



# NEWS

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**By Barbara Brackman**

## **Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History August 1-7, 1854**

In Massachusetts, the Garrisonians, the most radical of the abolitionists, celebrated their annual version of Independence Day on August 1<sup>st</sup>, the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies. Led by William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the weekly newspaper the *Liberator*, Garrisonians refused to deal with a federal government that sanctioned Southern slavery. Garrison's principle was simple. The newspaper's motto was "No Union with Slaveholders," or, as he phrased it in a letter to his wife: "The dissolution of the Union must first precede the abolition of slavery." The legal niceties of a free-state/slave-state vote in Kansas were a waste of time.

Most anti-slavery activists believed Garrisonian extremism blocked practical reform and viewed them as divisive if not absurd, as in Missouri Representative Thomas Hart Benton's description of one anti-slavery couple: He was "abolitionist enough for anybody outside of a mad house---and his wife abolitionist enough for all those who ought to be in one."

Eli Thayer, advocating a practical and idealistic emigration society, became a bitter enemy of William Lloyd Garrison, fuming in later life that any credit the Garrisonians took for freedom in Kansas was revisionist history. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, the 29 men he sent to Kansas left the settlement of Wakarusa to climb Back Bone Ridge. As they pitched their tents, they painted a sign naming the hill "Mount Oread," an echo of Thayer's Oread Hill back in Worcester. Each man set out to mark a claim but found that most of the most desirable land down on the banks of the Kansas River was already inhabited by squatters, among them William Lykins, the missionary's son raised in Kansas, Achilles B. Wade, a Missourian, Clark Stearns, an Iowan, and the large family of Moses Baldwin.

Wade's claim at a bend in the river looked like a good spot for a town, which they intended to call Wakarusa. Wade and Stearns offered Thayer's agents the rights to their claims for \$500 and \$1,000, respectively, but James Blood refused the opportunity, "I regarded the buying of claims at that time as impolitic." Blood may have been hesitant to pay an exorbitant price for land to which Wade and Stearns had no actual legal rights. Without a land survey, a federal land office

and officially registered claims, the concept of a squatter's legal ownership was an oxymoron.

The federal government did, that week, make some progress in making sense out of the land rush by appointing John Calhoun of Springfield, Illinois, to the position of Surveyor General for the new territories. Calhoun, with experience in surveying and Illinois's Democrat politics, seemed quite qualified for the job. A friend and supporter of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, he was also a friend of the minor Whig politician Abraham Lincoln to whom he'd taught the surveying trade years ago.

Out on the California Road, west of the newly christened Mount Oread, a New Englander who'd set up his tent on what he thought was unoccupied land returned to find "his camp utensils, tent and all his fixings removed into the California road," in the words of New Englander B. R. Knapp. "Nancy [Miller] and another Hoosier woman made quick work with the intruders moveables. I had rather have a Prairee wolf after me than one of these Hoosier women."

"Hoosier" was then, as now, a nickname for citizens of Indiana. The term was indelicate if not offensive. Other common nicknames, now almost forgotten, were worse. People called Illinois residents "Suckers" and Missourians "Pukes."

You can read the *Liberator* on line. PDFs of its pages are now available in a sesquicentennial project from Kansas City Kansas Community College at [kckcc.edu/territorial\\_news/boston\\_liberator](http://kckcc.edu/territorial_news/boston_liberator) They've also scanned Kansas territorial newspapers from the files of the Kansas State Historical Society. (622 words)

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Letter from B. R. Knapp published in *Boston Sun News*, August 27, 1854, quoted in Louise Barry, "The Emigrant Aid Company Parties of 1854," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume XII, Number 2, May, 1943. Pg.122.

Walter M. Merrill, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979) Volume 4. March 1856, Pg 390.

Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1892) Blood's memoir. Pg. 72.