



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History March 7 - 13, 1854 (2004) (No Leap Year Day in 1854)

In Worcester, Massachusetts, on March 11th, a meeting was held at the City Hall to protest the Senate's passage of the Kansas Nebraska Bill. Eli Thayer, a school master who represented the town in the Massachusetts Legislature, rose to speak about a plan he had been considering. "I pondered upon it by day, and dreamed of it by night," he remembered. "Suddenly it came upon me like a revelation, It was *organized and assisted emigration*." Thayer decided that New Englanders opposed to slavery should sponsor like-minded immigrants to the new Kansas Territory, settlers who would choose a territorial legislature dedicated to creating a free state there. Money for transportation, farming and building would be raised by selling shares in a company, which would turn a profit, rewarding shareholders for their politics. The logistics of profiting while supporting a moral cause were vague, but Thayer's "Plan of Freedom" captured the national attention with its sunny concept of doing good while doing well financially.

In 1848, Thayer had founded a girl's school on Goat Hill outside of Worcester (pronounced somewhat like "Wuhster.") The Oread Collegiate Institute was dedicated to the rather novel proposition that women deserved an education equal to men's. Thayer's school, often called the Oread Castle, was named for a place in classical Greek mythology, "the abode of mountain nymphs." Goat Hill became Mount Oread.

Politician George Hoar recalled that he moved to Worcester as a young man, "chiefly for the reason that that city and county were the stronghold of the new Anti-Slavery Party, to which cause I was devoted with all my heart and soul." Worcester was also home to the "Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle," which raised money for the cause with women's traditional economic tool, the needle. Profits from quilts and other needlework went into the societies' coffers along with the monthly dues of 25 cents. Among the items in the Sewing Circle's annual budget were three subscriptions to the radical abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*. Not everyone in Worcester was an anti-slavery advocate, and it may be that some women who stitched for the abolitionist cause preferred to read their weekly *Liberator* at the sewing society rather than at home under the disapproving eyes of fathers and husbands. (370 words)

George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (London, Bickers & Sons, 1904) Pg. 158.

Address by Eli Thayer, *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity For the Year 1886* (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1887) Pg. 25.

Worcester Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle Record Book, manuscript collection, Worcester Historical Society.