



# NEWS

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By Barbara Brackman

## **Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History**

**June 27-July 3, 1854**

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, the Pierce administration commissioned a governor for the new Kansas Territory, lawyer Andrew H. Reeder of Easton, Pennsylvania. Reeder, who'd never held public office; seems to have had three major qualifications. One was strong support for the Democratic Party; two, a belief in Douglas's concept of squatter sovereignty, and three, backing from Pennsylvania Congressman Asa Packer. Reeder's appointment appears to be Packer's payoff for his vote for Douglas's Kansas Nebraska Act.

The following day, the Senate confirmed Reeder's appointment and that of a territorial secretary, plus a Kansas justice system, which included three judges, a U.S. Marshal and a District Attorney. Of the seven appointees, three were Northerners, four Southern. Their annual salaries ranged from \$2,000 to \$2,500, a substantial sum at a time when, for example, Texan Margaret Houston paid her housemaid \$96 a year. Those in the know understood that federal appointments could provide opportunities for other kinds of advancement. Appointees might benefit from land speculation, shipping and building contracts---any transaction involving political power or inside knowledge.

The facts of American political life in the decades before the Civil Service Act of 1883 confounded outsiders such as German Carl Schurz. In the days following the Kansas Nebraska act, he learned about the "spoils system" from a cynical newspaperman who explained the distribution of patronage, "public plunder." Congressmen, Governors, the President were occupied with obtaining "post-offices and government clerkships and consulates and Indian agencies for the party hacks and his personal hangers-on."

The development of two new territories with the potential for patronage jobs must have flooded Washington waiting rooms. Senator Sam Houston was among those who had complained about the constant stream. "I am harassed out of all patience," he wrote wife Margaret, "and pulled so, by applicants for office, that I am afraid to be seen out of my room or in the avenue." Houston also complained to Margaret on June 27<sup>th</sup> of Franklin Pierce. "The President poor fellow, as a man has sunk below contempt, and does not merit even pity....Every thing which I predicted, on the passage of the Nebraska Bill is daily transpiring."

While Reeder's political career was on the rise due to passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act, others tumbled. In Lawrenceburgh, Indiana, Congressman James H. Lane wrote an open letter to his constituents, placing a "card" in the newspapers announcing that ill health caused him to withdraw his name from re-election to a second term in the United States House of Representatives. (400)

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William E. Connelley, *Kansas Territorial Governors* (Topeka, Crane & Company) Pg. 18.

Madge Thornall Roberts, *The Personal Correspondence of Sam Houston* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2001) Letters dated March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1853, June 27, 1854, June 5, 1856. pp 60-61, 146, 220-221.

Carl Schurz, *The Autobiography of Carl Schurz* (New York: Scribner's, 1961) pg 113-114.