



# NEWS

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By Barbara Brackman

## **Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History September 26 – October 2, 1854**

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, John and Joseph Speer arrived from Medina, Ohio, to start a newspaper in the future territorial capital. After discussing the infant settlements, the brothers decided that Wakarusa/Lawrence, thirty miles from Missouri, was “hardly far enough west for the capital.” Their assessment was colored by the belief that Kansas would be settled only along the eastern quarter. The territory beyond the junction of the Smoky Hill and Kaw Rivers could not be farmed. “Missourians inculcated that idea to keep Yankees away.”

Having determined that Tecumseh, twenty miles west of Lawrence, might be the logical choice for a capital, they disembarked and spent the night at the only house on the site, the home of Thomas and Julia Stinson, the town’s founders. There, they encountered a Southern Methodist minister who lectured about Biblical support for the Fugitive Slave Act. When informed that their newspaper would have a free-state bias, Stinson told them he could not encourage that editorial stance as it might drive Missourians away. The Speers “concluded if he desired to try town building exclusively on Missouri slaveholding enterprise he ought to be permitted to go on in uninterrupted happiness. We returned to Lawrence.”

The brothers hoped to hire a job printer in Westport to print the first edition of their Lawrence newspaper, but again, their anti-slavery position won them no friends. As the week wore on, they considered returning to Ohio where printers took jobs regardless of editorial content.

In Pennsylvania, George W. Brown also planned to start a newspaper in Lawrence, but was crating his own press and newsprint to ship. Commissioned by the New England Emigrant Aid Company, Brown was leading a group of emigrants from Conneautville, a town near the Ohio border by Lake Erie. The Fitchburg, Massachusetts *Sentinel* picked up a story about him, printed on the 29<sup>th</sup>, entitled “For Kansas, Ho!” Brown, the article said, “takes with him a power press, and material for a first class printing office, with which he is to print the *Herald of Freedom*. He also takes a large bookstore with him, and expects to supply the people of the territory with their reading matter, school books, stationery, &c.”

The *Sentinel* was full of such second-hand stories, reprinted from other newspapers in a system of “exchanges.” Editors filling a four-page weekly newspaper printed a bit of local news, a column foot or so of advertisements and an occasional letter from a “correspondent” such as Daniel Anthony and Samuel Wood, who wrote the editors in their home towns of their Kansas adventures under their initials or a nom-de-plume like “Charleston.”

The bulk of the “news” was reprints, unrestricted by copyright laws. National and international news was thus exchanged, as were correspondent’s stories, which were picked up by newspapers around the country. A local editor with a free-state bias might comment on the story about Brown with congratulations, while a pro-slavery editor might lament that hordes of demented abolitionists were heading west.

Sunday, October 1<sup>st</sup> marked another anti-slavery holiday. In Syracuse, New York, law officials, empowered by the Fugitive Slave Act, had attempted in 1851 to arrest a runaway slave named Jerry, but were foiled by a citizen mob. The Jerry Rescue Celebration touted the *Liberator*, was the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary “of that enterprise which, in the future history of our country, will be commemorated as [more memorable] than the destruction of the Tea in the harbor of Boston.... If you can, rejoice together with the Rescuers of Jerry.” (578 words)

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*The Boston Liberator* # 1053, September 30, 1854, page 3.

Fitchburg (Massachusetts) *Sentinel*, September 29, 1854

John Speer, “Told By A Pioneer,” *Bulletin of the Shawnee County Historical Society*, Number 12, December 1950, pages 55-56.

“Douglas,” in the Manuscript Collection at the Kansas State Historical Society