

Pioneer Life in Kansas

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Table of Contents	Page
Introductory	1
First white men in Kansas	1
Influences which led settlers to Kansas	2
Social Conditions	2
The Kansas Grain	3
Rail	3
Dwelling houses	4
Kansas made a Territory	5
Rush to the Shawnee reservation	5
Pre-emption law	6
Organization of pro-slavery people	7
Emigrant Aid Company	7
Border troubles	8
Lawrence massacre	9
Women in the home	10
Towns founded - Newspapers	11
Winter of '55-'56	12
Conclusion	13

For the flourishing condition of our beloved state of Kansas we are greatly indebted to its earliest settlers, its pioneers. "Ad Aspera Per Aspera", ("To the stars through difficulties") has always been the motto of the people of Kansas, and they have succeeded in converting a broad expanse of uninhabited prairie into a thriving and prosperous state, whose citizens are free, liberty loving people, instead of hard hearted slave owners, as they might have been. The Aborigines, the American Indians, who roamed over portions of the state, were not inclined to agricultural pursuits, though they raised such products as corn, beans and pumpkins.

The first white men to settle in Kansas were, Daniel Boone, who was sent to the mouth of the Grasshopper creek, where he began farming in 1824, and Rev. Thomas Johnson who founded the Shawnee Mission in Johnson County in 1830. The earliest settlers were farmers, who were attracted by the richness of the soil, though soon all classes of people might be found here. All professions and

callings were represented. Some on account of losses came to retrieve their lost fortunes and make a new start in life, some, attracted by the mild climate to regain lost health, and here, many young men found an open field for their callings or professions. Later the settlers flocked here for political reasons. All came for a good cause, to build up a home, and so doing, they built up the state.

Here, upon the broad prairie, all conventionalities were entirely lost, and in place of it there was a freedom, a liberal feeling, among the people. Each lost the peculiarities of his former state, for Kansas was too broad to admit of it being retained. In that stage of Kansas History, no one would stop to ask the ancestry of a person; what they would want to know was the extent of his ability and courage.

Kansas was a thoroughly attractive state even in its desolate condition, where for miles not a fence was to be seen nor a habitation. A traveler after passing through the state at that time, says he could find no words with which to

express the beauty of the Kanear Prairie. It was such a broad expanse, covered with grass, mostly rich and thick. Many mounds, which were objects of wonder and admiration were to be seen. They seem to have been artificial constructions for defense, worship, or astronomical observations.

The settlers who came for the purpose of carrying on agricultural pursuits found a dark rich soil, varying somewhat in different localities. It was either slightly sandy, clayey, or a good vegetable mould. The splendid water supply also afforded great advantages. Buffaloes, Antelope, elk, Prairie chickens and quails formed parts of the animal food of the settlers; in fact the pioneers were fortunate in having a variety of good food. Apples, pears, peaches, plums, grapes, berries, and all kinds of fruits as well as vegetables and cereals were readily produced.

The dwellings were mostly rude affairs being made of logs. Some of the settlers were fortunate enough to have plaster between these logs, but those who were not

had cool summer houses, and when the cold north winds of winter came they pasted papers over the openings. These answered the purpose very nicely until a heavy rain made them damp, so that they tumbled off; then they must be re-pasted and so on according to the number of rains. These cabins were usually about fifteen feet square and eleven feet high. The windows were of cotton cloth, the doors made of a frame, with a cross piece, covered with cloth. In building these cabins joists were driven into the ground and the oak shakes, which were logs rudely hewn, were nailed to the outside. Frequently the roof was ceiled with cotton cloth nailed across the rafters, while the floors were sometimes remarkable on account of their absence. Such were the homes of many noble men and women, in their founding of the state.

The population of Kansas did not increase in a remarkable degree, until it was made a territory in 1850.

There were no towns of any size at this time, and no place for the legislatures

to meet; the first legislature however met in a large stone house a short distance from Fort Riley, the second at the Shawnee Mission. By 1854 Leavenworth, Atchison, Lawrence and Topeka, had been founded and people were flocking into the state.

About this time the "Kansas-Nebraska bill" which declared, that the inhabitants of the state should decide, whether or not, slavery should be allowed within its limits, was passed. It was generally understood that the United States Government was going to make a treaty with the Shawnee Indians, whose reservation, was just across the Missouri line, in order to obtain this land for pre-emption by the settlers.

The pro-slavery people were determined that Kansas should be a slave state, so in, they flocked, across the Missouri line and staked out their 160 acres of land upon this reservation. These claims, illegal at the time were held till the last, and defense was made by the use of arms when necessary.

The law of pre-emption provides that the head of a family may settle on a tract of land not exceeding 160 acres, for which ^{\$}1.25 per acre must be paid at the end of twelve months. When the claim was taken, a foundation, which usually consisted of four poles, forming a square, was laid. On a few claims a pole was stood straight up and half a dozen shingles were nailed to the top. While the pro-slavery people were rushing in, to make Kansas a slave state the abolitionists were also congregating about the border. Kansas, being such a central state, this contest for and against slavery, largely determined the fate of the Union. It was thought, that if Kansas could be free, then perhaps slavery would gradually pass away from Missouri. The pro-slavery people brought slaves only as domestics, and not as field hands. These southerners settled in communities, claiming the surrounding region, informing all people not of the right kind, that this land was taken up, so the abolitionists were kept out of the state as often as

possible. Such settlements organized, and passed resolutions, which were sent out to the public as the sentiment of Kansas. But many brave men from the north, faced all opposition, though it was very bitter, and came to help free, Kansas. The New England Emigrant Aid Company, came to the rescue and sent out many abolitionists. They offered cheap transportation, and induced eastern people to come, by themselves investing money in Kansas thus giving these pioneers a start. At this, the pro-slavery people grew anxious, and held many meetings, some of which were violent and disgraceful. From this time, throughout the struggle they advocated: first; stopping northern emigrants from coming in, second; getting rid of all Northerners that were then within the Kansas boundaries. The Northern people were commanded to leave, with the threat, that if they did not they would be wiped out of existence. It seemed that Kansas was to become the battle field, where all

the disputes of the Nation were to be settled. The Missourians seemed to take pride in burning towns, and killing the most honored citizens. This was not only carried out by the Missourians and their followers; they probably were the originators of such outrages, and were by far the most cruel in their opposition, but the northern men did their best to return to them like treatment. The equal to the horror during the early history of Kansas, has never been recorded.

After the threat was made by the pro-slavery class, many honest abolitionists were driven from their homes, and their families left desolate. It was not safe to refuse a compliance to commands in those days. The chances were, that an individual would be frightfully mistreated or killed if he did. Rev Butler, a northern minister, was asked to sign a set of resolutions of the southerners, On his refusal, he was set out on the river on a raft, bearing such inscriptions as these: "The way they are

served in Kansas", For "Boston" and "Cargo insured — unavoidable danger of the Missourian and Missouri River excepted". If any attempt was made to sympathize with the negroes was made, suffering was the consequence. John Day and his son tried to free thirteen negroes, who had fled from Missouri. Their object was to convey the captives to Canada, but alas. They were caught and thrown into prison for five years. Then they remained but a short time as a mob of their friends accosted the jailer and compelled him to release them.

The most bloody scene during the whole contest, was the massacre at Lawrence. Quantrill with a band of followers, marched on the city, came up main street just before day break, and succeeded in making a wholesale slaughter before they left. They were like mad men, yelling and raving, and frightening the people with their demon like noises. They burned the city and shot people in all directions.

Such cold blooded murders were surely never, before nor since, committed. The raiders would take a drink of water from a citizen with one hand, and shoot him with the other. I have heard an old minister, who in the early times lived in Lawrence, tell of his escape into a cornfield just out of town. As he was climbing the fence a southerner fired at him, but missed the mark. Being quick witted, he tumbled over the fence and lay like dead. One of the company briefly remarked, "There went a d— Northerner" and the moved on. When all were out of sight he fled to his hiding place. A great many people were scared in the cornfields and ravines just outside the city. One of the raiders asked a woman what was out in the cornfield. Her reply was, "Go and see, but it is the hottest place I have been in today. She took her warning and did not go for which she rejoiced, as many in that field had depended upon her for water that day. Many were the hundreds that were

slain on Kansas soil between 1854 and the close of the war. Such, were the hard blows on the pioneers. Many were the fields of corn that were lost, for, instead of gathering corn, the citizens were guarding their homes and their settlements. Much money and many meals were given to the soldiers. The women sat in their houses in dread of an approacher, for they knew not which he would prove, a friend or an enemy. The sound of fire arms was continually heard in the eastern part of the state. The cabins were often fired at, bullets easily passing between the logs, or even penetrating them, making it much safer to sleep near the floor. Rifles and ammunition were ornaments in every home in early Kansas.

The years were long and lonely ones till the close of the war. — The settlers lived so far apart, and there was such danger in traveling any distance that the ones at home must remain there. Many of them had come

from the east, and heard, only once in a great while from the friends at home, for the mail system was not, at that time, very good - all mail was carried overland from Kansas City.

Besides the political difficulties, the winter of '55-'56 was exceedingly cold. Snow fell from the twenty second of December till the third of January, and the river was frozen over two feet deep. This extreme cold caused much suffering as did the drouth the year before. The settlers were becoming accustomed to hardships, but yet when the grasshoppers came, they were made almost destitute, for all crops were a failure and the troubles had lasted so long, that there was nothing laid by for a rainy day.

That Kansas people were intelligent is shown by the fact that public schools and churches, were built soon after the place became a territory. Newspapers - "The Kansas Weekly Herald", and

"The Kansas Pioneer" were printed as early as '54.

What the state might have been, if less intelligent, less patriotic, ~~and~~ less energetic people had inhabited it, we can scarcely tell. The time of "Per Aspera" was long and bitter, but soon after followed the glorious "Ad Aspera". May the motto dear to the heart of every Kansas youth be "Ad Aspera Per Aspera", and may we never forget what we owe to the pioneers, and do our utmost to make Kansas the purest, noblest state in the Union.

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