

BEFORE BLEEDING KANSAS

Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844–1854

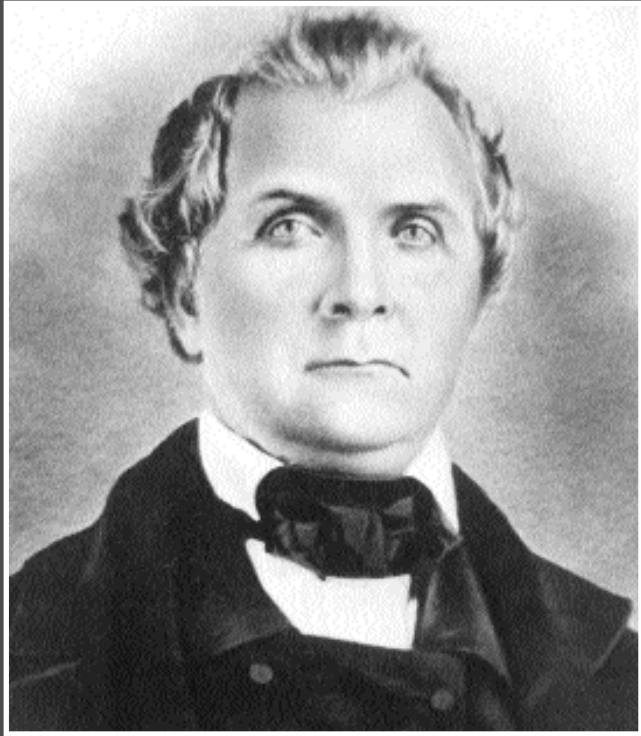
by Kevin Abing

Few would deny that passage of the Kansas–Nebraska bill in 1854 was a watershed in the United States’s march toward civil war. The bill repealed the hallowed Missouri Compromise and replaced it with “popular sovereignty,” paving the way for the extension of slavery into territory above the 36° 30’ line. Battle lines quickly formed as pro- and antislavery settlers rushed into former Indian country to claim the choicest land and to perpetuate a particular socio-economic system. The area became the scene of the country’s most violent clashes over slavery in the antebellum era.

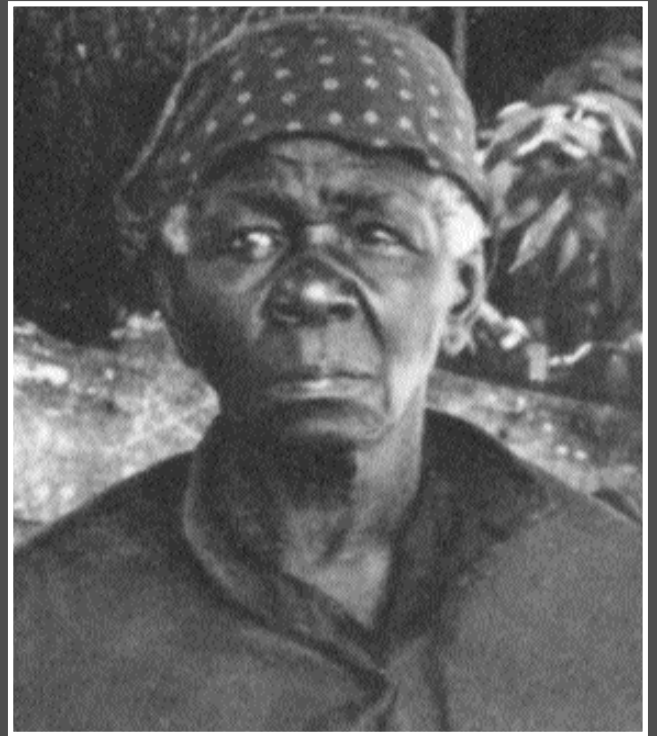
Much has been written about Bleeding Kansas, but the literature examines the slavery controversy in this region only after Congress passed the Kansas–Nebraska bill.¹ This is an incomplete picture at best. In-

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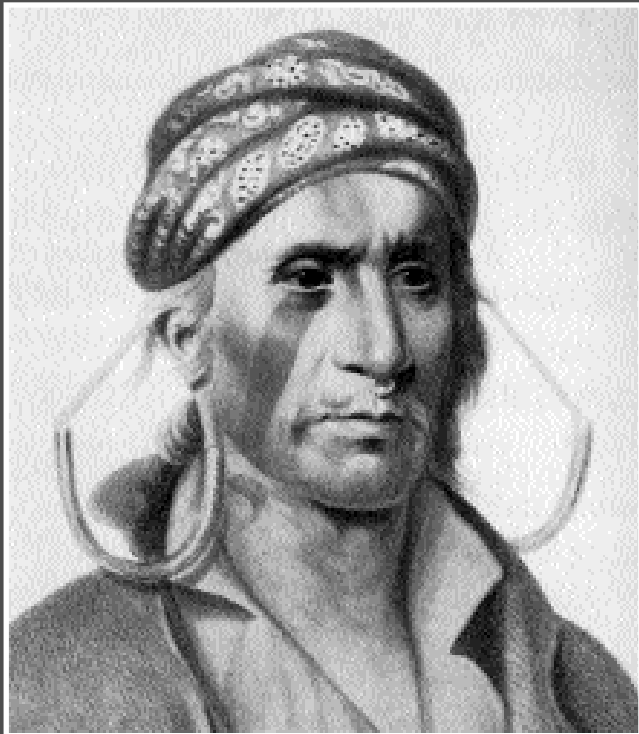
1. The literature dealing with this period is voluminous, but examples of works that do not examine the slavery controversy in pre-territorial Kansas include Thomas Goodrich, *War to the Knife: Bleeding Kansas, 1854–1861* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1998); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union, Vol. II: A House Dividing, 1852–1857* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947); Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: “Bleeding Kansas” and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969).



THE MISSIONARY (Thomas Johnson)



THE SLAVE (unidentified)



THE SHAWNEE (Payta Kootha)

deed, the seeds of Bleeding Kansas fell on fertile ground, for slavery was a source of contention in Indian country long before Kansas was organized.

This was especially true among the Shawnee Indians. The location of the Shawnee reservation assured that slavery would intrude upon tribal matters; it was a 1.6-million-acre tract that hugged the south bank of the Kansas River and stretched westward 120 miles from the Missouri border. Immediately to the east lay Westport, Missouri, a zealously proslavery settlement. More important, internal forces stirred the controversy to a fever pitch. Ironically, missionaries—men of God laboring to “civilize” Shawnees—were most responsible for unleashing and perpetuating sectional turmoil among this group, thereby laying the groundwork for Bleeding Kansas.

For Shawnees, owning slaves was a recent development. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries black captives occasionally were found among Shawnee bands living in the Southeast, but typically they were assimilated into the tribe. This process reflected the Shawnees’ view that all should contribute to the benefit of the tribal community. They placed little value on the accumulation of personal property. This mind-set was vital to the tribe’s survival. The Shawnees’ subsistence pattern paralleled that of other Eastern Woodland tribes as hunting was the primary source of food. Shawnee women supplemented the tribal diet by growing a variety of crops and by foraging for wild berries; however, reliance on wild game often meant that hunger was a very real presence. Thus, it was crucial that Shawnees pool their efforts and resources for the collective good.²

2. Jerry E. Clark, *The Shawnee* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 30–31; James H. Howard, *Shawnee! The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and Its Cultural Background* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), 1–17, 43–46; Charles Callender, “Shawnee,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 624–25, 631.

Furthermore, outside circumstances hindered the tribe’s adoption of slavery. By the late eighteenth century most Shawnees lived in Ohio, an area in which the Northwest Ordinance prohibited slavery; thus, Ohio bands received limited exposure to the “peculiar institution” in comparison with Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws, who occupied much of the southeastern United States. This explains why the historical literature pertaining to black slavery and Native Americans has focused upon these southern tribes.³

Shawnees, like their southern counterparts, did not begin accumulating slaves until their traditional culture came under the “civilizing” influences of the United States. This transformation first occurred among some Ohio Shawnees, but it accelerated after the government removed the tribe to Indian country. Beginning in 1825 Shawnee bands near Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and from Ohio emigrated to their new home in a piecemeal fashion. The last Shawnee bands left Ohio in 1833 and made their way west.⁴

On their new reservation, Shawnees encountered a vigorous civilization program. As part of this effort, the federal government supplied the tribe with agricultural tools to encourage them to learn Euro-American-style farming techniques. This would, in theory, stimulate the tribe’s members to abandon their nomadic ways and settle on individual plots of land. And, if Shawnees were to become truly “civi-

3. See, for example, Theda Purdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540–1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979); R. Halliburton Jr., *Red Over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977); Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (1915; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

4. Grant W. Harrington, *The Shawnees in Kansas* (Kansas City, Kans.: Western Pioneer Press, 1937), 3–6; Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2: *Treaties* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 262–64, 331–34; Grant Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 54, 72–85.

From the beginning Thomas Johnson was the focus of the interdenominational discord, harboring a driving ambition that poisoned relations with his neighbors.

lized," they would have to relinquish their "heathen" deities and adopt Christianity. The tribe worshiped an array of deities imbued throughout nature, and its religious beliefs and ceremonies promoted a sense of balance in its existence. To combat this "heathenism," missionaries ventured to the Shawnee reservation to spread the Gospel and establish schools where Indian children could receive a "proper" education.

Shawnees faced difficult realities in Kansas.⁵ The area was crowded with other transplanted tribes—Delaware, Kickapoo, Potawatomie, and Miami, among others—and there was not enough wild game to support so many. Although some Shawnees tried to live as they had in the past, increasing numbers realized their culture would have to be altered. Statistics illustrate this transition. According to an 1846 census, all the tribe's 931 members were farmers.⁶

Yet another impulse dictated Shawnee acculturation: increasing numbers within the tribe were mixed-bloods. There are no concrete figures, but when Quaker missionary Wilson Hobbs arrived in Kansas in 1850 he noticed only a few full-bloods among the tribe, as "two hundred years of contact with border whites had done much to change their blood."⁷ As products of white and Indian cultures, these mixed-bloods were more amenable to white society.

The changes also filtered down to Shawnee children. In 1837 Chief John Perry told a group of missionaries, "When we lived in Ohio, where we could get game, I thought not worth while to send my children to school, and I sent none; but now we live where we cannot get game, I want my children to go to school and learn to work too."⁸ Accordingly, Shawnees supported mission schools in which their children received a rudimentary education and learned a trade to help survive in a changing environment.

Shawnees had several schools from which to choose, for the missionary field on their reservation was crowded. Thomas Johnson of the Methodist Episcopal Church began ministering to Shawnees in late 1830. The following year Baptist missionaries Isaac McCoy and Johnston Lykins

commenced their work among the tribe, and in 1837 the Quakers established a third mission school. All three denominations ostensibly worked toward the same goal, but relations among them quickly soured as they competed with one another for Shawnee souls.⁹

From the beginning Thomas Johnson was the focus of the interdenominational discord. A Virginia native, he ministered to white settlers in Missouri and Arkansas prior to his appointment as a Shawnee missionary. He possessed qualities that served him well in his missionary endeavors—piety, excellent administrative skills, and a keen business acumen.¹⁰ But he also harbored a driving ambition that poisoned relations with his pious neighbors. Johnson hoped to monopolize the Shawnee mission field and exclude any rivals.

Establishment of the Shawnee Manual Labor School epitomized his desire. Initially, Johnson conducted a small boarding school for the tribe, but he grew disenchanted with its limited success. He envisioned something on a grander scale. In 1838 he traveled to New York and secured approval of the Methodist missionary board for a large manual labor school that would serve Shawnees and nearby tribes. He then ventured to Washington and gained the enthusiastic endorsement of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Carey Harris. Lastly, Johnson met with Shawnee leaders and persuaded them of the necessity for his school. The Shawnee Manual Labor School was a mammoth enterprise, occupying nearly two thousand acres. Johnson chose a site roughly one-half mile west of the Missouri border along the Santa Fe Trail. Eventually, three large, brick schools/dormitories were constructed, along with a variety of farm buildings and workshops. Enrollment figures swelled to well over one hundred students, and the school quickly became the showpiece of the government's civilization program. The Methodist institution completely overshadowed

9. For a discussion of this interdenominational rivalry, see Kevin Abing, "A Holy Battleground: Methodist, Baptist, and Quaker Missionaries Among Shawnee Indians, 1830–1844," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Summer 1998): 118–37.

10. William Stewart Woodard, *Annals of Methodism in Missouri* (Columbia, Mo.: E. W. Stephens, 1893), 62–63; Edith Connelley Ross, "The Old Shawnee Mission," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1926–1928 17 (1928): 422; J. J. Lutz, "The Methodist Missions Among the Indian Tribes in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1905–1906 9 (1906): 161, n. 6; Nathan Scarritt, "Reminiscences of the Methodist Shawnee Mission. And Religious Work Among That Tribe," *Annals of Kansas City* 1 (October 1924): 436.

5. Indian country encompassed the present states of Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. The Shawnee reservation, however, lay entirely within the Kansas portion.

6. "Census and Statistics of the Shawnee Tribe of Indians," Letters Received, 1824–1881, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, roll 302, M234, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Letters Received).

7. Wilson Hobbs, "The Friends' Establishment in Kansas Territory," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1903–1904 8 (1904): 253.

8. 1837 Meeting Minutes, Society of Friends, Ohio Yearly Meeting Records, 1808–1991, 13 (microfilm), Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

the modest Baptist and Quaker schools, thereby accomplishing Johnson's wish to dominate missionary activities among the Shawnee people.¹¹

Thomas Johnson also was at the center of the evolving slavery storm. Indeed, he introduced slavery into Indian country, perhaps as early as 1832. He was not alone, however. Indian Agent Richard Cummins also brought slaves to the area sometime between 1832 and 1837.¹² Regardless, Shawnees experienced little turmoil over slavery during these early years, even though it was not a part of Shawnee tradition. But, as the tribe's acculturation progressed, some wealthier Shawnees (most of whom were mixed-bloods) emulated Johnson and Cummins and began acquiring slaves. Joseph Parks, for example, was by most accounts the richest member of the tribe. He owned a trading house in Westport, a large farm, and several slaves. It is not clear when he purchased his first slave, but by early 1843 he had a sixteen-year-old black "servant" appointed assistant blacksmith. Other Shawnees followed Parks's example. By 1848 Richard Cummins commented that the "more opulent" members also owned slaves.¹³

Slavery did not afflict relations among the three missionary groups during the first decade of their work; plenty of other issues were argued among the Methodists, Baptists, and Quakers. Perhaps the missionaries glossed over the question to maintain a semblance of cooperation and to prevent it from completely disrupting their religious labors. This may be why, in the early 1840s, the Methodists dismissed the presence of slaves at the Shawnee Manual Labor School as a "temporary arrangement justified by peculiar circumstances."¹⁴

But the area would not remain immune from the agitation surrounding slavery. In 1844 the issue divided the Methodist Episcopal Church into northern and southern

11. For more detailed accounts concerning the Shawnee Manual Labor School, see Kevin Abing, "A Fall From Grace: Thomas Johnson and the Shawnee Indian Manual Labor School, 1839–1862" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995); Martha B. Caldwell, comp., *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1939).

12. Charles E. Cory, "Slavery in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1901–1902 7 (1902): 239. In 1850 Cummins moved back to Missouri and took as many as fifteen slaves with him.

13. Lutz, "The Methodist Missions," 399–401; Harrington, *The Shawnees in Kansas*, 6, n. 16; Richard Cummins to D. D. Mitchell, February 2, 1843, William Clark Collection, vol. 8: 94, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Mitchell to Cummins, May 5, 1843, vol. 7: 234–35, *ibid.*; Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1848, NCR microcard ed., 446.

14. William H. Goode, *Outposts of Zion, with Limnings of Mission Life* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864), 99.

factions. Members of the Indian Mission Conference, which included the Shawnee reservation, allied themselves with the Methodist Church, South. As a result of the "Plan of Separation," the northern church lost jurisdiction over all Indian missions in Kansas. The rupture between the Methodists, and similar splits among the Baptists and Presbyterians, were dark omens for these were the first nationwide breaches between slaveholding and nonslaveholding sections.¹⁵

The splintering also pushed slavery to the forefront as a source of controversy among Shawnee missionaries. The battle lines were clearly drawn. The Methodists obviously defended the practice, while the Baptists, especially Massachusetts native Francis Barker, and the Quakers charged that slavery should have no place among those doing "God's" work. The Quakers' aversion to slavery was widely known, and the presence of slaves at the Shawnee Manual Labor School especially struck them. Noting that situation, R. P. Hall asked, "Now is not this a strange idea? It is to me, to think of heathenizing one portion of mankind [while] erasing heathenism from another portion. I think the machine can't work well long."¹⁶

The Methodists dismissed the Quakers' concern, claiming they treated their slaves benevolently. Indeed, Jerome Berryman, superintendent of the Shawnee Manual Labor School from 1841 to 1844, argued that slavery benefited African Americans. Looking back upon his missionary career, Berryman concluded the physical, social, and moral condition of black slaves was "greatly preferable" to that of any Indians. Berryman acknowledged that evils "incidentally connected themselves" to slavery, but these he attributed to bad men and not to the system. And, the Bible recognized circumstances under which individuals could own slaves "without rebuke from Him who is the Master of us all."¹⁷

Evidence shows, however, that the slaves' lives at the school were not as benign as the Methodists claimed.¹⁸ A

15. C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 13, 78–90; Lutz, "The Methodist Missions," 179–80, 191.

16. Zeri Hough to Daniel Huff, November 28, 1845, Huff Family Collection, Lily Library, Earlham College, Richmond, Ind.; R. P. Hall to unidentified, n.d., *ibid.*

17. Jerome Berryman, "A Circuit Rider's Frontier Experiences," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1923–1925 16 (1925): 180–81.

18. Later accounts also argued that the Methodists treated their slaves well. See James Anderson, "The Methodist Shawnee Mission in Johnson County, Kansas, 1830–1862," *Trail Guide 1* (January 1956): 12–15; Cory, "Slavery in Kansas," 239.

slave girl complained to the Quakers that she thought it “quite hard that she had to work so hard and earn nothing for herself.” Moreover, unsubstantiated rumors held that Thomas Johnson fathered an illegitimate child by one of his slaves and sold the woman before the baby was born. Lastly, Miriam Hough, a Quaker missionary, heard of two whippings at the Methodist school in August 1846. In one case, a school employee whipped a black woman, but Hough found the other incident even “more disgraceful.” The same employee “corrected” a male slave for an offense that Hough thought a “mere trifle.” The punishment angered the slave, and he brandished a knife at his attacker. A struggle ensued during which the slave lost his knife and immediately tried to flee. The employee hit the slave with a brick bat, slamming him to the ground. The employee jumped on the slave and beat him with a club. The thrashing stopped, Hough supposed, when the employee concluded that the slave “was hurt bad enough.”¹⁹

The Quakers thought this situation should be brought to the public’s attention. Richard Mendenhall fired the first salvo when the National Era reprinted his December 1847 letter to a friend in the East. Mendenhall’s sole purpose was to “bring to the notice of the friends of Humanity the existence of slavery in this Territory, contrary to the restrictions of the Missouri Compromise.” He laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of government officials and the missionaries of the Methodist Church, South. Even more startling than slave-owning missionaries, he argued, was the fact that the

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Methodists used slaves to civilize the Indians. “Is not this the climax of inconsistencies?” he asked.

Mendenhall thought this circumstance bore bitter fruit among the Indians. The children at the Methodist school developed an aversion to labor that was “so common among white people in a slave-holding community.” This, he claimed, subverted the entire civilizing program because the children failed to learn “habits of industry.” Mendenhall maintained that most Indians opposed slavery, but some would own slaves if they could afford them. He also feared that Indians who helped fugitive slaves might arouse the ire of slaveholders in Missouri. Therefore, Mendenhall implored the “friends of Justice” to remove this evil from Kansas. He realized he might be persecuted, but he was determined to “bring the subject to public notice at all hazards.”²⁰

The Friends’ agitation undoubtedly embittered their interaction with the Methodists. When Wilson Hobbs arrived at the Friends mission in 1850, he observed that the Methodist school “seemed to hold herself aloof from, and above, the more humble sisters near by, and they were too modest either to court or demand her respect. Hence, there was little intercourse between them.”²¹

The controversy tainted more than just missionary relations, for it also drove wedges among the members of the Shawnee tribe. The Ohio and Missouri bands often quarreled over money and land. And in 1852 the mixed-blood leaders of Ohio Shawnees overhauled the tribe’s traditional pattern of hereditary leader-

19. Flora Harvey Kittle and Anna Steward Pearson, *Shawnee Indians in Kansas* (Kansas City, Kans.: N.p., 1917), 28; “Interview with E. F. Heisler, Editor of the Kansas City, Kansas, Sun,” E. F. Heisler Misc. Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Miriam Hough to Daniel Huff, August 30, 1846, Huff Family Collection.

20. Richard Mendenhall to Dr. Bailey, October 30, 1847, National Era (Washington, D.C.), December 23, 1847, reprinted in Jerry C. Roy, “The Shawnee Indians in Johnson County: Some Views From Contemporary Accounts,” in *The Shawnee Indians in Johnson County Kansas* (Overland Park, Kans.: Johnson County Center for Local History, 1985), 6.

21. Hobbs, “The Friends’ Establishment in Kansas Territory,” 256.

ship and replaced it with an elective form of government. Not surprisingly, the mixed-bloods dominated the new structure. Lastly, the strain between traditional and Christian Shawnees alienated various bands and tore families apart. The introduction of slavery only hardened tribal factionalism, as the “progressive” mixed-blood leaders supported the proslavery missionaries, while the traditional Missouri bands sided with the antislavery forces. The stress was such that a portion of the antislavery Shawnees left to join a Shawnee band in present Oklahoma.²²

Existing Methodist records blithely ignore the strife; yet, others involved in Shawnee matters were very aware of the problem. In March 1849 Baptist missionary Francis Barker wrote that the subject of slavery underwent an “extensive investigation” among the tribes along the Missouri border, and at one time “much excitement prevailed.” The Baptists, Barker related, prudently took no public stance in the debate, but he believed “that the system has but few advocates around us.”²³

Indian Agent Richard Cummins also commented upon the explosive situation. In a January 1849 report he noted that the slavery controversy had infiltrated the “Indian Country” and would “be the cause of much evil among the Indians themselves.” For example, several antislavery Indians had removed their children from the Shawnee Manual Labor School. Cummins believed if the agitation continued, the tribes would split into pro- and antislavery factions and the churches would be pitted “antagonistically, one against the other.” Surely, he pleaded, “there is no necessity for such division & strife to be created among Indians.”

22. Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians*, 169–70; Thomas Mosely to Luke Lea, July 20, 1852, *Letters Received*, roll 364.

23. Francis Barker to Solomon Peck, March 14, 1849, *American Baptist Foreign Mission Society–American Indian Correspondence*, American Baptist Historical Society, Valley Forge, Pa.

Cummins reported yet another difficulty. Slaves from Missouri fled into Kansas and Nebraska. Frequently, the Indians returned the slaves to the agent, but Cummins intimated that the Indians sometimes helped runaway slaves. If the Indians became “tainted with abolition doctrines” and if Missourians became “jealous & suspicious of Indians on the subject,” the “consequences that would ensue would be very easy to conjecture.” Up to this time, Cummins noted, the Indians had maintained peace and goodwill with their neighbors, but a “convulsion tending to destroy” the harmony “would be deplorable indeed.”²⁴

The problem soon became worse. Since the split, northern and southern Methodists engaged in “border troubles,” as each group struggled to control churches along the Mason–Dixon line. Finally, at the 1848 General Conference, members of the Methodist Church, North, repudiated the Plan of Separation. Consequently, they began re-entering mission fields that the southern church controlled. Their entrance into Kansas aggravated the growing tension.²⁵

Trouble continued in 1849 when the Missouri Conference of the northern church appointed Thomas Markham as a missionary to the Shawnee tribe. After securing permission from the superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, David Mitchell, Markham immediately embarked on his missionary duties. It was not long before he encountered obstacles. In March 1850 Indian agent Luke Lea advised Markham of the Shawnee leaders’ opinion that “it was contrary to their wishes that you should preach, any

24. Richard Cummins to Thomas Harvey, January 16, 1849, *Letters Received*, roll 303.

25. Arthur E. Jones Jr., “The Years of Disagreement, 1844–61,” in *The History of American Methodism*, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke, 3 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 2:144–175; Fred Louis Parrish, “The Rise of Methodism in Kansas, 1830–1861, From its Inception to the Opening of the Civil War” (master’s thesis, Northwestern University, 1922), 50; Mark Stephen Joy, “‘Into the Wilderness’: Protestant Missions Among the Emigrant Indians of Kansas” (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1992), 192.

Shawnee supporters of northern Methodists pointed to southern Methodists as the source of strife, saying they have succeeded in carrying out “their mad schemes.”

more, within their Country." The chiefs believed Markham's "sermons and conversations with their people better calculated to divide and distract their Nation, than of uniting and making them more happy and contented." Consequently, Lea instructed the missionary to confine his ministerial labors "among those who may be of opinion, that your services will be of more use to them."²⁶

Markham's Shawnee supporters did not acquiesce easily. One month later James Captain, Charles Fish, and John Fish addressed a lengthy letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Orlando Brown. They noted that eighty-five Shawnees had applied to the Methodist Church, North, for a missionary, and Markham had been appointed as a result. They denied that Markham caused any trouble, pointing instead to the southern Methodists as the source of strife and insisting that these individuals "have so far succeeded, as to procure the official aid of the U.S. Agent, to carry out their mad schemes of proscription and oppression."

The authors then launched a scathing attack upon those missionaries, claiming they were "devoid of all sympathy either for us, or our children." Conditions at the school were miserable, convincing Shawnees that the only reason the Methodists educated their children was to earn a profit. "The truth cannot be concealed," they contended; the Methodists "have departed from their legitimate office and have become 'money changers.'"

These were the type of men, the Shawnee people declared, who turned the Indian agent and the chiefs against the tribal members remaining loyal to the Methodist Church, North. Fearing the "northern" Shawnees would expose their "ill concealed corruptions," the southern missionaries, like "all other religious tyrants," conspired with the civil authorities to eliminate the threat. Thomas Johnson and his colleagues tried to undermine the so-called "northern" Shawnees by pinning the "odious name of abolitionist" upon them, even though they held no such sympathies. James Captain and his co-authors believed immediate emancipation "ruinous to the country," but they thought no true Christian should engage in slave trafficking. They also asserted that the southern Methodists sup-

26. Parrish, "The Rise of Methodism in Kansas," 50; Lutz, "The Methodist Missions," 192; D. D. Mitchell to "whom it may concern," September 3, 1849, Letters Received, roll 785; Luke Lea to J. B. Markham, March 20, 1850, *ibid.*

pressed religious liberty. They observed that the Church, North, had organized a conference in Missouri. "Shall we," they asked, "who live on free soil enjoy less liberty than the citizens of a slave state?" They assured Commissioner Brown that Markham never discussed slavery in his sermons or in private talks "except to correct some gross misrepresentation of the inquisitors of the Big institution." The Shawnees asked Brown to have Agent Lea cease harassing Markham, to inform their chiefs that they had no jurisdiction over the matter, and to initiate a government investigation.²⁷ But the commissioner took no immediate action.

Despite the government's delay and Lea's persistent pressure, Thomas Markham continued preaching to the Shawnees. In March 1851 Markham finally met with Lea and several Shawnee chiefs to discuss the matter. Markham presented a letter from the commissioner of Indian Affairs, authorizing his activities. Lea, however, refused to take any action because most of the Shawnee Council was absent. But he promised to address the matter in a few weeks before the full council. Markham chastised the missing chiefs, for they "had not moral courage to attend when requested and defend their cause." He also criticized Lea for basing his actions, not on the wishes of his superiors, but on the "mere wishes of a majority of the Chiefs of the Nation" who may be "the dupes of Sectarian bigotry, or the mere hirelings of Some trader, or Speculator, or whiskey trader, whose interest might require that the Indians should be kept in ignorance." If this was government policy, Markham insisted, then it ought to be publicized, for he and his missionary brethren were "hazzarding a great deal." He was sure this case would be precedent setting, for the northern church had enemies everywhere who would "do any thing in their power to drive us out of the whol[e] Territory, and State of Missouri also."²⁸

Finally in May 1851 federal officials took action. The commissioner of Indian Affairs informed Lea that the government acknowledged the right of all denominations to send missionaries to the Indians. He admitted that the gov-

27. Charles Fish, James Captain, and John Fish to Orlando Brown, April 22, 1850, Letters Received, roll 303.

28. August 1850 Meeting, Journal of the Missouri Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1849–1864, 36–39, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Petition from the Shawnee to the President of the U.S., December 14, 1850, Letters Received, roll 785; Edmund S. James and J.P. Durbin to Luke Lea, January 15, 1851, *ibid.*; Lea to J. B. Markham, December 31, 1850, *ibid.*; Markham to J. P. Durbin, March 20, 1851, *ibid.*

ernment appreciated the “opinions & wishes of the constituted authorities of an Indian tribe, & will on all proper occasions act in conformity with them.” But in this case the Indian Department could not accept the Shawnees’ decision, for in religious matters, “the rights of the minority, as well as those of the majority are entitled to protection.”²⁹ Before Lea could explain his actions to the commissioner, he was thrown from his horse and killed, and the entire matter remained in limbo. Finally, on July 21, 1851, the Indian Department notified David Mitchell in St. Louis that unless objections arose, other than the Shawnee Council’s decision, Markham must be allowed to minister to the Shawnee people.³⁰

After three long years the northern Methodists won the right to work among the Shawnee tribe. But the victory was not without cost. The disturbance generated much ill will among the northern and southern Shawnees. Indeed, yet another portion of the tribe migrated to Oklahoma to distance itself from the troubles.³¹ The conflict also created an enduring bitterness between the northern and southern Methodists. Years later William Goode, a member of the Church, North, visited the Shawnee Mission, but Thomas Johnson ignored him. As far as Goode could tell, his experience was not uncommon.³²

Throughout this intradenominational struggle, sectional conflicts further intruded upon Kansas. For years Americans had been clamoring to open part, if not all, of this region for economic development. Several motivations prompted this: to provide safe passage for the pioneers migrating to the far West, to quench the desire for Indian land, and to speed construction of a transcontinental railroad. Organization boosters, such as Illinois senator Stephen Douglas, claimed that “hostile savages” blocked the country’s progress, and, therefore, the “Indian barrier must be removed.” This view ignored the fact that the Great Plains were not entirely filled with “hostile” Indians. For years the Shawnees and other tribes along the Missouri border had maintained peaceful relations with their white neighbors and had made great

progress as agriculturalists. Nevertheless, Congress periodically debated bills to organize the territory west of Missouri, but each time, sectional rivalries blocked passage.³³

As pressure mounted, officials in the Indian Department faced a dilemma. In the removal treaties of the 1820s and 1830s, the government made promises to the various tribes that their new homes would last forever. Yet, despite these pledges, white reformers could not and would not impede American progress. The country’s rapid expansion convinced them that the Indians would survive only on small, closely supervised reservations.³⁴

To balance white demands with justice to the Indians, policy makers revived the tired argument that breaking up the reservations and allotting land to individuals was the only way to truly civilize the Indians.³⁵ Thomas Johnson added his voice to the growing chorus. In October 1849 he wrote, “For many years my mind has been directed to the probable destiny of these remnants of tribes west of Missouri.” Johnson was “fully satisfied that they never can be extensively improved as separate nations,” and the time would come when it would be best for the United States “to throw around this country some form of government, and buy up the surplus lands belonging to these little tribes.” Those tribes unwilling to assimilate could maintain separate reservations, while the “enterprising part of each nation [could] hold property in their names and live among the whites, and take their chance with them.” Johnson declared “that more of the Indians, in this part of the country, would be brought to enjoy the benefits of civilization on this than any other plan ever presented to my mind.”³⁶

Although good intentions may have motivated Johnson, other less lofty incentives certainly influenced his thinking. He was an aggressive entrepreneur who capitalized on any opportunity to enhance his own wealth. By

29. Luke Lea to Luke Lea, May 8, 1851, Letters Sent, 1824–1881, Office of Indian Affairs, roll 44, M21, National Archives (hereafter cited as Letters Sent).

30. Thomas Johnson to Luke Lea, June 19, 1851, Letters Received, roll 785; J. P. Durbin to Lea, June 29, 1851, *ibid.*; Charles Mix to D. D. Mitchell, July 21, 1851, Letters Sent, roll 45.

31. Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians*, 169–71.

32. Goode, *Outposts of Zion*, 250.

33. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 145–49; Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 5, 25–26; John W. Ragsdale Jr., “The Dispossession of the Kansas Shawnee,” *UMKC Law Review* 58 (Winter 1990): 233; James C. Malin, *The Nebraska Question, 1852–1854* (Lawrence, Kans.: 1953), 7–19, 123–54; Stephen Douglas quotation from *ibid.*, 18; David M. Emmons, *Garden in the Grasslands: Boomer Literature of the Central Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 7–15.

34. The standard work with regard to the evolution of the reservation policy is Robert A. Trennert Jr., *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846–51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975).

35. See, for example, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1847, 108.

36. *Ibid.*, 1849, 149–50; Thomas Johnson to Orlando Brown, October 13, 1849, Letters Received, roll 784.

1850 he had formed a freighting business and also dabbled in real estate in the fledgling community of Kansas City. And many suspected that Johnson established the Shawnee Manual Labor School to enrich himself and his Methodist brethren. Undoubtedly, Johnson viewed the potential breakup of the Indian reservations as an opportunity to get rich in the typical American fashion—through land speculation.³⁷

The escalating pressure worried the Shawnees. In 1851 several members asked Thomas Wells, superintendent of the Friends school, if the government intended to open their reservation to white settlement. Wells believed the “disturbed mind of the Indians” would be calmed if the government assured the tribe that it “did not countenance such practices and schemes.”³⁸ The government gave no such assurances. Nor did the Methodist missionaries provide any solace, for Thomas Johnson played an integral role in the efforts to organize the territory.

Wyandot tribal leaders, many of whom were mixed-bloods, took the first steps toward organization. As early as the winter of 1851 the Wyandots unsuccessfully petitioned Congress to organize the “Nebraska” Territory. The following year they chose Abelard Guthrie, a white man who had married into the tribe, to serve as a delegate to Washington and lobby for organization, although he exerted little influence upon Congress.³⁹ Nevertheless, in February 1853 the House of Representatives easily passed a bill creating Nebraska Territory. But again, sectional concerns over the location of a transcontinental railroad blocked the bill in the Senate. Moreover, Southerners objected to organizing a territory without protection of slave property.⁴⁰

Johnson viewed the potential breakup of the Indian reservations as an opportunity to get rich in the typical American fashion—through land speculation.

Although Nebraska advocates suffered a setback, the issue certainly was not dead. Congress took an important step toward organization on March 3, 1853. It added a provision to an appropriation bill authorizing negotiations with tribes of that region to open land for American settlement by extinguishing all or part of Indian title.⁴¹

This move sounded an ominous note for the border tribes and encouraged Nebraska boosters in Indian country, including Thomas Johnson, to step up organization efforts. On July 26, 1853, Wyandot missionaries, leaders, agents, and traders gathered at the council house. They passed several resolutions, including calls for a central transcontinental railroad, recognition of Indian rights, election of a congressional delegate, and establishment of a “provisional” government. Abelard Guthrie was nominated territorial delegate only after Thomas Johnson declined the position. William Walker, Wyandot chief and new

provisional governor, announced the election would be held on October 11.⁴²

The convention did not offer the last word on this issue. At roughly the same time came a move to name a proslavery delegate to oppose Guthrie. In early August, Thomas Johnson and others issued a call for another convention to meet at the Kickapoo village, near Fort Leavenworth, on September 20. This gathering also advocated the immediate construction of a transcontinental railroad and the speedy organization of the territory, but it demanded that slavery be protected. Lastly, Thomas Johnson was a unanimous nominee for the territorial delegate.⁴³

37. Abing, “A Fall From Grace,” 292–93, 301–305.

38. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1851, 86.

39. For a sketch of Guthrie’s life, see William E. Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory and the Journals of William Walker* (Lincoln, Neb.: State Journal Co., 1899), 101–52.

40. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 102–12; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 149–52.

41. R. McClelland to George Manypenny, August 18, 1853, Letters Received, roll 55; Miner and Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas*, 6.

42. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 179–86; Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, 30–37; *St. Louis Daily Missouri Democrat*, August 10, 1853.

43. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 186–90; Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, 37–38.

Johnson agreed to the candidacy, presumably because he approved the Kickapoo resolutions. The Wyandot resolutions did not mention the slavery issue, but the fact that supporters of Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton dominated the meeting signified its antislavery tenor; Abelard Guthrie's nomination amplified this tone. To proslavery men, Johnson seemed to be the ideal opponent: a slave owner, he also commanded substantial influence among the mixed-blood Shawnee leaders and had the active support of government officials, especially commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny.⁴⁴

Manypenny arrived in Kansas on September 2 to discuss land cessions with the border tribes. He found them in an agitated state because many white settlers, undoubtedly encouraged by events within the territory, were exploring the region to find choice claim sites.⁴⁵

The situation was so bad that several tribes talked of using force, if necessary, to drive these intruders off their lands. Manypenny gradually quelled any talk of hostilities and turned his attention to new treaties. He met stiff opposition. Tribesmen repeatedly pointed to government promises that this land would belong to them forever. Manypenny acknowledged those pledges, but now the Indians' "true interests required that these treaties should be cancelled, and that new ones should be made . . . as to conform to the great and unexpected changes that had taken place." Most tribes balked at ceding any land, but eventually they became amenable to selling portions and maintaining smaller reservations. Manypenny objected, believing individual allotments were the key to the Indians' salvation. He hoped the tribes would be willing to forsake their reservations by the following spring and move to "some less ex-

44. William G. Cutler and A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1: 626.

45. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 128–37; Miner and Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas*, 7–8.

posed place." He also urged that Nebraska be "speedily opened, and actual settlers invited into it on the most liberal terms." Manypenny believed this course was in the Indians' best interests, for it combined Indian welfare with American progress.⁴⁶

Manypenny's concern prompted him to delve into the area's political affairs, and he used his official position to influence local residents to elect Thomas Johnson congressional delegate. Perhaps Manypenny helped Johnson because both wanted to extend slavery into Nebraska.⁴⁷ More likely, however, Manypenny supported Johnson's candidacy because both expressed similar ideas about the Indians' ultimate fate. Other factors help explain the Manypenny–Johnson alliance. Manypenny was himself a Methodist, and Johnson took great pains to expand upon that common bond. He met the commissioner at the Westport River landing, made a room available at the

school, escorted him around the territory, and provided information and advice.⁴⁸

On October 11 local "citizens" gave Thomas Johnson a landslide victory in the contest for congressional delegate. This was no surprise to William Walker. He observed that Abelard Guthrie had only the support of his personal friends, while Johnson had the active backing of his fellow missionaries, Commissioner Manypenny, Indian agents, military personnel, and various Indian traders—a "com-

46. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1853, 29–36; George Manypenny to R. McClelland, November 9, 1853, Report Books, 1838–1885, 344–50, roll 7, M348, National Archives; George Manypenny, *Our Indian Wards* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke and Co., 1880), 117–18.

47. This is the position argued by William Connelley. See, for example, Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, 38; Connelley, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, 5 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), 1: 309–11.

48. Jotham Meeker to Solomon Peck, August 31, 1854, Jotham Meeker Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

Missouri residents were anxious to grab Indian land and were angry because Manypenny did not conclude any treaties with the border tribes.

bined power that [was] irresistible." Yet, confusion marred this first election. The conventions at Wyandot or Kickapoo failed to clearly spell out who were qualified voters, and, in the words of a contemporary, the election was conducted "loosely" and "any and everybody were permitted to vote."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Walker issued a certificate of election to Johnson in early November 1853. An irate Abelard Guthrie ignored the election results and made his way to Washington as a Nebraska delegate. Adding to the confusion, a third delegate from the northern portion of Nebraska Territory (west of the Iowa border) also traveled to Washington.⁵⁰

The confusion in Washington reflected the strife along the Iowa–Missouri border. Missouri residents were anxious to grab Indian land and were angry because Manypenny did not conclude any treaties with the border tribes. Sectional tensions, which had been building for years, became more acute because the status of slavery in the proposed territory was in doubt. The emigrant tribes were equally restive. "Progressive" tribes, such as the Wyandot, wanted to integrate themselves more fully into white society; others wanted to sell all of their land and move to a safer area in present Oklahoma. Delawares, Kickapoos, and Potawatomes, among others, adamantly refused to sell any land. Lastly, tribes such as the Omaha agreed to sell a portion of their land and maintain a smaller reservation.⁵¹

As for Shawnees, Baptist missionary Jotham Meeker commented that they were "more divided among themselves than any other tribe in this region." Shawnee bands were split into "heathen" and Christian factions. Despite missionary efforts over the years, the majority of the tribe still adhered to traditional beliefs. As for the Christian groups, they were further subdivided into Quaker, Baptists, northern Methodists, and southern Methodists. Meeker also observed that the tribe squabbled over selling tribal land. When Manypenny visited the Shawnees in October, the tribe reached a majority, but by no means unanimous, decision to sell off a portion of its land.⁵²

Thomas Johnson was pivotal in determining the fate of Shawnee land, although he exerted little influence on the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska bill. In January 1854 Congress began debating another organization bill. To gain the support of Southern senators, Stephen Douglas included a provision repealing the Missouri Compromise and substituting popular sovereignty in the new territories. The bill set off a storm of protest throughout the North, but Douglas steered the bill through Congress, and President Franklin Pierce signed it into law on May 30, 1854. For his part, Johnson aided organization efforts by helping extinguish Shawnee title to its reservation. Johnson returned to Shawnee country in late March 1854. He carried instructions from Commissioner Manypenny directing Agent B. F. Robinson to assemble the Shawnees and have them appoint a delegation to accompany Robinson and an interpreter to Washington to negotiate a treaty.⁵³

Tribal leaders were ready, for conditions in Kansas promoted a sense of urgency. As early as January, Robinson complained that Americans were stealing valuable lumber from Shawnees and encroaching upon their land. Tribal members met on April 5 and chose eight men to represent their interests in Washington. All but two, Black Bob and Longtail, were "progressive" chiefs. Despite any differences, all members of the delegation concurred that selling a portion of the tribe's land and securing defensible titles would best serve the tribe. On April 11 the Shawnees, Agent Robinson, and Thomas Johnson, acting as interpreter, boarded the steamer *Polar Star* on their way to Washington.⁵⁴

Commissioner Manypenny opened negotiations on April 24. The Shawnees resisted Manypenny's attempts to have them sell all of the tribe's land and move to a more distant location. Chief Joseph Parks asserted that the tribe was willing to sell a portion of its land but refused to move. The government, he claimed, had made solemn promises to protect Indian property from whites who were

49. "The Journals of William Walker," reprinted in Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, 386–88; Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 192–96, quotation on 196.

50. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 192–96; Hadley Johnson, "How the Kansas–Nebraska Line Was Established," *Nebraska State Historical Society, Transactions 2* (1887), 85–87; Connelley, *The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory*, 39–41, 83–85.

51. Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 212–14, 223–27; Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1853, 30–31.

52. Jotham Meeker to E. Bright, December 28, 1853, folder 17, roll FM100, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

53. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 154–71; Malin, *The Nebraska Question*, 288–349; George Manypenny to B. F. Robinson, March 15, 1854, *Letters Sent*, roll 48.

54. B. F. Robinson to Alfred Cumming, January 5, 1854, *Letters Received*, roll 364; Ragsdale, "Dispossession of the Kansas Shawnee," 238–39; Caldwell, *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission*, 79; *Weekly Missouri Statesman* (Columbia), April 28, 1854, Missouri Valley Historical Society Collection, folder 47, box 2, ser. 2, Kansas City Public Library, Mo.

“like the prairie wolves, prowling and stealing.”⁵⁵ The negotiations dragged on until a treaty finally was hammered out on May 10. The Shawnees ceded 1.4 million acres, retaining two hundred thousand acres in the easternmost portion of their reservation.

The treaty also ensured that Johnson and the proslavery Methodists dominated the Shawnee missionary field. Johnson persuaded the chiefs to accept his overture to pay the tribe ten thousand dollars over ten years for educating up to seventy Shawnee children. In return, the Methodists received nearly two thousand acres of some of the best land in Kansas (a tract that Johnson himself eventually acquired). The Shawnees also agreed to let the Quakers have 320 acres, as long as they maintained a school. If the school were disbanded, the land would be sold to the highest bidder. Tribal leaders made no mention of the Baptists during the negotiations until Manypenny asked them to grant a small parcel to that denomination. The Shawnees consented to set aside 160 acres for the Baptists, under the same restrictions placed upon the Quakers. Absolutely no mention was made of the northern Methodists. The southern Methodists, in effect, gained title to three sections of land, whether they operated the school or not. Their missionary rivals, however, secured only temporary rights to much smaller tracts.⁵⁶

That provision further embittered the rivalry between the Methodists and Baptists. In June 1854 Lewis Doherty, a Shawnee-language interpreter, dictated a petition to Francis Barker demanding the Shawnee school fund be equitably distributed to all missionary groups. Barker forwarded a letter and a copy of the petition to Michigan senator Lewis Cass. In his letter, Barker hinted that Johnson had bribed three Shawnee delegates to win their support of the school fund provision and claimed those delegates intimidated other tribal members from signing Doherty’s petition.⁵⁷

Barker’s actions gained him powerful enemies. Joseph Parks charged that Barker himself wrote the petition and then duped Doherty into gathering the signatures. Agent B. F. Robinson accused Barker of deliberately misleading the Shawnees, who were ignorant of the petition’s contents, and threatened to remove him from the Shawnee reserva-

tion unless he stopped “intermeddling in matters so disconnected and remote from the duties of a missionary.”⁵⁸

Barker’s protests also disturbed Commissioner Manypenny. Barker drafted a letter to Manypenny, claiming there was no evidence that he had fraudulently procured signatures for the petition. He pleaded with Manypenny to consider his many years of missionary work and not to take steps prejudicial to the Baptist school.⁵⁹ Barker’s appeal fell on deaf ears. Manypenny believed Barker had nothing about which to complain, asserting that, during treaty negotiations, the commissioner went to great lengths to convince the Shawnees to include a land grant for the Baptists. Tribal members, Manypenny claimed, objected because they “did not like Mr. Barker; said he was under the influence of those who were not their friends; that he had always kept up strife amongst them; and that they wanted him out of the country.” Manypenny believed that Barker was a tool of “designing men,” who hoped to derail the treaty.⁶⁰

Thomas Johnson likewise denounced Barker. In a message to Secretary of the Interior Robert McClelland, Johnson denied allegations that the government showed favoritism toward the Methodists with regard to the one-hundred-thousand-dollar school fund. He also argued that the Methodists fairly compensated Shawnees for the huge land grant. But if the Senate desired to place the Methodists under the same restrictions as the Baptists and Quakers, Johnson added, the Methodists would not object as long as the improvements “or their value be secured to the several benevolent societies.” Johnson’s and Manypenny’s efforts succeeded. On August 2 the Senate unanimously ratified the treaty with a number of amendments, none of which pertained to the mission schools.⁶¹

58. B. F. Robinson to A. Cumming, June 10, 1854, Letters Received, roll 364; Explanatory Statement from George W. Manypenny, 33d Cong., 1st sess., 1854, S. Exec. Doc. and Rept. 25, 8.

59. Explanatory Statement from George W. Manypenny, 11–12; see also Francis Barker to E. Bright, September 6, 1854, folder 7, roll FM97, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

60. The documentary evidence partially substantiates Manypenny’s claim. He did bring up the Baptist school during negotiations, but there is no evidence that the Shawnees objected to the proposal. See “Ratified Treaty”; Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America, 33d Cong., 1st sess., vol. 9 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969) 344–45, 347–48; Explanatory Statement from George W. Manypenny, 1–7; see also George Manypenny to Sam Houston, July 17, 1854, Letters Sent, roll 49; Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America, 365, 376–77.

61. Thomas Johnson to R. C. McClelland, July 14, 1854, Selected Classes of Letters Received by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1849–1880, roll 18, M825, RG 48, National Archives; Ratified Indian Treaties, 1722–1869, roll 10, M668, National Archives.

55. “Ratified Treaty No. 268: Documents Relating to the Negotiation of the Treaty of May 10, 1854, With the Shawnee Indians,” roll 5, T494, National Archives (hereafter cited as “Ratified Treaty”).

56. Ibid.

57. Francis Barker to Jotham Meeker, May 26, 1854, Meeker Collection; Barker to Lewis Cass, June 8, 1854, Letters Received, roll 787.

Ever the opportunist, Thomas Johnson quickly maneuvered to gain control of the Shawnee school fund. Taking advantage of his presence in Washington, Johnson contacted Commissioner Manypenny on August 3 and proposed a ten-year contract in which the Shawnee Manual Labor School would educate and board up to seventy Shawnee children. For these services, Johnson requested the government pay the Methodists six thousand dollars per year, a portion of which would defray the Methodists' costs for the three sections of land.⁶²

Manypenny forwarded Johnson's proposition to Secretary of Interior McClelland with the advice that the school fund should not be divided among several denominations. It was better, Manypenny observed, "that one Society should manage [the fund], and that one efficient school will be more valuable to the Indians than two or three rival establishments in the same tribe, with the funds so divided as to render each school to some extent inefficient and useless." He added that the Shawnee delegation negotiating the treaty favored the Methodist school, a reputable institution with facilities that "excel those of any other establishment in the Indian Country."⁶³

Before endorsing Johnson's offer, McClelland thought it prudent to consult the Shawnees. Consequently, Manypenny instructed Agent Robinson to present the matter to the Shawnee Council and have it decide which school it preferred. Manypenny did not explicitly state his preference for the Methodists, but he certainly implied it when he wrote that it was "desirable that the fund should be concentrated in a single School, and Agent Robinson will so inform the council and request their judgment on

62. Thomas Johnson to George Manypenny, August 3, 1854, Letters Received, roll 787.

63. George Manypenny to R. McClelland, August 5, 1854, *ibid*; Manypenny to McClelland, August 5, 1854, Report Books, roll 8.

the subject." Thomas Johnson and Robinson undoubtedly pressured the Shawnee Council and successfully convinced its members to award the school fund to the Methodists.⁶⁴

The council's decision fanned Baptist resentment. Several days later Jotham Meeker contacted the mission board in Boston and angrily noted that the Shawnees had granted the entire school fund to the Methodists and "barely permit the Baptists to teach their children." Meeker also reported how Robinson and Johnson told the Shawnees that Commissioner Manypenny wanted Francis Barker out of Indian country. Meeker had developed a fairly close working relationship with Johnson and visited him to discover what was actually said at the meeting. Johnson told Meeker that Barker had lied in his letters to Manypenny and Lewis Cass. Consequently, Manypenny, the secretary of the interior, and the entire Senate looked upon Barker's actions as an insult, and only the government's respect for the Baptist Church prevented any punishment against Barker. Johnson also took offense, telling Meeker that he intended to hold Barker "responsible for every false assertion and insinuation" made against the Methodists. Compounding Barker's difficulties, Meeker discovered that Agent Robinson and Joseph Parks "have joined with [Johnson] in his deadly hatred to our brother Barker." Despite their cordial relationship, Meeker disapproved of Johnson's ambition. Noting Johnson's enormous influence with government officials, Meeker advised the Boston board that "the better way would be, as soon as

64. Robert McClelland to George Manypenny, August 8, 1854, Letters Received, roll 787; Manypenny to Alfred Cumming, August 9, 1854, Letters Sent, roll 49; B. F. Robinson to Cumming, August 22, 1854, Letters Received, roll 364. In November 1854 McClelland endorsed the decision of the Shawnee Council and Johnson's contract proposal. See McClelland to Manypenny, November 21, 1854, Letters Received, roll 787; Manypenny to E. W. Schon, November 24, 1854, Letters Sent, roll 50.

Ever the opportunist, Thomas Johnson quickly maneuvered to gain control of the Shawnee school fund by taking advantage of his presence in Washington.

possible, to discontinue all labors at the Shawanoe Station."⁶⁵

Meeker's suggestion outraged Barker. For years a certain amount of hostility had existed between Barker, on one hand, and Meeker and fellow Baptist John G. Pratt, on the other; Barker attributed their animosity to jealousy because the Shawnees enjoyed a better reputation for industriousness and piety than did Meeker's Ottawas or Pratt's Delaware Indians. But Meeker's latest action convinced Barker more sinister forces were at work. He charged that Meeker was more interested in cultivating the favor of proslavery groups than in helping the Shawnees and that he, Pratt, and Thomas Johnson were conspiring to drive him (Barker) out of Kansas. It seemed to Barker that Johnson had "extended his wings over Mr. Pratt and Mr. Meeker, all darkend as they are with slavery, for the purpose . . . of carrying his ends," which were the extension of slavery, the extraction of a large sum of money from the Shawnee nation, and the removal of Francis Barker.⁶⁶

Others likewise believed the strife over the mission schools was symptomatic of a graver matter. Westport resident Samuel Jones, son of a famous Baptist missionary, contacted the Boston missionary board at the height of the controversy. Jones conveyed his belief that Thomas Johnson and the southern Methodists were determined to remove Barker and any persons who would "not use their influence to bring the Indians to favor the introduction of slavery in Kansas Territory." Jones claimed Johnson and Agent Robinson lied when they stated that the Shawnee Council unanimously awarded the school fund to the Methodists. There was, Jones insisted, much disagreement

within the council, but Johnson and Robinson abruptly cut short any discussion and claimed victory without taking a vote, "well knowing that there would be an overwhelming majority against" the proposal. Jones asserted this treachery was typical of the Methodists, and the corruption was so evident the Indians had lost confidence in them. Never-

theless, Johnson still wielded a great deal of influence because he had the backing of Indian Department officials. Jones alleged Johnson exploited that support to misrepresent the true wishes of the Shawnees in his "desperate effort to get every one away who has the confidence of the Indians, and can give them advice, and information about what is going on." Jones foresaw dire consequences if Johnson succeeded. Not only would many Indian souls be lost, but proslavery forces would gather much strength. Lastly, Jones commented that Meeker and Pratt seemed to be "afraid to sustain Brother Barker." But Jones did not impli-

cate them in any deceitful scheme, believing they hesitated, "lest they should excite the same opposition against themselves."⁶⁷

Lewis Doherty, Barker's Shawnee interpreter, surmised, as Barker did, that Pratt and Meeker were involved in an insidious plot with Thomas Johnson. Without Barker's knowledge, Doherty dictated a letter through Richard Mendenhall of the Friends school to the Baptist mission board. Doherty noted that Meeker had sent Ottawa children to the Methodist school for years where they were "taught to believe that slavery is right" and that Meeker and Pratt conferred frequently "in secret counsel" with Johnson. He asked, "Can it be possible that this course has the sanction of the Board? Will they thus indirectly lend their support to slavery?"

"For myself,"
John G. Pratt
wrote, "I dislike this
mode of proceeding,
it gives an evil ap-
pearance to opera-
tions of a religious
character."

65. Jotham Meeker to Solomon Peck, August 31, 1854, Meeker Collection.

66. Francis Barker to E. Bright, March 1, 1854, folder 7, roll FM97, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society; Barker to Bright, September 2, 1854, *ibid.*; Barker to Bright, September 1854, *ibid.*; Barker to Bright, September 6, 1854, *ibid.*

67. Samuel Jones to E. Bright, September 4, 1854, folder 11, roll FM102, *ibid.*

Doherty intimated that Barker's opposition to slavery, not the school fund issue, fueled his opponents' bitterness. A key part of his enemies' campaign to drive Barker out of Kansas was the controversy concerning the Shawnee petition. Doherty forcefully claimed it was he who dictated the document to Barker and collected the signatures. Many Shawnees, Doherty asserted, supported Barker and would be aggrieved to see his school abandoned. They were, Doherty added, "wholly unwilling to send their children to the Methodist mission to be educated under proslavery influences."⁶⁸

Barker's and Doherty's condemnations of Pratt and Meeker were unwarranted. It is doubtful that the two Baptists conspired to oust Barker; rather, they wanted to abandon the Baptist Shawnee mission because they were angered by the Shawnees' favoritism toward the Methodists.⁶⁹ Moreover, the alleged personal link between Johnson and the two Baptists may not have been as strong as Barker thought. As noted, Meeker criticized some of Thomas Johnson's actions. Pratt did likewise in a January 1855 letter to the mission board. He commented on the profitable farming operations of other denominations, especially those of "the notorious Methodist educator," Thomas Johnson. "For myself," Pratt wrote, "I dislike this mode of proceeding, it gives an evil appearance to operations of a religious character."⁷⁰

Although the extent of Pratt's and Meeker's association with Thomas Johnson is uncertain, the southern Methodists clearly emerged victorious in this denominational rivalry. By early 1855 Francis Barker abandoned the Shawnee station, and the northern Methodists also gave up their short-lived, but hard-fought, venture. The only competitor left was the unobtrusive Quakers.⁷¹

The Methodists' victory proved a loss for the Shawnees. Thomas Johnson's efforts helped unleash a more destruc-

tive force than slavery among the tribe: white encroachment. Indeed, the flood of white settlement drowned out any tribal discord over slavery, as tribal members banded together to protect their homes. After the Kansas-Nebraska bill became law on May 30, 1854, Americans poured across the Missouri border. Congress, however, blundered because it organized Kansas Territory before any treaties with the border tribes had been ratified. Technically, no land in Kansas was legally available for settlement. But the lure of Indian land was too strong; settlers, speculators, and railroad agents fiercely vied with one another in a rapacious land grab. The Shawnee reservation was particularly tempting because it lay just across the Missouri border and offered fertile land and ample timber resources. By July Agent B. F. Robinson declared Indian country was "filled up with Squatters." In the case of the Delaware tribe, this was due, in no small part, to the military, which actually encouraged illegal settlement by organizing a town company and laying out lots.⁷²

Clearly, the struggle that ensued in Kansas Territory was, above all, a contest to control land.⁷³ The majority of Kansas settlers, whether pro- or antislavery, widely ignored Native American land rights. As Commissioner Manypenny wrote, "From highest to lowest amongst the people in Kansas, there has been one continued, persistent, determined effort to plunder the Indians, and by force or fraud to deprive them of their lands. Amongst all their differences the Squatters have uniformly agreed in this."⁷⁴

68. Lewis Dougherty to the Board of the American Missionary Union, September 10, 1854, folder 7, roll FM97, *ibid.*

69. Jotham Meeker to Solomon Peck, August 31, 1854, Meeker Collection; J. G. Pratt to Edward Bright, December 27, 1854, folder 2, roll FM101, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

70. J. G. Pratt to E. Bright, January 12, 1855, folder 2, roll FM101, *ibid.*

71. *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence), March 3, 1855; Robert C. Miller to Alfred Cumming, May 21, 1855, Letters Received, roll 809. Most slavery opponents naturally attributed Barker's demise to his antislavery stance. See "Mycon to the editor," February 9, 1855, *Herald of Freedom*, February 10, 1855; Sara T. L. Robinson, *Kansas; Its Interior and Exterior Life*, 3d ed. (Cincinnati: George S. Blanchard, 1856), 26.

72. B. F. Robinson to Alfred Cumming, July 13, 1854, Letters Received, roll 364; Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1954), 1-3, 19-21; Miner and Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas*, 3-4, 12-15; Anna H. Abel, "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of Their Title," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1903-1904 8 (1904): 93; Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians*, 172; George Manypenny to R. McClelland, September 26, 1854, Letters Received, roll 364.

73. Gates, *Fifty Million Acres*, was the first to critically examine the primacy of the land issue in the Kansas struggle. Subsequent historians have incorporated Gates's interpretation into their own accounts. See, for example, Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 202-3; Rawley, *Race & Politics*, 82-84, 98.

74. George Manypenny to Robert McClelland, February 29, 1856, Report Books, roll 9; see also Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1855, 8. Most *Bleeding Kansas* accounts completely overlook how the contest affected Native Americans. More recent studies have filled that gap. See Miner and Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas*; Joseph B. Herring, *The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990); Herring, "The Chippewa and Munsee Indians: Acculturation and Survival in Kansas, 1850s-1870,"

Armed with that mentality, Americans greedily set out to dispossess the Indians. In the rush, violent clashes over land claims inevitably arose because of the confusing status of Indian lands and because no surveys had been completed. The introduction of slavery added a volatile component to an already explosive situation. Unfortunately, the Indians were caught in the middle.


The Shawnees could not look to Thomas Johnson for refuge, for he was at the center of the unfolding controversy. As the nation's attention focused on Kansas, his notoriety and that of the Methodist school grew. Newspapers throughout the Northeast published letters excoriating Johnson's attempts to extend slavery into Kansas. A correspondent for the Springfield, Massachusetts, *Daily Republican*, for example, labeled Johnson one of the "most determined bitter and unprincipled enemies to Freedom." The author indicted Johnson for betraying the cause of Jesus Christ, in the same vein as Judas Iscariot, by using the Shawnee Manual Labor School to amass a "splendid fortune . . . in the vinyard of his Master." Equally galling was Johnson's use of slaves to increase his riches. Reportedly, one slave netted Johnson a yearly profit of one thousand dollars. In addition, the correspondent charged that Johnson promised one slave family the opportunity to work toward freedom but sold them before they could do so. Lastly, the writer disparaged Johnson's political ambitions. He pointed to the missionary's role in securing passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and also noted that Johnson invited recently appointed Governor Andrew Reeder to locate his offices at the manual labor school, an act that lent credence to rumors that Johnson intended "to be the real governor of this territory."⁷⁵

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 6 (Winter 1983-1984): 212-20; C. A. Weslager, *The Delaware Indians: A History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972), 399-416; William E. Unrau, *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673-1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 164-215; Robert E. Smith, "The Final Removal of the Wyandot Indians," *Westport Historical Quarterly* 7 (June 1972): 6-15.

75. *Springfield Daily Republican*, September 20, 1854, reprinted in "Annals of Shawnee Mission: Final," 250-54, folder 5, box 4, Historic Indians Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. Similar letters are reprinted in *ibid.*, 241-59 *passim*; see also D. W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 43;

It is unclear how much of the correspondent's account is true, but he correctly discerned Johnson's political aspirations. Johnson's experience in Washington whetted his appetite, for he assumed a leading role in Kansas politics and helped shape the territory's immediate future.

Shortly after Andrew Reeder became territorial governor, Johnson told Jotham Meeker that he indeed asked the new governor to establish his executive offices at the Shawnee mission. And, Johnson believed the territorial legislature would also meet at the mission during the coming winter.⁷⁶ In October Reeder arrived in Kansas and eventually made his headquarters at the manual labor school. His first move was to hold an election for a territorial delegate on November 29. Once again, Johnson worked on behalf of the slave interests. He campaigned for proslavery candidate John W. Whitfield and encouraged Jotham Meeker to do his best to secure Whitfield's election.⁷⁷ Whitfield won easily, but fraud tainted his victory, as Missourians crossed into Kansas and voted illegally to ensure his election. Sadly, this process was repeated the following year, further polarizing the territory.

By 1855 the Shawnees and Thomas Johnson took different paths with regard to slavery. The tribe closed ranks and muted tribal differences in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to maintain its Kansas lands. Johnson's actions, however, only served to intensify the slavery controversy. He was elected to Kansas's first territorial legislature and helped secure passage of its stringent proslavery laws, a key step toward Bleeding Kansas. Prior to this episode, the slavery issue in this region had been limited to a war of words. But it was an undeniably contentious issue among whites and Indians alike. Ironically, preachers who were meant to be men of peace propelled the controversy to a more violent stage that eventually precipitated the most destructive conflict in American history. 

William Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas By Missouri and Her Allies* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Co., 1856), 16-18; "S. H. C. to the editor," *New York Daily Times*, November 15, 1856, in *Indian Missions in Kansas* clippings, 1:153, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

76. Jotham Meeker to Solomon Peck, August 31, 1854, Meeker Collection; see also Thomas Johnson to Meeker, November 2, 1854, *ibid.*

77. Thomas Johnson to Jotham Meeker, November 25, 1854, *ibid.*

