



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History September 12 – 18, 1854

In September, a tobacco factory failed in Chariton, Missouri. Henry Clay Bruce, a slave who'd worked there eight months, was then hired out by his master to a farmer. Bruce worried about his new position. The farmer, fresh from Louisiana, was reputed to be a hard master to his thirty slaves. Bruce's job was clearing land and splitting rails, something he knew nothing about, and his teacher, a slave named Ike, spent more time telling stories than cutting logs. When the slaveholder came upon Ike sitting in the shade entertaining Henry, he cut a hickory switch and ordered Ike to remove his shirt. Henry recalled feeling "scared almost to death, thinking my turn would come next.... I had determined to run if called and take chances on being shot, for I could not and would not stand such punishment." Thirty lashes on a bare back was typical punishment for a malingering slave, but Henry escaped the master's wrath. Industrious and responsible, he was proud to recall that he served out his term, which ended on Christmas Day, 1854, "without even being scolded."

At the store at Salt Creek, near Leavenworth, K.T., on September 18th, Isaac Cody stopped to watch a neighborhood discussion. His daughter Julia recalled that Cody's reputation inspired the free-state men to ask him to speak in their favor. "He tried to beg off, offering every excuse [but] they grabbed him, and put him put on a big Dry goods box, and he seen no way out of it when they called out, Speech, Speech." While outlining his hopes for peaceful settlement of the issues, Julia remembered, Cody was asked if he was in favor of a free Kansas. His affirmation inspired Charles Dunn to curse him as "a Damed Abolicetionist" as he stabbed him through the lung.

The *Liberty Democratic Platform* reported the incident as a claim dispute. "Cody is severely hurt, but not enough it is feared to cause his death. The settlers on Salt Creek regret that his wound is not more dangerous, and all sustain Mr. Dunn in the course he took. Abolitionists will yet find 'Jordan a hard road to travel!'" While Cody recovered at his brother's home in Weston, his neighbors drove off his horses and burned the hay he'd laid up to sell to Fort Leavenworth. Dunn was never prosecuted.

On September 15th, a newspaper was issued in the city of Leavenworth by two recent arrivals. Editors Osborn and Adams noted “all the type...has been set under an elm tree...ourselves and our compositors have been, like the Patriarchs of old ‘dwellers in tents’ for the past two weeks.” The *Kansas Weekly Herald* published an informal census of the tent city, estimating the “population of this town is nearly as follows: 99 men, 1 woman and 0 babies. Total 100.”

During September, free-state newspapers announced a contest: “The Emigrants Aid Society will pay a prize of \$50 for the best song, to be sung by emigrants to Kansas, en route, adopted to a popular melody or national tune.” Whittier’s *Song of the Kansas Emigrants* had been surprisingly effective. Sympathizers gathered at railroad stations to sing it as Aid Company colonists passed by. Prospective emigrants hummed it to keep up their spirits as they packed their belongings. Why the Aid Company felt the need for another song is unclear, but the promised reward of \$50 inspired many to pick up their steel-nibbed pens. (570 words)

Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years A Free Man* (York, PA: P Anstadt & Sons, 1895) Pg. 69.

Robert A. Carter, *Buffalo Bill Cody, The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: J. Wiley, 2000) Pp. 19-20

(Leavenworth) *Kansas Weekly Herald* September 15, 1854.

Don Russell (editor), “Julia Cody Goodman’s Memoirs of Buffalo Bill,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly*. Volume XXVIII, Number 4, Winter, 1962. Pg. 459.