



NEWS

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By Barbara Brackman

Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History March 21 - 27, 1854 (2004)

Readers of the *St. Joseph Gazette* on March 22 found numerous advertisements for paint and toothbrushes, patented eye salve, grape vine starts and Missouri tobacco. Among the items for sale was "A Negro Girl." Edmond Robidoux, a founder of the town, offered "a likely young Negro Girl about 15 years of age. She is well grown and sprightly, is a good cook and washer and ironer." No price was mentioned.

Another slaveholder advertised two people: "A number one servant, aged 23, an excellent cook, washer and domestic, strong, healthy and likely, with her boy aged one year, is now offered for sale. Both slaves warranted sound in body, mind and title indisputable. She is not offered for fault of disposition but because the owner WANTS MONEY! For further particulars, inquire at this office."

In the same paper Penick, a seller of general merchandize such as tea, advertised *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The merchant might have been a bit rash to call attention to his stock of Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist book in a slave town. Few people were neutral about her tale of "Life Among the Lowly," a view of America's "peculiar institution" from the slaves' perspective. The book was confiscated, banned and burned in many areas of the South. The book burners fear of the written word was well-justified. Many recalled the tale changing their lives. It's first appearance was as a serial three years earlier in the abolitionist newspaper *The National Era*.

"It was the reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that really made my father hate slavery so bitterly that when the call came for colonists to go to Kansas and settle there and make it a free state, he was ready to go," recalled Annie Soule Prentiss many years later. "What a sensation that story made! No one today [1929] can even imagine it...At first mother started to read it to us on Sunday afternoon, so father could be there to hear, but the paper came on Wednesday, and soon we became too eager for it to wait until Sundays, and besides, our neighbors wanted to borrow the paper. They were as eager as we, so mother would read it to us Wednesday nights...I can see father yet, striding up and down the room, his hands clenched in fury." (380 words)

A. B. Macdonald, "She Looks Back Seventy-Five Years..." *Kansas City Star*,
January 13, 1929.
St. Joseph Gazette, March 22, 1854.