



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History March 28 – April 3, 1854 (2004)

With the river now open to steamboat traffic, travelers began appearing in Westport and the city named Kansas. On March 28th, the Reverend Thomas Johnson returned home from Washington City where he had been working to affect Congressional opinion on the necessity for a new Kansas Territory.

Johnson was one of the few whites who resided in the territory, having spent over twenty years managing the Shawnee Methodist Mission, a mile or two from the Missouri border. The only non-Natives permitted by the government to live west of the Missouri line were Indian agents, traders, spouses of the Natives, and missionaries like Johnson and his family.

In 1853, a few men who favored a territorial government open to white settlement held an irregular election, choosing Thomas Johnson as “delegate at large” to Congress. In early 1854, he’d left for the nation’s capital. When he took a seat on the House floor, he was promptly asked to leave by the doorkeeper. Johnson watched the spring session from the galleries, denied an official seat because he had no legal basis to be there.

According to Andreas’s *History of Kansas*, Johnson was “a Southern man, born and reared in the South. His ancestors were Southern, and most of his associates and associations were Southern.” In other words, Thomas Johnson was a strong advocate of slavery and a slaveholder. Seven years earlier, Quaker missionary Richard Mendenhall had written a letter complaining of slavery in the Indian lands west of Missouri, noting that few of the native tribes kept slaves. “It is white men in the service of the Government of the United States and missionaries, that have introduced slavery here.” About the same time, Ann Archbold, a teacher at the Shawnee Mission, overheard the enslaved cook (probably Jackson Young of Fayette, Missouri) dictate a letter to friends back home. “He told her to tell them that at the Mission, ‘was first white people, then Indians, then dogs and then n[egroes].’” Archbold wrote that the native tribes’ opposition to Johnson’s slaveholding caused her enough “alarm” that she soon returned to Ohio. Among the slaves at the Mission in 1854 (estimates range from six to twenty people in Johnson’s custody during his years at the Mission) were

two girls, Jane about 8 and Mary about 3, whom Johnson had bought during the past year for \$550.

Thomas Johnson was home at the Mission for only a few weeks; long enough to gather together local tribal leaders to return with him to Washington City where they would negotiate treaties to cede their lands should the Kansas Nebraska Bill pass the House. (435 words)

Martha B. Caldwell, *Annals of the Shawnee Methodist Mission*, (Topeka, KSHS, 1976) Pp. 78-79.

Biography of Johnson by Nathan Scarritt, A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Topeka, KSHS, 1976 reprint) Pg. 300.

Mendenhall letter, quoted in Louise Barry, "Kansas Before 1854: A Revised Annals," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* VXXX, 1964, pg. 552.

Ann Archbold, *A Book for the Married and Single, the Grave and the Gay*, (East Plainfield, Ohio: Practical Preacher, 1850) Pg. 70.