

Peace Convention-Background Material

The peace convention was held in Fort Scott, Kansas on June 15, 1858. It was held because of all the troubles in Fort Scott and the surrounding area, but the specific incident that triggered it was Montgomery's attempt to burn the Western Hotel. This happened the early morning of June 7. This was the beginning of a very busy week at Fort Scott. That very evening, there was a ladies meeting in town held to discuss what could be done to protect the town from attacks. Captain Nathaniel Lyon arrived in town with an infantry unit on Wednesday, July 9. Governor Denver arrived in town on July 13. In the party with him were Charles Robinson, Judge John C. Wright, and Mr. Babb, a reporter from the Cincinnati Gazette.

Governor Denver's goals were to bring peace to southeastern Kansas and to reorganize the county government. In February of 1858, the territorial legislature had passed laws prescribing how county governments were to be set up. Counties were organized into townships and each township would elect a supervisor. The supervisors would form the governing board for the county. Under the old system, a probate judge and two commissioners formed a county court, which governed the affairs of a county. There was also a sheriff to enforce the laws. In Bourbon County, not only had the township supervisors not been elected, there was not even a county court. There was a federal court in Bourbon County, presided over by Judge Joseph Williams. A deputy marshal enforced the will of the court. So, one of the things that Governor Denver did while he was here was to organize the county government, which was one of his intentions. Sheriff Cummings was released from office and was replaced by T. R. Roberts. The township supervisors were elected, and they were predominantly free state, since by that time free staters formed a majority in the county.

Another factor that influenced the peace convention was that Governor Denver and his party visited with Montgomery in Linn County the day before they arrived in Fort Scott. Montgomery had favorably impressed them and had spent some time explaining his course of action. Montgomery had previously written Governor Denver a letter dated May 24th, 1858. In this letter, Montgomery stated that he and his men would cease and desist from their activities, if the governor would recall the troops and place Free State men at the head of the government. Montgomery found the presence of the troops insulting to the populace and humiliating to the soldiers themselves. He also stated that the only real purpose the troops served was to protect the Pro-slavery Border Ruffian element; a sentiment echoed by Captain Nathaniel Lyon. After the peace convention was over, Denver publicly condemned Montgomery for his actions, yet privately agreed with Montgomery's beliefs, and did not think he should be arrested.

The peace convention began with the Governor and Charles Robinson making speeches about what they hoped to accomplish. Judge Wright then said that pro-slavery men should not be feared, that up in the northern part of the territory, they took pro-slavery men and made abolitionists out of them. He then alluded to knowing Governor Ransom when he was a better Free State Man than Judge Wright.

Governor Ransom then stood, denounced his charges, stating that he had never been an abolitionist, and that the abolitionist or Free State parties were responsible for men being driven out of their homes. Judge Wright stood up in defense of the Free State Party, a shouting match occurred and the whole audience might have become engaged in a riot had not Governor Denver rose and spoke, regaining control and restoring calm in the audience.

The outcome of the peace convention practically followed Montgomery's demands. The people of Bourbon County agreed to the following resolutions:

1. A thorough reorganization of the county government.
2. Referring all past offenses to the grand jury.
3. Refrain from prosecutions and arrests for petty offenses.
4. To work through legal channels in enforcing the laws and punishing violators.
5. To stay out of quarrels regarding land claims, and to settle disagreements through legal means.
6. To be completely intolerant of assaults and other unlawful acts committed in the town of Fort Scott and to bring such persons to justice.
7. Other residents of Bourbon County to be under same pledge.
8. The governor agreed to withdraw U.S. Troops from Fort Scott as soon as he was satisfied that peace was restored.

The townspeople, both Free State and Pro Slavery, agreed to these terms, as did Montgomery and his men. The troops withdrew in August, but peace was only temporary. By July, John Brown had returned to the region and smoldering embers began to gather, as the firestorm of Bleeding Kansas would again erupt in Fort Scott toward the end of the year.

Peace Convention-Narration

The peace convention was held in Fort Scott, Kansas on June 15, 1858. Governor Denver arrived in town on July 13. In the party with him were Charles Robinson, and Judge John C. Wright. Also speaking at the peace convention would be Epaphroditus Ransom-a former governor of Michigan, the receiver of the land office, and a proslavery man who was respected in Fort Scott.

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Governor Ransom then stood, denounced his charges, stating that he had never been an abolitionist, and that the abolitionist or Free State parties were responsible for men being driven out of their homes. Judge Wright stood up in defense of the Free State Party, a shouting match occurred, and several other men drew pistols. The whole audience might have become engaged in a riot had not Governor Denver rose and spoke, regaining control and restoring calm in the audience.

As a result of the peace convention a series of resolutions was adopted, which were agreeable to both the proslavery and the free state men and peace was restored for a period of five months to Bourbon County as a result. However, the peace was only temporary. By July, John Brown had returned to the region and smoldering embers began to gather, as the firestorm of Bleeding Kansas would again erupt in Fort Scott toward the end of the year.

Peace Convention-Historic Document

Governor Ransom's Speech at Peace Convention

Thank you, it gives me great pleasure to see this day. I have longed to see the governor in our midst, to confer with us. I regret exceedingly having been absent when he addressed you. I was anxious to hear his speech but was unavoidably absent at the time. I did not suppose we were brought here to discuss the subject of slavery. . . .

In Judge Wright's speech, which I listened to with no little surprise, he alluded to knowing me twenty years back. I do not recollect the gentleman. If he knew me then, he knew me to be what I now am--an unqualifying, an unmitigating, an uncompromising *Democrat*. I have never gone down in the slime of abolition. If there is anything that sets a man down low, it is the principles of that party. When Governor of Michigan, in 1849, I favored the Wilmot proviso, but the subject of abolitionism was not discussed. I was never left to fall in the ditch of abolitionism, or to cast a vote for any of its friends. I have been a law abiding, a Constitution-loving man, and have everywhere declared my hostility to mob law. You all know that a large body of our men have been driven from their homes--The band of miscreants who have done this are abolitionists, Free State men or whatever you call them. . . .

Did not Judge Wright say that we were in the power of Free State men? Did he not exult over it? What reason does Montgomery assign for coming here and doing us injury? The pretense can't be set up that within twelve months we have done him harm. I assert that there has not been a more law-abiding set of people than those in Fort Scott. What means Montgomery by firing the opposite building? What does he mean by firing his rifle balls in our town, and at my house when I am trying to sleep with my wife and children? I know that the trouble has all been one-sided, that our party has been outraged. We ought to have a mounted force here to ferret out the rebels.

It has been said that I recommended that the torch be applied, and that the Free State men be driven out. I deny this charge. I have nothing but pure motives.

Cast of Characters-Instructions for Placement-Props Needed

Peace Convention

Setting

The setting for this scenario is the Free State Hotel although the famous woodcut depicting the event shows it at the Western Hotel, historical evidence indicates that the Peace Convention did take place at the Western Hotel. For this program, we are assuming that the newspaper accounts are correct and that the incident took place at the Free State Hotel. There will be two different people playing Ransom, the one reading the speech and the one up on the porch portraying him.

Cast of Characters

- Governor Denver-Stands on porch of hotel in between Ransom and Wright facing towards parade ground-Holds both hands in air as if to calm things down-Wears top hat.
- Charles Robinson-Stands to right side of porch looking at Wright and Ransom as they argue-wears hat
- E. Ransom-Stands on right side of stairs-with right fist up in air and left hand out in front as if fending off attack with mouth open as if yelling.-wears hat.
- Judge Wright-Stands facing Ransom with both fists clenched at his side and an angry look on his face with mouth open as if yelling-wears hat.
- Townspeople-All the rest of the people (up to 8) in this scene can be townspeople. All will wear hats and guns and will stand on the steps of the hotel facing each other with guns drawn.

Reader

- Ransom-Reads speech made at Peace Convention that inflamed everyone.

Props Needed

- Eleven Civilian Hats
- One Top Cap
- Eight Guns

Materials Needed

- Historic Document
- Placement Map
- Narration