Josiah Miller around 1860.
Josiah Miller, an Antislavery Southerner: Letters to Father and Mother

by Dennis M. Dailey

Josiah Miller arrived in Lawrence, Kansas Territory, in the fall of 1854, just a few months after the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act. For the next sixteen years, until his death in 1870 at age forty-two, he was active in journalism, local and territorial politics, and a wide variety of business activities. When Miller arrived in Lawrence, he and his friend and business partner, Robert G. Elliott, set about the establishment of the Kansas Free State newspaper, which was one of Miller’s initial motivations for coming to Lawrence. He was also concerned with finding a suitable place for his father, mother, and several siblings to settle. It took until April 1858 for Miller’s family to join him in Kansas Territory, and in the years between his arrival and theirs, they kept up a correspondence on matters personal and political that survives as a witness to the struggles of frontier life during the days of Bleeding Kansas.¹

Josiah Miller’s family dates back to the immigration of his great-great-grandfather, also named Josiah, who moved his family to Chester District, South Carolina, in the mid-1700s. Josiah’s father, Robert Hyndman Miller, a third-generation South Carolinian, was born on December 6, 1796, in Chester, South Carolina. Robert married Susannah McAliley on January 14, 1823. Susannah’s parents and grandparents had migrated to Chester District at the same time as Robert’s parents and grandparents. Robert, like most of his family before him, became a prosperous farmer and he and Susannah had ten children. Their son Josiah was born in Chester District, South Carolina, on November 12, 1828.

In a book titled Missouri’s Memorable Decade, 1860–1870: An Historical Sketch, Personal — Political — Religious, Josiah’s brother George wrote that the “family were members of the Associated Scotch Presbyterian Church. This church at an early day took strong grounds against slavery. . . . No one owning slaves was permitted to become a member of this church. But as the proslavery sentiment began to encroach upon these Associated Church communities, one family after another would sell out and move north.”

Fifteen years before Robert and Susannah Miller left South Carolina for the North, a significant and galvanizing event took place. With the Associated Church losing membership, finding full-time ministers was difficult. The new minister who finally came to the local Smyrna Church was assaulted by proslavery partisans following his first sermon; they tarred and feathered him and drove him from the community. Robert Miller was “so impressed by the outrage” that he pursued legal action. Shortly thereafter, he too was “brutally treated” and only recovered after several months had passed. Despite this experience, Robert and Susannah decided, for the time being, to stay in South Carolina.

These violent encounters were surely difficult for the entire Miller family and the Associated Church community, and they had a lasting impact on Josiah, who was at the time a mere twelve years old. Just six years after this “outrage” against his father, Josiah Miller, “refusing to live longer in social ostracism, went north.” He left to attend Indiana University, from which he graduated in 1852. He then studied law in Poughkeepsie, New York.

After Josiah Miller arrived in Kansas Territory in 1854, he set to work trying to find a suitable place for his father, mother, and several siblings to settle. For generations the family had lived in Chester District, South Carolina, but in the run up to the Civil War life in the South became more and more dangerous for antislavery families like the Millers. Josiah’s father, Robert Hyndman Miller, pictured, was “brutally treated” by proslavery neighbors before heading north in the late 1850s. Photograph courtesy of the author.
Carlisle on January 3, 1854. In partnership with his father, Josiah was involved in land speculation, and traveled for business to Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. Again, his concern for his parents was always at hand and occupied his attention. Josiah also renewed his friendship with his former college friend, Robert Elliott, and together they began making plans to start a newspaper, even though neither had a journalism background. It was the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act that turned Josiah Miller’s attention towards Kansas and the possibility of settling in Lawrence.

According to historian Bill Cecil-Fronsman, Miller’s short stay in Illinois before going to Lawrence was significant in shaping his philosophy. “He joined Daniel B. Combs as the co-editor of the Bloomington Central Illinois Times,” explained Cecil-Fronsman, and many of the positions “staked out” by Combs in Illinois “closely resembled those taken by the Free State. Although Combs denied being a ‘ranting abolitionist,’ he denounced slavery and looked forward to the day ‘when the tightly riveted bands of oppression shall be rented asunder.’”

In the few months following his arrival in Lawrence, Miller became involved in local and territorial politics. His strong feelings in the contest between antislavery and proslavery elements in the area were early reflected in editorials in his newspaper. His free-soil position contrasted somewhat from that of the eastern abolitionists who had come to Lawrence with the New England Emigrant Aid Company. “Positioning itself ideologically between abolitionist New Englanders and proslavery Missourians,” Cecil-Fronsman asserted,

the Free State helped craft a strategy that united opponents of slavery around a common denominator. The Free State emphasized slavery’s doleful effect on whites and made the harm inflicted upon slaves themselves a secondary concern. Despite opposing efforts to exclude blacks from the territory, the editors eventually capitulated to the racist elements in their movement. To no small degree was the successful establishment of the Kansas free-state movement the result of the newspaper’s ability to find this common ground.8

The Reverend Richard Cordley, a contemporary of Miller, observed that “Josiah Miller was different. . . . He belonged to a class which was one of the unrecognized elements in the Kansas problem. He was an anti-slavery man from the South. It was common to consider all immigrants from the South as in favor of slavery. But many of the most determined opponents to slavery were from the South. . . . Josiah Miller grew up without any great love for the peculiar institution of his native state.”9 As an antislavery Southerner, Miller was well positioned to seek a middle ground. He was not an ardent abolitionist, yet had strong feelings about the immorality of slavery, given his religious upbringing in South Carolina. He was committed to Kansas entering the Union as a free state, but was not beyond compromises that might be necessary to achieve that goal. In some respects he was the right man at the right time.

The first issue of the Kansas Free State newspaper was dated January 3, 1855, but it appeared on the streets of Lawrence on January 10.10 Miller wasted little time making his position on slavery and Kansas as a free state clear. In the fifth issue, published on February 14, he wrote:

Our neighbors in Missouri have rather a stormy time in their Legislature. The balloting for the U.S. Senator, by the last accounts, show a drilling of forces, and an unwavering adherence to their respective candidates by each of the three parties, which we have seldom seen equaled. It is the general opinion that none of these parties can effect a compromise, and without which there can be no election. But such a result would be much more desirable, than the election of a Slavery Propagandist, such as the candidate of the Secessionist. . . . We never wish those in our national council who are constantly grasping for supremacy, although they now possess a power greatly superior to that which their numbers entitles them, and who are not content with the whole of our immense territory in which to establish the institution of slavery, but demand also the privilege of inflicting this curse upon other States, in opposition to the popular will. What means the assertion that the Federal compact protects the slaveholder in possession of his human property wherever he may please to carry

8. Ibid., 102–4.
continued, however, to engage in the politics of the day. He traveled east in the summer of 1856 to canvas on behalf of John C. Frémont, the Republican candidate for president. He returned to Lawrence in the fall of 1856 and in 1857 stood for and was elected probate judge for Douglas County, Kansas Territory.\(^2\)

\[\text{While Miller busied himself with political and business affairs in Lawrence, his parents and several siblings left South Carolina and spent two years in Illinois before finally deciding to settle in Lawrence. They arrived in Leavenworth on the steamer \textit{Duncan S. Carter} from St. Louis on the Missouri River, thence to Lawrence on April 15, 1858. Miller had already acquired farmland for them about two miles southeast of downtown Lawrence.}^3\]

\[\text{The family quickly set about constructing their home and necessary out buildings, which they occupied in late December 1858.}^4\]

\[\text{Just as they had done in South Carolina, Robert and Susannah Miller focused primarily on farming and caring for those children who still lived at home, three of whom were teenagers.}^5\]

\[\text{The elder Miller also joined Josiah in numerous business activities, including the purchase and sale of town lots and the con-}\

\[\text{Miller lost interest in the newspaper business by early 1856, dissolving his partnership with Elliott, who had failed to uphold his end of their financial agreement. Miller}^6\]

\[\text{Outraged by the attack on his father, Miller left the South to attend Indiana University. There he married Agnes B. Carlisle in 1854, the year this photograph was made. Throughout this period and in partnership with his father, Josiah was involved in land speculation, traveling for business to Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. Photograph courtesy of the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence.}^7\]

\[\text{11. Josiah Miller, “Missouri Legislature,” (Lawrence) \textit{Kansas Free State}, February 14, 1855.}^8\]


\[\text{13. Of the original 1858 farmstead, five acres remain. The original house and several out buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places, and the property is known as the Robert Miller Home. Various Miller family members occupied the home for about one hundred years. It was then owned by Leo and Dorothy Eller. Since 1983 the author and his family have owned and cared for this historic property. National Register Nomination available online at kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/Douglas_MillerRobertHHouseNR.pdf; on the elder Millers’ removal from South Carolina, March 1856 migration to southern Illinois, and final removal to Lawrence, see Miller, \textit{Missouri’s Memorable Decade}, 29.}^10\]

\[\text{14. Less than a year following his arrival in Lawrence, Robert won an award for his watermelons and beets from the Douglas County Agricultural Society, which held its first annual fair on October 8, 1859. A copy of that award can be found in the Miller files, Watkins Community Museum, Douglas County Historical Society, Lawrence, Kansas.}^11\]
struction of the Miller Block in the now seven hundred block of Massachusetts Street. Among others things, the Miller Block served as a meeting place for the territorial legislature after the Free State Party gained control in 1858.

Unlike Josiah, Robert Miller does not appear to have been particularly political. He was, however, involved in Underground Railroad activities in Douglas County, which would not be surprising given his religious beliefs and experiences in South Carolina. This would have been a quiet activity, since discovery could be dangerous to person and property, and it would be prudent given that proslavery settlers lived in the neighborhood and the proslavery settlement of Franklin was just two miles away. Josephine Shirar McGonigle, in her history of Eudora, Kansas, wrote: “The southern route Stop Station led to a three story barn (located at Twenty-third Street and Lawrence Avenue), with the northern route Station passing through the pasture (the Miller farm), via the unearthed trenches of Fort Franklin.” Slaves were sheltered in a smokehouse on the Miller farmstead.

Although he was elected in the fall of 1859 as a senator in the first state legislature, Josiah Miller continued to serve as probate judge until Kansas was admitted to the Union as the thirty-fourth state in January 1861. When the legislature convened in March, he assumed his new role as senator from Douglas County. He served for less than a year in this position before resigning to become the Lawrence postmaster, another significant and prestigious position in territorial and early statehood times.

On February 19, 1863, Thomas Carney, the second governor of Kansas, commissioned Josiah Miller as “an Aid-de-Camp to the Commander-in-Chief, with the rank of Colonel.” Just a week later a second gubernatorial appointment named Josiah Miller, along with S. M. Thorp and Isaac T. Goodnow, to a commission charged with identifying a suitable location for a state university. After a somewhat political process involving bribes and backroom dealings, they selected Lawrence as the site, which the legislature confirmed.

15. Josephine Shirar McGonigle, Mankind Yields (Lawrence, Kans.: Meseraull Printing Inc., 1978), 90; see also file on Rebecca Brooks Harvey, Watkins Community Museum, Douglas County Historical Society, Lawrence, Kansas, in which Harvey, born a slave in North Carolina, describes her arrival in Lawrence. “The refugees as they were called suffered many hardships,” wrote McGonigle. “They landed in the woods immediately East of Lawrence called Miller Grove.” On Harvey see also Katie H. Armitage, “Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free: African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 31 (Autumn 2008): 154–75. In personal conversations with descendants of Robert Miller, the author learned that frequent references were made at Miller family gatherings to Robert’s involvement in the Underground Railroad. It is also interesting, but maybe not unusual, that in the year prior to the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Robert Miller had regularly hired blacks to work on his farm. See Robert Miller’s diary in “Account Book,” RH MS C24, Robert H. Miller Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence; see also Diane Mutti-Burke, On Slavery’s Border: Missouri’s Small Slaveholding Households (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2010).


17. At the same time, Emporia acquired the Normal School and Manhattan took advantage of the recently passed Land Grant College Act to found the State Agricultural College. The original cover letter and commissioning document are in the author’s personal collection; for the letter of appointment to the university committee see Thomas Carney to Josiah Miller, February 24, 1863, folder 6, box 1, “Correspondence 1863,” RH MS 4, Josiah Miller Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter cited as “Miller Collection”). See also Clifford S. Griffin, “The University of Kansas and the Years of Frustration, 1854–1864,” Kansas Historical Quarterly 32 (Spring 1966): 26–28; and Griffin, The University of Kansas: A History (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), 23–26.
In early summer of 1863 Josiah Miller resigned as postmaster in Lawrence. In a letter dated July 28, 1863, signed by Edward Stanton, Secretary of War, Miller was notified of his presidential appointment as a paymaster in the U.S. Army with the rank of major. In a letter from Fort Leavenworth dated April 17, 1864, Miller wrote to his brother William complaining that he was not being informed about his business interests. He questioned, “what are the negroes doing on the farm?,” and described the difficulty he was having in getting his superior to accept his resignation. Miller expressed eagerness to get home and general dissatisfaction with his wartime service. Following the completion of this service in the Civil War, he returned to Lawrence, where he was again elected to the state legislature in 1866.

Throughout his sixteen years in Lawrence, Miller’s life was a mix of journalism, advocacy for Kansas as a free state, politics, and a variety of business enterprises. By 1857 his involvement in the Kansas Free State had ended and the question of Kansas entering the Union as a free state had been largely resolved. Politics and business were the focus of his last years. He was very active in state politics and at the same time was a principle in the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad, the Lawrence Bridge Company, and the Lawrence Dam Water Power and Manufacturing Company. Josiah Miller died on July 7, 1870, from complications following leg surgery in St. Louis, Missouri.

From the time he left South Carolina at the age of eighteen to go to school, Miller kept up an active correspondence. What follows are ten letters dating from early in 1855 to August 29, 1858, written to his father and mother. Although there are a few extant letters before and after these dates, the letters selected here focus on Josiah Miller’s reflections during the early settlement period in Lawrence and Kansas Territory. The letters were edited to reduce repetitiveness and to focus on Miller’s descriptions of life in early Kansas, but occasional lapses in spelling, punctuation, and grammar have not been corrected. Words or phrases that could not be identified are purposely left blank, but seldom detract from understanding Miller’s intent.

This partial letter, perhaps the first extant correspondence to his parents from Lawrence, Kansas Territory, appears to have been written in late 1854 or early 1855. It reflects the intensity of Miller’s feeling towards slavery, although his prediction that the South would not leave the Union over slavery was to be an error. His curiosity about how Southerners felt towards the Kansas–Nebraska bill and the “Emigrant Aid Association” are illuminating. Perhaps it reflected the fact that he retained his Southern roots and old attachments, despite the negative feelings he harbored towards the South, and in particular how poorly his family was treated at the hands of proslavery neighbors. He retained a sense that South Carolina and Chester District were, after all, home.

[to Father and Mother]

. . . to move you should have somebody along who has traveled a good deal or you will be impeded upon. I have made all the suggestions in my letters that I can think of. I give them for what they are worth. From everything proposed you can select what you think most judicious & expedient. . . . I would like to hear from you soon. Let me know what the Southern papers think of the Nebraska Bill & the Emigrant Aid Association. The disposition of the North is to make an Anti Slavery President in ’56. The North say no more slave States & one object in Kansas is to run a line of Free States from Nebraska to the Gulf of Mexico & thus hem in the Slave States & say no more

21. All of the letters transcribed and published in this article, unless otherwise noted, are located in folders 1–3, box 1, Miller Collection, and images of most of the original handwritten letters are available on territorialkansasonline.org. The author is indebted to Carol Francis, who transcribed some of the letters as a part of her book, Carol Buhler Francis, The House Building: My Search for Its Foundations (Lawrence, Kans.: Transom Work Press, 1990).

22. An earlier letter, dated September 10, 1854, not included in this article of letters from Lawrence, was written from the “Wyandot Nation, 8 miles from the Mouth of the Kansas River,” apparently shortly before Miller settled in Lawrence. Miller made no mention of Lawrence, but he does discuss his and Elliott’s plan for starting a newspaper that was to be called the Kansas Free State, which would “cherish an uncompromising hostility to any and every attempt to legalize slavery in Kansas or any of the territories.” Josiah Miller to Father and Mother, September 10, 1854, photocopy of original, RH MS P901, Miller Collection; a typed copy of a transcript of the “partial letter,” which is in the author’s personal collection, was provided by Carol Francis, Lawrence, Kansas.

23. Even though Josiah was very antislavery, he was not abolitionist, and soon he had difficulties with the Emigrant Aid Company. He did, however, accept its contribution to the resolution of the slavery question in Kansas. This is probably what gave rise to his curiosity about how Southerners might view the company’s activities.
Two buildings are associated with the Kansas Free State on this 1854–1855 map of Lawrence. The map, drawn by J. E. Rice, who arrived in town in April 1855 with the first New England Emigrant Aid Company party of that year, shows Lawrence from the perspective of Seventh Street looking north down, from left to right, Vermont and Massachusetts Streets toward the Kansas River. Building 2—halfway down Massachusetts Street—is labeled “Kansas Free State Office” and Building 17—on the far southwest side of Vermont—as “Miller and Elliot’s [sic] Old Printing Office.” While Rice may have made his drawing in 1855, the building labels appear to have been added later and are not in all cases accurate. Rather, the map seems to include some structures from 1854 that no longer stood and others that were not built until 1855, so that it is more a composite of Lawrence’s early years than an exact snapshot of any single moment. In May 1856 the offices and presses of the Free State and the abolitionist Herald of Freedom, Building 3 on Rice’s map located just south of the Free State offices on Massachusetts, were destroyed in the sacking of Lawrence by proslavery forces.

extension of slavery. I believe the proper feeling is afloat at the North to do what they say. They begin to feel that they have been scared with threats of Disunion long enough & that there is no danger of the South leaving the Union. . . . We are going to make a model Free State of Kansas not let it fuss through all the various stages of the ordinary pionerey state but aim at the highest civilization at once. Our eastern men are going to establish manufacturies ______ at once, schools, churches, RRs & hundreds and Millions of Dollars will be put into Kansas soon & lands will become suddenly valuable. But we can’t buy any lands here yet as they are not yet surveyed & will not be for one year. The Eastern Company bought a hotel in Kansas on the line of MO. as a receiving house for $10,000. It will be used to receive persons emigrating to the Territory & will take care of them until such time as they can get places. 24

Let me know all the current news. . . . Tell Sam McAliley & Dr. Reedy, Mat McKevin & other [proslavery neighbors] that I have made & am making & am going to make a vast number of Free Soilers, that my every effort pecuniary, mentally & physically shall forever be

directed against Slavery. That part of the moral world under pestiferous influence all intellect languishes & all virtue dies, that paralyses the hand of industry weakens intellectual effort and retards the moral progress of our otherwise great & glorious nation. That I am a Free Soiler, or am an Abolitionist—whatever they have in mind to call me—that I remember the treatment Morgan & I rec’d at their hands & shall eternally fight against them.\(^\text{25}\) George is interested in the same great cause & Samuel McCan’s son is all right on the question. I have worried myself a great deal about one thing & another & do not feel very well. I have walked 10 & 12 miles before breakfast several times & a 20 mile walk after 3 o’clock before supper. Such efforts have reduced me very much. This world has but few charms for me & I am going to spend my life as dearly & as splendidly as I can. But I shall ever remember as the most pleasant remembered assistance you have lent me thus far & the great interest you take in me.\(^\text{26}\)

Yours most sincerely & affectionately
Josiah Miller

The tension between Josiah Miller and Charles Robinson, the New England Emigrant Aid Company, and much of the eastern establishment they represented became apparent shortly after Miller arrived in Lawrence. Miller saw himself as a westerner, which is interesting given his roots in the Deep South. He clearly opposed slavery, but did not think of himself as an abolitionist. It was an important distinction, which allowed the editors of the Kansas Free State to seek and achieve some middle ground in the battle for Kansas. And Miller and Elliott found a great deal of support, even in Lawrence, for this position. Indeed, many Kansas settlers were antislavery more as a matter of economic reality than a strong positive feeling towards blacks, slave or free.

\(^\text{25}\) These few sentences capture the intensity of Miller’s antislavery beliefs, the essence of the free-soil political stance, and his commitment to the success of the free-state movement. In many ways this stance was less about slavery as a moral wrong, in and of itself, and more about the economic costs of a system that allowed for slavery and free labor. Freesoilers were quick to point out the economic superiority of the North. For a rich discussion of the free-soil/free-state ideology in Kansas, see Nicole Etcheson, Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

\(^\text{26}\) Josiah rather regularly made reference to his less-than-good health. He does appear to have been prone to anxiety, not only about his health, but about many events in his life. There is also a pessimistic tone in his writing, which might suggest some sort of mood disorder or depression. These observations are subjective, of course, but may be useful in understanding Josiah Miller.

Dear Father and Mother:

We are now in receipt of two letters from you of the 27th July having enclosed a draft on the Bank of the Republic of NY for $250. The other I got this morning. I should have written to you immediately upon receipt of the check. I wrote to you some time ago about moving this fall. If you cannot collect all of your money you will have to leave it & I will go down and collect it for you afterwards & not ask you to go back. Two revolvers & a knife is all I want & the first man that touches me in a violent manner I blow him through. . . .

You remember my prediction when I first left home with Dale while we were going to Chester. “I said that you ought to get away from the South as soon as possible, that this Slavery question would continue to agitate until before ten years civil war & disunion would be the result.” This I told you as we were going from the Widow Whites into Lawrence. There is over three years of the time to come yet, as things now look everything goes to strengthen the prediction. If you cant collect your money this fall you can by spring by urging it very strongly. If Castles fails to pay you I will be none to[o] good to blow his brains out. . . .

There were a few men from the Free States who voted & returned home, but they were men who had come out with no intention of voting at all, only stayed to see the results, but ______ fraudently cast their votes. There was not over 25 of these men altogether whereas there was 1200 illegal voters from Mo. at this one place.

As to Robinson’s address. So odious has the Aid Co. & its Agent Robinson become that any thing that he has to do with is looked on with suspicion. While he was delivering the address many men who might go with the Free State party left the ground and swore that they would always in future be found on the Proslavery side. I know the people in the States will condemn me for this, but thank God the people of the Territory sustain me even in this District where so many Eastern men are[.] I can raise a great majority on my side as was demonstrated last Saturday when we elected my ticket by 2 votes to 1 in opposition.\(^\text{27}\)

\(^\text{27}\) The personal and political animosity between Robinson and Miller persisted throughout the territorial period. “Complicating relations between the Aid Company and the Free State was Josiah Miller’s legal practice,” wrote Cecil-Fronsman. “Miller represented a group of squatters whom the Aid Company was seeking to dispossess. At issue was whether its town site claims took precedence over those of the squatters. Miller successfully defended the squatters and forced a
My field is Kansas Territory and the States. I can rally more Southern men to the support of the Free State ticket than any other man in the Territory. Because I am disposed to treat them with a decent respect. There is no good sense in driving them on to the Proslavery side when we can just as well have them act with us.

J. A. Dale is at work here for $1.50 per day making enough to support him well. Junkins is still ploughing & teaming some. He is now making hay. We have a very fine prospect for corn at present in Kansas.

We will have a very interesting time when they come to enforce their laws, as most Free State men are determined to resist them to the last. I think I can invest your money to a good advantage in Wyandotte. I am going to look out a good farm there for you.

Elliott & myself must dissolve partnership. We cannot get along any longer. He furnishes no money nor does he do anything about the office. Write soon.

Yours as ever
Josiah Miller

The next letter home was written just days after the free-state faction refused to participate in the election for congressional representative. A few days later freestaters held their own election. Miller captured well the increased animosities that were building over the establishment of Kansas as a free state or a slave state.

Office of “Free State”
Oct 15th 1855

Dear Father & Mother

We received yours of the 20th Sept in due time. Were glad to hear that all were well for which we should be ever thankful for such mercies. We have not had any war yet in Kansas, nor do we anticipate any soon. There was no such thing as 70 Missourians going through the territory driving off Free State Settlers. Our elections are all over, but we have not yet the returns.

Robinson, general agent of the Aid Company, had arisen because the Free State’s editors had stopped Robinson’s ‘swindling operations.’ ‘Because we did this,’ Miller and Elliott charged, Robinson ‘seeks all the vile means he can to crush us to the earth and drive us from the Territory.’ Although viewed from the outside as a center of abolitionism, all was not harmony and good will in early Lawrence or within the free-state movement. Cecil-Fronsman, “The Kansas Free State,” 109.


29. The proslavery territorial legislature called an election for October 1, 1855, to choose a delegate to Congress. John W. Whitfield was reelected. The free-state faction refused to participate but held its own election for delegates to the Topeka Constitutional Convention and a delegate to Congress on October 9. Former governor Andrew Reeder won the latter position. Etcheson, Bleeding Kansas, 69–88.
about 2,200 for Whitfield the Pro Slavery candidate. It is also thought that Governor Reeder will have a larger vote than Whitfield, notwithstanding his foreign vote.30 This will be a great triumph to the Free State Party. Everything passed off quietly at both elections, tho many foreigners appeared at the first and voted for Whitfield. We cast 557 votes in this town for Reeder. I am glad Reeder has been so well sustained as I was the first one that suggested his name as candidate. He had prepared all the evidence he can get so as to contest Whitfield’s seat. He takes the name of every voter, as well as the returns of the election with him to Washington. There are at least three Free State voters to 1 Pro Slavery. There is on hand a State Organization at present which bids fair to prove something serious. How it will terminate I know not. It is the design to apply for admission into the Union this winter & it is presumed we will be successful. In the meantime we design to get up a State organization and pass laws for our own government keeping up our State government until we are admitted. This is an awful crisis in our affairs at present. How it will go we know not. The laws and acts of the people of the Territory will be in direct antagonism to the laws of the late Pseudo-Legislature.31 Governor Shannon and all the Territorial officials will be arranged on one side & the people on the other. Then comes the tug of war. By this course we place Congress & the Administration in a position in which they must define their position in regard to these outrages.

Mr. Elliott has been sick for near four weeks with fever. He was near well but caught cold & it settled in his thigh so that he cannot walk. We have had no division of lots yet. He proposes giving me one half of the lots & paying me all the money that I have put in. But I do not like to have it until Kansas is a free State. He is unwilling to allow me any more than one half of the lots. I want two thirds for what money I used of yours & what I put in and what I put in more than he has. I presume we will have a good deal of difficulty about it.

As to moving out West, we were pleased to hear of it. We forgot how many acres you have. We do not know whether $2,000 is enough or not for it. We suppose it is as much as you will get. . . . I think there is no danger in sending money thru if you are careful to have the letters registered when mailed under the new law. You can always get a duplicate if it is lost. I think I can invest to good advantage before Spring. I have put your last 250 in town lots here. . . . Had Elliott not been sick I would have been down to Wyandotte before this time to look at those lands. I think I can get a good little farm for you there. . . . There are but few Eastern Emigrants this season to the Territory. I believe none of the Free Staters as such have promised any help yet. The Editors in this town said a good deal about help when it is necessary for our assistance.

The Legislature of Nebraska met last winter. It was free soil I believe. The slavery question was not agitated there at all. The question there was in regard to locating the Capital. This created a good deal of excitement.

Luisa Dale is teaching school near Bloomington Ind & doing well. Jim is here working a $1.50 per day every day he wishes to work. He and Junkins board themselves doing their own cooking & the latter is engaged in teaming. It is very sickly in the West this season, especially in some parts of Kansas. We have not yet seen the “Christian Standard” you speak of sending me. If you had only cut the piece out & sent it in a letter it would have been more sure to come. I would be very glad to see it. Send it yet if you can get a copy. As [George] Brown is all the time charging me with being Pro Slavery, it might be of advantage.32 Let me know where William Dale has gone to. How Francis Ready & Walker families are doing.

I paid near 1,000 dollars in to the Free State & Elliott has about $275. So I have stopped operations until he gets some money & also to move our office into another building for which I pay $150 per year rent. I can rent the old office for that amount.

Yours truly
Josiah Miller

30. Governor Andrew Reeder was Kansas’s first territorial governor, but after a short tenure he was removed by President Franklin Pierce, a pro-Southern Democrat. The Pierce administration had accused Reeder of speculating on land, although the freestaters believed it was because Reeder had raised objection to the “bogus” legislature. Reeder was subsequently nominated as a congressional candidate by the Free State Party. “Foreigners” is obviously a reference to the Missourians who crossed the border at every occasion to vote in early territorial elections, including the March 30, 1855, election called for by Governor Reeder to choose the first territorial legislature. Craig Miner, Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State: 1854–2000 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002); and Etcheson, Bleeding Kansas, 50–68.

31. The usual reference to the proslavery territorial legislature, following the disputed election on March 30, 1855, was “bogus” legislature, but Miller opted for “Pseudo-Legislature” here.

32. George Washington Brown was the editor of the Herald of Freedom, another early Lawrence newspaper and the organ of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. The Kansas Free State stood in some opposition to Charles Robinson and the Herald of Freedom and combined with Miller’s South Carolina roots it was easy to imply, if not directly accuse him of being proslavery. The conflict between Robinson and his allies and their staunch abolitionist position contrasted with the antislavery free-soil position held by Miller and Elliott that admitted to some areas of compromise. Cecil-Fronsman, “The Kansas Free State,” 109.
Although still involved in political activities, particularly the creation of the Free State Party and the preparation of a state constitution to be submitted to Congress, by late 1855 Miller’s attention turned more strongly to business. He was very active in the purchase and resale of town lots in the growing city of Lawrence. Miller also realized that newspaper publishing was not as rewarding as he initially thought. His rewards from publishing were economically modest at best, and his general feeling of not being appreciated for his efforts was apparent. Clearly, however, he got personal rewards for both his political and business involvement.

Office of Free State
Nov 26th, 1855

Dear Father and Mother.

Yours of the 29th Oct is at hand found us all enjoying good health & this has us so, hoping that it will find you all well, for which we have great reason to be thankful for such blessings. As to the check of $550. It arrived safe some time ago & I wrote you immediately on the receipt of it. I have a good deal of difficulty in getting them cashed. The 250 one I had to send to Missouri & pay $1.50 on it[;] the last one I got cashed here at its face. The reason of this is the vast amount of checks accumulating here. All the immigrants bring their money in checks expecting to get them cashed at this point, & having no Banks or brokers houses nearer than some points in MO. we have to do the best we can on them. Well I find it very difficult to get any land in Wyandott yet as the land is not yet all surveyed & the Indians have not yet made their selections. There is a good deal of delay & threatening by Indian Agents to scare off the Whites but some of the Indians have agreed to let me know when I can buy. 

33. This is likely a reference to the Wyandot Float and the Shawnee Indian tribe, which occupied a large area of east-central Kansas Territory where Miller was searching for a farm site for his parents and speculating on other lands that might be available. The Float provided that the Shawnee had first choice of lands available. See Homer E. Socolofsky, “Wyandot Floats,” Kansas Historical Quarterly 36 (Autumn 1970): 241–304.

The tension between Josiah Miller and Charles Robinson, the New England Emigrant Aid Company, and much of the eastern establishment they represented became apparent shortly after Miller arrived in Lawrence. Miller clearly opposed slavery, but did not think of himself as an abolitionist. Indeed, many Kansas settlers were antislavery more as a matter of economic reality than a strong positive feeling towards blacks, slave or free. Both Miller and Robinson, along with several others involved in the proslavery/free-state debate, are listed as speakers on this advertisement for a September 1855 mass meeting on “the important questions now before the people of Kansas.”

Josiah Miller, an Antislavery Southerner 77
I have invested the $250 check in town lots here. I think I can double the money by spring on them. The Post Master & myself have bought lots in a certain spot in town & design moving the P.O. on to one of them & this will improve the value of all. The other check I am putting into gold & have it ready when a chance offers in Wyandott to put it in.

Well I presume Elliott & myself have dissolved partnership. He had only 430 dollars in the paper at first & he has been paying his board 3.00 per week & other incidental expenses out of that ever since & the paper did no more than pay expenses & I have sustained it all along this far & Elliott too, & it seemed impossible to get him to raise any money. So I gave him an equal division of the lots & bought his interest in some so that it reduced my sum in the office to $800. I told him that there must be a dissolution, that I could not go on this way unless he would get money that I could not give him one half of the profits & sustain all the expenses myself. Well I declared that he would not leave the paper that he had no other occupation, but I being a lawyer could get along better than he. It went on in this way until three or four weeks when I concluded he might have the office & I would go at something more lucrative, viz. the practice of law & buy & selling real estate. . . . There being no vehicle of agreement between Elliott & myself I can dissolve the partnership at any time & proceed to sell out the concern & wind it up & this I will do if he does not pay me & come up to his agreement of dissolution. I find that publishing papers is not just the thing. We have suffered a great deal physically lost a good deal pecuniarily & elevate more men into power & get nothing for it whatever. They seem to think that in the dispensation of office that Editors have enough of glory & desire no promotion. Quite a number of men have crawled into office through our paper & yet they never think of giving a dime for it.34 Papers will not pay except they be in cities. I can make myself rich by pursuing one course now & that is to devote my whole attention to land, law & trading in real estate & the sooner I commence the better. By going out now I can superintend my town lots & buildings & make it pay very well. I was offered $20. per month rent for a house that cost me $175. but I was living in it & had no other place to go.

We had a very serious accident here the other day. One of our steam saw mills burst her boiler tearing everything all to fragments & killing one man dead & dangerously injuring another, both visitors at the mill[,] all the hands escaped unhurt. It was a serious loss to the proprietors—to the community & to the families of those kill[ed] & wounded. It was the best of the three we have here.35 This deranged my and Junkins calculations about lumber as Junkins was hauling logs to it at the time of the explosion. The great lack here is lumber. The town is improving very rapidly.

Everything is suspended here now. All appears to be waiting to see what Congress will do for us. The Free State party has this constitution all ready, we publish it this week. We shall apply for admission this winter and then comes the tug of war. . . .

Josiah Miller

It appears Miller misdated the following letter, perhaps not yet having made the mental transition to the new year. His parents had apparently made their long anticipated decision to leave South Carolina and had successfully sold their land.

Lawrence, K.T. Jan 4th 1855 [sic, 1856]

Dear Father and Mother.

Yours of the 27 Nov is at hand, being a long time detained & one written by Margarett dated 10th Dec arrived with it at the time. We have written to you of late but owing to the irregularity of the mails it is very uncertain whether they go safe or not. We were very sorry to hear of Robert being so afflicted with Rheumatism. Cotton clothing is a very unhealthy kind of dress in the winter season. It is some what strange to find so young a person so much afflicted with that disease. Well we received the check you speak of. As to what you should bring with you I meant your Beds and Bed clothing all as feather beds cannot be had in this country at all. You need not overload yourself with cotton clothing as you will have but little need for such here. Were it not for Reedys family I would advise you to all come by the [railroad] cars and [steam] boats, &

34. In a “Valedictory” appearing on February 18, 1856, Josiah Miller announced that he had transferred his interest in the newspaper to Elliott the previous November, but for unspecified reasons the paper carried Miller’s name—“Miller & Elliott”—until after the February 18 issue was published. Kansas Free State, February 18, 1856; and Cecil-Fronsman, “The Kansas Free State,” 114.

35. By late 1855 Lawrence had three mills providing wood for building. The loss of this mill had a significant impact on the pace of construction in Lawrence. There were increasingly long waits for building products. A dramatic example of this was the efforts of Ephraim Nute, the Unitarian missionary to Lawrence, in the building of his church. Bobbi Groth, The Incredible Story of Ephraim Nute (Boston, Mass.: Skinner House Books, 2011), 29–79.
I still think it would be best for you & Mother & Margaret & Ann & Robert if he is sickly to come on the cars & boats & let George & William bring the Reedys family & the wagon through. It will take nearly two months to come by wagons from Chester to Lawrence. While you could come by RR & boats in 10 days or 2 weeks. It would cost you about $150 more by last mentioned route. Or if you did not wish to separate altogether the wagon could bring you all to where ______ lives in Geo. near Chatanooga. Then you could take the cars to Nashville & then a boat to St. Louis. This will be the nearest & warmest route for you if you should come by land because you can go due West for 200 or 300 miles then bear up through Tennessee in a North West direction towards St. Louis & if Walker is going to Mississippi you could come more of the way with him & it would not be much out of your way to go by your land in Miss. You could start a good deal earlier by going this way than if you should go directly N. through Ashville &c & probably find better roads. . . . As to the clock you can get a very good clock in the West for $5.00 to $10.00. I think you better plan to sell off everything if you can get anything for them at all. Sometimes I think this would be the best plan to sell everything but the bed clothes & buy to spring carryalls & put two horses in each & roll along that way. But I merely suggest all these plans so that you can select which is best for you. As to your bringing the money in gold there might be danger of someone robbing you which would not be the case if you had it in checks & you can ______ easily get the gold for the checks at St. Louis & they would be a great deal easier carried than gold.

Junkins & myself have not been doing much for some time with the team we have been trying to sell it but could not as he did want to go to Iowa to enter some land but he has given up the idea & is making $4.00 a day with it. As hay is very high & there was but little hauling to do we thought we could make more to sell the team & hay & then buy in the Spring but I thought I would keep them so that if you come out you would probably need them. As one yolk of cattle which cost $80. is worth as much on a farm as two good horses. J A Dale is working at $2.00 per day & McDonald at $20.00 per month, all well satisfied.37 Mrs. Miller has not gone yet to see her mother. She wants to go March next & remain all summer. . . .

We send the paper to you whenever we issue it but since I have talked of selling out to Elliott there has been no paper but 2 or 3 issues. I presume we will complete our bargain today. I go out & take just what money I put in with interest at 10 percent &2 city interests worth about $600.00 so that I am safe enough. I am now going to turn my whole attention to land speculations & law & I am sure it will pay. I wrote you since the late war. Everything is now quiet again.38 Tell Margaret that I will answer her letter in a few days. I think I can either buy or rent a good farm for you the first year. I have invested 400 or 500 dollars in town lots here that I think will pay.

I got a letter from Bloomington Ill stating that 300 per cent has been realized on those lots I talked of buying that time & that property has double[d] in value since I left. I will write again soon.

Ever yours
Josiah Miller

Miller wrote of the depth of the conflict in Kansas between the “Border Ruffians” from Missouri and the free-state settlers, and the flavor of that conflict was intense. He also exhibited concern for his parents’ move from South Carolina, which clearly weighed heavily on him. His father was in his late fifties, and Miller might have been concerned about how stressful such a move would be. Nonetheless, he seemed very encouraged that his parents’ plans to move were just around the corner.

Lawrence, K.T.
Jan 25th 1856

Dear Father & Mother.

Yours of the 3rd inst. is at hand. We were glad to hear from you that all were well, presuming that Robert is better. But we were sorry that you appeared somewhat discouraged, at the prospect, of coming to Kansas & at having sold your land. I do not think you should be. You will probably remember that I told you on the day I first left home before we got to Chester as I was advising you

Junkins family is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in the Miller family plot. Both Junkins and Dale left Chester, South Carolina, about the same time as Josiah (see letter of August 29, 1855).

36. Josiah’s older sisters, Susannah Reedy and Jeannette Walker, and their families decided to leave South Carolina and go to Mississippi at the same time that Josiah’s parents left for Illinois.

37. James W. Junkins (1827–1913) was a longtime friend and business partner of Josiah Miller. Junkins married Margaret Miller, Josiah’s sister, and they had two children, both of whom died very young. The entire family is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in the Miller family plot. Both Junkins and Dale left Chester, South Carolina, about the same time as Josiah (see letter of August 29, 1855).

38. During the weeks following the so-called “Wakarusa War” (or what Miller called the “late war”) of early December 1855, relative calm returned, but it did not last long, and 1856 would be the most violent and unsettled of the Bleeding Kansas decade.
to leave the South. I told you that before ten years this slavery question would work a civil war, & that it would be better for you and your family to be in a Free State. There is a strong probability now that my prediction will come true. And even supposing we have a civil war in Kansas, you should not regret having sold out, as in that event, it will become general & every man in the South would be impressed into service to defend Slave property & fight for the South. Then it would be much better for you to be in a Free State or some of the Western Slave States. As to the interest on your money, it would amount to nothing, compared with what you could make by investing it in real estate in the West. Never again lend money.

As to the state of affairs here, they are yet highly excited. The election, for State officers, came off and resulted in a difficulty near Leavenworth. The Pro Slavery men there, with the aid of some from Mo, attempted to break up the election and got into a little skirmish & 8 or 9 rounds were fired on both sides. Two proslavery men were badly wounded, but none on our side. It was not long until some 8 of our men were taken prisoner, but they were all released except one Brown, who commanded the little party of our men. They just butchered him up—cutting him all to pieces with hatchets. After they had beat & chopped him shockingly they hauled him ten miles in the cold & then sent him home to his distressed wife, where he lived a few hours & died.39

This incensed our people very much, but it is now very generally believed that we are not able to cope with all Missouri. The people here have always believed that the Mos [Missourians] were cowards & would not fight. Knowing the character of Southern men, I have always told them differently. But the last war fully substantiated the truth of what I always said, & this is the reason that Robinson & Lane made the Treaty, agreeing to assist in the execution of the laws, as they thought they were not then ready to fight. They did not act manly about it, for as soon as the enemy had disbanded, they again defied the Sheriff to execute the laws. This has aroused the enemy, & they

are now drilling their forces in every part of the State.40 My policy was to make no treaty of peace, unless we could get our own terms, & when made to stick by it to the end, to say nothing about the laws—as we were acting on the defensive to protect our lives & property, but to require them to leave the Territory & deliver into the hands of Justice the murderers of [Thomas] Barber. But the others thought that by putting them off by agreeing to enforce the laws, for the time, until we could get reinforcements from the States, would be best. This is a Yankee way of doing a thing, but it is not in accordance with the policy of high minded honorable men.41

They have now sent to the states for men, money & munitions of war. The enemy has heard this & are also preparing for the contest. Our Commanders acted highly impolitic in letting this be known, but they presume so much on the cowardice of the enemy, that they imagine they can frighten them into terms, which fact will, I fear, prove disastrous to our cause, as the enemy can conquer us & cut off our reinforcements before they can reach us. The Legislature meets the 4th of March next & it is said that the enemy intends attacking and dispersing that body. I was defeated here for the Legislature, by the Eastern men, because I am a Southerner and oppose their treacherous _______.42 Their prejudices are deep seated. I did not try to be elected as I knew it would be a great deal of expense & no profit.

I wrote to you some time ago telling you what course you had better take. If you have sold out & collected your money do not by any means stay any longer in Carolina, but go West. I could hardly advise you to come here, owing to the very critical state of affairs at present, but it would be much better for you to emigrate now, when you have got everything ready, whether we have a difficulty or not, & as I said at first, it would be much quicker, easy, & convenient to come by cars & steamboat. . . . But this is all about the way to come, now as to when you should go. I would suggest that you stop in Indiana and Illinois this coming summer, so that you could look around the summer, where you would like best to live. I would suggest that near where the Wilsons & Whites live in Ill, St Clair Co, would be the most convenient point. You could rent a place there for the family to live on, till fall so by that time we can probably tell what will be done in Kansas. . . .43 You might write to Wilsons or Whites about the prospect of spending a summer there, & getting a place for you, if you think best. I intend writing to them soon in regard to it. It would be the best place by far. You could then in the course of the summer determine whether to settle in Ill, Iowa, Kansas or Missouri, there being first rate chances for investment in all of those States. . . . I think there is no cause whatever for you to be discouraged but great occasion for rejoicing, that you are going to get away. Were it not that it would cost me $100. & the fact that I hate to leave here in such perilous times, as there might be an imputation of cowardice, I would go down & help you get away. . . . There were some people in the Free States ready to come to our assistance, but they did not intend coming until we signified our intention, that we wanted them. But if we are invaded again, there will be a large force from the Free States come to our assistance.

The land will be in the market here if nothing happens, by the first of Aug, so the surveyor told me yesterday. He is now sectioning near our town. Since I spoke of selling out to Elliott he has not issued any papers. I do not know what he intends to do with the office. I fear the Free State will be a great loss in the end to me, as he seems slow to give me the proper security for what he is behind.

We have had very cold weather, since the 22nd of Dec there has been but 3 days, that it melted, ground covered to reconvene on July 4, 1856. Etcheson, Bleeding Kansas, 72–75; and Durwood Ball, “Scapegoat? Colonel Edwin V. Summer and the Topeka Dispersal,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 33 (Autumn 2010): 164–83.

43. A number of Chester District families from South Carolina found their way to this area of Illinois, both as a temporary stopover and as a permanent area of settlement. St. Clair County is just east of St. Louis, Missouri. The ongoing connections between these families is witness to the close relationships they formed in South Carolina and within the Associated Presbyterian Church. Josiah’s grandmother was Jeannett White (for whom his sister was named). The Whites were early settlers along with the Miller family in the 1750s.
with snow, & thermometer at from 10° above to 25° below zero. This winter being just the opposite of last, caught us with our house not plastered & it is very cold on us. I received a letter from George dated Jan 11th. His eyes were better & he was expecting every mail to be called home to assist you. I have been trying to put some building on my lots to protect them, as some say, lots are not safe without improvements. I have been unable to look after land, as it is too cold. Now I hope you will move right along the first of March, towards Miss & finally come up to St. Clair Co Ills. If you should do this write and let me know as I may go down there about the time you get there.

J. Miller

Unfortunately, only one additional letter from Miller to his parents, dated December 15, 1856, seems to have survived for the remainder of the territory’s most tumultuous and violent year, 1856. Miller apparently left Kansas Territory for a period of time in the late spring or summer, as he received a “pass out of this Territory” dated May 16, 1856, signed by Governor Wilson Shannon, Lecompton. The December 15 letter is relatively brief at just three pages, and in its present condition is quite faded and extremely difficult to accurately transcribe; it has been left out here for that reason. Although the political climate was still unsettled throughout 1857, free-state settlers gradually gained the upper hand and by the end of that year had come to dominate the politics of the territory. Business concerns were never far from Miller’s attention, and he was always looking for an edge that would enhance his profits from investments. Although not mentioned in the following letter, Josiah and Agnes may have been grieving the death of their first child, Mary, who had died just a couple of months earlier on April 26, 1857. The Millers lost a second child, Irene, on August 16, 1859.  

Dear Father and Mother

Yours of the 23 May having the check for $1593.69 is at hand. So is Georges two letters of a later date. We were happy to know that your eye was getting better & sincerely hope it may be well ere long. I will have to send your check back to St. Louis to get the gold on it. I can send it by express & get a return in eight days. It costing five dollars. It is almost impossible to get so large a check cashed here & gold is worth two for ct. Everything is dull here now but times will be better soon. Yesterday was the day fixed by bogus laws to elect Delegates to Constitutional Convention but the Free State men did not vote. There were no polls open at all in this place. The proslavery men advise Walker to enforce the laws collect taxes & c with the army but he thinks that a bold operation & supposes he can do more by making speeches. He sees that there are so many more Free State men than prosalvery that he can do nothing. He is in favor of submitting the Constitution to the people for their approval but the proslavery party generally have turned Democratic & it is a question with them whether they will get up A free State Constitution or not. They all see that Kansas will now be Free so the Proslavery or National Democratic party wish to have the credit of doing the work so as to give the lie to the Republicans who have charged the Democracy with trying to make Kansas a Slave State.  

Provisions are high here 16 cts a lib. corn $2 a bus[hel] eggs 25 cts per doz beef 12 ½ per lb. Though we eat but

Lawrence, K.T.
June 15th 1857

44. The winter of 1855–1856 was particularly bitter and difficult for the early Lawrence settlers. Unitarian missionary Ephraim Nute wrote of his circumstance on December 23, 1855: “I am writing in a room where the water freezes rapidly, and a lively breeze flutters my papers, which must excuse my haste and illegibility.” Groth, The Incredible Story of Ephraim Nute, 75–76.

45. Free Passage to Josiah Miller out of Kansas Territory, May 16, 1856, and Miller to Father and Mother, December 15, 1856, folder 2, box 1, “Correspondence, 1856–1857,” Miller Collection.

46. The June 15, 1857, letter appears to have survived only as an older, typed transcript. Miller to Father and Mother, June 15, 1857, folder 4, box 2, “Miller Family, Miscellaneous,” Miller Collection.

47. Although it is not clear what proportion of Robert Miller’s wealth is represented in this check, as he had already sent a good deal of money to Josiah to invest, it constitutes a fairly significant amount of money. In 2013 dollars it would be near $50,000.

48. Kansas Territory did not have a stable currency. It was not uncommon for immigrants to bring large sums of money with them to conduct business on notes backed by more stable financial institutions in St. Louis and further east. Josiah was constantly concerned for the safety of the money he was investing for his father and that his father might be bringing with him. George L. Anderson, “Some Phases of Currency and Banking in Territorial Kansas,” Territorial Kansas: Studies Commemorating the Centennial (Lawrence: University of Kansas Social Science Studies, 1954), 121.

49. Robert J. Walker was the fourth governor appointed to Kansas Territory. He was a Southerner who was proslavery, but he was also committed to the maintenance of the Union. He served only seven months, resigning over his opposition to the Lecompton Constitution and his concern over what he saw as fraudulent and questionable election procedures. Homer Socolofsky, Kansas Governors (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990); and Pearl Ponce, “Pledges and Principles: Buchanan, Walker, and Kansas in 1857,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 27 (Spring–Summer 2004): 86–99.
little and it does not cost us much. . . . I am looking every day for Mrs. Millers people then I will be able to leave here. Junkins and I are going down South to the lead mines of Mo and hunt up a Stock farm and go into raising stock. It is the best business we ever go into now. Don’t lend any more money at 10 per ct for I can lend it here for 2 ½ to 5 per month. I suppose it is about as well that George did not sell the land. You see now the difference between heavily timbered land & prairie. In the one case it will cost $15 per acre for clearing and in the other you can get it broke up for the first crop. This is the reason the great prairies of the West increase so much more rapidly in value than timber lands of the West and South. A man from Iowa tells me that land is rising there. I hope to get ten dollars per acre for our land. I would like to know what kind of speculation Wm Miller will make off his Texas land. It will be rather a hard bargain. Some men recently from there say that people are almost starving there in consequence of the cold dry weather.

I have been digging a well. Junkins & I dug eighteen feet and struck rock. We then spent thirty dollars blowing on it & had to give it up. It is a flat rock that underlies the whole town. Most every well in town strikes it some get water on it & some do not. We got water but as no one in town had blown it out I had a curiosity in doing it first but found it too Mirk[?]. We have enough to do us. I will write again soon & hoping some of you write often I remain

Yours very truly
Josiah Miller. . . .

The conflicts over who would govern Kansas came to a head in mid-summer of 1857, when Miller wrote the following letter. The city of Lawrence stood firm in its opposition to the proslavery territorial legislature, but Miller’s animosity for the strategies used by Charles Robinson and James Lane were becoming increasingly obvious. Despite this tension, the tide of free-state sentiment was growing, and territorial governor Robert Walker sensed that fact. He was strongly supportive of fair elections without influence from outside, in other words

50. William Miller was Josiah’s uncle, his father Robert’s brother, who also left South Carolina at about the same time as so many other Associated Church members seeking safety. He settled in Texas around the time Robert left for Illinois in 1856.

51. The Robert Miller Home in Lawrence has a large, hand-dug well, which one could speculate Josiah helped dig. The water level is at about eighteen feet and the well bottom is at twenty-seven feet.
Lawrence, K.T.  
July 20 [1857]  

Dear Father and Mother  

I arrived here on the 17th from Mo & found all well, but it is very hot & dry. My mare stood the home trip better than I expected though she was very tired. I received a letter from you dated July 7 which was sure glad to read. . . .

There is not much going on at present. The people here refuse to accept the charter granted by the territorial Legislature & have within the last two weeks held an election for town officers, a Mayor, Alderman, Justice of the Peace etc. Gov Walker was here at the time and saw all that was going on. I will send you the preamble & Charter also the Proclamation &c. Walker went over to Leavenworth & called out the U. S. Troops & our town is now surrounded by 700 men. Well on Friday evening the day they came the people called a meeting and had some of the most inflammatory speeches made by Lane and Robinson that I have as yet heard. They abused Walker most outrageously for bringing over the troops.52 Lane said that if he had one days notice he could surround the Troops with 20,000 men all well armed & dared Walker to touch a single man in Lawrence & he would blow him to “hell”. The troops are still here encamped & everybody is at work. It is reported that Walker is going to arrest some fifty of the leading men but there seems no evidence of it yet.

At the meeting I spok[e] of the Proclamation No 2. . . . The people treated him [Walker] with every personal indignity they could heap on him. I hope it will not result in anything serious. There has been a census taken by the Free State men of Kansas & in the greatest proslavery locality there is only one proslavery man to 7 Free State & the least proslavery is one to twenty. We intend going into the elections next fall with great vigor & just astonish the people of the U.S. at the very great & triumphant victory for Freedom by rolling up some fifteen thousand of a majority. . . .

52. Once again Miller found himself at odds with Robinson and Lane over relations with the governor and territorial legislature. He followed a more moderate line, not one of appeasement or modification of his antislavery position, but one that looked not to provoke or start troubles unnecessarily. In the view of Miller and Elliott, the absence of some compromise around exclusion (meaning not allowing blacks to enter the state) would undermine the overall effort of the Free State Party and might threaten the effort to have Kansas join the Union as a free state. Cecil-Fronsman, “The Kansas Free State,” 113–14.

I will send you the two papers from here regular. We have plenty of water in our well to do us. We only blasted two feet and came into the rock some more. I believe an Artesian well would do first rate her[e.]

Ever truly
Josiah Miller . . . .

Dr Father & Mother  

Yours of the 20th is at hand. We were glad to hear that all were well, but sorry that you had such bad luck about your business. We have been in good health. We are now boarding with a family and pay at the rate of four dollars a week for each, that is, we pay 5 dollars and give the family part of our house to live in, charging them three per week rent. It costs me about the same as it would to board ourselves. Well as to politics we have just had a Delegate Convention at this place. Stanton issued a call for an extra session of the Legislature yesterday, and they are to come together next Monday the 7th.53 Our policy was to get all the members together & meet anyhow, and then petition Stanton to recognize them, but Stanton, hearing of this, did not wish to be forced into that, & he anticipated our action by issuing his call before our members got together. The design of getting the legislature together is to pass some act repealing the law providing for a Constitutional Convention and then repeal every other law & pass an act submitting the Topeka Constitution to the people for their approval—give the Probate Judges criminal Jurisdiction in all cases with the power to arrest every Border Ruffian, who has any thing to do with the Lecompton Constitution or bogus law and thus effectively crush out that party

53. The “Delegate Convention” met in Lawrence on December 2 to denounce the Lecompton Constitution and ask the new legislature in special session to submit both the Lecompton and Topeka Constitutions to the people for an up or down vote. See Wilder, Annals of Kansas, 199, and William Frank Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawker State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 77–78.
from the usurped authority they have been increasing over us so long and so oppressively. This is our policy for the future.

There was great harmony in the party all day today. We adjourn from this place to meet at Lecompton on Monday next in mass convention. There will be more men in Lecompton that day than ever was before. Some hold that it is the old legislature that will meet, but Stanton evidently intended the new one to come together. On next Monday the legislature meets, and there is a convention of the Democracy to form a State ticket to be voted for in January, and my court also meets, and then is a mass convention of the Free State party all of which comes off at Lecompton on the same day. It will be a great time we intend to have more Free State men in town on that day than ever was before. There is a great crises [crisis?] in affairs here at present. Grave questions arise. Which Legislature shall come together? What law they can repeal when they do get together? How far they can effect vested rights? Etc. It is thought here that Walker & Stanton will both be removed & it is supposed that this is the reason that Stanton called the Legislature. The free state men are in exstacy at this last act of calling the legislature.54

Well the land has come in at last in this county. I have sold the three one hundred & twenty warrants at $1.25 per acre and four per cent per month. But I will have more trouble with the 80s. . . .

As to George. He wrote a letter full of insinuations about me having it in my power to ruin the family forever, & that I should not have done this, that, & the other thing. It was hurting to me to be told in plain words that if I should die, Mrs. Miller would get all the property bought

54. Walker resigned the governorship on November 16, but he did so under pressure from the Buchanan administration. Stanton, the territorial secretary who served as acting governor before and after Walker’s term, was fired by President Buchanan soon after he called the special session of the free-state legislature and was replaced by John W. Denver on December 21. Stanton remained in Kansas, becoming active in the Free State Party. Socolofsky, Kansas Governors, 55–69.
with your money. George denied what he said in his letter to me, and to convince him I remailed his letter so that he can see it in his own handwriting. I am very sorry that any thing of this kind should have taken place. . . . I hope there will be no more feeling about our affairs. It is & always has been my design to do what is right. As I told you on one occasion before I would rather give you all I had rather than have you dissatisfied. I have spent most of my time superintending your investments And could have borrowed money and secured most of the best ones myself if I had been so disposed & put your money into those that were not so good but I always gave you the choicest.55

As to the check you speak of. Mr. Hornsby a merchant here says he wishes to send gold to St. Louis to pay for goods, as no one will take a draft of any kind here. And in order to save the express charges on the gold you would send to me & also the gold he wishes to send to St. Louis. . . . I will get full directions from Hornsby for you so that you can send or go yourself with out making a mistake. . . .

Yours truly
Josiah Miller. . . .

55. It is not clear from these letters what the source of the tension was between Josiah and George. Both had been advising their parents, and perhaps they did not always agree on matters of their parents’ investments and move from South Carolina. George might have been upset because their parents were more inclined to follow Josiah’s advice, or maybe Josiah was a bit thin-skinned. And then, it might simply have been a sibling rivalry.

56. Columbia Hornsby was an early settler in the Lawrence area, arriving in late 1854. He was a merchant, but he was also very involved in free-state activities and was a strong abolitionist. “Sept. 28, 1854, a squatters meeting was held at Hornsby & Ferrill’s store, on the California road, about two miles from Lawrence, at which the free-state men had a majority.” These may be the same squatters that Miller defended against claims by the New England Emigrant Aid Company, which led to strained relations between Miller and Charles Robinson (see n27 above). Robinson, Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life, 11.
The following, from February 11, 1858, is the last extant letter that Miller wrote to his parents before they arrived in Lawrence, just two months later. There are a few other pieces of correspondence between Josiah and his parents following their arrival and settlement in Lawrence. He continued his business activities, but was now very deeply involved in efforts to create a constitution that would allow Kansas to enter the Union as a free state. He used all of his influence and legal training to facilitate that process, while at the same time planning for the arrival of his family from Illinois.

Lawrence, K. T.
Feb. 11, 1858

Dear Father & Mother

As I promised to write again in a few days in my last I have thought it about time to do it. Nothing of any interest has transpired since I wrote to you last. The Legislature will adjourn in a few days. They have repealed all laws passed by the bogus Legislature, but still they proceed very sluggishly in their business and I fear if they will leave the Territory in any better condition as to laws than was before. They have repealed and passed and mixed them up in such manner that it will be hard to tell what laws are in force. I got a letter from George a few days ago. He wrote of selling the Miss[issippi] land. As I said in my last it is a very bad time to sell land when everything is so low, and then having to wait so long at only 10 per cent interest. I think it a very bad move. . . .

I have been very busy in my office for some weeks. My Court sits first day of March next and will hold more over three weeks. I have about 80 cases on the Doc[ket]. Near all the business in Judge [Sterling] Cato’s Court is placed in my hands by the Legislature. There are 450 criminal suits against Free Staters that will be brought before me. Mostly for Rebellion and horsestealing & imaginary offenses that they conjured up against our men during the difficulties. If they come before me I promise a nolle prosequi will be intered in all cases. They are about passing a bill that makes it a felony punished with Death for any one to accept office under the Lecompton Constitution if we are admitted under it. All seem united in resistance to the Lecompton Constitution & will fight it to the bitter end. We have a mass meeting tomorrow to determine what policy to pursue. The Legislature adjourns tonight at 12 O Clock. . . .

Well as to coming up in the Spring I do not know what to say. I would like to have you here, but I should dislike it if you were dissatisfied afterwards.

I would like to have some understanding as to investing your money. It takes a good deal of my time in order to do it well. My expenses have been not less than one thousand dollars the past year and I have not made any thing. If I go on with my office I will not have much time to devote to your affairs and if neglected they will not make you near so much. I could hire someone to attend to my office I suppose. I have been trying to buy 10 or 20 acres for you close to town but I have not yet succeeded. If you do conclude to come I would advise against coming by land. If the boys are going to school, it would be best for you to sell off your horses and wagon &c but if they are coming here if they could get company it would be best for them to drive the team through and you, mother & the girls to come by boat. We have a very fine school here of 200 scholars and I suppose the boys could board with you here and go to school as cheap as any other place and then you could over look your money affairs and attend to investing it . . .

We have had a very fine winter but quite a number of Deaths.

Write often and I will write in a few days.

Yours as ever
Josiah Miller

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57. U.S. Judge Sterling G. Cato, a Southerner, was commissioned associate justice of the Kansas territorial Supreme Court on September 13, 1855, and served until August 13, 1858. He was reportedly a good lawyer “and usually just and impartial where the question of slavery was not involved.” Nolle prosequi is defined as “an entry on the record of a legal action denoting that the prosecutor or plaintiff will proceed no further in an action or suit either as a whole or as to some count or as to one or more of several defendants.” Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2005). On Judge Cato see W. H. T. Wakefield, “Squatter Courts in Kansas,” Kansas Historical Collections, 1891–1896 5 (1896): 74; and “Official Roster of Kansas, 1854–1925, Kansas Historical Collections, 1923–1925 16 (1925): 659.

58. A more complete picture of Miller’s business activities can be found in Francis, The House Building.

59. Education of the young was an early concern for the settlers in Lawrence. Unitarian missionary Ephraim Nute was a prime mover in the effort to develop educational opportunities in the city. Many of the early leaders in the free-state movement were of the Unitarian tradition, such as Charles Robinson and others associated with the aid company, some of whom had been in the church Nute served in Massachusetts before arriving in Lawrence. Groth, The Incredible Story of Ephraim Nute, 1–19.
Josiah’s siblings William and Margaret had an interesting encounter with William Clarke Quantrill during the infamous guerilla’s raid on Lawrence on August 21, 1863.

On the morning of the raid Quantrill stopped at the Miller farm. Margaret spoke with the guerilla leader, and indicated that she recognized him from a prior meeting, which may have influenced Quantrill to leave the family unharmed. In 1913, on the 50th anniversary of the Lawrence raid, William wrote a reminiscence of Quantrill’s visit to the Miller farm. It is reproduced here on the raid’s 150th anniversary.

R. H. Miller house
1101 E. 19 st¹

Early in the morning of Aug 21–1863 Quantrill and four or five hundred men stopped in front of our home southeast of town. Two of the men came to the house and knocked at the door. My sister Margaret opened the door. They hurriedly asked for the man of the house. Not wishing to disturb Father she called me. As soon as I came out they said, “We are on a forced march from Fort Scott and want all the soldiers we can get; are there any in Lawrence”? When I told them there were no soldiers in town they doubted me until one of the men said, “If he says so it is so”. My sister said, “You are not soldiers you are Quantrill”, he leaned forward looked her straight in the face and said “You have guessed right. I am Quantrill and these are my men”. Then they ordered me to go with them. My sister thinking they were going to take me prisinor begged them not to take me. She said, to one of the men you are one of the men we prepared an extra dinner for the other day, now please let my brother stay. Finally one of the men pointed his revolver at me and told me to “go in the house and stay there” and said to the others “let us go on we have no time to stay here” and they quickly rode on west, about thirty rods west. Two of the men rode south and went ninety rods to where the Rev Snyder lived and shot him. We heard the shot and soon after the shooting in town which lasted about three hours. As soon as I could saddle my horse I went for the neighbors but found none of the men. When we saw them about a mile west getting ready to leave, thinking I would be safe, I started on horse back to town. When near there two of the men chased me back. I leaned forward on the horse and making him go as fast as he could. They were shooting at me, I went past our house and rode up to the fence by our corn field and jumped over and ran into the corn, bullets flying after me. They took the horse a very fine Arabian. After they had gone I came out and went to town and with others helped to care for and watch over the dead that night and next day helped to bury them. Such an experience will never be forgotten. This was written by William Miller in 1913 but has not been published.²

1. In 1913 the address of the Miller home was 1101 East Nineteenth Street. Subsequently the address was changed to its present 1111 East Nineteenth Street.

2. The reminiscence was transcribed without changes in spelling, punctuation, etc., and the original can be found in the William Miller Collection, Reminiscence, RH MS P467, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence. William was twenty-two years old when Quantrill visited the Miller farm and his sister Margaret was twenty-six. According to Miller family oral history, Quantrill had taken a meal with the Millers sometime before the raid and had spent a night at the house. It seems reasonable to surmise that if that were the case it could account for why no harm came to the Miller family or their property on the day of the Lawrence raid, particularly given the fact that upon leaving the Miller farm the raiders went a short distance to the west and killed the Reverend Samuel S. Snyder. When Quantrill was in downtown Lawrence during the raid he protected others who had treated him well during the days he had spent living in Lawrence in 1859 and 1860. When the raiders spotted and chased William as they were leaving Lawrence following the raid, he did what many others had done, including James Lane, by hiding in a cornfield. Apparently the raiders did not go into the cornfields themselves because they were not sure what might greet them on entering.
The Millers were but one of many antislavery South Carolina families who fled to the North when their beliefs made it uncomfortable and even dangerous for them to remain in the South. Many of the names referenced in Josiah Miller’s letters are of other families who had moved north, some that shared a connection to the Associated Scotch Presbyterian Church. The very frightening experiences the Millers suffered at the hands of proslavery neighbors in Chester District, South Carolina, led to Josiah’s move north for college. The continued concern he showed for his parents’ safety and his push for their move north in his letters suggests that the situation did not improve for antislavery families after his departure.

After the elder Millers settled in Lawrence they remained very close to their son and his family, particularly in ongoing business ventures, and with the other children who had come with them to Lawrence. When Robert Miller died in July 1882, the operation of the farm and the care of his wife, Josiah’s mother Susannah, fell to brother William and his wife Estella Ayers Miller. William Miller had lived and worked on the farm all of his life, and he partnered with Josiah in several agricultural ventures. Until his death in 1919, William was a very successful farmer. The last Miller family member to occupy the farmstead was William’s son, Vanroy Miller, who along with his wife, Birdie (Zwick), ran a successful dairy operation until his death in 1952.

The Millers occupied notable roles in the early history of Lawrence. Robert’s involvement in the Underground Railroad and his success as a farmer, Josiah’s involvement in territorial politics and business, and the family’s association with Quantrill’s Raid are all important in Kansas and Lawrence history. The letters Josiah sent his parents, as the family struggled with the effects the national fight over slavery had on their lives and livelihoods, offer a glimpse into how the slavery question shaped the choices forced upon many Americans in the run up to the Civil War. The war would separate North and South, as well as family members caught up in the fight. The Millers’ story had a happier ending, as they reunited in Kansas before the war began in earnest.