



NEWS

6425 SW Sixth Avenue
Topeka KS 6615-1099
785-272-8681

www.kshs.org/sesquicentennial/

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 November 14 – 20, 1854

The *Boston Liberator* published a clipping about recaptured fugitive slave Anthony Burns from the Richmond (Virginia) *Enquirer*: “It may be some gratification to Anthony’s Boston friends to learn, that Anthony left here on Friday, the 3rd instant [the current month], in possession of David McDaniel, Esq. of Nash county N.C., who purchased him for the purpose of putting him to work in a cotton field, or where duty calls.”

In Massachusetts, 28-year-old teacher Lucy Larcom composed a Kansas song to enter in the contest sponsored by the New England Emigrant Aid Company. She was one of eighty-nine poets who sent their rhymes to Secretary Thomas Webb, hoping to win the \$50 prize, although she later denied any ambition in a letter to her mentor John Greenleaf Whittier. “I wrote it with the simple wish to write something that would do to be sung in so good a cause; not expecting to hear from it again, as it was announced that all the compositions sent in would be retained.”

Poetry was, in mid-19th-century America, an important form of self-expression and an opportunity to begin a literary career. Newspapers often published the work of amateurs next to that of professionals like Whittier and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, members of the New England literati well known for their reformist writings. Events such as the Kansas Nebraska Act and Anthony Burns’s capture inspired metaphor, imagery and rhyme that illuminated events in the same way a graphic photo can shape public opinion today. The *Liberator* included several relevant poems in every issue and in the fall advertised for sale “*Anthony Burns’s Farewell to Boston, A Poem Set to Music by J.W.*” The publisher was John P. Jewett who specialized in abolitionist literature, advertising that fall a series of “Anti-Slavery Picture Books,” with the advice: “Indoctrinate the Children And when they grow to be Men and Women, their Principles will be Correct!”

On the 18th, Pennsylvanian Cyrus Holliday wrote to wife Mary from Lawrence, K.T., giving her an idea of the “suffering” among some recent arrivals, which were “very ill-prepared for the journey. There was a good deal of disaffection among them. Where they have gone I can’t find out.” Holliday, 28 years old, had already made a fortune building a railroad in Meadville, Pennsylvania. He

planned to re-invest in Kansas, but was unsure of his course. “It may be that I will be home in a week or ten days after [you receive this letter or] I may not come until near spring.”

Holliday dispatched the letter with a friend returning to Meadville. Mail service, like many other federal programs, had not yet effectively reached the territory. Letters and newspapers were picked up in Westport or Weston, where the postmasters, Pierce appointees, might destroy mail viewed as abolitionist propaganda.

In 1854, a half-ounce letter cost 3 cents to mail, the same price as in 1954. Congress had recently reduced the cost from 25 cents, but Americans still practiced frugality, filling a sheet of stationery completely rather than mailing any part of a blank page, and sometimes cross writing by inscribing the first part of a letter horizontally, then turning the paper 90 degrees to write the second page atop the first.

Newspapers cost only a penny to mail, a federal subsidy of the press encouraging national periodicals like Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* and the Southern *DeBow’s Review*. Some penny-wise correspondents might save two cents by mailing a coded newspaper rather than a letter, dotting letters in a sequence to send a message home, as Lucy Stone did when she passed her school examinations in the 1840s. (621 words)

—

Letter from Cyrus Holliday to Mary Holliday, dated November 18, 1854, Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

Letter from Lucy Larcom, dated February 22, 1855, published in Grace F. Shepard, “Letters of Lucy Larcom to the Whittiers,” *The New England Quarterly*, Volume 3, July, 1930, Pg 501-502.