments of right and wrong into the political arena. Republican editors across the North, eager to focus attention on proslavery depredations in the disputed territory, welcomed letters from Kansas. In general, Republicans attempted to portray Bleeding Kansas as a conflict between peaceful Northern families of settlers and bands of half-civilized, proslavery men, with the Democratic territorial and national governments siding with the Southerners. As a result, depictions by Kansas women of the sufferings of "innocent" citizens were warmly greeted as evidence for the extent of Southern violence and for the enormity of the public crisis. Lovejoy, together with other Kansas women including Clarina Nichols, Sara Robinson and Hannah Ropes, soon found herself in the middle of the Republican party's 1856 national campaign.⁶ Such were the conditions when Lovejoy began her second series of letters from Kansas.⁷

This letter, Lovejoy's first from 1856, appeared in two Republican papers, the *Independent Democrat* on September 11, and the *New York Evening Post* on September 13. In many ways Lovejoy's first letter was similar to what Republican editors were printing already about Kansas. Julia Lovejoy's insistence upon the Christianity and innocence of the Northern victims, her portrayal of women and children as the objects of proslavery violence, and her depiction of the Southerners as gamblers, ruffians, and murderers all concurred with earlier Republican sketches of Kansas. It comes as no surprise that Lovejoy, a month after this letter was written, encouraged Northern women "to exert their individual and associate influence, over their husbands and brothers in favor of freedom and Fremont."⁸

Nevertheless, parts of Lovejoy's letter are distinctive. The religious, even apocalyptic tone of the letter exceeded most of the admittedly one-sided Republican writing about Kansas during the presidential campaign; this was an indication, no doubt, of Methodism's continuing influence. Perhaps most importantly, Lovejoy flatly contradicts the moderate Republican party's stance that the Constitution protected slavery in the states where it already existed by calling for the imminent and apparently violent eradication of slavery from every corner of Missouri. Thus, while she endorsed Republican John C. Fremont, the moderate antislavery candidate, Lovejoy maintained an abolitionist rhetoric about the immorality of slavery and an abolitionist position concerning the extermination of slavery throughout the country.

6. Note, for example, Sara T. L. Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Co., 1856), and Hannah Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas, by a Lady* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Co., 1856), as well as the 1856 speaking tours on Bleeding Kansas by Sara Robinson and Clarina I. H. Nichols.

7. Lovejoy's public and private letters are published in "Letters of Julia Louisa Lovejoy, 1856-1864," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 15 (May 1947): 127-42; (August 1947): 277-319; (November 1947): 368-403; 16 (February 1948): 40-75.

8. Lovejoy to the *Independent Democrat*, September 22, 1856, in "Letters of Julia Louisa Lovejoy," 138.

Letter From Kansas

Men and women of New Hampshire! We ask you to read the following letter of a New Hampshire woman, Mrs. Lovejoy, the writer, is the wife of the Rev. C. H. Lovejoy, a well known Methodist clergyman, formerly located in the western part of this state.

We ask for her words the credence that is due to a lofty Christian women [sic], who writes in the midst of scenes such as were never, elsewhere, witnessed in America. We ask only for her, as she asks, the aid and prayers of all the Christian men and women in New Hampshire. Read her glowing words, and then doubt whether they are true:

Lawrence, Kansas Territory,
August 25th, 1856.

I want to tell you a story that will make every ear tingle in hearing, and every eye weep in reading! O, could the readers of the *Democrat* see what I have seen, and feel what I have felt for a few days past, they would concentrate every power of the mind in one point, and that would be intense hatred to a system that is butchering and scalping with more than savage barbarity, in the highway, on the public thoroughfares, men that have taken no part in the matters that now agitate this distracted territory. We are in the midst of war—war of the most bloody kind—a war of extermination. Freedom and slavery are interlocked in deadly embrace, and death is certain for one or the other party. The hour has come, and freedom's martyrs will be strewn along the rivers of Kansas, and deluge her plains with their life-blood, or slavery will be driven across the Missouri river, and vainly essay to hide its thousand-vipered head among the rich plantations of the Mississippi.

A crisis is just before us, and if we fall our last petition is, that our blood may be avenged, and that our own New England, that achieved such wonderful victories in the Revolution of '76, will join her forces with our western brethren in the drama of '56, and ravage Missouri to its nethermost nook and corner, until every chain shall be broken and slavery die, without a resurrection! We never prayed for the destruction of men, made in the image of their Maker, but if they persist in killing and torturing our innocent citizens, let the sword be driven to the hilt! If they still persist, with horrid imprecations, to call for blood, let them gorge to the full, from their own whiskey-infuriated clan. I have neither time nor space to tell a tithe of the murdering, scalping and disfiguring that almost daily occur here.

Last Tuesday, a man with his family just arrived from Illinois, left the boat at Leavenworth, took a hack and brought his wife to stop with her brother, Rev. Mr. Nute, of this place, and returning to take back the hack, met a man on horseback, who accosted him with, "Where are you from?" He unsuspectingly answering "Lawrence," he deliberately shot him through the head, and then leaped from his horse and scalped him before life was extinct. A lady and her child seeing the whole transaction from her door, set up a terrible scream, and our people hastened to the spot and found his temples still throbbing. The monster fled and entered Leavenworth in triumph, holding up the reeking scalp and crying out to some pro-slavery men, "I have got it." He had made a five dollar bet before starting that he would bring back an "abolition scalp," and this man, the first he met, just because he answered the fatal word "Lawrence," must die. They hate that name with a deadly hatred. His poor wife is very sick, and may not survive this tragic affair.⁹

9. Rev. Ephraim Nute, the Unitarian minister in Lawrence, distributed Northern Emigrant Aid relief and toured the North as a free-soil stump speaker in the spring of 1856. Nute's brother-in-law was William Hopps, allegedly murdered by Charles Fuget on August 19, 1856. Fuget, however, was acquitted by a possibly sympathetic jury in June 1857. For the fullest treatment of Hopps' murder and Nute's speaking tour, see Charles Richard Denton, "The Unitarian Church and 'Kansas Territory,' 1854-1861, Part One," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Autumn 1964): 465-71. Nute himself wrote to Rev. Francis Tiffany of Boston on August 22 that "my home has become a house of mourning. A brother-in-law came out to us, and reached our house a week since, with his wife, an own sister of mine. On Monday last, he started to return to Leavenworth, leaving his wife sick. That night he was shot through the head, within a few miles of Leavenworth, and his scalp exhibited by his murderer in the town, who declared: 'I went out for the scalp of a d-d abolitionist, and I have got one.'" *Daily Republican*, Springfield, Mass., September 3, 1856. For Nute's distribution work, see Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1954), 167, 219. The widowed Mrs. Hopps apparently survived and soon left Kansas, her departure supposedly hastened by proslavery commands. Richard Cordley, *A History of Lawrence, Kansas from the First Settlement to the Close of the Rebellion* (Lawrence: E. F. Caldwell, 1895), 105.

The free state men have within a few days conquered and driven them from two of their strongholds, burnt two of their forts and took a large quantity of ammunition and valuable property—one Titus, captain of a pro-slavery party, having entrenched himself in a strong fortification, actually received slugs into his body just as they came from the destroyed printing-office, block type, shot from a cannon, our men in the meantime crying out, "the revised edition of the *Herald of Freedom* sent out by a new press"—the poor fellow fought like a tiger, but at last cried for quarter—he is fatally shot.¹⁰ A brave fellow in our company was shot but lived long enough to repeat, "I am reconciled to die, for my blood will help water the tree of freedom in Kansas." He was a Christian.¹¹

Hundreds are flocking in here; two hundred came this morning, runners have gone to every part of the territory for help—800 Missourians, it is said, are encamped on the Wakarusa, and our people are preparing to rout them. The stillness of the holy Sabbath was broken in upon every hour yesterday by firing guns, making wheels for their cannon, and preparing for battle—thousands of Missourians are gathering along the frontier, ready to pounce upon us, and we can muster at least 1,500 or 2,000.¹² But we want more help, and more means. A decisive battle is now to be fought, and will not our dear friends in New Hampshire lend their aid? As far as we are personally concerned, we are in the most imminent danger. One of our horses died as his driver was taking a circuitous route to escape being assassinated, and another stolen, and here we are, no remuneration, and we know not but every hour may be the last.

I have just come in from Manhattan, eighty miles from here, and there all is quiet, though their forces are expected here now. We fear famine will tread upon the heels of war, for not a sack of flour can be bought here, or ham. Mr. Lovejoy had two hogs salted down here for his family, and went to Manhattan after us, and when he arrived here every pound was gone; and where we are going to get food to keep body and soul together we cannot tell. The road is blockaded between here and Leavenworth, and no supplies can come from thence, and it is sure death to venture in the other direction, via Westport. If our army gets strong enough they will sack Leavenworth or Westport, and get provisions to keep us from starving.

Everything is as gloomy as the grave! The ruffians are circulating their handbills, in which is printed, "We give no quarter, nor ask quarter." Women and children now will not be spared, and only God knoweth where it will end. Do come and help us. Come on through Iowa.¹³ Forty wagons are now on their way here in that direction, we learn. If any of the friends of freedom will set apart a day of fasting and prayer for bleeding Kansas, they will confer a favor.¹⁴ Do help us in some way and God will reward you. They are pressing our men, through fear of death, into their service.

JULIA LOUISA LOVEJOY

10. On the night of August 12, free-state forces began a series of attacks on the proslavery "forts" around Lawrence. After two successful encounters with the garrisons of these glorified log cabins, they met stiff resistance at Fort Titus near Leecompton on August 16. The fort soon proved susceptible to cannon fire, however, as Lovejoy suggests, and the small garrison surrendered. Colonel Titus, however, survived his wounds. Allen Crafton, *Free State Fortress: The First Ten Years of the History of Lawrence, Kansas* (Lawrence: World Co., 1954), 109, 114-18; Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 197-202; Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 135-38.

11. The only known free-soil fatality was Henry J. Shombre who had arrived in Kansas in early August.

12. There was good reason for Lovejoy to fear warfare on August 25, 1856. The resignation of Gov. Wilson Shannon on August 21 had left Daniel Woodson, a fervent proslavery advocate, in command of the territory. While no significant fighting broke out, tensions ran high until the arrival of newly-appointed Gov. John Geary on September 10, 1856. Geary's administration, despite a promising beginning, ultimately failed to maintain order in the territory. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 202-3; Crafton, *Free State Fortress*, 123-25. For Geary's administration, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 146, 148, 153-58.

13. A reference to James Lane's trail through Iowa as a means of avoiding the blockade on free-soil travel through Missouri. The first arrivals through Iowa had appeared in early August. See William E. Connelley, "The Lane Trail," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1913-1914 13 (1914): 268-79.

14. This is certainly one of the earliest published appearances of the impassioned moniker Bleeding Kansas, which apparently gained currency during the campaign of 1856. For the origin of the powerful phrase and other contemporary uses, excluding Lovejoy's, see "A Few References to the Origin and First Use of the Term 'BLEEDING KANSAS'" (Unpublished manuscript, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society); and D. W. Wilder, comp., *Annals of Kansas, 1541-1885* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 138, in which a September 13, 1856, entry for a Republican campaign song contains the phrase.