

To Make Kansas Free:

The Underground Railroad in Bleeding Kansas



Henry Clay Bruce
Photo: Kansas State Historical Society

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“I then felt myself a free man”¹

When Henry Clay Bruce chose to seek freedom for himself and his fiancé in 1864, he joined hundreds of others in Missouri who made similar journeys from enslavement. Bruce determined to have his freedom or if overtaken, would have “sold his life very dearly.” To surrender, he knew, meant death. Bruce recounted his story in 1895, giving voice to experiences shared by many others. Resistance to enslavement through escape and flight on the Underground Railroad occurred wherever African Americans were held in bondage. Singly or in small groups, enslaved people generally began their journey unaided and some completed it without assistance. Whether or not they received help, these fugitive slaves achieved their freedom through the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad in Kansas threatened the ability of slave owners in the region to control their property and contributed to the ultimate success of the Free State cause. Indeed, abolitionists caused such disruption that slaveholders hesitated to bring their property to Kansas. By the end of the 1850s, slave owners in Kansas and western Missouri were moving their bondsmen away from the territory or selling them to avoid the risk of loss. Underground Railroad activity in the Kansas-Missouri border region was both more deliberate and more violent than found in more established areas. Activists, even Quakers, made trips into Missouri to bring slaves off plantations. Abolitionists adopted an established route, the Lane Trail, to send fugitives on the way to Canada.

Traditionally, historians have overlooked the agency of African Americans in their own quest for freedom by portraying the Underground Railroad as an organized effort by white religious groups, often Quakers, to aid “helpless” slaves. Abolitionists sheltered fugitives in

¹ Henry Clay Bruce, The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man, Recollections of H.C. Bruce (York, PA: P. Anstadt & Sons, 1895), p. 109.

hiding places—tunnels or cleverly concealed secret rooms in attics or cellars. Railroad terminology, in the parlance of the times, bespoke of “conductors,” “station masters,” and “passengers.” Northerners were the heroes of the story—benevolent protectors of the African American slave—while Southerners were vilified as cruel and heartless. The North Star guided fugitives to Canada, or at least to northern free states, where freedom lay. Once there, fugitives had their happy ending.²

Larry Gara, in his seminal work The Liberty Line, argued that most depictions of the Underground Railroad should be classified as folklore, rather than history. Portrayals of an organized Underground Railroad were overstated, according to Gara, as he concluded the abolition movement was too fractured for such organization. Many abolitionists preferred to focus on legal means of securing freedom for the enslaved or buying freedom for fugitives, rather than taking direct illegal action.³ Gara focused on the agency of fugitive slaves in effecting their own escapes and emphasized the role of the African American community, both enslaved and free, in supporting fugitives

Even among those active with helping fugitives, enticing slaves to escape from the south met with disapproval. Oberlin College’s President James H. Fairchild recalled that most abolitionists there disapproved of going into the south to lure away slaves, feeling it was too reckless and risky. Thomas Garrett, noted Quaker conductor in Wilmington, Delaware, insisted that he would only help fugitives who came to him. Quaker Levi Coffin, considered by some as the “President” of the Underground Railroad operating in Indiana and Cincinnati, assured his

² Larry Gara, The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 1-7.

³ Gara, p. 73.

southern business acquaintances that he had no intention of interfering with their laws or their slaves.⁴

The quest for freedom moved West as the country expanded. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 set the stage for the violent confrontation over the expansion of slavery known as Bleeding Kansas. Championed by Stephen Douglas, who was anxious to see the territory settled to further the cause of a northern route for a transcontinental railroad, the legislation ended the Missouri Compromise and opened the Kansas territory to the possibility of slavery. Under the doctrine of popular sovereignty, the inhabitants decided whether slavery should be allowed. Waves of emigrants flowed into Kansas from the East, determined to put their stamp on the issue. From Boston came ardent abolitionists of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, who founded Lawrence, the most active Underground Railroad community in the territory. American Missionary Association emigrants from New York founded Osawatomie, another active abolitionist, Underground Railroad town. The moderately anti-slavery American Home Missionary Society sent clergymen who lent a conservative voice to the evangelical assault on bondage in the Kansas territory.⁵

Pro-slavery advocates poured across the border from Missouri, if not always to settle, then at least to participate in the electoral process. Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina sponsored Southern emigrants. Alabama appropriated \$25,000 to help its emigrants, though for the most part they did not enjoy the same level of support as their northern counterparts.⁶ Many southerners came to Kansas without slaves or means, looking for the opportunity to make their fortune. Some of these settlers found slave catching and kidnapping to be lucrative pursuits. In

⁴ Gara, p. 81.

⁵ Gunja SenGupta, For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁶ Perl W. Morgan, The History of Wyandotte County, Kansas, and its People, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), p. 140.

1858, President James Buchanan claimed that Kansas was a slave state in law as much as South Carolina or Georgia, though in practice it was one without slaves.⁷ Pre-territorial period military posts and Indian missions formed the nucleus of Kansas slave holding areas. The largest number of pro-slavery settlers came in the first two years, and brought their slaves with the intention of founding new homes. When the partisan strife broke around them, many chose to remove their slaves to a safe distance lest they lose them to the Underground Railroad; others waited to see what the outcome might be.⁸ In the territorial census of 1855, although Southerners were in the majority, slaves constituted only 2.2 per cent of the population (186 of 8525 people). The average size slave-holding was small—2.3, compared to 6.1 in Missouri’s Little Dixie or 7.7 in the Upper South.⁹ Some estimates indicate that the slave population more than doubled by 1857 and the average size of slave holdings likely increased.¹⁰ Most likely, the bonds people supplemented the labor on family farms and assisted in “taming” the wilderness.

Settlers of both stripes sought to transplant their clashing visions of society and republicanism to the new territory. Free State proponents held a range of ideas about slavery, some supporting African American equal rights and others focusing their concern over slave competition with free labor.¹¹ All of these views sprang from optimistic notions of progress engendered by the evangelical and capitalist transformation of Northern society that free staters brought to Kansas on a mission to civilize less advanced people—southern slaveholders, Catholic immigrants, or western frontiersmen. They aimed to bring Yankee-style progress to the Plains by transplanting the “trophies” of free labor—churches, schools, mills, and towns. This

⁷ SenGupta, p. 117-118.

⁸ Zu Adams, “Slaves in Kansas”, typescript, Slavery Collection, 2, Kansas State Historical Society, September 1895, p. 1-2.

⁹ SenGupta, p. 120-121.

¹⁰ SenGupta, p. 127.

¹¹ SenGupta, p. 2.

blending of Northern humanism and notions of progress with broadly defined free-state goals legitimated anti-slavery politics. The Southern response was likewise rooted in notions of republicanism. To white Southerners, race rather than money determined privilege. As such, all whites had access to social and economic democracy. Southern honor rested on self determination and independence made possible by slavery and the subjugation of blacks.¹²

Northerners and Southerners alike found their world view threatened in Kansas. To the free staters, President Franklin Pierce's endorsement of the "bogus" pro-slavery legislature¹³ raised the specter of British tyranny of the Revolutionary period. Pro-slavery forces and their Missouri neighbors regarded eastern efforts to "abolitionize" the territory as an assault on their independence and lifestyle.¹⁴ Many Free State advocates, however, were not initially abolitionists. They viewed slavery as a means of controlling African Americans, and they did not particularly want blacks in the territory. To Mark Delahay, editor of the moderate Kansas Territorial Register, as long as slavery was legal, slaveholders had the right to settle and the government was obliged to protect their property. He therefore supported the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁵ The Free State party in 1855 did not represent the moral abolitionist movement. Proponents fought for freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the freedom to elect local officials, but they were not yet willing to extend freedom to African Americans.¹⁶ In 1855, Free State voters supported a Black Law that barred "all Negroes, bond or free" from setting foot in the territory. Only voters in Lawrence, Juniatta, and Wabaunsee rejected the provision.¹⁷

¹² SenGupta, p. 2-4.

¹³ Free staters used the term "bogus" to refer to the pro-slavery legislature elected in 1855 with the participation of Missouri residents who came across the border to vote.

¹⁴ SenGupta, p. 3-4.

¹⁵ Rita G. Napier, "The Hidden History of Bleeding Kansas: Leavenworth and the Formation of the Free-State Movement," Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 27 (Spring-Summer 2004): p. 52.

¹⁶ Napier, p. 61.

¹⁷ SenGupta, p. 99.

The struggle for political ascendancy pushed each side to extreme positions. Proslavery extremists had seized control of the territorial government through fraudulent voting. They wrote one of the most stringent slave codes in the country, demanding, for example, the death penalty for anyone who enticed away or aided a slave. The slave code also placed limits on freedom of the press and freedom of speech. Rather than allow local communities to elect county officers responsible for enforcement, the slave code reserved this responsibility for the legislature.¹⁸ Only by controlling the legislature, passing the necessary laws, and creating a system of enforcement could slaveholders be assured of the stability necessary to bring their human property to the territory.¹⁹

In the face of such proslavery abuses, many who came to Kansas with moderate free-state ideals channeled their daily fear of violence into energy for the anti-slavery cause. Some, already with abolitionist leanings, took a more active role in violent confrontations and Underground Railroad actions.²⁰ Fear of southern ‘mob’ rule in Kansas caused some Free Staters to become ardent abolitionists. Northern men and women empowered themselves with the twin tools of ideology and violence.²¹ Some became radicalized in their political views and abandoned their non-violent beliefs. Violence in the name of liberty became acceptable, even encouraged, by a growing number of anti-slavery activists in Kansas and back East.

By the spring of 1856, violence appeared to be the only remaining option. On May 21, pro-slavery forces destroyed Lawrence, burning the town and throwing the Free State presses into the river. Free Staters, smarting from this ‘Sack of Lawrence’, bristled at Preston Brook’s

¹⁸ Napier, p. 57.

¹⁹ Napier, p. 55.

²⁰ Kristen A. Tegtmeier, “The Ladies of Lawrence are Arming!: The Gendered Nature of Sectional Violence in Early Kansas” in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., Anti-Slavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), p. 216.

²¹ Tegtmeier, p. 228.

attack on Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner the following day.²² Northern newspapers issued a rallying cry for a violent response. Ruffians “must be crushed by the same spirit and the same power that broke the rule of the tyrants of ’76.”²³ Some writers connected the North’s “virtual slavery” to its “feeble manhood” and called for a more militaristic defense.²⁴



Armed Lawrence settlers. Photo: Kansas State Historical Society

In this atmosphere, anti-slavery advocates reconsidered the non-violent ideals of Garrisonian abolitionists. Northern women, some of them Quaker pacifists, picked up Sharpe’s rifles and threatened men at gunpoint. In contrast to traditional gender roles, women had to learn to use firearms to defend against border ruffians when their husbands were absent. Underground Railroad conductor Dr. John Doy wrote that many women stood by their men with rifles in hand. He claimed that “many a marauder fell by the ball from a rifle fired by a woman’s hand. The women of Kansas are worth to be classed with those of 1776 ... and that the blood of brave mothers still flowed in the veins of equally brave daughters.”²⁵ Northern men, often noted as

²² Tegtmeier, p. 226.

²³ New York Daily Tribune, May 20, 1856, quoted in Tegtmeier, p. 227.

²⁴ Tegtmeier, p. 227.

²⁵ John Doy, The Narrative of John Doy, of Lawrence Kansas...: Printed for the Author, (New York: T. Holman, 1860), p. 20.

law-abiding and industrious, justified betraying territorial laws and exchanging gunfire with proslavery men in response to perceived Southern excesses.²⁶

Against this backdrop, Kansas settlers struggled over the enslaved status of African Americans in their midst. Slave holders concentrated along the Missouri River, though they brought few enslaved people to Kansas. Most Missouri slaves lived in the “Little Dixie” region of western Missouri where hemp production occupied the slave labor force. Just to the south of Kansas, Indian tribes such as the Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles held slaves. Among the anti-slavery settlers, some came to Kansas from Underground Railroad communities to the east. Others came with abstract convictions about slavery that were tested once they reached the front lines in Kansas. Congregationalist minister Richard Cordley grew up near Ann Arbor, Michigan. He recalled his indignation when the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850 while he was a student at Andover Theological Seminary. At the time, he declared his intention to shelter a fugitive if ever confronted with the opportunity. Once in Kansas, Cordley observed “It is easy to be brave a thousand miles away. But now I must face the question at short range....But I felt there was only one thing to do.”²⁷ Cordley told his friend Monteith that he would help shelter Lizzie, a young woman who was seeking her escape to Canada. Lizzie stayed with Reverend Cordley’s family for several months before Monteith made plans for the next part of her journey.

Some Kansans gave casual assistance, not through any great moral conviction, but rather on the spur of the moment. Benjamin Van Horn expressed the view of many Free State men who felt the Border Ruffians and federal government were working to make Kansas a slave

²⁶ Tegtmeier, p. 216.

²⁷ Richard Cordley, “Lizzie and the Underground Railroad” in *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1903), p. 122-136, as reprinted in Richard B. Sheridan, ed., *Freedom’s Crucible: The Underground Railroad in Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas, 1854-1865: A Reader*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1998), p.69-70.

state.²⁸ He noted that a good number of radical abolitionists in Lawrence and Topeka encouraged slaves to run away, helping them on the Underground Railroad. Other settlers were more conservative, wanting only to stop the spread of slavery, especially into Kansas. In Van Horn's view, "the government officials at Leavenworth often sent United States soldiers out to hunt for and capture runaway slaves, that, all of us objected to, from the fact that if our horses ran away or were stolen we had to get them ourselves or let them go."²⁹ At his boarding house in Topeka, van Horn reported that two fugitives had sheltered for two days, hiding as necessary under some floor boards in the dining room. One day during breakfast thirty soldiers rode up. Two were sent inside to search for the runaways who crawled under the boards. While the search proceeded, the diners ate an "uncommonly hearty breakfast" at a leisurely pace until the soldiers left empty-handed.

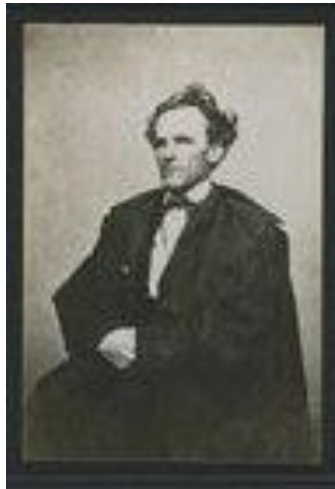
Underground Railroad activist John Armstrong related the story of Ann Clarke whom he helped to escape. Colonel H.T. Titus and George Clarke, government officials who lived near Leecompton, jointly held Ann Clarke in bondage. For a time while he made arrangements for the journey north, Armstrong hid her for six weeks at the boarding house of Mrs. Scales in Topeka. Ann would come out during the day when the boarders were gone and help with chores. One day Captain Henry, a boarder and strong pro-slavery man, chanced upon Ann and Mrs. Scales doing dishes. Mrs. Scales admonished him to keep a secret, which Armstrong noted Captain Henry did, never giving them away. Eventually, Armstrong raised sufficient funds from

²⁸ Benjamin van Horn came to Kansas in May 1857 from southern Indiana to pursue commercial opportunities. B.F. Van Horn to George W. Martin, January 4, 1909, Kansas State Historical Society.

²⁹ Van Horn to Martin.

Governor Charles Robinson, Major James Abbott, Colonel John Ritchie and others to take Ann Clarke and another woman to Iowa via the Lane Trail.³⁰

The Lane Trail, which Armstrong used in Ann Clarke's escape, became the primary Underground Railroad route through Kansas. Pro-slavery forces controlled the Missouri River west of St. Louis and had virtually closed the river route to Free State passengers and freight by 1856. Missourians turned back the *Star of the West* and the *Sultan* in June, forcing Northerners to seek an overland route through free territory.³¹ Running west from Chicago, the Lane Trail crossed Iowa, the southeast corner of Nebraska, and south to Topeka, thereby skirting Missouri. Lane marked the route with stone cairns, "Lane Chimneys," built on elevations such that they

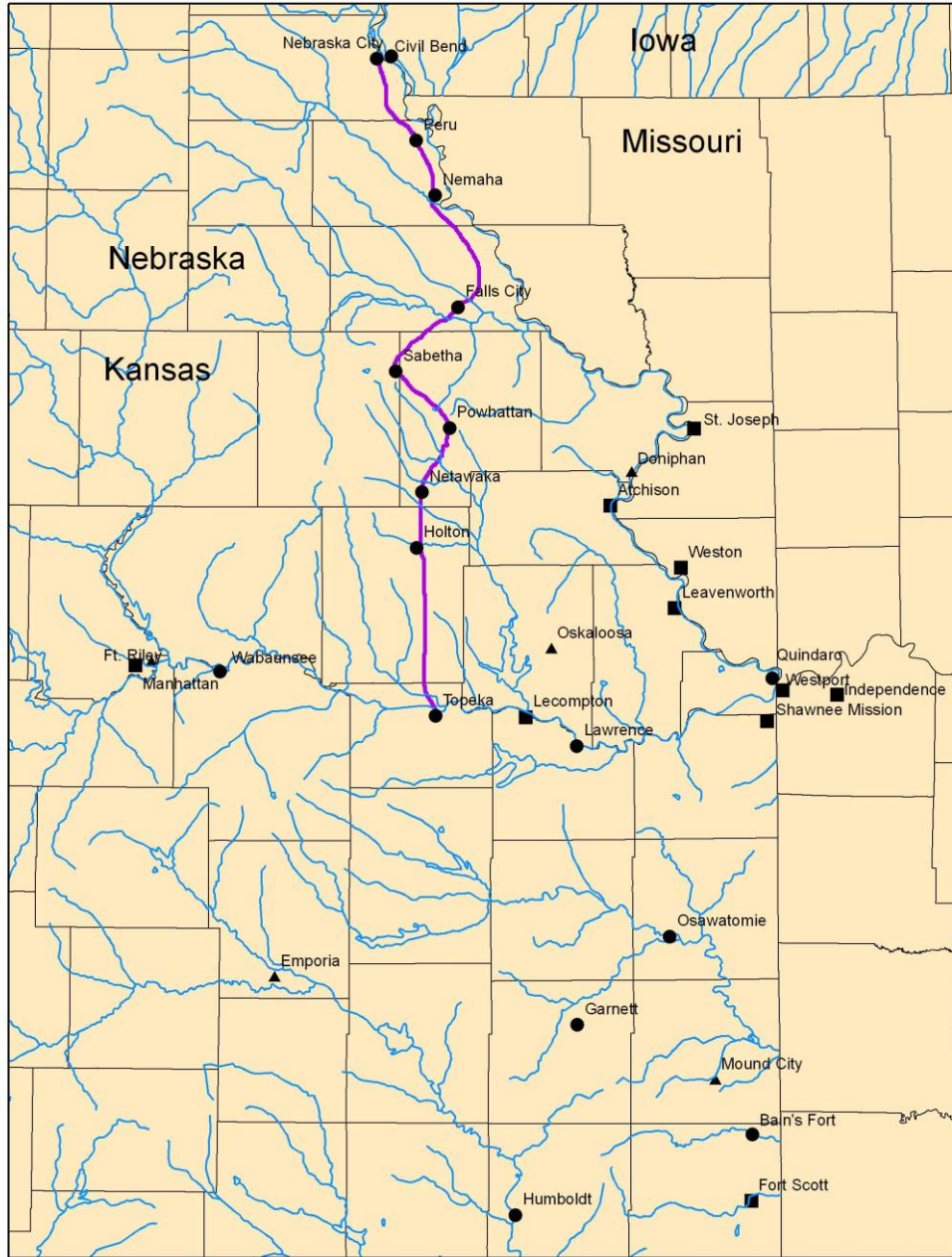


James Lane. Photo: Kansas State Historical Society

³⁰ John Armstrong, "Reminiscences of Slavery Days", Kansas State Historical Society. James Abbott and John Ritchie were officers in the Free State militia movement.

³¹ Samuel A. Johnson, The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1954), p. 191-193.

Kansas Underground Railroad and the Lane Trail



Key

- Free State town
- Pro-slavery town
- ▲ Uncertain affiliation town
- Lane Trail

could be seen across the plains.³² Dr. Ira Blanchard who operated an Underground Railroad station in Civil Bend, Iowa, proposed to John Brown that the Lane Trail was the most practical route for transporting fugitives in Kansas to freedom in Canada. Brown brought Blanchard to Topeka in 1856 to arrange the network of supporters at the trailhead. In response to the threat of slave catchers, abolitionists in Kansas sheltered fugitives in their homes until arrangements could be made to take a group north with an armed escort. Underground Railroad conductors required money, food, arms, transportation, and clothing to assist escaped bondsmen to safety. John Armstrong, John Ritchie, Jacob Willits, Daniel Sheridan, and others pledged that they would safely conduct all fugitives arriving in Topeka to Blanchard's stop in Civil Bend, Iowa.³³

The Topeka men inaugurated the route in February 1857 with the Ann Clark escape. John Brown forwarded another three slaves to Armstrong in charge of a man named Mills. Mills and Armstrong took the fugitives in a covered wagon north on the Lane Trail. The group passed through Kansas without incident, but border ruffians stopped the wagon outside Nebraska City. Escaping detection as they hid in the false bottom of the wagon, the group pushed on. John Kagi, one of Brown's inner circle, had gone ahead of this first group and met them at Nebraska City where his father and sister lived. Kagi helped Armstrong at the river crossing where they persuaded the ferryman at gunpoint to risk the ice laden river. After the ice pushed them half a mile downriver, the group made the far shore and continued without incident to Civil Bend. The first trip thus successfully completed, Brown considered the Underground Railroad through Kansas firmly established.³⁴

³² Some of these chimneys have been reconstructed by property owners.

³³ William Elsey Connelly, "The Lane Trail", Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1913-1914, vol XIII, p. 269-270.

³⁴ Connelly, p. 270.

This trip demonstrated a tactic further developed by Kansas Underground Railroad conductors. As fugitives found their way to Lawrence or Topeka, abolitionists sheltered them until an armed escort could convey them to Iowa. Groups of a dozen or more bondsmen with several armed protectors comprised such convoys. Dr. John Doy, John Brown, Reverend John Stewart, Charles Leonhardt, and even the Quaker “Iowa boys” who settled in Pardee organized trips of this type. In January 1859, Doy wrote to Massachusetts abolitionist Samuel May, requesting financial assistance and describing the Kansas operation:

We have now seventeen coloured [sic] persons waiting till the means is obtained to send them escorted to Iowa. I have just returned from a journey in which I have laid out a good substantial under ground road appointed conductors at each station about fifteen miles apart we have a well organised [sic] society for the reception & protection of our coloured [sic] brethren till each train is made up then see them to a place of safty [sic]. I would refer you to the following persons as officers of aforesaid society—Mr. John Bolles Treasurer, Rev. C. Nute Secy, collectors Chas Stearns, Dr. John Doy, Lyman Allen. Please do what you can among your friends and oblige one who is a stranger to you but one in heart and design.³⁵

The formation of a society with officers to receive and protect fugitives indicates an established organization. Doy’s statement about conducting “each train” of fugitives to safety implied the group had accomplished repeated forays. The “under ground road” that Doy charted may be an indication that slave catcher knowledge of the Lane Trail made it too dangerous, causing conductors to seek new routes. Alternatively, Doy may have been referring to a feeder route that connected to the Lane Trail north of Topeka.

Doy’s knowledge of the terrain and local conductors made him a logical choice for assisting free blacks from Lawrence in January 1859.³⁶ From the harangues of proslavery leaders, the enslaved population of Missouri knew that Lawrence was a place to trust and therefore it became a destination. Slave hunters also knew Lawrence as a place to find fugitives,

³⁵ John Doy, Lawrence, K.T., to Samuel May, Massachusetts, January 1859, Boston Public Library, Ms.B.1.6, vol 7, No. 91

³⁶ Doy, Narrative, p. 23.

or failing that, to kidnap free blacks. Abolitionist James Abbott observed that kidnapping free blacks was more lucrative to slave-catchers because the proceeds from selling them were generally more than the reward for returning a fugitive.³⁷ After several episodes with kidnapers, the African Americans of Lawrence appealed to the white citizens for protection. Together they made a plan for the blacks to emigrate to Iowa where they could live without fear. Dr. Doy agreed to escort a group of thirteen people to Holton.³⁸

Plans originally called for Doy's party to travel with John Brown, who was leaving Kansas with a group of twelve fugitives he had stolen from Missouri. An armed guard of ten men was to accompany both groups, and was deemed sufficient to secure their safety. Circumstances prevented the groups from traveling together, and Brown overruled Doy, taking the entire escort. Brown argued that his group of fugitives, having been taken from Missouri in open defiance, faced a greater risk than Doy's group of free blacks. Determined to proceed, Doy risked the twenty mile trip from Lawrence to Oskaloosa unprotected.³⁹ About twelve miles out from Lawrence, a party of twenty armed and mounted border ruffians ambushed Doy's party, taking them to Weston, Missouri. Missouri officials held Doy and his son Charles at the Platte County jail to await trial for abducting slaves from Missouri. Slave traders sold the thirteen African Americans in the party into slavery, wives and children being separated from their husbands and fathers. Charles Doy gained his freedom, but the Missouri court found Dr. Doy guilty and sentenced him to five years of hard labor in the state penitentiary. While awaiting an appeal to the state Supreme Court, Doy's Kansas allies launched a daring rescue in July 1859. The "Immortal Ten" bluffed their way into the jail at St. Joseph to which the court had

³⁷ James, B. Abbott, "The Rescue of Dr. John W. Doy," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1886-1888, vol IV (Topeka, 1890), p. 312-323, in Sheridan, p. 22.

³⁸ Doy, p. 23.

³⁹ Doy, p. 123.

transferred Doy. They walked out with him, making their escape across the Missouri River in boats they had hidden on the banks for that purpose.⁴⁰



The “Immortal Ten” rescue party, with John Doy seated. Photo: Kansas State Historical Society

One of Doy’s rescuers was the “fighting preacher” Captain John E. Stewart. A former Methodist minister, Stewart lived on the Wakarusa River, south of Lawrence on a stockaded farm that was noted as a leading station on the Underground Railroad. Rather than wait for fugitives to make their way to his farm, Stewart raided plantations in Missouri. In December 1859, he wrote to New York merchant and abolitionist Thaddeus Hyatt that since the Doy rescue, he had liberated fourteen slaves from Missouri, including “one unbroken family, of which I feel rather proud.” Stewart described his method of going into Missouri on the pretense of buying livestock or produce. Conversing with enslaved laborers, he showed them the hidden wagon bottom and armed them for self-defense. Sometimes successful escape depended on the fleetness of his horse, sometimes on a steady hand. Since his only capable horse had given out, he requested money from Hyatt to obtain another. Further, Stewart and his allies in Kansas did not have the resources necessary to help the fugitives who were destitute of any material goods. Once he liberated the slaves from Missouri, Stewart asked for assistance in finding a safe place.

⁴⁰ The “Immortal Ten” included Silas S. Soule, J.A. Pike, S.H. Willes, Joseph Gardner, Thomas Simmons, Charles Doy, Jacob Sinex, John E. Stewart, George Hay, and James B. Abbott. They were careful not to carry Sharps rifles, a well known badge of Kansas abolitionists. Sheridan, p. 27-34.

He speculated that “something is wrong in Nebraska & Iowa. I am fearful that some have been captured there & sent back.” Stewart concluded with a sentiment from his wife who lamented that slavery made everyone wicked because she wanted to “burn every slaveholder up. I believe, husband, it would be right for you to shoot them.”⁴¹



John Stewart
Photo: Kansas State
Historical Society

Stewart continued his work in spite of these challenges. Close friend Silas Soule, another of the Doy rescuers, wrote from Coal Creek on May 9, 1860 that Stewart had just brought up another three slaves, making 68 since he started. While Soule and Stewart were in Lawrence the previous day, a runner came with word that kidnappers had attacked Stewart’s place. By the time Stewart and Soule could get back to the stockade, the kidnappers had taken one man and wounded another. The blacks had revolvers while out plowing the field, but Soule reported the five kidnappers had fired fifteen or twenty shots. The abolitionists gave chase for six miles but could not overtake them. Soule speculated that William C. Quantrill was among the kidnappers.⁴²

⁴¹ John E. Stewart to Thaddeus Hyatt, December 20, 1859, Kansas State Historical Society

⁴² Sheridan, p. 131-132.

William Quantrill was a key figure in another Underground Railroad episode. A group of “Iowa boys,” sons of Quaker parents from Springdale, Iowa, settled in Pardee, Kansas about 1859. Springdale was a hotbed for the Underground Railroad, and one of John Brown’s stopping places. The Pardee Quakers carried this spirit with them and in the summer of 1860 began making plans for incursions into Missouri to liberate slaves. Albert Southwick, one of the “Iowa boys,” and Mrs. Negus who lived in the Pardee settlement, provided narratives of the events to Reverend Lutz. Both recount the first successful raid in September 1860, when the group conducted twelve fugitives—a family of seven and five others—safely to Springdale.⁴³

As they prepared for a second raid, Quantrill learned of their intention and gained the confidence of Charles Ball, one of the group.⁴⁴ Together they developed a plan to liberate relatives of three African American slaves who had previously escaped from the Cherokee Indians south of Kansas and were living in Springdale. At an intermediate stop in Osawatomie, the “Iowa boys” abandoned the plan due to insufficient support from the local abolitionists. At Quantrill’s suggestion, they turned their attention to the feasibility of raiding the Morgan Walker farm in Missouri. Walker, reputed to be a hard, cruel taskmaster, used 26 slaves to cultivate his 1900 acre plantation six miles southeast of Independence. Local Jayhawk leader Captain Ely Snyder opposed the idea. Having been on raids to Missouri with Quantrill, Snyder denounced him as a traitor. Other members of the party from Lawrence deferred to Snyder’s objections, but Quantrill convinced the Pardee Quakers that the raid was feasible.⁴⁵

Charles Ball, Edwin Morrison, Chalkley Lipsey, and Albert Southwick went with Quantrill into Missouri, walking the last stretch and camping near the Walker farm. Ransom

⁴³ Reverend John J. Lutz, “Quantrill and the Morgan Walker Tragedy” in Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904, (Topeka, Kansas, 1904), Vol. VIII, 324-332, in Sheridan, p. 92-93.

⁴⁴ Sheridan, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Sheridan, p. 137.

Harris stayed behind at the group's log cabin at Pardee. Quantrill and the four Quakers camped for several days near the Walker place and talked with the slaves to lay the groundwork. While Southwick remained to guard the camp, Ball, Morrison, and Lipsey went with Quantrill to Walker's house one evening toward the end of December 1860. Quantrill, Ball, and Lipsey went inside to inform Walker that they had come to take his slaves. While Quantrill remained with the family, Walker's neighbors fired on Ball and Lipsey as they left the house. Quantrill had earlier betrayed the plan to Walker who rallied his neighbors to his defense. The Missourians killed all three of the Pardee Quakers who visited Walker's farm. Walker afterwards gave Quantrill a horse, bridle, saddle, and fifty dollars cash.⁴⁶

One of the most committed of all Underground Railroad radicals in Kansas, though, was John Brown. His exploits in the fight for Bleeding Kansas and the raid at Harpers Ferry are well and often told. From a staunchly abolitionist family, Brown had a lifelong involvement with the Underground Railroad, never missing an opportunity to assist fugitives.⁴⁷ George Gill and journalist Richard Hinton provided an account of Brown's famous raid into Missouri to liberate a slave family. In December 1858, Jim Daniels, an enslaved man, confided to George Gill that his owner planned to sell Daniels and his family soon. Daniels had encountered Gill in Kansas while selling brooms, though the real motivation for his sales trip was to find help for himself, his family and a few friends.⁴⁸

When Gill passed the request to John Brown, he seized the opportunity to forcibly liberate slaves. Gill speculates that Brown was "expecting or hoping that God would provide the

⁴⁶ Sheridan, p.137-139.

⁴⁷ John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 12, 1858, in Sheridan, p. 77

⁴⁸ Richard J. Hinton, John Brown and His Men, With Some Account of the Roads They Traveled to Reach Harper's Ferry (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1894), p. 217-28 in Sheridan, p. 79

basis of action. When this came, he hailed it as heaven-sent.”⁴⁹ With a party of about a dozen, Brown went into Missouri on the night of December 20, 1858. A second party of about eight, led by Aaron D. Stevens also conducted a raid that night. Brown liberated Daniels and his family, taking the personal property belonging to the estate to help finance the long journey ahead. Brown reasoned that the property, having been bought with the slave labor, rightly belonged to them. The party led by Stevens succeeded in getting Jane, whom they had sought, but in so doing, killed her owner Mr. Cruise.⁵⁰

Several safe houses in the Osawatomie area offered shelter to the fugitives once they had safely arrived in Kansas. Augustus Wattles, Richard Mendenhall, and Samuel Adair were among those who housed the group.⁵¹ The Daniels party spent weeks at some cabins near Garnett, unable to travel easily because Mrs. Daniels was pregnant. Under the care of Dr. (later General) James Blunt, she gave birth to a son named John Brown Daniels. Finally, about January 20, 1859, the group was ready to leave Garnett. Brown was anxious to depart because he had heard rumors of threats to either kill him or hand him over to the Missourians. With his party of twelve fugitives, Brown and his men proceeded to Lawrence where he arranged finances and provisions before proceeding to Topeka. From Topeka, the party picked up the Lane Trail heading north. Just past Holton at Spring Creek, pro-slavery forces stopped Brown’s group. A messenger took word back to Topeka where John Ritchie and John Armstrong raised a rescue party. At the resulting “Battle of the Spurs” on January 31, Brown’s party took several prisoners who they kept for a day or two before allowing them to walk home. Gill reported that some of the Topeka party remained with the group through Tabor, Iowa, as they believed squads of

⁴⁹ Sheridan, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Hinton in Sheridan, p. 80-81.

⁵¹ Samuel Adair’s wife Florella was John Brown’s half-sister. Samuel was a Congregationalist minister, trained at Oberlin.

armed men were following them. Indeed, arriving at Blanchard's in Civil Bend, he learned that the posse had preceded him and searched the place thoroughly. Brown's party arrived at Tabor, Iowa on February 5, 1859, staying until February 11. The Congregationalists there continued to aid Brown's party though they held meetings and passed resolutions denouncing his violent and illegal actions.⁵² Brown and his party with twelve fugitives continued through Detroit to Canada, from where he continued his preparations for the raid at Harpers Ferry.

John Brown's exploits have been highly publicized, but a secret group in Kansas, the Danites, employed similar tactics in the battle to make Kansas a free state. The group originally formed in Lawrence in 1855, but smaller groups broke off in southeastern Kansas where they took to the field in 1858, becoming known as Jayhawkers. In 1859, Kansas ratified a constitution prohibiting slavery, and the remnants of the Danites utilized their connections by becoming more active in the Underground Railroad.⁵³ Charles Leonhardt, a Prussian who came to Kansas in 1854, became involved with this group and felt an obligation to detail the Danite's Underground Railroad operations. In a manuscript "The Last Train", Leonhardt recounts a journey to bring fugitives to Iowa. A group of Danites, including Leonhardt and Reverend John Stewart, escorted a group of twelve fugitives in June 1860 from Lawrence to the Quaker communities at Springdale and West Branch, Iowa.⁵⁴

Joe Coppock, one of the Danites with Leonhardt on the "Last Train" published an article in 1895 hinting at the impact of such activities. Brown's raid into Missouri to liberate slaves became an example that others such as the "Fighting Preacher" John Stewart and even the Pardee Quakers imitated. Slaveholders, threatened by the potential loss of their property, began selling

⁵² Hinton, in Sheridan, p. 83-85.

⁵³ Todd Mildfelt, The Secret Danites: Kansas' First Jayhawkers, (Richmond, Kansas: Todd Mildfelt Publishing, 2003), p. 12.

⁵⁴ Charles Leonhardt, "The Last Train", Kansas State Historical Society.

their slaves and leaving the area. The exodus from the region was “so formidable that slaves sold from one-half to two-thirds of their former price.” Coppock, who was initiated in border warfare under Stewart, asserted that Stewart had done in northern Kansas what Brown had done in southern, and all the slaves were cleared from the territory.⁵⁵ Clearly, Coppock overstated the case, but slaveholders in the region felt the impact of the Kansas abolitionists

Border regions between slave and free territories present opportunities for the enslaved and challenges for their owners. James Abbott, who led the Doy rescue party, observed that slaves learned where to find freedom from the slaveholders themselves. The masters came to understand the danger of holding people as property so close to a free state and began to move the slaves farther south. Facing the threat of sale, many slaves in the region took action to free themselves.⁵⁶ In strategic terms, if Kansas became a free state, slavery in Missouri was seriously threatened. Bordered on three sides by free states (Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois), Missouri would be isolated and runaway slaves would be more likely. A similar phenomenon has been observed in other border regions, such as between Texas and Mexico, where slave communities looked to the Rio Grande as a source of liberation.⁵⁷ The geographical proximity would facilitate supplying propaganda to the enslaved in Missouri and enticing them into Kansas.⁵⁸ Indeed, one zealous abolitionist, inspired by the martyred John Brown, proposed building an airship from which to drop leaflets directing the slaves to make preparations to make their escape in the large airship to follow. When conditions were right, they would let down the basket on the airship and

⁵⁵ Joe Coppock, “John Brown and His Cause,” Boyd Stutler Collection, West Virginia State Archives, 1895, quoted in Mildfelt, p. 84.

⁵⁶ Abbott in Sheridan, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Sean Kelley, “Mexico in His Head’: Slavery and the Texas-Mexico Border, 1810-1860”, Journal of Social History, vol 37, issue 3 (Spring 2004): p. 709.

⁵⁸ Napier, p. 53.

“tell the Boys if they want their liberty to jump on board, and we would be out of reach of powder and ball before they could reach us.”⁵⁹

Attempts to protect slave property were not particularly successful. A number of informants spoke to the fear of slave owners. Dr. Stringfellow informed H.L. Stein that for fear of losing them, Kansas slave owners sent their slaves to Missouri, and those that could, sold them.⁶⁰ Samuel Adair in Osawatimie recalled that few slaves lived in the area because the slaveholders were afraid to bring them there.⁶¹ Both Thomas Byne and John Speer told the story of James Skeggs taking about 30 slaves to Texas because slavery in Kansas was in danger. Byne reported that Free State thieves had threatened to rob Skeggs and liberate his slaves. Heavily armed, Skeggs made good his exodus.⁶² Rob Walker in 1857 wrote that Carey Whitehead of Doniphan County left to prevent Kansas abolitionists from stealing his slaves and that Esquire Yocum, Judge of the Probate Court in Franklin County, removed from the area after losing his slaves and having his life threatened.⁶³ Kansas, it appears, was not a safe place to hold slaves.

Once Kansas was admitted as a free state and the Civil War began, however, it became a safe haven for fugitives. By 1861, slaves no longer had to flee Kansas to achieve safety. Kansas military units active in the border counties in Missouri escorted considerable numbers of contraband to Lawrence and Douglas counties. Large numbers of fugitives fled on their own from Missouri. John Wood of Lawrence wrote to George Stearns in Boston on November 19, 1861, that 131 had come to Lawrence in 10 days and the day before 27 had arrived by 2:00pm. While the harvest was in progress, Wood wrote that the farmers could care for them, as the

⁵⁹ Daniel Wood to George L. Stearns, May 16, 1860, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁶⁰ H.L. Stein to Honorable G.W. Martin, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, May 31, 1903.

⁶¹ Samuel L. Adair to Zu Adams, September 16, 1895, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁶² Thomas R. Byne to Zu Adams, September 11, 1895, Kansas State Historical Society and John Speer's Reminiscences of Jas. Skaggs, formerly a slave owner near Lecompton, July 13, 1895, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁶³ Rob J. Walker to Secretary Cass, July 15, 1857, Kansas State Historical Society.

fugitives—incidentally—provided labor in the fields. Following that, however, the townspeople of Lawrence would be hard pressed to feed and clothe them.⁶⁴

About the same time, in winter 1861, Muskogee leader Chief Opothleyahola fled from Oklahoma into southern Kansas to escape pro-Confederate Cherokees led by Stand Watie. Opothleyahola's followers numbered 9000 Union loyalists, including hundreds of escaped slaves and free blacks. Their desperate winter time escape, pursued by Native American Confederates, resulted in three major battles and the loss of nearly a third of the fleeing Indians and many of



Opothleyahola. Photo:
Kansas State Historical
Society

the blacks. Stand Watie's troops finally routed Opothleyahola's warriors at Bird's Creek in late December 1861, and the survivors, including women and children, scattered without clothing or provisions. In one of the coldest winters on record, they left corpses and blood from Indian Territory to Kansas where the survivors sought refuge near Humboldt. Substantial numbers of the refugees joined the Union army as early as April 1862 and became the core of the First Indian Home Guard and the First and Second Kansas Colored Regiments. Successor Creek leaders kept Opothleyahola's promise of freedom to all blacks who made the journey and drafted

⁶⁴ Sheridan, p. 107.

treaty language acknowledging the necessity of the Emancipation Proclamation and promising to provide land to their freedmen.⁶⁵

The struggle over slavery on the Kansas frontier resulted in Underground Railroad operations which were more organized and more violent than in the east. Many of the escapes from this region utilized the Lane Trail, which ran north from Topeka to Nebraska City, across the Missouri River to Civil Bend, Iowa, and onward to Chicago. With the exception of Methodist John Stewart, the “fighting preacher”, the most active conductors were Congregationalists and Quakers. Normally pacifists in other parts of the country, in Kansas a number of religious abolitionists, including Quakers, turned to violence and direct confrontations. Several conductors including John Stewart, John Brown, and the Pardee Quakers, were committed to forays into slave areas of Missouri to bring slaves off plantations. Large numbers of fugitives gathered in Lawrence and Topeka waiting for armed escorts to Iowa and beyond. John Doy, John Armstrong, the Pardee Quakers, Charles Leonhardt, John Brown, John Ritchie, John Stewart, all participated as guards on such convoys. In the face of this, slaveholders hesitated to bring their bondsmen to Kansas, and a number sent their slaves back to Missouri, moved them away from the Kansas frontier, or sold them. The inability of the pro-slavery forces to secure slave property in the Kansas-Missouri region contributed to the ultimate success of the Free State cause. When Kansas was finally admitted to the Union as a free state in 1861, it became a destination for those who remained enslaved in surrounding states.

⁶⁵ Willard R. Johnson, “Tracing Trails of Blood on Ice: Commemorating ‘The Great Escape’ in 1861-1862 of Indians and Blacks into Kansas,” in Negro History Bulletin, vol 64, numbers 1-4 (2001), p. 11-12.

Appendix A: Underground Railroad Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>State of Origin</i>	<i>Religion</i>
Albert Southwick	Iowa	Quaker
Amasa Soule	New York	
Armstrong, John		
Augustus Wattles	Ohio	Presbyterian
Chalkley T. Lipsey	Ohio	Quaker
Charles Ball	Iowa	Quaker
Charles Robinson	Massachusetts	
Charles Stearns		
Daniel Sheridan		
Doctor James Blunt		
Dr. Eliab G. Macy	Ohio	Quaker
Dr. John Doy	New York	
Edwin S. Morrison	Iowa	Presbyterian
Elizabeth and William K.		
Enoch Platt	Illinois	
Ezekiel Colman	Massachusetts	
George W. Packard		
Henry and Ann Harvey	Ohio	Quaker
Henry Hiatt	Indiana	Quaker
Henry Strong	Connecticut	
J. Bowles		
Jacob Willits		
James Blood		
James Lane	Indiana	
James Monroe Bisbey		
Jehu Hodgson	Illinois	
Joel Grover	New York	
John Brown	Ohio	Congregationalist
John Brown Jr.		
John Dean		Quaker
John Smith		
Joseph Gardner	Indiana	Quaker
Joshua Smith		
Major James B Abbott	Connecticut	
Mary Minta Cox Cordley	Michigan	Congregationalist

<i>Name</i>	<i>State of Origin</i>	<i>Religion</i>
Monteith family	Vermont	Congregationalist
Mr. Bird		
Mr. Mills		
Mrs. James B. Abbott	Connecticut	
Mrs. Scales		
Ransom L. Harris	Vermont	Quaker
Rev. John E. Stewart	New Hampshire	Methodist
Richard Cordley	Michigan	Congregationalist
Richard Mendenhall		
Ritchie, John	Indiana	Congregationalist
Robert and Josiah Miller	South Carolina	
Sam C. Smith		
Samuel and Florella Adair		Congregationalist
Samuel f. Tappan	Massachusetts	
Silas S. Soule	New York	
Walter Oakley		
William Lloyd Garrison Soule	New York	
William Mitchell		

Appendix B: Freedom Seekers

<i>Name</i>	<i>Associated story</i>	<i>Date</i>
Allen Pinks		
Ann Clarke	John Armstrong; Dr. Barker	1857
Charles Fischer	John Doy	1858-1859
Charles Smith	John Doy	1858-59
Charley	Jehu Hodgson	
George	Ritchie, Bodwell	1858
George Washington	joined Lane's 1st Kansas	1862
Henry Clay		1861
Henry Clay Bruce		1864
Ike Gaines	betrayed by Quantrill	
Jim Daniels	John Brown	December 1858
Judy		1856
Lizzie	Rev. Richard Cordley	summer 1859
Mike		
Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Harper	John Brown	1858-1859
Napoleon Simpson	Joseph Gardner	1859-1960
Violet		
William Harper		c. 1861
William Riley	John Doy	1858-1859
Wilson Hays	John Doy	1858

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