FROM the stage of the Topeka Opera House, Gov. John P. St. John looked out upon the great crowd thronging the building. At 7:30, a half hour before the meeting was to commence, the hall had been completely filled, some people even standing in the aisles. The gathering, for which the churches of the city had dismissed their evening congregations on this Sunday, April 20, 1879, had been called to consider the problem of providing relief for the destitute freedmen from the South who were pouring into the state.\(^1\)

The governor could have recalled the events responsible for this meeting with little difficulty. Since early March, the Negroes from the river parishes and counties of Louisiana and Mississippi had been pushing up the Mississippi river aboard steamboats bound for Kansas. Most of the migrants, however, became stalled in St. Louis from lack of money, and were only able to resume their journey to Kansas with the help of their colored brethren of that city.\(^2\) To those who had watched the northward progress of the migration, it came as no surprise, therefore, when the first group of 150 to 200 freedmen arrived at Wyandotte, Kan., during the week of March 23 aboard the steamer Fannie Lewis.\(^3\)

Wyandotte, which was conspicuously located at the junction of the Missouri and Kansas rivers, a short distance from the state line, was the first Kansas town of importance encountered en route from St. Louis.\(^4\) This feature, which had previously aided the

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1. For an account of the Opera House meeting see the Topeka Daily Capital, April 21, 1879, and the Topeka Commonwealth, April 22, 1879. Although the Commonwealth announced the meeting for 7:00 P. M., the Daily Capital gave the opening time as 8:00.


3. Wyandotte Herald, April 3, 1879. See, also, the Kansas City (Mo.) Journal of unknown date as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 2, 1879.

4. From its settlement in 1857 until after the Civil War Wyandotte was rivaled only by the former "free-state" town of Quindaro, a few miles north on the Missouri river, and Armstrong, a small settlement to the south. After 1865, however, Kansas City, Kan. (1869), Rosedale (1872), and Argentine and Armourdale (1880) were laid out, all of which form modern Kansas City, Kan.—"Kansas City, Kansas," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., v. 14, pp. 263, 264.
growth of the settlement, had now become a liability, being mainly responsible for the flood of destitute Negroes soon to descend upon the city. For following the arrival of the Fannie Lewis, came the steamer Joe Kinney on March 31 with 350 migrants on its deck, while the largest group ever to arrive in Wyandotte, 450, came aboard the E. H. Durfee on April 6.5

The astonished residents of Wyandotte had witnessed the invasion of close to 1,000 migrants in less than two weeks. Two colored churches, the Methodist and Christian, opened their doors to these travelers, and the church of the “Christian Brotherhood” sheltered some even though it was unfinished. Many of the newcomers naturally resided with the colored people of the city,6 and a large detachment had been sent to nearby Quindaro, where they were housed on the Freedmen’s University campus.7 With this sudden influx of dependent Negroes, numbering almost one-fourth of the population of the community,8 it was small wonder that the whistle of every boat filled the residents of Wyandotte with “anxious thoughts.” 9

The seriousness of the situation was brought to the governor’s attention by a letter from A. N. Moyer, a real estate man of Wyandotte. With the endorsement of the Rev. R. M. Tunnell of the First Congregational church, Moyer urged the intervention of the state government as a “war measure.” Besides making it plain he wanted the newcomers to “move on,” he showed particular concern regarding the possible outbreak of disease as a result of the migrants, and the probability that an epidemic would spread into other cities of the state.10 “Many are sick,” explained Moyer, “and their dead are scattered along the way. The dead and dying you could see at any time were you here to look about you.” 11

5. Wyandotte Herald, April 3 and 10, 1879, and Kansas Pilot, Kansas City, April 5, 1879.
6. On April 24, 1879, the Wyandotte Herald remarked that “there is as much difference between these Southern niggers and the colored people of Wyandott as there is between day and night.”
7. The Freedmen’s University was founded by the Rev. Eben Batchley in 1857 in the then flourishing Free-State town of Quindaro. Following the Civil War the community declined and the university passed into the hands of the colored men of the city. They placed it in the hands of the African Methodist church of Quindaro when it was chartered as Western University. The institution led a precarious existence until 1899 when the state began appropriating money for its operation.—William E. Connelley, History of Kansas State and People (Chicago, 1928), v. 2, p. 1076.
8. In 1879 the population of Wyandotte was 4,012, exclusive of the migrants then in the city. This was an increase of 400 over the previous year. See an unofficial census taken by a “Capt. Nelson” as reported in the Wyandotte Herald, April 17, 1879.
9. Letter, A. N. Moyer of Wyandotte to Gov. John P. St. John, April 7, 1879.—“Governor’s Correspondence,” Archives division, Kansas State Historical Society.
10. The spread of yellow fever was a constant danger. The arrival of the Negroes and their filthy baggage was especially feared since they came from areas frequently plagued by this disease.
11. Letter, A. N. Moyer to Gov. John P. St. John, April 7, 1879.—“Governor’s Correspondence,” loc. cit.
Meanwhile, these unfortunates had been provided with whatever the citizens of Wyandotte could supply. But as the numbers grew and demands became greater, it was necessary to put relief on a more organized basis. Accordingly, a public meeting was held on the afternoon of April 8 in the city hall. It was agreed that the newcomers "should be aided only to such extent as they are unable to help themselves," and assistance was pledged to the migrants "in continuing their search for homes." A committee of five persons was appointed to carry out the wishes of the meeting.12

If the situation had formerly been considered serious, it now began to assume the aspect of desperation. The governor recalled having received a telegram from Mayor J. S. Stockton, asking for the sake of "God and humanity," for help in transporting 400 of the newcomers from the city.13 More alarming, however, was the news that on April 13, the steamer Joe Kinney had made its second appearance in the city with around 200 more migrants, while over 300 had left St. Louis April 14 on the E. H. Durfee.14

With the continued arrival of the freedmen, a part of the local citizenry, including some members of the relief committee, began calling for force to prevent future landings. Criticism was also directed at the relief group. In answer to a charge in the Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, that Wyandotte would like to rid herself of the Negroes, but that the committee was not "the most efficient organization in the world," R. M. Tunnell, speaking for the group, listed the following accomplishments: medical attention had been provided, a daily supply of bread was furnished, and, although meat was not available daily, the newcomers were receiving more than they were accustomed to. Most important, however, was the news that plans had been made to transport the migrants from the city as soon as money was available. Up to April 15 the committee had received only $6! This meant, of course, that the local residents had contributed practically no money, but rather had made their donations in kind. Little could have been expected from solicitations made in New York, Chicago, and Kansas newspapers,


for scarcely a week had elapsed since these appeals had been placed.  

Nevertheless, the citizens of the community demanded a release from the burden of caring for so many indigent persons, and Mayor Stockton, as chairman of the relief committee, was forced to take action. To expedite the matter, an executive committee was appointed. The most pressing problem confronting the new group was the lack of funds with which to work. It, therefore, immediately appealed to “The Generous Citizens” of the country to help relieve the “1,70[0] entirely destitute” and the “thousands more in the same destitute condition” en route from the South.  

With the conditions then prevailing in the community, the committee realized that the only proper course was to provide transportation from the city as fast as possible while working to turn the tide in other directions. Until then, however, the newcomers had to be fed. If the members entertained hope of obtaining provisions from Fort Leavenworth, this was soon abandoned when Mayor George W. Shelley of Kansas City, Kan., telegraphed Secretary of War George W. McCravy, asking for provisions from the fort. The secretary replied that he lacked authority to comply with such a request and advised the mayor to petition congress for the desired aid.  

As the hope for an adequate supply of relief material faded, the migrants, the objects of so much solicitation, were promising to increase. With the news of the approach of the steamer E. H. Durfee, came also rumors that “Drought Rifles” might have to be used to prevent the landing of the vessel.  

Mayor Stockton had taken the unprecedented action of proclaiming “most respectfully, but emphatically,” that Wyandotte would hold everyone concerned with transporting destitute persons into the city “to the strictest

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15. Topeka Commonwealth, April 17, 1879. V. J. Lane testified that the relief committee received some money but used it to build a barracks on Walker road instead of transporting the Negroes away.—See “Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States,” Senate Report No. 699, 46th Cong., 2d Sess., 1879, pp. 326, 327. N. C. McFarland, in his account of his trip to Wyandotte, reported giving $100 to help move the building to a more convenient location.—Topeka Commonwealth, April 24, 1879, and the Topeka Daily Capital, April 24, 1879.  

16. Atchison Daily Champion, April 17, 1879, and the St. Louis (Mo.) Post-Dispatch, April 17, 1879. The executive committee consisted of V. J. Lane, G. W. Bishop, and George H. Miller, superintendent of the Kansas Institution for Education of the Blind.  

17. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 17, 1879.  

18. See the Leavenworth Times, April 19, 1879, as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 27, 1879. The Wyandotte Herald, as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 27, 1879, referred to the stories concerning “Drought Rifles” as “sheer fabrications,” and stated that while the people would be “inclined to do all they can to discourage the migrants from coming, they would not place themselves “in an attitude of hostility to the laws of the country.”
legal consequences and penalties of the law attaching to such offense." 19

While the prevention of more migrants entering the city would have been a rewarding accomplishment, the members of the relief committee realized that the problem confronting Wyandotte would thereby be only partially solved. A new appeal for funds must be made. Now, however, the committee apparently decided to so phrase their plea that success would be more likely. Either this motive, or extreme emotion would have caused the members to declare, quite erroneously, that there were "still 1,000 [Negroes] in our midst perishing daily for want of proper food and shelter." 20 The appeal continued:

Surrounded by the present horde of sick, dying and destitute men, women and children that must starve unless the generous-hearted people of the United States will respond to our call for aid; . . . with our city-to-day almost a general hospital, business largely suspended, we ask in the name of our common humanity, donations of money to provide for and forward these suffering and destitute . . . [migrants]. 21

Such a petition, of course, could not fail to produce results, and money began coming in, at least enough to send a group of 100 of the Negro families to Lawrence, which had previously agreed to receive some of the newcomers. The executive committee made arrangements for the transportation of the group on Saturday, April 19. 22 With the great number of migrants then in the city, it was, of course, no problem to find the 300 Negroes finally sent to Lawrence. This was only the first of several shipments made to neighboring towns. At a later date 28 migrants were sent to Tonganoxie, 140 to Leavenworth, 200 to Manhattan, and 250 to Ottawa, in addition to 150, who left Wyandotte on their own resources. 23

Wyandotte’s neighbors were not the only ones who had finally taken an interest. The New York Daily Tribune, appealing for aid for the Negroes, compared the exodus to the flight of the Israelites of old, but unlike their predecessors, the freedmen from the South had "no pillar of fire and cloud to lead them; no bread from Heaven

19. As quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 20, 1879.
20. The italics are mine. There were closer to 1,800 migrants in the city at this time.
22. Wyandotte Herald, April 24, 1879. See, also, a letter, from a "D. Shelton" to Gov. John P. St. John, April 21, 1879.—"Governor’s Correspondence," loc. cit. Shelton was in the Kansas Pacific railroad offices when arrangements for the shipment were made by the committee on April 18. See, also, V. J. Lane’s account of the shipment in Senate Report 603, pt. 8, pp. 326, 327.
23. Wyandotte Herald, April 24, 1879. For other reports on the distribution of Negroes by Wyandotte, see ibid., May 1, 1879, and the Topeka Daily Capital, April 25, 1879. Some of the migrants remained behind and erected a little village on some public land near the levee.—See the testimony of W. J. Buchanan of Wyandotte in Senate Report 693, pt. 8, p. 463.
to feed them.” While there were those able to extend a hand of relief, pleaded the Tribune, let it not be said that “God’s help has failed for them out of the world!” 24

Of more immediate satisfaction to the residents of Wyandotte, however, was the action of the capital city. The Topeka Commonwealth, taking its cue from the Tribune, asked if it would not be wise for Kansas to organize a state relief group to properly distribute the money that would soon be pouring into the state. Not only that, but “advice as to where those people should go,” individuals to “select lands, make arrangements for transportation, and the thousand details of such a movement,” would be needed. “We trust,” concluded the Commonwealth, “that the Mayor, or perhaps what might be better, the Governor, will take such steps as may be deemed the best to devise a plan which will best effect the object desired.” 25

The governor was not averse to such humanitarian labors, 26 and undoubtedly quickly assented to lend his time and influence for the relief of the migrants. As a result, a call for the meeting, signed by Governor St. John and over 60 of the leading personalities of Topeka and the state, appeared in the Sunday morning, April 20, edition of the Commonwealth. This journal viewed the proposed meeting with such concern that it recommended “every citizen having interest in the welfare of our city and State” to attend. To remain silent, warned the article, “may now be a crime.” 27

With these events as a background for this momentous meeting, Governor St. John rose to speak to a hushed and serious audience. To speculate upon the causes of the exodus, began the governor, would now be idle and untimely. The inescapable question was simply what Kansas was going to do with those already arrived and the thousands more en route from the South. Could Kansas reject her glorious history on behalf of the downtrodden Negro? No! That was precisely the reason the freedmen were now pouring into the state. Could Kansas turn her back upon a people whose blood had mingled with that of the

25. Topeka Commonwealth, April 19, 1879.
26. Born in 1839 in Indiana, St. John left home at the age of 12 with a meager education. Through his own efforts, however, he was later admitted to the bar in Illinois. He entered Kansas politics in 1873, and by leading the woman’s rights and antiliquor movements in the state was elected governor in 1878 and again in 1880. For other aspects of St. John’s life see Edna Tutt Frederikson, “John Pierce St. John,” Dictionary of American Biography, v. 16 (1935), pp. 303, 304.
27. Topeka Commonwealth, April 20, 1879.
whites to preserve an endangered Union? Could the state refuse succor to a race whose members had helped Northern soldiers in their flight from Southern prisons? The idea was unthinkable! As Kansas had met and conquered other emergencies, so she would not rest until these Negroes were settled in the state. "Negroes are not beggars," the Commonwealth reported the governor as saying. "He had fed at his house many tramps, but never a black tramp." 28

These penetrating remarks were followed by those of the Rev. James E. Gilbert, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal church, who spoke briefly while the resolutions committee was completing its task. He stood on the same ground that St. John had occupied. "Would Kansas be true to herself?" If the Negroes were told to stay at home and the exodus was discouraged, Kansas would be false to herself. His referral to the state as the asylum of the oppressed brought a hearty round of applause from an enthusiastic audience. 29

The resolutions committee had likewise warmed to its work, and submitted an important and well designed plan of action. Since the state government could not provide aid in such an emergency, the report called upon the people of the state to shoulder their "respective shares." It provided for a committee, with the governor at its head, "to receive such contributions of money, food, etc., as charitable citizens in all parts of the country shall contribute for distribution by said committee." 30 Relief work was put on an operating basis when those attending contributed $533 for immediate aid.

Early the following morning, April 21, Governor St. John appointed a 12-member executive committee and summoned them to an 11:00 o'clock meeting in the office of N. C. McFarland, a

28. Ibid., April 22, 1879, and the Topeka Daily Capital, April 21, 1879. The reference to "tramps" was timely, since their presence in Kansas at this time constituted a serious social problem. St. John's speech was regarded by some as a direct invitation to the Negroes to come to Kansas. Dr. F. M. Stringfield, the recently defeated Independent candidate for the majority of Topeka, and who had also donated his professional services for the migrants, said: "Governor St. John, in his speech at the Opera House, threw the doors of the State wide open, and said he wanted a million of them to come in."—Senate Report 695, pt. 3, p. 329. M. Bosworth, the first treasurer of the relief committee, thought the governor "did perhaps go a little too far . . . . and they might construe from what he said that he was rather bidding for them."—Ibid., p. 289.


30. The Topeka Commonwealth of April 19, 1879, reasoned that the legislature would not be in session for nearly two years. Even if it were in session and could provide aid, the Commonwealth thought a "private organization" would be preferable.

31. Topeka Daily Capital, April 21, 1879. The resolutions also appeared in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 22, 1879.
prominent Topeka attorney. As further donations would be needed by the committee, the governor appointed a group of women to solicit throughout the city for money, clothing, and other items, and ordered the corresponding secretary, J. C. Hebbard, journal clerk of the state house of representatives, to find a place of deposit for contributions of bulky goods. The most urgent business, however, was to provide relief for Wyandotte, and after discussion, McFarland was chosen to proceed to that city with some of the previous night’s collection and furnish such pecuniary aid as was possible.

When McFarland stepped off the train at Wyandotte that Monday evening, April 21, he was walking into a city seething with discontent. Following Mayor Stockton’s proclamation of April 18, threatening with legal action those bringing migrants into the town, Stockton had obtained a warrant for the arrest of the captain of the steamer E. H. Durfee, which was due in the city that very day. This action sent the Wyandotte relief group into a long and earnest conference. Realizing that those within the city were only “the vanguard of thousands to follow,” the committee agreed at first, apparently unanimously, “to stop the immigration at all hazards, and use radical measures for that purpose.” This must have been a temporary stand, however, for “wiser measures” were reportedly adopted.

The group subsequently decided to allow the migrants to come into the city, under protest, and send them on immediately. The change of attitude was demonstrated by the unanimous support of R. M. Tunnell’s motion calling for the withdrawal of the mayor’s warrant for the arrest of the Durfee’s captain. The course of action taken by the committee probably saved the city from much public condemnation. To convince the community as a whole that this was the wisest course was to prove more difficult!

Although the committee had agreed to allow the newcomers to enter the city, those aboard the E. H. Durfee were not destined to enjoy that privilege, at least not immediately. In the evening following the meeting of the relief committee, Mayor Stockton met the vessel upon its arrival in the city, and persuaded the cap-

32. The executive committee consisted of Governor St. John; M. H. Case, mayor of Topeka; the Rev. T. W. Henderson, editor of the Topeka Colored Citizen; M. Bosworth; Willard Davis, attorney general; A. H. Washburn; Bradford Miller; C. H. Bowen; J. K. Hudson; N. C. McFarland; Mrs. E. Christiansen; and J. C. Hebbard. For a sketch of the life of N. C. McFarland, see James L. King, History of Shawnee County, Kansas, and Representative Citizens (Chicago, 1905), pp. 324, 325.

33. Topeka Daily Capital, April 21, 1879, and Topeka Commonwealth, April 22, 1879.

34. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, April 22, 1879, as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 23, 1879.
tain to unload his passengers across the river on the Kansas City side.\(^{25}\) There they remained all night without food and shelter. On the following day, April 22, McFarland used $17.50 of the Opera House collection to buy 100 loaves of bread and 250 pounds of bacon and had it sent over to them.\(^{26}\)

While McFarland was relieving a suffering humanity in Wyandotte, an attempt was made to obtain assistance from congress. On April 21 Rep. James A. Garfield of Ohio introduced House Resolution 523, which provided for an appropriation of $5,000, and authorized the Secretary of War to issue tents and rations, to relieve the “temporary distress” of the freedmen.\(^{27}\) Rep. D. C. Haskell of Kansas telegraphed Governor St. John the day following the introduction of Garfield’s bill, expressing fear that passage was improbable. The Carfield sponsorship was prompted by the thought that since his state was not immediately affected by the exodus chances of success would be greater. Even with this advantage, however, Haskell presumed the appropriations committee would kill the bill by refusing to report it.\(^{28}\)

The senate became a part of the exodus drama when Mayor Stockton appealed to Sen. John J. Ingalls of Kansas, reciting the sufferings and privations of the migrants and the limited resources of the city. On April 22 Ingalls read the letter to his colleagues, remarking that the “great free communities” of the West could absorb the unfortunate Negroes, but that certain cities should not be called upon to bear the whole burden of what he apparently felt was a national responsibility. In line with his feelings, therefore, he introduced Senate Bill 472, for the relief of the “destitute colored persons now migrating from the Southern States.”\(^{29}\) He reminded his fellow senators that they had given aid to relieve suffering upon other occasions similar to the exodus, and urged “immediate and efficient action on the subject.”\(^{30}\)

35. Ibid. See, also, McFarland’s account of his Wyandotte trip in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 24, 1879. Although the verbal exchange was not reported, a similar conversation between the mayor and Captain Vickers of the Joe Kinney has been preserved. The captain reminded Stockton, in answer to the latter’s warning not to bring more migrants to Wyandotte, that steamboats were common carriers and bound to transport paying passengers. Stockton then threatened the boat with quarantine, whereupon the captain replied, that in the absence of an epidemic, he would ignore such a proclamation.—St. Louis Missouri Republicans, April 21, 1879.

36. Topeka Commonwealth, April 24, 1879. A more detailed account of conditions at Wyandotte appeared in the Topeka Daily Capital, April 22, 1879.


38. See a telegram and letter of April 22 and 28, 1879, from D. C. Haskell to Gov. John P. St. John.—“Governor’s Correspondence,” loc. cit.


40. Topeka Commonwealth, April 29, 1879.
Meanwhile, discontent had reached a head in Wyandotte. On Wednesday evening, April 23, a mass meeting was held in the city hall with the intention of taking strong action. After organizing with Probate Judge R. E. Cable in the chair, the resolutions committee returned the recommendation that “having done all in our power to prevent the emigration, and having been utterly disregarded, we resist the landing of any more of the refugees on our shores, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must.” 41

It was further recommended that a committee of “public safety” be formed, “to act in any manner they may see fit, and we hereby pledge our support to them, in any measure that they promulgate.” 42 With this radical proposal, the two factions present prepared for a showdown. The “peace party” was able to carry a motion to strike out the words “peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must,” and to substitute, “by all lawful means in our power.” The opposition, which controlled the meeting, would allow no further weakening of their resolution. Following the defeat of a motion to postpone final vote on the resolves, the crowd approved them by “a large majority.” The advocates of moderation were conclusively defeated when V. J. Lane’s move to reconsider the vote was decided by the chairman to be “lost.” 43

State Senator W. J. Buchan of Wyandotte felt the opposition to the migrants in the city stemmed from two factors: the fear of yellow fever, the germs of which were thought to be carried in the Negros’ baggage, and the increased expense of caring for so many helpless persons. 44 V. J. Lane was particularly concerned about the “safety” committee. “I opposed those resolutions,” testified Lane, “and said that this was a free country, and these people had a right to come. Of course it was unfortunate for us to have such a large indigent population set down on us; but we could not prevent them by force from coming.” 45

Discontent in Wyandotte had reached its climax, however, and only the sober second thoughts had saved the city from disgrace at the hands of the radicals. Even then, the reputation of the

41. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, April 24, 1879, as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 25, 1879.
42. Ibid. See also, Wyandotte Herald, April 24, 1879. Twenty-five persons were appointed to form a “committee of safety.”
43. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, April 24, 1879, as quoted in the Topeka Commonwealth, April 25, 1879.
44. See the testimony of W. J. Buchan in Senate Report 693, pt. 3, p. 474.
45. See the testimony of V. J. Lane in Ibid., p. 327. “The mayor was called upon to appoint a police force of fifty to go down to the wharves and prevent them from landing from the boats,” testified Lane. “I told him not to do it, and if he did he would see more bloodshed there than he had ever seen anywhere in his life.”
city, and finally the state as a whole, became suspect because of the very mention of sending an armed force to the river front. Much distrust of Kansas relief was dispelled, however, by the resolute and energetic measures taken by the executive committee in Topeka.

That body was no longer solely concerned with the explosive situation in Wyandotte, but was now endeavoring to extend its organization state wide. On the morning of April 24, the committee met in the office of N. C. McFarland, to draft an address "To the People of Kansas." The various communities throughout the state were invited to organize freedmen's aid societies through which contributions of relief materials could be distributed to the Negroes. The central committee in Topeka could also be advised by these auxiliary organizations concerning the number of migrants that could "be provided with employment or homes in their respective localities." 47

An effective organization would be useless, however, without money, food, and other relief materials. With this in mind, no doubt, Governor St. John wrote Maj. Gen. John Pope, commanding the Department of Missouri, Fort Leavenworth, requesting the use of spare facilities at the fort, or at least tents and rations for the migrants. The governor realized, of course, that the installation, located on the Missouri river, would make an ideal place for the reception of the Negroes as they arrived on the river boats. Maj. E. R. Platt, assistant adjutant general, writing for General Pope, who was absent in New York, answered the governor's request by stating that no surplus facilities were available for the freedmen and that he had no power to allow tents or rations to be used for such a purpose. 48 It should have been plain to St. John, especially after a similar request made to the Secretary of War by Mayor Shelley of Kansas City was so clearly denied, that no help could be expected from that source.

With prospects for federal aid for the migrants becoming increasingly hopeless, dependence upon local benevolence was as-

46. The Topeka Commonwealth, May 2, 1879, reported the Chicago Journal as saying that a "current" report mentioned Negroes being turned back by river bank patrols. "'Bleeding Kansas' is not a good place for the exhibition of such a bull-dozing spirit," commented the Journal. One M. Howard of Washington, D. C., wrote to Governor St. John telling of a card being published in the "daily papers" of that city, in which it was reported that "a sort of volunteer militia" was patrolling the banks of the Missouri river "with loaded guns."—Topeka Commonwealth, May 4, 1879.

47. For the text of the address see the Wyandotte Herald, May 1, 1879, the Coffeyville Journal, May 3, 1879, and the Topeka Commonwealth, April 25, 1879.

suming greater importance, and, with few exceptions, the various municipalities were taking their shares of the burden of caring for the migrants. One of the exceptions, of course, was Wyandotte, which, after narrowly averting a serious clash between the races, was launching a redoubled effort to turn the stream of migration in other directions.

On April 25, Mayor Stockton met with the Colored Refugee Relief Board of St. Louis and received assurance that the group would contact the executive committee in Topeka and send the migrants to places designated by the Kansas authorities.49 On the following day, April 26, V. J. Lane and George H. Miller conferred with the executive committee in Topeka. They asked that “sufficient measures” be taken by the central committee to assure their city relief from the continuing arrivals of Negroes from St. Louis. They received assurance that measures would be taken to give them the desired relief.50

The Wyandotte visitors were likewise gratified when the committee turned its attention to the drafting of a long overdue and much-needed address to the Southern Negroes, explaining the true conditions in Kansas. This action was occasioned by the general belief that the migration had been initiated by circulars giving exaggerated accounts of opportunities in Kansas. Many of these promised free land, implements and animals, and government subsistence for one year to all who arrived in the state.51 The committee’s plan to counteract the influence of the “lying circulars” was hailed by the Topeka Daily Capital as a step toward preventing the Negroes from being deceived.52 The Atchison Daily Champion, which had been calling for such action for some time, felt that if the freedmen came to Kansas fully informed of conditions awaiting them, their chances of becoming successful residents of the state would be greatly improved.53

Both newspapers were to be disappointed, for at a meeting on the evening of April 26, the majority of the committee decided to

49. Stockton was accompanied by State Senator W. J. Buchan and William Albright, deputy county treasurer of Wyandotte county.—Topeka Daily Capital, May 6, 1879. See, also, an article, possibly from the Chicago Tribune, April 26, 1879, in the “Horatio N. Buell Scrapbook; Relating to the Negro Exodus From the South to Kansas, 1880,” p. 45.—Kansas State Historical Society library.
52. Topeka Daily Capital, April 26, 1879.
suspend action "for the present," while the matter was given further consideration.\textsuperscript{54} The temporary suspension soon became an indefinite postponement, the members feeling that such an address would be "garbled by the Southern press" and the desired object of the effort would be defeated.\textsuperscript{55}

Meanwhile, apparently not content with the answer he received from Fort Leavenworth concerning his request for quarters and rations for the migrants, Governor St. John telegraphed Rep. D. C. Haskell of Kansas asking him to contact the Secretary of War for permission to use the facilities of the fort. In his reply of April 28, Haskell explained that the secretary was "more than willing personally" to comply with the request, but to do so "would be like exposing himself to a drove of wolves," since the Southern congressmen were "wild over this exodus & they hope & pray (apparently) that enough of the poor creatures will come to want [in Kansas], to deter the rest from leaving."\textsuperscript{56} There was no hope of aid from congress, and Haskell felt it had been a mistake to introduce bills into that body for relief of the Negroes. Besides there being no chance of passage, he feared such proposed legislation would only tend to diminish private contributions.\textsuperscript{57}

This correspondence extinguished the last flickering hope of receiving federal assistance. It likewise left Wyandotte in her unenviable position of being the main recipient of migrants in Kansas. In spite of assurances from the relief groups in St. Louis and Topeka, it was not until C. W. Prentice, chairman of the St. Louis transportation committee, arrived in Topeka to confer with the relief authorities there, that any help for Wyandotte was possible. At a meeting of May 3, it was agreed that the St. Louis group could send the migrants to Kansas City, Kan., by water, and a member of the Topeka committee would superintend their transportation from Kansas City to Topeka by rail. This would certainly answer the demand of Wyandotte that the flow be diverted from that city, and in this manner the sudden invasion of a host of destitute persons upon an unprepared community would be avoided. J. C. Hebbard, committee secretary, was dispatched

\textsuperscript{54} Topeka \textit{Daily Capital}, April 28, 1879.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., April 30, 1879.
\textsuperscript{56} Letter, D. C. Haskell to Gov. John P. St. John, April 28, 1879. In a telegram of the same date to the governor, Haskell warned that if the secretary of war granted supplies from Fort Leavenworth, "impeachment proceedings would be commenced at once. Southern feeling is intense."—"Governor's Correspondence," \textit{loc. cit.}
\textsuperscript{57} Letter, D. C. Haskell to Gov. John P. St. John, April 28, 1879.—\textit{Ibid.}
to Kansas City to meet the first group arriving on the *E. H. Durfee* on May 5.\(^{58}\)

With Wyandotte now freed from the burden of caring for the migrants, Topeka emerged as the center of the relief movement—a development of great significance. As already noted, the various cities of the state were now relieved of the costly and often distasteful necessity of providing food, shelter, and transportation for the migrants. In addition, this development provided for the creation of centralized relief necessary to care for the greater numbers soon to descend upon the state. Further, relief was now in the hands of men whose names commanded respect, and donations sufficient to meet the needs of the impending deluge were thereby assured.

The members of the central committee also recognized the importance of their new role. At a meeting on May 2 the incorporation of the committee under state law was discussed, the members feeling that "a proper organization might do much toward assisting the immigrants to establish small colonies in different parts of the state."\(^{60}\) On May 5, the matter was given additional consideration,\(^{60}\) but it was not until the following day, May 6, that the committee decided definitely that the move was necessary to give "stability and responsibility" to relief efforts in the state.\(^{61}\) On May 8 the committee was incorporated as the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association with St. John as president.\(^{62}\)

One of the sorest problems confronting the new organization was still the matter of maintaining cordial public relations. This became increasingly difficult, especially in North Topeka where the migrants arrived on the Kansas Pacific railroad, and where they remained. There were protests concerning the manner in which the newcomers' necessities were managed. Many of them were suffering from a variety of diseases. In one group of around 70 persons, such ailments as measles, pneumonia, pleurisy, consump-

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58. See an account of the meeting in a report by Prentice to the Colored Refugee Relief Board of St. Louis in the "Benjamin Singleton Scrapbook," Kansas State Historical Society library. While the Topeka *Daily Capital* carried no report of the meeting, the Topeka *Commonwealth*, May 5, 1879, related the substance of the agreement. Hebbard arrived in Kansas City on May 5.—See the Wyandotte *Herald*, May 8, 1879. Arrangements of a "favorable nature" were reportedly made with P. B. Grout, general passenger agent for the Kansas Pacific railroad, for the transportation of the migrants to Topeka.—See the Topeka *Commonwealth*, May 1, 1879. This was prior to the Prentice visit, and whether the arrangements were made by Wyandotte or Topeka is not known.


tion, and the bloody flux were reported. Nearly all were suffering from "a sort of dietetic diarrhea." 63

Until the first few days of May, the Negroes had had to shift for themselves. Most of them had finally settled along the Kansas river in tents, dugouts, and other temporary shelter. On April 29, the Topeka Commonwealth reported the probability of the migrants being quartered for the time being at the Topeka fair grounds. On May 1 some of the Negroes had taken possession of the facilities there, and these were joined the following day by 20 more. 64

No sooner had the executive committee begun lodging its charges at the fair grounds, however, than dissatisfaction developed, 65 and the county commissioners, who were responsible for the grounds, requested the relief committee vacate the premises in order to permit repair of the buildings. 66 As early as May 3 the committee had discussed the possibility of erecting some temporary barracks, and as time went on and the exodus showed little indications of cessation, this plan began to take shape.

It was not until late in June, however, that the relief committee was able to begin work on the shelter. After a building site had been promised but later denied by one Charles Curtis, the committee found land in the western part of the city, and hauled materials to the spot to begin construction. The following morning, June 18, the lumber was found in the river. Efforts were renewed, but discontinued when some of the "best citizens" intervened. The structure was finally erected near the junction of the Kansas Pacific and Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroads, north of the Kansas river. 67

The erection of the barrack was immediately followed by the committee’s appeal for more relief money—both sufficient indication that the end of the exodus was not in sight. In an address to "The Friends of the Colored People," dated June 25, 1879, the directors of the relief association reminded the country that the

63. Topeka Commonwealth, April 29, 1879, a report of the attending physician, Dr. F. M. Stringfield. Sec, also, the Topeka Daily Capital, May 24, 1879, for a report on the physical condition of the migrants.

64. Topeka Commonwealth, May 1, 2, 1879. John Jennings and George Wesley Jones, "members of the Board of Directors of the late Kansas Freedmen’s Bureau," were reported "managing for them [the migrants]."


66. See the testimony of M. Bosworth, first treasurer of the relief committee, in Senate Report 693, pt. 3, p. 290, who reported that the "county commissioners got a little tired of it, and wanted to use the fair-ground, and claimed they wanted to put it in repair."

67. North Topeka Times, June 20, 1879. This journal advised the relief committee to "use the Capital grounds, or go a respectable distance out of town," if they wanted to erect a shelter for their wards.
migration contained the answer to a national problem—the future of the Southern freedmen. The movement was, therefore, not the concern of Kansas alone, but of the nation as a whole.

To show what the relief committee had already done for the Negroes, the appeal recounted the following accomplishments: between three and four thousand migrants had received aid in Topeka.68 A total of $5,819.70 had been received, and the whole either spent or designated for "incurred obligations." A large amount of clothing and blankets had been donated, and a considerable quantity remained. The committee’s most pressing need, therefore, was for money with which to provide shelter and treatment for the sick, as well as to transport the Negroes to areas where employment and homes awaited them. Without the contributions of money, concluded the appeal, "all further efforts at organized assistance to these refugees" would have to be discontinued.69

It is doubtful, however, that the members of the association felt that relief would no longer command their attention. Certainly Governor St. John was hardly thinking along these lines when he predicted the migration from the South would continue “for many years.” In an interview by a reporter of the New York Daily Tribune, he voiced his opinion that the state of Kansas would feel little effect from the exodus, since being an agricultural region, great tracts of land were yet to be placed in cultivation. The governor believed that the colored people could settle much of the land by establishing small colonies of not more than 30 families, with from 40 to 80 acres allotted to each family.70

St. John foresaw a bright future for the Negro in Kansas under the colonization plan he wished to see inaugurated, but he thought the colored people would profit by remaining in the South, with, of course, some very important reservations. The Negroes must have “full protection of life and property,” political rights equal to that enjoyed by the whites of that region, and equal educational opportunities for colored children. Unless the South developed a “sense of justice” and assured the freedmen these three consti-

68. It has been estimated that between the arrival of the first group in Wyandotte and the middle of June, 1879, a total of about 5,100 migrants had arrived in Kansas.—See Glen Schwendemann, "Negro Exodus to Kansas" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1957), p. 161.


tutional guarantees, he predicted an exodus from the South that would involve two million Negroes.71

The governor was wrong in one respect. The migrants arriving in Kansas in the future would be numbered in the thousands instead of the millions. But they would continue to come—and those who smiled at the idea of comparing this exodus to that of the Israelites of old, were soon forced to admit that the impending deluge of Negroes from the South was sufficient evidence that these modern Israelites had apparently received the command to “go in to possess the land.”

71. Ibid.