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Memories from Kansas Territory: **CHARLES AND SARA ROBINSON**

Before Charles Robinson became the first governor of Kansas, he was a man of many interests. Robinson served as doctor in Massachusetts; prospector, restaurateur, and newspaper editor in California; and free-state leader in Kansas Territory. Indicted for murder in an 1850 altercation between settlers and land speculators in Sacramento, he later was acquitted.

Sara Tappan Doolittle Lawrence was one of Robinson's patients before he headed West. A Massachusetts native, Lawrence received a classical education in New England schools. Charles and Sara married in 1851 in Massachusetts, after Robinson's return to the East.

Because Robinson had traveled the prairies, the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company hired him as an agent to promote settlement in the new Kansas Territory. Charles arrived in Kansas Territory in September 1854. Sara followed in autumn 1855. Here in this unsettled land they met many challenges. A large number of correspondence, compositions, diaries, clippings, business records, and memo books provide a glimpse into the Robinsons' lives in Kansas Territory and are part of the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Much of this history now can be viewed at www.territorialkansasonline.org. This new web site, a cooperative effort of the University of Kansas and the Kansas State Historical Society, contains thousands of documents from the partner institutions. The project was funded by a federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

When the "bogus" legislature, composed of illegally elected representatives from Missouri, charted a proslavery course for Kansas Territory, freestaters organized, approved the Topeka Constitution, and elected Robinson as "governor." N. P. Banks, U.S. congressman from Massachusetts, sent Robinson a letter on March 19, 1856 from Washington with encouragement. "We are in good spirits, and hopeful the Kansas question will meet its first decision in the House this week, and I think it will not be against us," Banks wrote. However, Robinson was arrested in May 1856 for treason and conspiracy against the United States. He

spent several months in confinement at LeCompton before being acquitted.

To elevate the condition of his incarceration, Andrew Whitney, wrote "Gov. Robinson's Polka" in 1856, "respectfully dedicated to his friend." The song was played by the Fitchburg, Massachusetts Cornet Band. The sheet music and concert playbill can be seen online.

Sophy, Sara's sister, wrote with concern on July 20, 1856, probably from Massachusetts, about the imprisonment. She addressed the letter to a friend of Sara's for fear that it would be confiscated.

"Are you in any measure or degree comfortable in that tent?" Sophy asked. "Write particularly how you are situated – Do you suffer physically?"

During Charles' imprisonment, Sara sent a letter to an acquaintance to seek the support of President Pierce. "The President of the United States is your relative. He will soon know, if he does not already, that the real settlers have been allowed to take no part in framing the Territorial laws, which he upholds with the authority of the United States. I beg your good offices in behalf of my husband...This Territory cannot be made a slave State except with the assistance of the Executive."

Sara became active in attempting to correct misperceptions regarding Kansas history. Her interest in the free-state movement grew along with that of her husband's, leading to her book, *Kansas, Its Interior and Exterior Life*, published in 1856, to encourage free-state support.

"The sad tragedies in Kansas will be avenged, when freedom of speech, of the press, and of the person, are made sure by the downfall of those now in power, and when the song of the reaper is heard again over our prairies, and, instead of the clashing of arms, we see the gleam of the ploughshare in her peaceful valleys," Sara wrote. "Men of the North, shall the brave hearts in Kansas struggle alone?"

In January 1857 Sara received an invitation to a Citizen's Ball from Richard McAllister, deputy secretary to Governor Geary, to be held in LeCompton. "I trust, Madam, that you will favor us with your presence and induce as many of your fair friends as you can to accompany you," McAllister wrote.

Writing from nearby Quindaro in August 1859, Charles offers encouragement to Sara and provides an update on his business dealings.

"We have as yet completed nothing by way of settlement but I am getting things arranged so as to bring matters to a close after a while & I think satisfactorily,"

Charles wrote. "I think railroad matters look very well for Quindaro & we are quite encouraged."

While Charles was traveling in New York in 1860, Sara wrote with descriptions of spring "showers and lightning" and travels to Quindaro. She mentions news of the "trouble at Charleston" which might delay the efforts to admit Kansas into the Union.

"I am afraid you will not receive this letter so feel little inclined to write much – A Commissioner has come out to make a treaty," Sara wrote in April 1860. "I could not help smile that you who have always advised me rather authoritatively to be careful to send my letters by the mail to secure their certain and quick arrival should have trusted yours in hands which carried it to Leecompton," Sara wrote in May 1860.

Robinson was again elected governor under the Wyandotte Constitution and became the state's first chief executive when Kansas was admitted to the Union in 1861. He served one two-year term. His other political ventures included serving as a state representative and state senator, and conducting two subsequent unsuccessful gubernatorial campaigns. He helped to found and served as a regent for the University of Kansas. He also served as superintendent of Haskell Institute. Robinson summarized his efforts during the territorial period in a book, *The Kansas Conflict*.

Robinson died in 1894; Sara in 1911. Under the terms of his will, Kansas property and a large sum of money passed to the University of Kansas.

Beginning in 2004, Kansas commemorates the 150th anniversary of the territory. Exhibits, events, publications, and numerous other activities will be included in the seven-year commemoration. For further information about the Kansas Territorial Sesquicentennial Commission, contact the Kansas State Historical Society at 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS 66615; 785-272-8681; TTY 785-272-8683; www.kshs.org.