



NEWS

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A weekly series from the Kansas Territorial Sesquicentennial Commission

Available online at www.kshs.org/sesquicentennial/series.htm

By Barbara Brackman

Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History May 16 - 22, 1854 (2004)

On the 22nd of May, the House of Representatives passed the Kansas Nebraska Bill by a vote of 113 to 100. The bill required two more steps in the legislative process before becoming law. It would be returned to the Senate for approval of the final form and passed to President Franklin Pierce for signature, steps that seemed assured.

The North's increasing indignation was reflected in speeches, meetings, petitions and outcries in the press. Most outraged were the anti-slavery newspapers, among them . William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, both of which were so inflammatory that Southern post masters felt at liberty to destroy them before they reached their subscribers. The *Tribune* was the largest anti-slavery paper, reaching over 150,000 national subscribers in mid 1850s, but the far smaller *Liberator* was the most infamous. Garrison and his newspaper represented the radical edge of anti-slavery politics. Garrisonians demanded immediate abolition in contrast to gradualists who advocated freedom for the next generation of slaves or advocates of colonization who believed a return to Africa in the best interests of the ex-slaves and the white citizens of the United States. Garrison and his followers came to the opinion that any political action was tantamount to sanctioning slavery, a position he dramatized in 1854 by publicly burning a copy of the Constitution.

The imminent passage of the Kansas Nebraska act seemed to radicalize even the gradualists. "Pierce and Douglas have made more abolitionists in three months than Garrison ... could have made in a half-century," wrote Greeley on May 17th .

Settlers continued to trickle into Kansas despite feeble warnings by the federal government that they were trespassing on Indian land. The Army was obligated to expel illegal squatters, but the Pierce government with Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War refused to order soldiers at Fort Leavenworth to act. Many of the soldiers were among the squatters marking their plots with names carved into tree bark and other signs.

Immigrants on the way to California and Oregon in mid-May passed many small camps of would-be settlers sure their squatting would entitle them to the most productive lands once the former Indian reserves were surveyed and land offices established. Among them was Isaac Cody, a former representative to the Iowa Legislature. In 1853, determined to be the first to make a claim in the new Territory, he moved his wife and family of six children to Weston. With son Willie (later known as Buffalo Bill Cody), Isaac rode west past Ft. Leavenworth until he came upon a hill overlooking the Salt Creek Valley, a spot impressive for its beauty. Looking for a legal loophole that would allow him to occupy the hill, he obtained a contract to cut the prairie grasses there to supply hay for the horses at the Fort. With permission to build a temporary home and pasture his horses, Isaac Cody waited to hear of Congressional action on the Kansas Nebraska Bill. (500 words)

Greeley quoted in Frank W. Blackmar, *The Life of Charles Robinson* (Topeka: Crane & Co., 1902) Pg. 97