



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History October 24-30, 1854

In October, the territory was cooling off after a summer described by Father John Duerinck at the St. Mary's Catholic Mission as the hottest he'd experienced in his eight years in Kansas. The mission's thermometer had measured 105 degrees daily for six weeks.

Yet Kansas continued to heat up in the press as amateur correspondents writing letters to their home newspapers captured the country's attention and inspired many young men to "light out for the territory" as Mark Twain later phrased it. William Lloyd Garrison's son George was among them. He "talks of either going to Kansas or to sea," wrote his father, "but we cannot consent to his doing either." Twenty-two-year old Edward Fitch, who arrived in Kansas City in early October, wrote his mother that when he told the high school teacher in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, he planned to go to Kansas, "he said I ought to have a *straight Jacket On.*"

By the end of October, over 500 enthusiastic Kansas pilgrims had traveled west, taking advantage of the cut-rate travel packages offered by the New England Emigrant Aid Company. But enthusiasm waned when some encountered the realities of camping in a wilderness. Charles Loomer of Lynn, Massachusetts, with his wife and three children, never made it beyond Kansas City. They decided to stop at the western edge of civilization, renting a log cabin in Missouri near the California trail. Discouraged emigrants, returning from the territory on the road by his house, warned him of the Kansas climate and landscape. Even in October, Kansas was relatively hot. "There is but one hill to be seen...timber is scarce and water is very scarce indeed."

Others complained about the Aid Company's travel arrangements, which George O. Willard believed had been misrepresented. For the price of their passage, about \$35, emigrants expected cheap meals (20 cents) and half-price hotel rooms while on the road and at base camps in Kansas City and Lawrence. West of New York, however, hotel rooms were scarce and meals expensive. Many spent their nights sleeping on the floor. Once in Kansas City, they found the Aid Company's hotel overbooked. "We paid for, and were told we should have first class passage, instead of which we barely got third-rate."

Worse, in Lawrence there was no hotel, just a large tent, an A-frame building constructed of poles covered with sod and hay thatch, called by various names “the meeting house,” the Pioneer House, or the Astor House, an ironic reference to New York City’s best hotel. Harriet Litchfield and her husband Lewis of Cambridge, Massachusetts, managed the boarding house, feeding campers for \$2.50 a week. Emigrants crowded the tent hotel, trying to decide where to go. The best land around Lawrence, the land with timber and streams, had filled up with claimants. Groups were setting out to explore the riverbanks south and west for other promising sites. Facing winter in a hay tent, a good percentage of the emigrants decided to return to the east.

In Kansas City, John R. Everett met Orville C. Brown who was planning a settlement at the junction of the Pottawatomie and Osage Rivers (also called the Marais des Cygnes.) On October 28th, after a visit to the junction, Everett wrote his wife back in New York that Osawatomie, a name derived from the two rivers, “*may grow up to be as beautiful a village as there is in the West.*” The spot had limestone, clay, timber and river water, “*excellent for drinking.*” “*And we are there contiguous to some Indian lands, most beautiful and fertile, that are soon to come into market. One on the grounds will be much better able to take advantage of choice spots, than a stranger.*” (620 words)

Letters from George O. Willard to the Boston [?] *Journal*, published January 7, 1855, and Charles Loomer to the Boston *Herald*, published November 10, 1854, quoted in Louise Barry, “The Emigrant Aid Company Parties of 1854,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume XII, Number 2, May 1943. Pp. 138-139,146.

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“Letters of John and Sarah Everett,” 1854-1864. *Kansas Historical Quarterly* February 1939, Volume 8, Number 1.

Edward and Sarah Fitch, *Yours For Freedom in Kansas: Letters of Edward and Sarah Fitch* (Lawrence, Kansas: Douglas County Historical Society, 1997) Pg. 21.

William Lloyd Garrison, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979) Volume 4, page 320.

Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.