



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History November 28 – December 4, 1854

In the November 29th election for territorial representative, voters in the infant town of 110 in present-day Osage County cast 609 ballots for proslavery candidate General John A. Whitfield. At most, 20 men, women and children lived there. The great majority of the voters were Missouri residents, among them Samuel Ralston of Independence. Although Ralston's group was armed, "prepared for *any emergency*, fortunately we had no difficulty, everything passed off quietly and pleasantly."

In addition to guns, Missourians brought ballots pre-printed with Whitfield's name, ensuring they had enough of the conventional color-coded ballots of the day. Before the era of the secret vote, observers could easily project the outcome by checking the paper in each man's hand. Party loyalists could shape results by threatening voters with the wrong colored slip. Another irregularity in an election preceded by neither registration nor census was voting by soldiers and Native Americans, two groups forbidden by law to cast ballots.

In Leavenworth, a "large party from Weston and Platte County," crossed the river to vote at the hotel there, among them Missourian H. Miles Moore who remembered "a great crowd around the polls all day. There was a good deal of excitement, and some quarrelling and fighting." In Lawrence, quarrelling escalated to murder. As Henry Davis walked home to his claim after arguing with the election judge, he was shot by Lewis Kibby. Sam Ralston thought he might know the murdered Davis. A James Davis was "a worthy Gentlemen from [Jackson] County. Shot by a D----yankee...."

Ralston summarized the election in a letter to a friend: "Strangers at a distance may be led to believe that Kansas is all right on the Slavery question...Of the 2248 [votes] to Whitfield at least 2000 were Missourians, and Missouri has 10,000 more whenever necessity requires their services."

On the 1st of December, Ralston attended a convention at Independence where Missouri radicals revealed a new phase of their pro-slavery plan. Counties would join to sponsor agents traveling throughout the South, establishing branches of "our order all over the Slave holding states. Money is required to defray their

expences, we bleed freely.” Platte and Buchanan Counties, for example, would pay for Benjamin Stringfellow’s trip to Virginia and Maryland. “The men whom we send are, as we say here, right on the ‘Goose question,’” explained Ralston, as he asked his friend for a \$100 donation, which “would guarantee friends in days to come...We have no name, nor no books farther than a simple record of names. Jackson Co. numbers over 600.”

Ralston noted that David Atchison was elected President at the unnamed order’s Independence convention, but whether the Missouri Senator was actually there is unknown. His duties as President Pro Tem of the Senate now required his presence in Washington while Congress prepared for a new session. On the 4th, Atchison, probably realizing he could not effectively preside over the Senate and the Missouri Self Defense organization at the same time, chose to resign his Senate seat. His slave state Kansas campaign appears to have been designed to further his Senatorial election campaign, but his resignation to focus on the territory causes historians to wonder which were his ends and which were his means.

In early December, Abraham Lincoln also announced a change in political plans in a letter to a potential supporter. “I have really got it into my head to try to be United State Senator.” (572 words)

Letter from Samuel Ralston to an unnamed friend, December 9, 1854, in W. Darrell Overdyke, editor. “A Southern Family on the Missouri Frontier: Letters From Independence, 1843-1855”, *The Journal of Southern History*, Volume XVII, Number 2, May, 1951. 216-237.

H. Miles Moore, testimony before the United States Congress. Report of the Special Committee, (Howard Report) 1856.

Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Joseph Gillespie, December, 1854, in Roy P. Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953) Volume II, Pg. 290.