



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History October 10 - 16, 1854

By October, Anna Maria Goodell, who'd trekked across eastern Kansas in May, arrived at her destination, Grand Mound, Thurston County, Washington Territory. Her mother-in-law "had supper all ready when we got there.... O, how glad I was to sit at a table and eat like folks and to sleep in a house on a bedstead." Sarah Sutton's children were establishing new homes in the Willamette Valley of the Oregon Territory without Sarah, who'd died a few weeks earlier in the Tygh Valley east of Mt. Hood. Weakened by malaria, the "Illinois Ague," Sarah, 48 years old, was buried on the Oregon Trail in a shroud she had brought along and a coffin made of boards her family had prudently packed for just such an event.

On the other side of the continent, New York businessmen faced a financial panic. Stock prices fell all summer, banks were now defaulting and newspapers reported that dishonest brokers had been issuing worthless stock. Shipbuilding, a lynchpin of the national economy, was dealt a serious blow by an October disaster when the trans-Atlantic steamer *Arctic* collided with a French ship and sank, drowning 200 passengers while the crew escaped in the lifeboats. The ship company's stock soon sank too.

In Boston, the Know-Nothings, once a secret political organization called the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, held their first state convention with 1500 acknowledged members dedicated to Native Americanism. The Know Nothings enjoyed their greatest growth in the 1854-1855 political seasons as Irish escaping famine and Germans fleeing political unrest took over the northeast's unskilled jobs. Half of Boston was now Irish. Many Americans feared the immigrant influx, worrying they would change the economy and the culture. The Irish drew the most contempt but the Germans were also ostracized and ridiculed. German-speaking refugees were generally referred to as the Dutch, an Americanization of *Deutsch*, and their name for themselves.

The Know-Nothings' anti-foreign platform, dedicated to curtailing immigration and preventing foreign-born office holders, was summarized in a song that Charles W. Marsh remembered years later:

*“If I was president of the United States
I’d arrange my business accordin’;
The n[egros] I would sell
The Irish send to hell,
And the Dutch to the other side of Jordan.”*

Amos Lawrence, owner of several factories employing the new immigrants, received a letter from Charles Robinson, his chief agent in Kansas. Apparently, Lawrence was distressed to hear that the men he’d sent to the territory intended to name their settlement after him. Robinson, writing on October 16th, explained that Lawrence’s protest arrived “too late to influence the action of the citizens.”

Lawrence must have asked that they maintain the name Wakarusa, by which the area had been known for years. Robinson explained the townspeople’s objections. First, the town was not situated on that river. Second, and perhaps most important, the townspeople had discovered the word “Wakarusa” was immodest. “It is said to mean ‘not up to the middle,’” as Robinson delicately phrased it. “Hip deep” was another contemporary translation of a concept we might describe as “crotch high.” Amos Lawrence acquiesced and the free-state town kept his name.

Pierce appointees were arriving in the Territory to take over their new positions. Governor Andrew Reeder had set up an office at Fort Leavenworth, where he scheduled the first election to be held in the territory on November 29th. As a territory, Kansas was entitled to one congressman with no vote. This election would replace earlier illegally elected representatives Thomas Johnson and William Walker.

From Pennsylvania, Reeder had brought with him Democrat Robert P. Flenniken. W. J. Osborn, editor of the Leavenworth *Kansas Herald*, recalled meeting Flenniken on his trip from Uniontown, Pennsylvania, to Kansas and discussing career plans. If Flenniken won the November election he’d bring his family to the territory; if he lost he’d move to Pittsburgh. Flenniken solicited the *Herald’s* support for his candidacy, which advocated the official Democrat position favoring the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

C. W. Marsh, *Recollections 1837-1910* (Chicago: Farm Implement News Co., 1910) Pg 73.

Letter Charles Robinson to Amos Lawrence, October 16, 1854, transcript, Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

Anna Maria Goodell, “Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854.” Kenneth L. Holmes, editor. *Covered Wagon Women*, Volume 7, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) Pg.128.

W. J. Osborn, Congressional testimony, Report of the Special Committee, 1856 (Howard Report) Pg. 1131.

Sarah Sutton, "A Travel Diary in 1854." Kenneth L. Holmes, editor. *Covered Wagon Women*, Volume 7, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) Pp. 15-16.