



# NEWS

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## Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History Week of January 1 - 3, 1854 (2004)

In the slave-holding state of Missouri, 19-year-old Henry Clay Bruce's time of service for J. B. Barrett was over. Slaves were often hired out as laborers by the year, with their wages paid to their owners. Barrett owned a tobacco factory in Brunswick in central Missouri, where Henry Bruce and his brothers had worked during 1853 for room and board.

January first was the traditional date for slave contracts to begin after a week long vacation of sorts between Christmas and New Year's Day. Frederick Douglass remembered his time in slavery when the holiday was "used or abused nearly as we pleased. Those of us who had families at a distance were generally allowed to spend the whole six days in their society." Slaves might spend the time working for themselves making tools and baskets or hunting meat. "But by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriments as playing ball, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling, dancing and drinking whiskey....A slave who would work during the holidays was considered by our masters as scarcely deserving them."

Henry's last week of service was probably spent in relative freedom after 51 weeks of hard labor in the tobacco factory. In his autobiography, he recalled his temporary master: "Although he was a noisy kind of man, cursed a good deal and threatened to whip or have it done by his overseer . . . he seldom punished anyone, especially those who were grown . . . [I] was whipped only once and that for fighting another fellow who struck my younger brother." On New Years Day, Henry reported back to his owner to find out what type of labor would be assigned him in the year 1854. (290 words)

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

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. Edited by Houston A. Baker, Jr. Originally published in 1845. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982)