ONE hundred years ago, on May 30, 1854, President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska bill which created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and opened these areas to white settlement. The boundaries of Kansas were established on the north, south, and east as they are today: at the 40th and 37th parallels and the western border of Missouri. On the west the territory of Kansas extended to the summit of the Rocky Mountains.

Here were millions of acres of uncultivated prairie and plain. Grassland extended in every direction. In the eastern section there were trees along the streams. Farther west were the grazing grounds of vast herds of buffalo, deer, and other game.

The only inhabitants in May, 1854, were a few white missionaries, soldiers, traders, agents, squatters, and perhaps 25,000 Indians, representing eight native and 28 emigrant tribes. Many Indian tribes famous in the nation's history lived in Kansas, including the Kaw or Kansas, Osage, Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, Pawnee, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe.

One man more than any other, Sen. Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, was responsible for the political organization of Kansas and Nebraska. His primary interest in the region, by making its fertile prairies and grazing lands available for white settlement, was to secure a north central route for a transcontinental railroad which would link California and the East, with Chicago as the hub of the system.

The original plan was to establish one gigantic territory of Nebraska. But to improve the chances for a railroad by one of the two central routes political pressures brought about the creation of two territories with the 40th parallel as the dividing line. The Kansas-Nebraska act also repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in the area of the Louisiana Purchase north of the line 36°30', with the exception of Missouri, and provided instead that the people of the territories might decide their own in-
stitutions for themselves. This was the principle of popular sovereignty which had been applied earlier to the territories of Utah and New Mexico in the Compromise of 1850.

For Kansas, this “squatter” sovereignty provision, in theory an entirely democratic way of resolving a controversy, resulted in a bitter competition between the antislavery North and the Proslavery South for control of the territorial government. “Border Ruffians” from the western counties of Missouri crossed the line and staked out claims in the extreme eastern portion of the territory, and Leavenworth and Atchison became their headquarters. “Abolitionists” from the North moved farther into the hinterland, and so it happened that Lawrence and Topeka, and other towns 40 miles and more west of the Missouri line, became the centers of Free-State activity. The settlers of a new country had to expect struggle and hardship, but here they were faced with the additional difficulties caused by the bitter struggle over slavery which earned for the territory the name of “Bleeding Kansas.”

Public reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska act, both before and after its passage, was intense on both sides. Books, newspapers, and letters of the time are filled with strong language and intemperate thought. President Pierce, because he favored the bill, was denounced in the North as “a third-rate lawyer” who had been promoted to “the place formerly filled by the President of the United States.”¹ Senator Douglas was called a Judas, and the “Benedict Arnold of 1854.” Women of Alliance, Ohio, sent him 30 pieces of silver in the form of “bright new three cent pieces,” and an Ohio newspaper suggested that he had only to “go out and hang himself, and the parallel between him and his prototype” would be complete.² On the other hand, Proslavery sentiment was expressed in such language as this: “We are in favor of making Kansas a Slave State, if it should require half the Citizens of Missouri; Musket in hand, to emigrate there, and even sacrifice their lives in accomplishing so desirable an end.”³

Certain antislavery partisans in the North had determined, even before the Kansas-Nebraska bill became law, that Kansas should not become a slave state if it lay within their power to prevent it. Organizations were established to encourage Free-State sympathizers to settle in Kansas. These emigration societies obtained reduced

¹. Utica (N. Y.) Herald, quoted in The Liberator, Boston, April 7, 1854.
². Anti-Slavery Bugle, Salem, Ohio, quoted in The Liberator, Boston, March 17, 1854.
fares on railroads and steamboats for groups of emigrants; they raised money to purchase and send sawmills to the territory; they subsidized territorial newspapers; they even purchased and operated hotels for emigrants in Kansas City and Lawrence.

Best known and most successful of these organizations was the New England Emigrant Aid Company, led by such men as Eli Thayer, Amos A. Lawrence, and Thomas H. Webb. Emigrants who came to Kansas through the efforts of this company were largely responsible for the founding of Lawrence and Topeka, and for the establishment of Free-State supremacy in the areas around those towns. Agents of the company in Kansas included several men prominent in the Free-State movement, among them Charles Robinson, later first governor of the state, and Samuel C. Pomeroy, who became one of the first pair of United States senators from Kansas. The company was not established purely for altruistic reasons. Its organizers intended to obtain capital from Eastern investors and with the money buy land and incorporate towns. Settlers under the company's sponsorship were to purchase town lots, and any profit accruing—none did—was to be paid as dividends to the investors. The settlers, of course, were to be antislavery in sentiment, and the cause of freedom in Kansas would gain from their presence.

The struggle between Free-State and Proslavery partisans was at its height during 1855 and 1856. In these years the "Bogus Laws," legalizing slavery in Kansas, were passed by the first territorial legislature; the Free-State party was organized at Big Springs; Lawrence was sacked by Border Ruffians; John Brown and his men committed the bloody Pottawatomi murders; the battles of Black Jack and Hickory Point were fought; Franklin and "Fort Titus" were attacked; and assorted acts of terrorism committed, sometimes with fatal results. By and large, during this time, the Proslavery faction was in the ascendancy and the outlook for the Free-State cause seemed dim.

However, by 1858 the tide had turned. Antislavery settlers outnumbered their opponents, and the adoption of the Wyandotte constitution in 1859 settled the issue. It is frequently said that the first shots against slavery in the United States were fired in Kansas. Undoubtedly the failure to extend slavery to Kansas was a factor in the decision of the Southern states to secede from the Union and organize a separate government. Events in Kansas during the territorial period were thus of fundamental importance in determining the course of United States history.
KANSAS in 1954 is officially observing the centennial of the territorial organization. Gov. Edward F. Arn appointed a centennial committee, headed by Prof. Robert Taft of the University of Kansas, to make recommendations and to coordinate plans for state-wide observances. Perhaps its most important accomplishment to date has been to obtain from the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad an equipped display coach in which exhibits were installed by the Kansas State Historical Society. Through the courtesy of the Santa Fe and the cooperation of other railroads operating in Kansas, the exhibition car will reach every county in the state during 1954.

Since the actual signing of the Kansas-Nebraska bill was on May 30, and this year that day comes on Sunday, it seems particularly fitting that the pioneers of Kansas should be honored by all the churches 100 years to the day that Kansas was opened to white settlement. The committee therefore respectfully encourages all denominations to include observances of this event on their programs for that day.

Professor Taft and a subcommittee, assisted by the Post Office Department and officials at Fort Leavenworth, are arranging a program for the first-day sale of the commemorative stamp for territorial Kansas, to be held at Fort Leavenworth on May 31. Sen. Frank Carlson and Governor Arn will participate in the initial sale and cancellation ceremonies. Fort Leavenworth was selected as the place of release because the first post office in present Kansas was established there in 1828. Members of the Kansas territorial centennial committee are also assisting local groups, wherever aid has been asked, in planning centennial observances.

On February 3, 1954, the Library of Congress formally opened an exhibition of rare books, maps, manuscripts, and photographs in commemoration of the centennial of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. Sen. Andrew F. Schoeppel of Kansas delivered the principal address. The library has printed a 71-page illustrated catalogue of the exhibit which may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C., for $1.25.

The University of Kansas, Lawrence, will be host to the Kansas Association of Teachers of History and Related Fields on April 30 and May 1. The meeting is to be a conference on state and local history, and will include an address by Prof. Allan Nevins of Columbia University, New York.

The state historical societies of Kansas and Nebraska plan a joint luncheon meeting on May 9 at Falls City, Neb., which members of
both societies and other persons interested are invited to attend. Featured on the program will be addresses by Prof. Robert Taft, on “Stephen A. Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” and Dr. Roy F. Nichols, of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, on “The Territories, a Vital Source of American Democracy.”

On May 11 a historical caravan will start from Mission, Kan., on a 460-mile trek along the route of the old Santa Fe trail across Kansas. Cities participating in this special celebration, and tentative dates, are: Mission, Olathe, Baldwin, and Burlingame, May 11; Osage City and Council Grove, May 12; Herington, Marion, Hillsboro, and Canton, May 13; McPherson, Lyons, and Ellinwood, May 14; Great Bend, Larned, and Garden City, May 15. Council Grove is having a three-day celebration May 10-12, culminating in the dedication of the state-owned Kaw Mission Museum on May 12.

Several other cities of Kansas plan special centennial observances. Those reporting include: Topeka, May 22-25; Junction City, May; Leavenworth, June 6-12; Atchison, June 21-26; Ogden, July 2-4; Perry, July 8-10; Marysville, August 17-19; Hays, late August; and Lawrence, September 15, 24-30. Visitors are welcome at all these celebrations, and widespread participation is desired.

In connection with centennial observances within the state, mention of several books and articles dealing with Kansas territory may be helpful. The first book on Kansas was written by the Rev. Edward Everett Hale, a New England antislavery leader who is best known today as the author of The Man Without a Country. Hale’s book, Kanzas and Nebraska . . . , was published in Boston in 1854. Three books published in 1856 were: William A. Phillips, The Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and Her Allies . . . ; Hannah A. Ropes, who wrote anonymously Six Months in Kansas; and Sara T. D. Robinson, wife of the first governor, author of Kansas, Its Interior and Exterior Life. In 1857, John H. Gihon, private secretary to Gov. John W. Geary, published Geary and Kansas . . . A Complete History of the Territory Until June, 1857, and Thomas H. Gladstone wrote The Englishman in Kansas, or, Squatter Life and Border Warfare. The list of books published in this period could be extended, but they are out of print and available only occasionally through rare book dealers. All of them, of course, were written by people too close to the scene to be objective.

Important studies dealing with the Kansas territorial period have

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been published by several scholars in recent years. Some of these books and their prices, if known, are listed in answer to many requests received from individuals and institutions wishing to build up Kansas libraries. Two works by Roy F. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce* (Philadelphia, The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931, $5.00), and *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1948, $5.00), the latter a history of the Buchanan administration, are perhaps the most able treatments of that period in national history.

George Fort Milton’s *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934, $5.00), although 20 years old is still the most recent and comprehensive biography of Douglas. Avery Craven, *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861* (A History of the South, v. 6, Baton Rouge, The Louisiana State University Press, 1953, $6.50), deals with the period from the Southern viewpoint. Allan Nevins has covered, in four substantial volumes, the history of the United States, 1847-1861, under the titles, *Ordeal of the Union* (1947), and *The Emergence of Lincoln* (1950, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 4 Vols., $22.50).

On the local level, as contrasted with national and sectional treatments, G. R. Gaedert’s *The Birth of Kansas* (State Printer, 1940), was developed from a doctoral dissertation presented to the University of Kansas. The newest and most complete study of the immediate background of the organization of Kansas and Nebraska territories is James C. Malin’s *The Nebraska Question, 1852-1854* (Lawrence, Rowlands College Bookstore, 1401 Ohio Street, 1953, $4.00). Professor Malin is well known to readers of the *Quarterly*. Two of his articles, in the November, 1951, and May, 1953, numbers, constitute a limited preview of his new book, which throws an entirely new light on the Kansas-Nebraska problem. Another of his books, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-six* (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1942, $5.00), is a scholarly contribution of unusual merit in its field.

Other recent publications that deal in part with the territorial period are Charles M. Correll’s *A Century of Congregationalism in Kansas* (Wichita, McCormick-Armstrong Company, 1953, $2.50), and Paul W. Gates’ *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts Over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 1954, $4.50).

Attention should also be called to Prof. Robert Taft’s articles in *The Kansas Teacher*, Topeka, beginning in September, 1953, under
the general title, "A Century of Kansas History." Other articles by
members of the University of Kansas faculty are appearing in Your
Government, published monthly by the Governmental Research
Center of the University, beginning September 15, 1953.

"Kansas—100 Years Ago," is the title of a series of weekly articles
prepared by the Kansas State Historical Society for publication in
Kansas newspapers. The articles, designed to be a week-by-week
story of the development of Kansas territory, are being released to
the newspapers beginning in April, 1954.