



NEWS

6425 SW Sixth Avenue

Topeka KS 6615-1099

785-272-8681

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By Barbara Brackman

Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History December 19 - 25, 1854

A reviewer for the *National Intelligencer*, a Washington based newspaper, was pleased to read Edward Everett Hale's book *Kansas and Nebraska*, although he mentioned that many readers might have had "their nervous exictabilities worn down and their sense of hearing deadened by the daily repetition of these names for almost a year---soft and sweet and euphonious though they be."

On Christmas Day, Charles Albright, an agent of the American Settlement Company, camped in the relative comfort of Westport after a two-week trip to Pawnee, K.T., also seemed weary of Kansas. He wrote a resignation letter to President Thaddeus Hyatt, complaining about conditions in the Settlement Company's proposed town of Council City, eventually named Burlingame. Instead of buildings and corded off lots, immigrants from New York and Pennsylvania found "nothing but an expanse of prairie, with no boundaries or nothing else." Albright encountered "a torrent of indignation" from would-be Kansans. "Five out of every six turned back!"

He found the landscape beautiful, but Albright was pessimistic. "This country is very deficient in timber and water. The best lands in the territory are owned and occupied by the Indians." He predicted that desirable land would continue to belong to the Natives, "as long as they are nations or tribes---such is the opinion of the Indian agents here and also Manypenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. These reserved lands...will forever be thorns in the sides of settlers." Albright's traveling companion, James McClure, returned to Westport to find his wife Hester had given birth to her second child on Christmas Eve.

The Fitchburg, Massachusetts, *Sentinel* announced that Kansas Governor Reeder would refuse to give a certificate of election to John W. Whitfield, because of voting illegalities. Reeder's opinion meant little, however, as Kansas's new Representative took the oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States that week in Washington City in a short and quiet ceremony. On the 23rd, several Lawrence citizens met to protest the election dominated by Missouri voters. A committee agreed to prepare resolutions of outrage.

The Fitchburg *Sentinel* also carried an advertisement for Christmas Eve services. “The approaching anniversary of the advent of our Saviour will be noticed by appropriate religious services and decorations in the Universalist Church.” Celebrating Christmas was one more way the Universalists broke with Calvinistic religious principles. New Englanders had long dismissed Christmas as “Popish,” a remnant of European Catholic tradition. The Universalists’ decorations of evergreen swags over doors and windows were a sign of progressive reform, a break with the Puritan past.

New England’s reformers also celebrated Christmas with craft fairs to support their causes, a tradition that endures in our annual Christmas craft bazaars that benefit churches. The National Anti-Slavery Bazaar opened on December 20th, an event so large it filled two halls on Winter Street in Boston. For weeks, the women who planned the fair had been advertising for donations. “We would call upon ladies at home for large contributions of *useful articles*, all kinds of fine needlework for ladies and children’s wear, gentlemen’s dressing gowns, shirts, collars and hosiery are greatly in demand. There is no danger that the supply will be too large or that articles will be sold at a sacrifice.”

Southerners with their Anglican history tended to celebrated Christmas with more ceremony than the Puritan New Englanders. Southern festivities included gifts, feasts and family reunions. Among the most enthusiastic Christmas revelers were the slaves, who traditionally received a week’s vacation. In Missouri, Henry Bruce finished his term clearing a forest and returned to his master’s farm to learn his next assignment. (600 words)

Charles Albright, Letter to Thaddeus Hyatt, December 25, 1854, Manuscripts Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years A Free Man* (York, PA: P. Anstadt & Sons, 1895)

Fitchburg, Sentinel December 22, 1854.

The Liberator, November 10, 1854.

Lawrence *Herald of Freedom*, January 6, 1855.

James R. McClure, “Taking the Census and Other Incidents in 1855,” *Kansas State Historical Society Collections*, Volume 8. Pp. 227-250.

National Intelligencer, December 21, 1854. Pg. 2