



WILLING to DIE for FREEDOM

by Rebecca Martin

The opening
of Kansas
Territory in
1854 ignited
a battle that
would find
resolution
only after
years of
struggle in

O n a fall day in 1856, David Buffum was quietly working in his fields near Lawrence. Suddenly, he observed a small band of riders stealing his team of horses. Because horses were both expensive and his only means of transportation, Buffum knew losing them would be a blow. He approached the thieves, protesting, and tried to elicit sympathy by pointing out that he was lame and had siblings to support. In response, one of the riders shot Buffum in the

1854

MAY President Franklin Pierce signs the Kansas-Nebraska bill creating Kansas Territory. In January 1854 Senator Stephen Douglas had introduced a bill into Congress that divided the land west of Missouri into two territories: Kansas and Nebraska. He had promoted popular sovereignty, which would allow settlers in the new territories to decide if Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state. Antislavery supporters were outraged because the terms of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 would have outlawed

JUNE Andrew Reeder is appointed the first governor of Kansas Territory.

JULY The first antislavery settlers of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company (predecessor to the New England Emigrant Aid Company) arrive in Kansas Territory and soon

OCTOBER Governor Andrew Reeder arrives at Fort Leavenworth and on November 24 moves his executive offices to Shawnee Mis-

NOVEMBER Governor Reeder calls the first election in Kansas Territory to select a dele-

1855

MARCH An election is held to select the territorial legislature. About 1,000 proslavery Missourians enter Kansas "armed with guns, pistols, rifles, and bowie knives . . . two cannon loaded with musket balls." They take charge of the polls, cast fraudulent votes, and intimidate free-state citizens to prevent

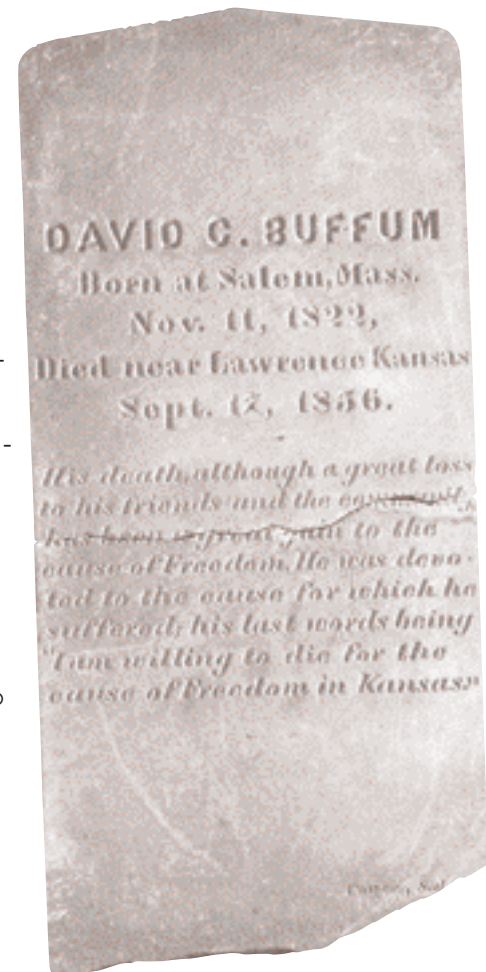
SPRING Sons of abolitionist John Brown begin arriving in Kansas and settle along Potawatowmie Creek near Osawatowmie. Their infamous father later joins them.

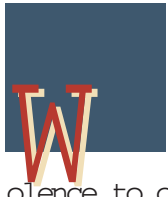
At first glance this seems to be a cold-blooded murder committed against an innocent bystander. But in Kansas Territory, things were seldom as simple as they seemed.

The truth is that Buffum hardly was innocent, nor was he a bystander. He had come to Kansas Territory two years earlier with members of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, a strongly antislavery group. Furthermore, he had helped other free-state settlers smuggle a cannon into the territory. Buffum's lameness, although giving the impression of defenselessness, actually was the result of an earlier skirmish.

As he lay dying nearly 150 years ago, David Buffum voiced support for the antislavery cause in words that became his epitaph: "I am willing to die for the cause of freedom in Kansas." The proslavery militiamen who killed Buffum undoubtedly knew him and hated his politics. This

Gravestone of David Buffum, who was killed by proslavery supporters near Lawrence in 1856 and lies buried in Pioneer Cemetery on the west cam-





doesn't excuse his murder, but it does change its place in history from a baseless act of violence to one grounded in territorial politics.

Created by an act of Congress in 1854, Kansas Territory quickly became the center of the nation's attention as people battled over whether it should enter the Union as a free or slave state. Why Kansas? A variety of circumstances contributed to its being a focal point in the debate over slavery. To follow the story from the beginning, we need to back up several decades, to the end of 1818 when the United States held an equal number of slave and free states. In that same year when Missouri applied to Congress to be admitted to the Union as a slave state, it set off a firestorm of controversy about the extension of slavery into new western states. In an attempt to resolve the debate, Congress passed the Missouri Compromise in 1820, which allowed Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state and Maine to enter the Union as a free state, but the Compromise also prohibited slavery in the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase north of latitude 36°30' north (the southern boundary of Missouri).

Unfortunately, resolution was temporary, and old wounds reopened in 1854 when the Kansas- Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise and permitted the possibility of slavery in Kansas. Much to the chagrin of antislavery supporters this act decreed the principle known as "popular sovereignty," which allowed the people of the new territories to decide if they would enter the Union as a slave or

JULY The first territorial legislature comprising mostly proslavery members convenes at Pawnee near Fort Riley. Dissatisfied with the accommodations, they reconvene at

AUGUST The first convention of freestaters meets in Lawrence and calls for the election

AUGUST Wilson Shannon is appointed governor; Governor Reeder was removed from of-

SEPTEMBER Freestaters meet in Big Springs to form the Free State Party.

OCTOBER 23–NOVEMBER Free-state delegates assemble in Topeka and draft the Topeka Constitution prohibiting slavery in the territory. The constitution is presented to Congress

NOVEMBER Freestater Charles Dow is killed by proslavery man Franklin Coleman, in a land dispute. Dow's friend, Jacob Branson, is arrested by Sheriff Samuel Jones and subsequently res-

NOVEMBER The Wakarusa War begins following Jacob Branson's rescue. Governor Shannon calls out militia forces, which lay siege to Lawrence. A truce is reached on December 8.

DECEMBER Thomas W. Barber, having aided in the defense of Lawrence during the Wakarusa War, is shot and killed by a proslavery supporter while riding to his home southwest of

1856

JANUARY A proslavery and an antislavery man are killed in Leavenworth County during an

MAY Free-state leaders including Charles Robinson and John Brown Jr. are arrested for "high treason" and held in Leecompton, the

MAY Sheriff Samuel Jones and his proslavery posse sack Lawrence. The "Demons of slave power" burn the home of Charles Robinson and destroy several businesses, including

MAY Senator Charles Sumner from Massachusetts is beaten on the U.S. Senate floor by South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks after Sumner delivered his "The Crime

MAY The Pottawatomie Massacre occurs in Franklin County when free-state forces led by John Brown brutally murder five proslavery

JUNE The Battle of Black Jack takes place near Baldwin when free-state forces led by John Brown clash with Henry Pate's proslavery

JUNE Free-state forces attack a proslavery camp south of Lawrence in the first Battle of Franklin. A second attack will occur Au-

JUNE Freestater Jacob Cantrel is killed in Johnson County following the Battle of Black

JULY Under an executive directive, Colonel Edwin Sumner and U.S. military forces disperse the free-state legislature at Topeka.

AUGUST Avoiding the Missouri blockade, James Lane and nearly 600 emigrants arrive in Kansas, traveling the Lane Trail through Iowa and Nebraska. They establish the free-state forts of Plymouth, Lexington, and Holton. Marked by piles of rock known as "Lane's chimneys," the trail also serves as part of the

AUGUST David Starr Hoyt, a freestater, is killed near Fort Saunders, a proslavery camp

AUGUST Fort Titus, a proslavery fortification near Leecompton, is attacked by free-state forces. Several men are killed during the battle, and twenty proslavery prisoners are

AUGUST Governor Wilson Shannon is removed from office, and John Geary is instat-

free state. Because Kansas bordered Missouri, a slave state, it seemed likely that slavery would extend into the new state. People from all over the United States came to Kansas to cast their votes for or against slavery in the new territory.

Kansas is unique among states in its complicated territorial politics. Between 1854 and 1861 it created four separate state constitutions (one of which was voted on three times), the territory had ten different governors, the capital moved to five different towns, and two separate legislatures existed at the same time—one antislavery (and illegal) and the

P other proslavery. Fraudulent elections, threats of violence, and congressional disagreements all prolonged the conflict. Adding to the tense atmosphere, both anti- and proslavery supporters committed murders, attacked towns and settlements, and destroyed property. The area became known as Bleeding Kansas because of these clashes.

Much of the violence in Kansas, however, was exaggerated by the press, with both Northern and Southern newspapers playing up acts of aggression. Most of the events referred to as "battles" were little more than skirmishes, and the "forts" nothing more than reinforced log cabins. As a result, however, the nation believed all of Kansas to be a bloody battleground. In reality, more settlers felt the threat of violence than actually suffered from it directly.

People on all sides of the Kansas conflict were, however, willing to die for freedom — as they defined it. Proslavery



supporters fought for the right to extend slavery into new territories and maintain the Southern way of life. Opposing them and their ideals was the free-state contingency, perhaps a more complex group because it comprised both abolitionists and the more moderate antislavery advocates. While these two factions supported the



Artist's rendition of a skirmish between proslavery and free-state forces at "Fort Titus"

common cause of making Kansas a free state, abolitionists believed slavery to be morally wrong and sought to abolish this institution, freeing all slaves, even those in the South. The more moderate freestaters also opposed slavery but not necessarily because they thought it was morally wrong. Slavery, they believed, limited economic opportunities for white settlers; they did not want to compete with

AUGUST The Battle of Osawatomie, Miami County, ignites when 400 Missourians attack the town, driving out freestaters led by John Brown. The town is burned and looted, and

SEPTEMBER The Battle of Hickory Point, south of Oskaloosa in Jefferson County, ensues between a Lawrence force and proslavery men. The latter surrender after one fatal-

SEPTEMBER Free-state man David Buffum is murdered near Leecompton by Charles Hays, who is attempting to steal Buffum's horse.

1857

JANUARY

JANUARY The proslavery legislature meets in Leecompton. The National Democratic Party of Kansas Territory is formed.

FEBRUARY William Sherrard, who recently has threatened the life of Governor Geary, is shot and killed at a political meeting in Leecompton.

MARCH Governor Geary resigns his position,

MARCH The Dred Scott decision is handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court. The decision states that "Negroes are not citizens of the United States; and that the residence of a slave in a Free State does not affect his legal

MARCH Robert Walker is appointed governor of Kansas Territory.

JUNE At the free-state convention in Topeka, James Lane urges free-state men not to participate in the Leecompton movement and declares the proslavery territorial laws invalid.

JULY Following city elections in Lawrence, Governor Walker declares that action rebellious and reluctantly sends U.S. troops to en-

AUGUST A free-state convention is held at Grasshopper Falls to decide if free-state men should take part in the October territorial

SEPTEMBER The proslavery Lecompton Consti-

OCTOBER The free-state faction achieves a victory in the election for the territorial legis-

OCTOBER 19 – NOVEM- Members of the constitutional convention at Lecompton draft the Lecompton Constitution, which if passed by Congress will make Kansas a slave state.

NOVEMBER A free-state meeting is held in Lawrence to pass resolutions against the Lecompton Constitution movement and denounce the election under it as a "farce and a

DECEMBER At the Lawrence free-state convention, officers ask for resolutions to submit the Lecompton and the Topeka Constitutions to

DECEMBER Four proslavery men are killed in Bourbon County by freestaters defending

DECEMBER Robert Walker resigns his position as governor of Kansas Territory.

DECEMBER With freestaters refusing to participate in the election, the Lecompton Constitution is approved, with nearly 6,000 votes for a constitution with slavery and around 600 votes for a constitution without. Nine votes are recorded in favor of "To Hell with the Lecompton Constitution." Fraudulent

DECEMBER James Denver takes the oath of office to become governor of Kansas Territo-

slave owners for land and feared slavery would drive down wages for everyone.

Supporting the antislavery cause, many emigrants came to Kansas Territory from



Tintype of an unidentified African American woman, ca. 1860. This photograph was passed down through generations of the Platt family. Jireh Platt was an active abolitionist in Mendon, Illinois. His sons Enoch and Luther, members of the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony, settled in Wabaunsee County where they operated a station on the underground railroad. The Platts may

the "Old Northwest" (Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, and nearby states). Easterners, also strongly backing the free-state movement, formed the New England Emigrant Aid Company, which became the best-known organization to bring settlers to Kansas. The majority of proslavery sup-

1858

porters came to Kansas from neighboring Missouri. Although most did not own slaves themselves, they viewed Kansas as an extension of that slave state and supported slavery in the new territory. Some Missourians did not settle in Kansas but crossed the border to cast fraudulent votes in territorial elections, adding greatly to the tensions between anti- and proslavery settlers.

Near and dear to nearly all involved in the fight to settle and govern Kansas was another major factor: money. Financial gain through business ventures and land speculation attracted both proslavery and anti-slavery advocates, including abolitionists. Regardless of moral or political convictions, settlers flocked to Kansas Territory to reap the economic benefits of seemingly endless opportunities. Even the founders of the New England Emigrant Aid Company viewed their organization as a "money-making venture."

While the story of territorial Kansas often focuses on the struggles and politics of the white settlers, African Americans also were an important group, albeit a small one, during territorial times. Blacks truly perceived Kansas as the land of opportunity—especially freedom. The activities of John Brown and other abolitionists in Kansas were widely known throughout the nation. Within their slaves' hearing, slaveholders cursed the residents of Lawrence and other antislavery strongholds, and blacks all over the South came to equate Kansas with freedom. Both slaves and free blacks lived in Kansas Territory, but in reality the "land of freedom" was something of a paradox for African

FEBRUARY The Lecompton Constitution is presented to Congress. President Buchanan advocates for its approval saying, "Kansas is . . . as much a slave state as South Carolina or Georgia." After much debate, Congress rejects the constitution and directs that it be

MARCH A free-state constitutional convention meets at Mineola but adjourns to meet two days later in Leavenworth. The Leavenworth Constitution is completed on April 3,

MAY The Marais des Cygnes Massacre in Linn County results in the death of five free-state settlers and five more wounded, all unarmed and gunned down in a ravine by a proslavery mob. In response to the tragedy, John Greenleaf Whittier would publish his famous "Le Marais Du Cygne" poem, calling the

MAY U.S. troops arrive in Fort Scott to quell violence between proslavery forces and James Montgomery's free-state jayhawkers.

JUNE James Lane shoots and kills Gaius Jenkins in Lawrence over a land claim dispute.

JUNE Abraham Lincoln addresses the National Republican Convention in Springfield, Illinois, declaring, "A house divided against itself

AUGUST A popular vote on the Lecompton Constitution, under a compromise known as the English bill, defeats the constitution.

SEPTEMBER Governor Denver resigns his office, effective October 10. Hugh Walsh is named acting governor until Samuel Medary

DECEMBER John Brown goes into Missouri to liberate fourteen slaves. A \$3,000 reward is offered by the governor of Missouri for

1859

JANUARY At Trading Post in Linn County, John Brown writes his famous "Parallels," decrying territorial injustice. The Lawrence Republican publishes them ten days later.

JANUARY Dr. John Doy and son Charles, with thirteen fugitive slaves, are arrested in

JANUARY Accompanying liberated slaves north through Kansas, John Brown is stopped near Holton where proslavery forces try to capture him. When their attempt fails, the retreat of the proslavery men becomes known

MARCH The trial of Dr. John Doy results in "No verdict." At a second trial in June, he is convicted of "negro stealing" and sentenced

MAY A free-state convention is held at Osawatimie and organizes the Republican Party

JULY The fourth constitutional convention convenes at Wyandotte. The Wyandotte Constitution, under which Kansas eventually becomes a state, is adopted July 29.

JULY John Doy is rescued from jail in St. Joseph, Missouri, by Kansas men.


OCTOBER Kansas voters ratify the Wyandotte

OCTOBER John Brown and eighteen men take possession of Harpers Ferry, Virginia, seizing the federal arsenal. Brown is captured. He is tried, convicted of treason, and

DECEMBER Abraham Lincoln arrives in Kansas Territory. He delivers speeches and visits several towns including Leavenworth and Atchison during a week-long sojourn.

Americans: racism was prevalent, even among freestaters, many of whom did not support equality for blacks and some who even favored exclusion of blacks from the territory. Unfortunately, Kansas Territory did not advocate equal rights nor hold the same opportunity for everyone.

Native Americans also were victims of inequality. For decades Indians had been removed to Kansas to make room for white settlement. As Kansas Territory was readied for its new white pioneers, treaty after treaty usurped hundreds of thousands of acres from tribes that impeded the westward flow of white migration. Native and immigrant tribes all struggled to find their place, or give up their place, in a

 rapidly changing world. Generally, the most successful Indians— at least in economic terms—were those willing to conform to the ways of the white world.



In 1856 this flag was used in a rally at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for Republican presidential nominee John C. Frémont. The oversized thirty-fourth star and the words "Admit Me Free" in the canton of the flag support Kansas admittance to the Union as a free state. The flag

While the political conflict in Kansas Territory took center stage

Julia Bushman Stinson, part Shawnee and wife of Thomas Stinson. The Stinsons, slave owners themselves, operated a trading post at Tecumseh that served both proslavery and free-state advocates. At the outbreak of the Civil



from 1854 to 1861, many came to the territory during that time simply looking for a place to set down roots, to establish homes, to "get ahead" economically, and to go about the business of everyday living. The Stinsons are an excellent example of one Kansas family that tried to do just that. Thomas Stinson was a white man married to Julia Bushman, a part-Shawnee woman. Together, they owned slaves. Like most Kansans, the Stinsons hoped to achieve financial success while avoiding the devastating conflicts over the slavery issue. They owned land, operated a trading post first at Uniontown and later at Tecumseh, and ran a ferry on the Kansas River.

Tecumseh had strong proslavery leanings, but the Stinsons did not discriminate between free-state or proslavery when KH

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1860

FEBRUARY A bill to admit Kansas to statehood is introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Two days later the Wyandotte Constitution is introduced to the U.S. Senate.

MARCH In Doniphan County workers begin laying track for the Elwood & Marysville Railroad, the first track laid on Kansas soil.

APRIL The first Pony Express leaves St. Joseph, Missouri, traveling across northeast

APRIL The U.S. House votes to accept

APRIL John Ritchie of Topeka shoots and kills Deputy U.S. Marshal Leonard Arms when Arms attempts to arrest Ritchie for alleged offenses during the political troubles of

NOVEMBER Abraham Lincoln wins plurality in a four-way presidential contest.

DECEMBER The Morgan Walker raid results in the death of three abolitionists who are killed when they attempt to rescue slaves at the

DECEMBER South Carolina becomes the first state to secede from the Union.

1861

JANUARY President James Buchanan signs the Kansas admission bill. Under the Wyandotte Constitution, Kansas enters the Union

MARCH The first state legislature convenes in Topeka.

APRIL Secessionist troops fire on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, officially beginning the