

**The New England Emigrant Aid Company: Its Impact on
Territorial Kansas, 1854-1857**

by

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ABSTRACT

The New England Emigrant Aid Company, formed in 1854 under the direction of Eli Thayer, was established to send settlers into the Kansas territory. The New England Emigrant Aid Company's goal was to secure Kansas as a free-state. This position was in direct opposition to the proslavery Missourian's desire to make Kansas a slave state. The New England Emigrant Aid Company supplied emigrants and leadership to the free-state movement in Kansas. This caused conflict between the free-state party and the proslavery faction.

The company's impact upon Kansas and the border Missourians needed to be examined thoroughly to understand its place in Kansas history. The consequences of its presence in the territory as an antagonistic force to the proslavery Missourians has never been fully examined. It is the focus of this study to determine the effects of the company's presence and its propaganda in Kansas. The problems that the company faced from critics will also be explored in depth. Furthermore, it is the intention of this work to understand the reasons why the company presence in the territory threatened the proslavery Missourians into action.

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Introduction

The Historiography of The New England Emigrant Aid Company

The New England Emigrant Aid Company was an organization founded by Eli Thayer in response to the opening of Kansas territory to the possibility of slavery. The company organized emigration; defenders have claimed it saved Kansas to freedom, while critics argue it caused the conflict with the proslavery faction and escalated violence.¹ The problems in Kansas began with the proposed Kansas-Nebraska bill that had been introduced by Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois in early 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska Act signed by President Franklin Pierce on May 30, 1854, required "that the territories of Kansas and Nebraska would be admitted to the Union, with or without slavery, according to the stipulations of their constitutions at the time of their admission."² This Act caused Northerners much concern because it repealed that part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 which stated that slavery would not be allowed north of the 36° 30' line. The

¹Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1954), 8.

²Joan E. Lampton, "The Kansas-Nebraska Act Reconsidered: An Analysis of Men, Methods and Motives" (master's thesis, Illinois: Illinois State University, 1979), 1.

passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened up the territory of Kansas to the possibility of slavery. Once this Act was passed by Congress Kansas became a battleground between the proslavery and free-state forces.

Douglas never intended nor did he foresee the trouble that came to Kansas. Douglas believed in popular sovereignty and never thought that the passage of the Act would drive slavery or violence into the territory. He had faith in the people of the Kansas territory and their right to choose their own legislature in order to enact their own territorial policies.³ Douglas knew that the South wanted more territory but he believed Southerners would not interfere with the right of the people in the territory to choose for themselves whether they would live in a free or slave state. He, unfortunately, underestimated the South's desire for more slave territory; passage of the Act allowed the proslavery faction to focus on creating a slave state in Kansas. The proslavery faction's intention to make Kansas slave was in direct opposition to the North's intent to make it free, thus resulting in conflict.

Kansas territory bordered western Missouri and for

³Stephen A. Douglas, Letter to the Editor of the *Concord*, 16 February 1854 in *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas*, edited by Robert W. Johannsen, (Illinois: Urbana, 1961), 285.

proslavery Missourians to have a free-state as a border was a direct threat. They felt threatened because they did not want a free-state on their border which could potentially harbor escaped slaves. The *Missouri Democrat*, a free-state St. Louis newspaper which espoused free-state views, quoted from *The Missouri Republican*, a rival newspaper with opposing views, their fears that "the abolitionists would settle in Kansas and run off with our slaves."⁴ The proslavery Missourians on the western border had no intention of allowing that to happen and it was that fear which first drove them across the border into Kansas. Missourians were moved to act by their Senator, David R. Atchison, who had fought for passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill with the intention of securing Kansas as a slave state. He urged, "Missourians to be prepared to rush across the border to settle Kansas Territory and secure her for the South the moment the lands to the west were opened."⁵ He and many residents of western Missouri were ready to take Kansas and they would not tolerate opposition.

While many Missourians felt that Kansas should be slave, not all did; some felt that it would be in Missouri's

⁴Elmer Le Roy Craik, *Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas: 1854-1858*(Topeka: State Publishers, 1923), 365.

⁵Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 9.

best interest if Kansas were free. Significantly, most St. Louis residents wanted Kansas as a free-state. The *Missouri Democrat* of St. Louis, supported the free-state view because it thought a free-state had more commercial potential than a slave state. The *Missouri Democrat* says, "The prosperity of Missouri is not identified with slavery, and it is against nature to make it so."⁶ Despite the feelings of many in St. Louis, Missourians on the western border were more willing to support slavery in Kansas. A significant number of Missouri slaveholders lived on the Missouri-Kansas border. Their close proximity to a potential free-state which could harbor escaped slaves concerned them. The slavery issue would make Kansas a battleground between the free-state and proslavery parties. Kansas was a volatile place from its inception and it was into this storm that the New England Emigrant Aid Company involved itself. The company, which included founders and trustees at this point, intended to organize emigration to the territory with the belief that this was the only course of action that would secure Kansas as a free-state.

The company played an important role during this explosive period between the years 1854-1857 in Kansas. The

⁶Elmer Le Roy Craik, *Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas: 1854-1858*, 365.

company philosophy was a reflection of New England ideals and it sought to bring those same ideals to Kansas. Company emigrants were not prepared to encounter the problems that life on the frontier would bring. The company trustees were later questioned by critics as to whether they were integral in making Kansas free or if they caused the violence and delayed statehood. Several historians have examined the company but these particular issues were not the focus of their monographs. The first and most prominent primary source which dealt with the company was that of Eli Thayer. Eli Thayer founded The New England Emigrant Aid Company. In 1887, he defended the importance of the company in *The New England Emigrant Aid Company and Its Influence, Through the Kansas Contest, Upon National History*.

As its founder, Thayer wrote a strongly biased account of the company and its part in creating a free-state in Kansas. His book described the company as the singular element that made Kansas free and noted that Southerners charged the company with the crime of making Kansas free.⁷ He used the animosity felt by the South toward the company as a validation for the success of his work. He cited the attention that the company received in the Senate as proof

⁷Eli Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company and Its Influence Upon Kansas History*(Worcester, Massachusetts: Franklin P. Rice, 1887), 31-32.

of the importance of his company. Congress accused the company presence in Kansas as the force which stopped slavery and Thayer took this belief as a vindication of his work. Thayer also addressed the issue of the Garrisonian abolitionists who denounced the company and its founder. He believed that William Lloyd Garrison was against the company because Garrison thought that if Kansas became a free-state then it would hurt the antislavery cause since it would settle the North's conscience and prevent the disunion which he sought.⁸ Thayer felt it was not the company's fault if the abolitionists were displeased with his work.

Thayer also addressed many accusations from Missourians and abolitionists suggesting that the company provided weapons intended for free-state violence. He justified the presence of Sharps rifles in Kansas for company members to defend themselves and nothing more. He argued that the knowledge that the settlers had weapons and were ready to use them caused the Missourians to retreat from Lawrence in December, 1855.⁹ Thus in Thayer's eyes the company was a protective influence in the territory. He would not believe that his company's actions could have been wrong. He stated:

⁸Ibid., 35.

⁹Ibid., 46.

No man, unless he is ignorant of the facts in the Kansas struggle, or is completely blinded by malice or envy, will ever attempt to defraud the Emigrant Aid Company of the glory of having saved Kansas, by defeating the slave power, in a great and decisive contest.¹⁰

Thayer's book was a primary and important source there have been other books written about the company which were more objective. While Thayer's feelings toward the company he founded were naturally biased another work was written about the company almost seventy years later. Samuel A. Johnson provided the first modern study of the company, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, in 1956, and supported the belief that the company was a positive force in Kansas. He also believes that its presence assured that Kansas would become a free-state. Johnson supports his thesis with evidence rather than opinion. While Johnson believes that the company played an important role in the Kansas conflict he also states that it may have escalated the violence. He mentions that company presence may have incited the proslavery settlers into violent action but he never brings this idea into focus. He believes that violence ultimately would have occurred whether the company was there or not. He admits that the company propaganda did antagonize the

¹⁰Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 46.

South and brought the conflict to a head.¹¹ Although Johnson may concede this fact he does not examine it deeply. Instead, he mentions it and then looks at the importance of the company. His occasional mention of some negative aspects of the company make Johnson an objective source concerning the role of the company in Kansas history.

Johnson reserves judgement and focuses primarily on the positive aspects of the company. He idealizes the founders of the company as crusaders, using that term consistently when speaking of them. He believes that all the founders went into the project with hopes to make Kansas a free-state. He does not question their motivation as being anything but pure. Johnson admits that few company emigrants remained in Kansas but argues that their impact while there was consequential. He feels that the emigrants were involved in free-state activity more than the western pioneers and it was company emigrants that took on most of the free-state leadership.¹² He believes that the company emigrants had an impact on Kansas by establishing free-state settlements such as Lawrence and Topeka. Johnson supports the company's actions in Kansas throughout his book and sees it as the means for ensuring free-state success in Kansas.

¹¹Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 299.

¹²Ibid., 296-297.

While Johnson has a positive view of the company, James A. Rawley has a different interpretation of the Emigrant Aid Company. Rawley wrote *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* in 1969 and uses the Kansas conflict as the focus for his study of race relations. The company plays a minor role in his book but he portrays that part as an inflammatory force. Rawley notes that the company presence in Kansas exaggerated the concerns of the Missourians and caused them to create secret lodges and committees to try to stop the flow of emigrants from the North.¹³ He sees the company as an explosive presence in Kansas since it not only antagonized Missourians but it also inflamed the national hysteria over the slavery issue. He presents evidence that the slave power in the South saw the Sharps rifles sent as an indication of impending violence. "Emigrant-aid societies had paid the passage of thousands of anti-slavery settlers and had fiendishly equipped them with Sharps Rifles and munitions of war."¹⁴

Rawley mentions the company only as it relates to his subject of North-South race concerns. He sees the company as an influential factor in Kansas but not as a positive

¹³James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War*(Philadelphia/New York/Toronto: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1969), 85.

¹⁴Ibid., 164.

one. Rather, it was a force for violence and a means for increasing the antagonism between the North and South. His interpretation of the company is thus in conflict with more recent studies concerning the company and its influence in Kansas.

Another modern interpretation is that of Rodney Mahlon Cole. He wrote his doctoral dissertation, "The Issue was Kansas: The Persuasive Campaign of The New England Emigrant Aid Company" in 1971. His focus is on company propoganda and its impact on Kansas territorial problems. Cole examines the ideology behind the company formation and its use of rhetoric to exploit pre-existing problems in Kansas for its own advantage. He feels that the company was responsible for raising awareness of the Kansas issue in New England as well as the rest of the nation. He questions the founders' motivations and their intentions in Kansas. Cole believes that they did want to make Kansas free but suggests that profit for the company stockholders was also a major concern. He raises this issue briefly and then concentrates on the propoganda's impact upon the Kansas conflict.

Cole examines Thayer's speeches, which were intended to gain support and funds for the company and as a means for spreading the word about the troubles in Kansas. Cole believes that Thayer's speeches were the first wave of

company propaganda. Cole thinks that Thayer's speeches influenced New Englanders to take action and emigrate and also brought into focus the differences between North and South. Cole believes that Thayer and the company heightened the polarization between North and South.

Cole also cites newspaper propaganda in the territory as the cause of many problems. He feels that the company exaggerated its numbers which concerned the proslavery faction. This issue helped to aggravate the tense situation in the territory and spurred the Missourians into action. Cole gives credit to the company as the major force behind making Kansas free. He sees the company as a political movement which became "a catalyst for the North."¹⁵ Cole credits the company with changing the politics of the North from inaction to action. Cole interprets the company in a different way than other authors. He is not a historian and so he viewed the company's program of organized emigration as a social movement which encouraged political change in the North. He gives the company more importance than it deserved in the scope of national politics.

A recent study concerning the Kansas conflict is that

¹⁵Rodney Mahlon Cole, "The Issue was Kansas: The Persuasive Campaign of The New England Emigrant Aid Company" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Topeka: University of Kansas, 1971), 245.

of Gunja SenGupta. Her study does not focus on the company yet she does give it a major role. Her book, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* written in 1996, explores various emigration groups and their impact on Kansas territory. She notes the importance of the company since it fostered organized emigration. SenGupta feels that organized emigration and the establishment of towns was a critical factor to garner free-state success. SenGupta takes an alternative view of the company emigrants and focuses on their ability to create a free labor system within the town structure. She thinks that this is an important step toward making Kansas a free-state and that the company was important to the cause. She concentrates on the company as a means for creating important centers for free-state activity; thus stopping the expansion of slavery. SenGupta does not give the company any more importance than that. Since the company is not the focus of her study she does not delve any deeper into their role in Kansas. She believes that they were critical to helping make Kansas free but that they were not the only factor.

These varied views of the company show the lack of agreement over the impact that the company made in Kansas. Some see it as the most important factor toward creating a

free-state in Kansas while others argue that it was a factor but not the only one. The company and its involvement in Kansas was controversial and complicated. It reflected the views of its founders who were also complicated. While the company did have an impact in Kansas the question remains whether its presence helped to escalate violence in the territory and delayed statehood. This question has never truly been explored and it needs to be answered before the company and its importance to history can be evaluated.

Chapter One

Company Founders and Formation

The New England Emigrant Aid Company had a controversial history but it is undeniable that their presence had an impact in Kansas. The company went through many stages in its creation while facing criticism and negativity from all sides. The company founders including Eli Thayer and Amos A. Lawrence, continued with their emigration plans despite many obstacles. The company founders were men who believed they could make a difference in Kansas and without the strength of their convictions they would not have accomplished their goal and helped to make Kansas a free-state.

There were two main company figures who were most responsible for its creation, Eli Thayer, founder of the company and Amos A. Lawrence, Treasurer and Trustee, who contributed more money to the company than anyone else. Thayer and Lawrence both had strong convictions and often found themselves at odds with one another. They differed in their own personal philosophies concerning the company's formation and they struggled with the direction the company should take. Although they differed on many levels the one belief they shared was the conviction that Kansas should be

a free-state. Unlike Lawrence, Thayer's motives were questioned by critics concerning his formation of the company and the strength of his antislavery beliefs. Despite their differences they often found themselves working in accord with each other for the common goal. Thayer would preach the sermon of organized emigration trying to raise funds and awareness for the company while Lawrence dealt with the all-important duties of treasurer, which included overseeing the allocation of funds. Thayer and Lawrence were the backbone of the company and without either one it would have failed.

A third but equally important figure was Dr. Charles Robinson, the resident company agent in Kansas. Robinson's actions were at times controversial because he became involved in the defense of free-state emigrants by requesting arms from the company. He never wavered in his belief in the company or the need to stop the expansion of slavery. He became an important free-state leader in the territory. Robinson convinced the free-state settlers to act peacefully toward the Missourians in an attempt to quell violent acts from both sides. His presence helped to halt some of the violence in the territory while preaching company propaganda. These three men were the most important figures to the company and to the struggle in Kansas. They

were also the most complicated and controversial figures as well.

Eli Thayer's interest in organized emigration as a means to halt the spread of slavery into Kansas and create a free-state was born with the proposal of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. He was born on June 11, 1819 in Mendon, Massachusetts. He was an educated man who graduated from Brown University and served as principal of Worcester Academy from 1847 to 1849. He established the Oread Collegiate Institute, a school for women, and he served in the Massachusetts General Court from 1853-1854 after being elected as a Free Soiler.¹ Eli Thayer formed his company plan and constitution for organized emigration to Kansas before the Kansas-Nebraska bill had been passed.² Thayer finalized his plan for organized emigration with his first company known as the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society which gained a charter from the Massachusetts legislature on April 26, 1854. This company later became The New England Emigrant Aid Company.

There were other men involved in Eli Thayer's dream and were equally important and integral to its formation. The

¹H. Donaldson Jordan, *Dictionary of American Biography: Volume 18*(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 403.

²Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union*(Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1885), 29.

first man recruited by Thayer was Reverend Edward Everett Hale. Hale believed in organized emigration before Thayer and wrote about it in a pamphlet published in 1845 entitled *How To Conquer Texas Before Texas Conquers Us*.³ Thayer was a neighbor of Hale's in Worcester and was familiar with his pamphlet about organized emigration. Thayer hoped to interest Hale in his plan concerning emigration to Kansas. Hale was a well respected Unitarian minister who suggested to Thayer that they should involve the clergy in their fight. Hale believed that the members of the clergy could not only be influential allies but could also contribute financially to the cause. According to Thayer, Hale united the clergy in 1855 in its support of the company when it became apparent that Kansas could eventually be free and, thereafter, they became life-time allies, friends and supporters.⁴ Hale always held antislavery beliefs and his participation in the company allowed him to take direct action against the spread of an institution which he hated. His motivation was to halt the spread of slavery into Kansas and that fact has never been disputed. He worked tirelessly for the company enlisting the New England clergy, giving his time and energy, and remaining dedicated and active with the

³Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 10.

⁴*Ibid.*, 125.

company until its end.⁵ Hale was proud of the fact that he helped to enable the company to continue after the Kansas crisis was over.

Hale became a propagandist for the company which brought criticism from abolitionists to his activities. Hale helped Thayer by developing the company propaganda throughout his tenure. His most important contribution included writing a book entitled *Kansas and Nebraska*, which showed the many attractions of the Kansas territory, how to reach it, and cited the many emigrant aid companies that had been formed following the example of the New England Emigrant Aid Company.⁶ This line of propaganda enticed emigrants to go to Kansas and to trust the company. Hale not only bolstered emigration to Kansas by his book but also brought prestige to the company. While some New Englanders and fellow clergymen looked to Hale as a leader many critics described him in unflattering terms. He was described as "a zealot in the anti-slavery cause, and later became the chief propagandist and historian of the Emigrant Aid Company."⁷ Hale took pride in the work that he did with The New England

⁵Ibid., 12.

⁶Eli Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade: Its Friends and Its Foes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 124.

⁷Ibid., 12.

Emigrant Aid Company and never doubted its importance.

The other men who bore some of the burden of company business were J. M. S. Williams and Dr. Thomas H. Webb. Williams, a Virginian by birth, was a businessman with the mercantile firm of Glidden and Williams and responsible for raising some of the initial funding for the company. Williams was responsible for persuading other businessmen to contribute money as well. Many times he paid for things from his own private funds and allowed the company to get credit for it and Williams also never refused to give money for the cause in which he believed.⁸

Williams' primary interest was to make Kansas free although at times he did not think that it would happen. In 1854 he wrote a check to the company which he described as his "farewell offering to liberty."⁹ He was pessimistic regarding the chances of Kansas becoming a free-state. Dr. Webb wrote in 1856, "I find one despondent man among us; that is our friend J. M. S. Williams."¹⁰ While he wanted to believe that freedom would prevail in Kansas and willingly worked toward that goal he did not believe that it would happen. Eli Thayer gave him a rare compliment in *The*

⁸Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 12-13.

⁹Ibid., 13.

¹⁰Ibid., 13.

Cambridge Chronicle of December 22, 1856, crediting Williams as the first man to give him any encouragement in Boston.¹¹ Williams came forward and gave Thayer a check for \$10,000 and it was his influence with other businessmen that allowed the company a chance to gain financial success.¹² It was this duality of nature that made Williams an interesting figure in the company structure. He was the first to give financial support, and later his time, but he did not think that the company could succeed with its mission. Williams' goal was to ensure Kansas became a free-state and to that end he gave money freely to the company despite his obvious pessimistic feelings toward the venture which have never been explained.

Dr. Thomas Webb was another man who worked consistently for the company and served as secretary until his death in 1866, and he was responsible for writing a pamphlet, *Information for Kansas Emigrants*, which he revised through twenty editions. The emigrants considered this pamphlet the most reliable of the settlers' handbooks.¹³ No one questioned his altruistic motives for his involvement with the company because he had no other intent besides gaining

¹¹Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade*, 225.

¹²Ibid., 225.

¹³Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 13.

Kansas as a free-state. Amos A. Lawrence characterized him as "the truest man of all."¹⁴ Webb was a man who believed in a cause and sought to do something to make a positive change. Hale, Williams, and Webb were important albeit secondary figures in the company structure.

Thayer could not have attempted to submit his charter without the support of Hale, Williams and Webb whom he had recruited into the cause. Despite the support of these and others like them the creation of the company charter was fraught with problems. The original charter of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society, was considered flawed by Lawrence who did not support the arrangement of stock subscriptions. Lawrence had immense power and influence due to his success in business and the respect he earned as a renowned philanthropist. As a result it was reorganized under the new company name known as The New England Emigrant Aid Company which received its official charter on February 16, 1855.

It was an arduous process to create a charter that was satisfactory to all parties involved. The primary problem occurred because the charter stated that subscribers to the stock were liable for all unpaid balances on their stock.¹⁵

¹⁴Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 14.

¹⁵Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 18.

This was unacceptable to the Boston group and became the first obstacle that Thayer, while working under this original charter had to overcome. Thayer sought to get around the problem by creating a new charter which would be acceptable to all. Thayer could not get a new charter from Massachusetts because the Massachusetts legislature was not in session so he obtained a charter from Connecticut which retained the original \$5,000,000 authorized capitalization but did not have the provision for share division and annual assessments.¹⁶ The Boston men, particularly Lawrence, did not agree with the new charter and refused to organize under it. As a result, things looked bleak for Thayer and his company. It did not appear likely that it would ever get organized and become functional.

Lawrence suggested that the New York businessmen take the Connecticut charter and the Massachusetts leaders start with a brand new one as a charitable society and not concern itself with making profit.¹⁷ Lawrence continued to have a problem with this arrangement concerning stock subscriptions because he thought selling stock was not a philanthropic gesture and he saw the company as a philanthropic venture. Once the Connecticut charter was recognized which included

¹⁶Ibid., 21.

¹⁷Ibid., 22.

that particular clause he resigned. Thayer refused to accept his resignation. Massachusetts eventually issued the charter and stated that the company was to have no capital stock, no stock subscriptions, and open membership to anyone who was willing to sign the constitution and pay dues.¹⁸ This was done at Lawrence's request because he wanted separation from the Connecticut and New York companies.¹⁹ The fact that the company was formed in this manner separate from all other aid societies strictly due to Lawrence is an indication of his importance in the Boston community and to the company, itself. It was in February, 1855, that John Carter Brown, a wealthy merchant of the Rhode island firm of Brown and Ives and newly elected president of the company, adopted the second charter.²⁰ Finally the company was functional and could begin focusing on sending emigrants to Kansas.

The purpose of the company was to ensure the protection of the emigrants to Kansas, to create a free state, and to acquire a marginal profit for the investors in the

¹⁸Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 25.

¹⁹Ibid., 23.

²⁰Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for The Union*, 31.

company.²¹ The company now had its plan and appeared ready to send emigrants to Kansas. Some New Englanders expressed their doubts in Thayer and in the ability of the company to send emigrants. His plan did not seem a viable option in Kansas and inevitably he had many detractors. Many New Englanders looked upon Eli Thayer as impractical, and his company as folly.²² Most people, especially the Garrisonians, did not believe that organized emigration would work. The Garrisonians were Thayer's worst critics because they believed that he hurt their cause since he did not fight for total abolition of slavery; instead he worked to halt the expansion of slavery into the territory. *The Liberator* editor, William Lloyd Garrison wrote in the June 1, 1855 issue that the company would do no good in the territory because the emigrants did nothing for the antislavery cause at home.²³ Garrison meant that the emigrants that went to Kansas were not staunch abolitionists. They would fight to make Kansas free but not

²¹Eli Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company and Its Influence, Through the Kansas Contest, Upon National History*, (Worcester, Massachusetts: Franklin P. Rice, 1886), 16.

²²Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (Lawrence, Kansas: Journal Publishing Company, 1898), 73. Taken from a paper read by Robinson on September 18, 1889 intended to alleviate the fears of potential emigrants.

²³Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 35.

to stop slavery in the South. Abolitionists wanted to put an end to slavery completely and they knew that the emigrants were not abolitionists even though they held antislavery beliefs. The emigrants' antislavery beliefs might allow them to create a free-state in Kansas but they did not have the desire to fight to end slavery in the South.

This reaction did not stop Thayer or his company which was finally in a position to send settlers. His problem was mainly personal since the public perception of him was as someone whose only interest was in money making. Thayer had ambition and he wanted to gain respect and wealth for himself. It was this need to gain a profit that brought on Thayer's harshest criticism and caused the greatest amount of skepticism over his true motivation for starting the company. William E. Connelly, historian, described Thayer as "a visionary, given to fantastic money-making schemes."²⁴ Connelly was a severe critic of Thayer, Robinson and the company and showed a strong bias toward James H. Lane, a prominent free-state man in Kansas who, unlike Thayer, never faced the accusation of going to the territory to make a profit. Thayer never denied wanting a profit and always intended the Company to return its investment:

²⁴Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 9.

The fact that we intended to make it pay the investors pecuniarily brought upon us the reproaches and condemnation of Abolitionists, at least one of whom declared in my hearing that he had rather give the territory to Slavery than to make a cent out of the operation of saving it to Freedom.²⁵

Thayer believed that the abolitionists would rather destroy the Union than to emigrate to Kansas with the company if it intended to make a profit.

This was the beginning of the abolitionist opposition to the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Abolitionists were those that wanted slavery ended immediately with equality for the freed slaves. Abolitionists used the company program which encouraged profit for company investors and the absence of true abolitionists like themselves as a way to attack the company and Thayer. One of his most outspoken critics was William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist and publisher of *The Liberator*. Garrison had problems with Thayer and his motives, as well as with the company as a whole. *The Liberator* became a forum for those opposed to the company. Charles Stearns, a Garrisonian abolitionist who reported from Kansas wrote in *The Liberator* on February 16, 1855:

It is true we denounce the Emigrant Aid Company, because we believe it to be a hindrance to the cause of freedom, and a mighty curse to the territory; we are

²⁵Ibid., 18.

the only ones who have taken a decided ground on the antislavery question.²⁶

Thayer was often accused by abolitionists of not being a true abolitionist. Eli Thayer never proclaimed himself to be one. He did not want slavery expanded but he was willing to allow slavery to continue in the South. Unlike Garrison, he did not favor disunion or any other staunch abolitionist view. *The Liberator* of June 1, 1855 remarked that "hardly a single abolitionist can be found among all who have emigrated to that country."²⁷ Thayer decidedly did not want any abolitionists in his company because he felt that it would be a detriment to their success. He took exception to Garrison's attacks especially when Garrison wrote, "Kansas cannot be made a free-state, and even if it should be, such a result will be a great injury to the antislavery cause, for the reason that it would quiet the Northern conscience."²⁸ Garrison believed that if Kansas became a slave state then that would enrage the North and allow abolitionism to become the main issue. If Kansas became a free state then the North would have nothing to focus on and

²⁶Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 140.

²⁷Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union*, 32.

²⁸Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 35.

the institution of slavery would continue to be tolerated by Northerners.

Thayer had constant problems with Garrison and his abolitionist colleagues. Thayer addressed his issues with the Garrisonians in his writings, condemning them and their activities. Thayer felt their activities were intended to ruin the company and stop emigration.²⁹ Thayer saw them as a hindrance to the cause of freedom. He saw himself and his company as the one element that could save Kansas to the cause of freedom. Thayer constantly claimed credit for everything that was accomplished which only gave his enemies more ammunition to attack him with. This attitude had allowed his critics to call him arrogant and cast aspersions on his character and his true motivations for sending emigrants to Kansas.

Many critics felt that the company did not stand for anything but profit because it was a reflection of Thayer. His attitude about money and his negative comments concerning abolitionists added to this perception of the company. A reporter for *The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle* reported, "The Emigrant Aid Society seems to us to be an aid society chiefly in name; and we fear that many who have gone under its auspices carried but very little genuine Anti-

²⁹Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 109.

Slavery with them.”³⁰ The company founders were accused by abolitionists for not holding stronger antislavery feelings while company agents felt that they were being accused in the territory for having too strong antislavery beliefs. The company president, John Carter Brown, along with Thayer, Lawrence, Webb and other company directors answered the latter charges in an article published in *The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*. They answered three charges by stating that they did not send fanatics into Kansas, did not encourage violence and sent New Englanders not to just vote and leave but to settle in the territory.³¹ Thayer alone had to answer to critics and charges of insincerity throughout his involvement with the company.

Amos A. Lawrence was the opposite of Thayer in almost every way. He was a man whose philanthropic motives were never questioned. Lawrence was born July 31, 1814 to a wealthy merchant family. He graduated from Harvard and became a successful merchant. Lawrence involved himself in philanthropy while possessing a strong desire to halt the spread of slavery. Lawrence never expected to receive any dividends for his stock but he continually gave money for

³⁰Reported by W.H.F. in *The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*, December 30, 1854.

³¹*The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*, December 22, 1855.

the cause in which he believed.³² Thayer praised Lawrence, describing him as "earnest, fearless and a hopeful worker in the cause to free Kansas."³³ Thayer also felt that Lawrence had "sterling integrity" was "fearless and conscientious" in the "discharge of duty" and had "sound and conservative views."³⁴ Lawrence supported the company with funds and was integral to its stability.

The company sent its first emigrant party of twenty-nine men to Kansas on August 1, 1854 and named their first settlement Lawrence. This is an indication of the respect that the emigrants and company agents felt for Amos A. Lawrence. Lawrence was a modest man and did not want to have a town named for him since he thought that people would accuse him of being involved in the company to gain fame. Charles Robinson wrote to Lawrence from Kansas after the latter had protested and replied that the people liked the name because of his connection with the company and his generous personal traits for which Robinson could vouch.³⁵

³²William Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*(Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 80.

³³Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade: Its Friends and Its Foes*, 190.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 190.

³⁵Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 83.

Lawrence was an honest man and at times he felt the company and Thayer were dishonest and misleading people. He wrote to President John Carter Brown, and voiced his concern "in regards to the movement of this company, and statements to the magnitude of our plans which are untrue."³⁶ He would not allow any type of fraud by anyone who was connected with the company. If he felt that things were going wrong, he would have no part of it. He wrote a letter to Hale on February 25, 1855 denying reports that the Company was sending out two parties a week with only a \$25 dollar fee. He said in conclusion:

These things make me think that you gentlemen at Worcester, who originated the scheme have a different way of doing business from ours and that ultimately we must separate thus allowing each to manage its affairs as may seem best.³⁷

Lawrence prepared to separate himself from the company if he found it to be defrauding the emigrants. He found no evidence in his search of company records to support this and remained with the company.

This is only one example of the high moral standards that Lawrence exhibited throughout his time with the company

³⁶Ibid., 85.

³⁷Letter from Amos A. Lawrence to Edward Everett Hale, February 25, 1855. *The New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers*, ed. Joseph W. Snell (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas Historical Society, 1967), microfilm, roll one.

and throughout his life. He added prestige to the company by his involvement. He was a man who was prominent socially, financially and a great philanthropist. With his name as part of the company, businessmen were willing to endorse it.³⁸

Thayer was an arrogant man who felt a certain rivalry with Lawrence. By all accounts he had to be the most influential man involved in the company, thus his competition with Lawrence. He felt that he had to add a negative view to Lawrence's reputation by saying he was connected to John Brown. There was some truth behind Thayer's accusation of Lawrence and his association with John Brown in Kansas. Lawrence did send \$1000 for rifles for Kansas emigrants to defend themselves against the Missourians, but he did not do it to incite violence or have any involvement with Brown's actions. His motives were to help the settlers to defend themselves against the threat of proslavery violence. Robinson wrote to him describing how the Missourians tried to drive them out through their proslavery legislature. Lawrence told President Franklin Pierce, "the emigrants must defend themselves; and therefore many persons here who refused at first (myself included) have rendered them assistance, by furnishing them the means

³⁸Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 68.

for defense."³⁹ Lawrence did not keep his involvement in supplying weapons a secret and even informed Pierce about his actions. He was thinking of the welfare of company settlers and their protection. Critics charged that the company did buy arms and to that Lawrence wrote a reply to Webb, "Dr. Cabot (company man) is treasurer of the rifle funds. I am treasurer of the relief funds."⁴⁰ Lawrence felt that the company had no choice but to send weapons to help the settlers defend themselves.

Lawrence was always concerned about others as evidenced by his philanthropic efforts, and that is why he sent money for guns to protect the settlers in Kansas. It is also why he continually gave money to the company out of his own funds to allow it to continue. Lawrence saw himself as a man who could stop the expansion of slavery in Kansas and he worked toward that end. He was a philanthropist whose motivation was to help others and that is why he was an exceptional addition to the company.

The career of Charles Robinson was also integral to the company and to the free-state movement in Kansas. He was born on July 21, 1818 in Hardwick, Massachusetts and involved himself in leadership roles as far back as 1849.

³⁹Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 95.

⁴⁰Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 106.

It was at this time that he went to California and opened a restaurant in Sacramento. This was a volatile time in California between speculators and settlers due to the Gold Rush and he was chosen president of the squatters' association. Robinson was deeply involved with land disputes and during one dispute was shot. He was incarcerated on a prison ship where he was expected to die but instead recovered and was released.⁴¹ This was not the last time that Robinson would be imprisoned; he would find himself one day in a prison in Kansas. Robinson showed his leadership qualities in the California land disputes and his determination to follow his beliefs. His leadership abilities and determination would allow him to play a vital role during the Kansas crisis.

Robinson returned to Massachusetts and there, in 1854, encountered Thayer at a public meeting. He listened to Thayer speak about his emigration plan and had a favorable impression of Thayer from the first. Charles Robinson noted that "evidently, here was a crusader who had thoroughly digested his plan, and had implicit confidence both in himself and his scheme."⁴² He wanted to be a part of the movement since he had seen Kansas and knew it would be a

⁴¹Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 53.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 67.

viable place to settle. He received a commission to go to Kansas and made arrangements to acquire land for settlement. Before leaving he met up with another company agent, Charles Branscomb, in Springfield.⁴³ This first mission into Kansas territory was just the beginning for Charles Robinson who became the leader of the free-state movement in the territory. Robinson conducted negotiation for peace between the free-state emigrants and the proslavery faction. Leverett W. Spring, described Robinson in his role as negotiator as "the man who sustained toward it the most intimate and confidential relations, and who mainly shaped its policy in the territory."⁴⁴ Robinson influenced the free-state emigrants to continue to struggle against the proslavery faction.

Robinson was dedicated to the movement and Thayer thought that he possessed all the right qualities for leading the company and the free-state movement to success. Thayer praised Robinson as embodying all the best qualities such as a great mind, justice, sympathy, heroic will and strong moral courage.⁴⁵ Thayer also felt that most

⁴³Ibid., 69.

⁴⁴Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union*, 33.

⁴⁵Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade: Its Friends and Its Foes*, 34.

importantly Robinson had the "power to govern based on self restraint, and love of freedom deeper than love of life."⁴⁶

Robinson consistently worked on behalf of the company and the free-state movement. He tried to quell violence wherever he found it since he knew that animosity would make matters worse in Kansas and put more people in danger. He knew events in the territory were moving at a fast pace concerning the election of a legislature. The elected legislature was a proslavery body that the free-state party rejected as a "bogus legislature." The free-state faction banded together, under the leadership of Robinson, and refused to recognize the laws passed by this legislature. The question of motive for Robinson are complex at this point. He felt that his actions advanced the company program. Robinson feared that if he did nothing to ensure a free territory then emigrants would not come to a place that had surrendered to slavery. Another interpretation of Robinson was that he was an extremist for the cause of freedom and could not allow that cause to fail.⁴⁷

Robinson's critics in the territory charged him with using the Kansas conflict to advance his own political ambition. This charge does have some merit since he was

⁴⁶Ibid., 34.

⁴⁷Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 104.

elected governor of the state of Kansas in 1861. Although he gained political success there is no proof to suggest that he did not fight for a free-state out of his own strong personal feelings. He was a politician and that is why his motives were called into question. Although his motives may be in doubt no one questioned his integrity and veracity.⁴⁸ Robinson was a capable leader because he kept his head in all situations. G. Douglas Brewerton, a reporter for *The New York Herald*, said of Robinson, "In fact to sum General Robinson up in a single sentence, we consider him to be the most dangerous enemy the Pro-Slavery party have to encounter in Kansas."⁴⁹ Robinson never gave in to intimidation by the proslavery Missourians and his belief in the free-state movement never faltered.

Robinson and the company were a good match because his view concerning Kansas free statehood coincided with the company plan. There are many ways to describe Robinson depending on whether that person was a friend or enemy. Yet despite his success he was never popular. He was accurately described by Wendell H. Stephenson in the *Dictionary of American Biography* as, "cautious and calculative, logical

⁴⁸G. Douglas Brewerton, *The War in Kansas*(New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 293.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 302.

and shrewd, judicious and argumentative." Stephenson also said that "his greatest service to Kansas was that he gave the Topeka movement equilibrium and was the brake and balance wheel of the Free State party."⁵⁰ He was the greatest instrument that the company had in Kansas and it allowed him free reign as long as he propelled the company plan forward and succeeded.

The men of The New England Emigrant Aid Company were all capable and intelligent. Thayer, Lawrence, Robinson, Hale, Williams and Webb, all came together at a time when such men were needed. They were crusaders who felt that slavery had to be stopped in Kansas and they had the drive and the means to accomplish it. The company fostered organized emigration to the territory as a means to acquire its goal of creating a free-state in Kansas. The men involved worked diligently to achieve that goal despite many obstacles. They endured criticism from their many detractors who did not approve of them or their company. The New England Emigrant Aid Company and its original founders had no concept as to the problems they would face in Kansas. They believed in their crusade and despite their critics and proslavery opposition they forged ahead to

⁵⁰Wendell H. Stephenson, *Dictionary of American Biography: Volume 16*, 36.

establish a free-state movement in the Kansas territory.

Chapter Two

The Company Encounters Conflict in Kansas

The founders of the New England Emigrant Aid Company took on a monumental task in their quest to organize emigration to Kansas. They did not realize the opposition they would encounter in the territory from proslavery Missourians. Thayer had trouble finding emigrants who were willing to go to Kansas and face the turmoil. The company had overcome its charter problems and once organized faced the problem of convincing emigrants that they could make a difference in Kansas. Thayer later explained, "There was very little faith in our enterprise up to this point."¹ The company fought an uphill battle to find support and belief in the fact that organized emigration could make an impact on the territory. The New Englanders felt that the institution of slavery had continued for so long and was so powerful that it gave even the strongest antislavery men pause before committing themselves to emigrate. Thayer wrote that most of the friends of the emigrants that were going to Kansas felt that it would result in catastrophe for those involved.² Feelings of hope and doubt accompanied the

¹Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade*, 63.

²Ibid., 63.

emigrants who originally planned to go to Kansas. Thayer and the company had an inauspicious beginning.

While the company made plans to send out its first emigrants, proslavery Missourians prepared for their arrival. Immediately after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, border Missourians and their politicians held a meeting in Kansas with squatters on June 10, 1854 to secure and preserve squatters' claims.³ The company was about to encounter people prepared to resist them from the beginning and who considered anyone from a free state to be an abolitionist. J.N. Holloway, wrote about Kansas and the enmity of the border Missourians toward the anticipated arrival of emigrants in 1868:

Thus so early, perhaps before a single emigrant from a free state had entered the territory, the people of the Border had resolved to afford them no protection, which as proven by following events, signified that they would not be allowed to settle in Kansas.⁴

Missourians were aware of the company and its emigrants due to the southern press. The company founders continued to make plans to send settlers to the territory with the anticipation of the hostility they might encounter upon

³J.N. Holloway, *History of Kansas: From The First Exploration of the Mississippi valley to Its Admission Into the Union*(Lafayette, Indiana: James, Emmons and Company, 1868), 106-107.

⁴Ibid., 108.

their arrival.

The company intended to make the journey from the North as easy as possible for the emigrants. It was up to company agent, Charles Robinson, to secure transportation for travel according to a list of instructions given to him on August 9, 1854. He made arrangements with railway and steam companies for lower fares for emigrant parties, secured cooperation with railway companies to protect emigrants from fraud and selected agents who would accompany emigrants to the territory.⁵ Robinson was busy trying to fulfill his duties and make transport as problem-free for the emigrants as possible.

While Robinson was in the East Charles Branscombe was in Kansas acquiring land for the emigrants to settle. He attained the land that eventually became the free state town of Lawrence. He and his group of 29 men reached the site of Lawrence during the summer of 1854 and built a hotel and grist mill. This town became the home of the influential free-state newspaper and company propaganda tool, the *Herald of Freedom*. The second party of emigrants arrived in Kansas about two weeks later; it numbered between sixty and seventy and was under the direction of Robinson and S.C. Pomeroy, another company agent.

⁵Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 55.

This activity sent shock waves through the southern press and alarmed the border Missourians. They felt that the settlement of Lawrence was the beginning of a large Yankee influence. The border Missourians felt that these emigrants came due to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. William Phillips, special Kansas correspondent for the *New York Tribune* observed the hostile feelings of the proslavery Missourians toward emigrants. He wrote: "Hence, their fury against any interlopers who might jeopardize their chances of making it a slave state."⁶ Southerners feared the influx of settlers into the territory and sought to agitate the border Missourians into action. One example of southern propaganda that appeared was written in the *Platte Argus* published in Missouri, 1854:

It is now time to sound the alarm. We know we speak the sentiments of some of the most distinguished statesmen of Missouri when we advise that counter organizations be made both in Kansas and Missouri to thwart the reckless course of abolitionists. We must meet them at their very threshold and scourge them back to their caverns of darkness. They have made the issue and it is for us to repel them.⁷

Southern propaganda was extremely volatile.

The proslavery Missourians viewed the company emigrants

⁶William Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and Her Allies*(Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1856), 28.

⁷The *Platte Argus*, 1854, quoted in Holloway, *History of Kansas*, 120.

as a threat to their creating a slave state in Kansas. The impending onslaught of abolitionists they expected to arrive aroused great agitation in Missouri. The press caused even greater concern when it was filled with stories of fugitive slaves being rescued from slave states by abolitionists. Missourians called meetings to draft resolutions concerning the emigrants:

Resolved, That this association will, whenever called upon by any citizens of the Kansas Territory, hold itself in readiness together to assist and remove any and all emigrants, who go under the auspices of the Emigrant Aid Societies.⁸

The Missouri societies were important because they allowed Missourians to act as a group against the free-state emigrants. These Missouri societies and associations sprang up due to the New England Emigrant Aid Company and its anticipated influx of thousands of emigrants. While the number of emigrants was not large the belief that there would be thousands spurred proslavery Missourians into defensive action. Holloway believed that it was "through these societies the political leaders had immediate access to, and control of the masses."⁹ The societies continued to inflame the masses into action by constantly bringing up the Yankee threat. It was through these efforts by the

⁸Ibid., 121.

⁹Holloway, *History of Kansas*, 125.

different society's leaders, in the fall of 1854, that allowed the Missourians to believe that they could intimidate the free-state men while at the same time deterring further Northern emigration.¹⁰

One such Missouri association was the Blue Lodge. There was so much conflict and charges of fraud in Kansas between the proslavery and free-state factions that the House of Representatives assembled the Howard Committee in 1855 to investigate the trouble in Kansas. Missourians stated in testimony given before the Howard Committee that their organization was created in 1854 to counteract the activities of the Emigrant Aid Societies.¹¹ It had secret signs and oaths and had the support of great numbers of Missourians. Their main purpose was to extend slavery into the Kansas territory as well as into all national territories.¹² They encouraged southern emigration to the Kansas territory with the purpose of making Kansas a slave state. The Blue Lodge was a danger to the free-state settlers because its purpose was to extend slavery at all costs. They were responsible for organizing subsequent

¹⁰Ibid., 125.

¹¹Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 97.

¹²Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and Her Allies*, 45.

armed invasions and excursions into the territory.¹³ The Blue Lodge members intended to make Kansas a slave state and continually tried to find ways to accomplish their goal. They found a semi-legitimate way to make Kansas a slave state and so they focused on the elections in 1854. Members helped organize and took part in sending 1729 Missourians to cast ballots to elect J.W. Whitfield as the "first congressional delegate from Kansas; because of the fraudulent voting, Whitfield was not allowed to take his seat."¹⁴ A new election had to be held due to the fraudulent voting by Missourians who crossed the border into Kansas to vote and then returned to Missouri.

The Missourian's Blue Lodge was not the only group charged with going across the border to vote for proslavery candidates and then leave. The Missourians felt from the beginning that the Emigrant Aid Company was supplying settlers with the means to go to the territory to vote for a free Kansas and then leave. Lawrence felt the need to defend the company against this charge when it was accused in Congress by Senator Thomas Hart Benton of employing the same tactics as the Missourians. Lawrence said, "I will

¹³Ibid., 46.

¹⁴Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War For The Union*. 41.

state that not one man has gone from New England who has had his expenses paid, even in part."¹⁵ Lawrence went on to state that the settlers went out to begin a new and active life in a new state and to keep slavery out of it.¹⁶

There was no agreement between the emigrants or the company that they would vote for a free-state. Lawrence asserted, "The society has no agreement with them nor pledge, nor are they asked any questions."¹⁷ The emigrants were free to do as they willed in the territory but it was assumed that they would vote for a free-state considering their New England background. The company founders believed that New Englanders would not vote for a slave state since they did not come from an area that had slavery; they came from an area with a free labor system. It was also understood that they went to Kansas to settle, although in the end most of the emigrants did return east and only half remained in the territory.¹⁸ Most of the emigrants returned east because they were unaccustomed to the types of challenges that they encountered living in newly settled territory. The company defended itself in Congress and the

¹⁵Lawrence, *The Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 87.

¹⁶Lawrence, *The Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 87.

¹⁷Ibid., 88.

¹⁸Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 296

Kansas company agents had to be ready to defend themselves against the border ruffians and their brand of violence.

There were different types of border ruffians that the company agents and emigrants had to deal with as well. The first were the judicial ruffians, peaceful proslavery men who did not commit violence in the territory and second there were the gentlemen border ruffians who took some action but were basically non-violent.¹⁹ These two groups were mostly political affiliations and the company dealt with them as such. The border ruffians that the emigrants had to fear were known as commonly in the territory as Pukes; they were native Missourians of the lowest character and eager to resort to violence.²⁰ It was this group that met the emigrants in their first days when they were still in their tents constructing the town buildings of Lawrence.

Charles Robinson knew that it was dangerous to be a company agent when he arrived in the territory in August, 1854 with his first group of emigrants. It was shortly after their arrival that they first encountered the border ruffians. Robinson and the company emigrants could see the border ruffians camped not far from the settlement. Robinson was apprehensive concerning their presence

¹⁹Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas*, 29.

²⁰Ibid., 29.

especially when they started to get boisterous, so he sent three free-state settlers to see what they wanted. They replied that the "abolitionists had to take down their tents and leave or they would be "cleared out" in the morning."²¹ All that night and into the next day ruffians shouted ultimatums that the tents had to come down. They began to form themselves into an army hoping to scare the company emigrants into leaving. Finally, by sundown when it appeared to the ruffians that the free-state settlers had no intention of backing down, the first party of ruffians left.²² After that the rest of the ruffians broke up and the quarrel was over for that day. This was the first but it would not be the last time that the town of Lawrence would encounter violence from ruffians. The animosity of Missourians toward company emigrants never abated and was continually strengthened by southern propoganda that played on Missourians' fears of abolitionists and their antislavery activities.

Eli Thayer and the company continued their activities despite southern propoganda. Thayer, did not mind being threatened in southern papers because it only bolstered his resolve. The *Platte Argus* offered \$200 for his capture and

²¹Ibid., 30.

²²Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas*, 33.

encouraged his hanging.²³ He felt that any mention of him and the company actually helped because it deterred cowards and people who were not dedicated to the cause from going out to Kansas.²⁴ He wanted emigrants that intended to settle in the territory and wanted to create a free-state. Southern papers in 1854 continually made threats of "bowie knives, revolvers, tar and feathers , hemp and grapevines."²⁵ This was meant to discourage any emigration from the North. Thayer believed that these threats only spurred the emigrants to go to Kansas and intensify their efforts to make it a free state.²⁶ Thayer saw the migration to Kansas as a great crusade and himself as a great crusader. Many others saw him as profit-mongering speculator who used the great cause as an opportunity to gain fame and wealth for himself.

The company encountered many problems when its emigrants reached Kansas but they were determined to stay. It did not matter to the emigrants that their presence in a concentrated settlement seemed to agitate the Missourians to action. It also did not matter to them that their being in

²³Holloway, *History of Kansas*, 122.

²⁴Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade*, 63.

²⁵Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade*, 64.

²⁶Ibid., 65.

Kansas encouraged the southern press to use them to aggravate Missouri and the South. The New England Emigrant Aid Company did more than cause and overcome conflict; it brought Kansas to the forefront of the national consciousness. While the company was embroiled in its conflict in Kansas it also had to endure criticism from all sides.

One such critic of Thayer and the company was William E. Connelly who believed the company's main purpose was as a speculative venture. Connelly was secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society and wrote extensively on early Kansas history. He was a severe critic of Thayer and wrote that making Kansas free was a secondary interest to Thayer and that he wanted to induce people to buy stock with the belief of an anticipated large profit return on their investment in the company.²⁷ While Thayer never denied that he wanted the company to make profit that was not his primary motive. Unfortunately for Thayer, he had many critics who thought that he was a fraud, not a crusader and that his company was a detriment to the antislavery cause. Among such critics were William Lloyd Garrison and the abolitionists that followed him. Garrison refused to believe that organized emigration could work and he used his

²⁷Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 46.

press and public meetings to rail against the company and Thayer. His own crusade against the company along with others who thought it was a detriment to the antislavery cause, was about to begin.

Chapter Three

The Company and Its Critics

Critics attacked the New England Emigrant Aid Company from both the antislavery and proslavery sides. The company was not composed of abolitionist crusaders, rather its members held antislavery views. The company founders did not want to end slavery where it existed but to stop its expansion by making Kansas free. The company was criticized by abolitionists and the proslavery faction alike. William Lloyd Garrison and his abolitionists accused the company founders of not having strong antislavery views and being a detriment to the abolitionist cause. Meanwhile the company in Kansas was accused by proslavery forces that they were staunch abolitionists who would turn Kansas into a haven for escaped slaves. The company tried to defend itself while attempting to make a place for its emigrants in Kansas.

Thayer responded to the accusations made by Garrison claiming that there were no abolitionists in the company. Thayer felt that abolitionism had acquired a bad reputation in the North and did not want that stigma attached to his company. The Garrisonians had the worst reputation since they wanted nothing less than disunion. Thayer admitted that people would often ask him before they offered support

to the Emigrant Aid Company if Garrison had anything to do with it and if there was any hint of abolitionism in the company agenda.¹ Thayer felt Garrison's attacks unjustified and occurred only because Garrison felt that organized emigration hurt his cause.

Garrison published letters in *The Liberator* that discouraged emigration. One such letter, written by Charles Stearns, *The Liberator's* Kansas correspondent, was published on March 16, 1855, "Do not advise people to emigrate here in companies. Let them come very few at a time. This sending large companies is a very foolish business for many reasons."² This comment while made to discourage emigration was a more profound observation than Stearns realized. The company concept of group emigration eventually became a detriment to Kansas becoming a free-state.

The South and primarily border Missourians feared thousands of northern abolitionist emigrants coming to Kansas to interfere with their goal of acquiring Kansas as a slave state. They believed the New England emigrants were a threat to their right to gain Kansas under popular sovereignty. The border Missourians also feared that the company would import Irishmen and other undesirables such as

¹Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 33.

²Ibid., 35.

criminals to Kansas who would rescue slaves and make Kansas a home to fugitive slaves and radical abolitionists.³

The concept of organized emigration by the New England Emigrant Aid Company gave the border Missourians and the South a group to focus their fear and frustration on. The company provided them with a clear target to inflict violence upon. The company gave the North a non-violent plan of action against the South and its slavery system. It allowed Northerners the chance to strike against slavery while remaining faithful to the Union.

Most Northerners and Southerners were still faithful to the Union but there were some who called for disunion. The most vocal group that called for disunion were the abolitionist followers of William Lloyd Garrison. Most Northerners did not support such radicalism and instead embraced the peaceful idea of emigration. Northerners did not realize that the company and organized emigration would become a catalyst in Kansas which would encourage violence and increase the polarization between North and South. The Emigrant Aid Company expected some criticism but it was unprepared for the outbreak of rabid criticism from the northern and the southern press. While Thayer and the

³Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown*(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 83.

company were being vilified by the opposition press they did have one important newspaper, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, that supported them in the beginning and was one of the main reasons for gaining as much Northern support as it did.

Eli Thayer went to Horace Greeley in the spring of 1854 to garner his support for his new enterprise. Thayer explained his company and his idea for organized emigration. There were two reasons why Thayer chose Greeley and his paper: Greeley was a Whig and he needed their political support since the antislavery free-soil party was weak, and because Greeley was known as an honest, patriotic man whose name and newspaper behind the company would add to its success and be a great victory for Thayer.⁴ Greeley had influence due to his newspaper and Thayer needed him to spread the word about the company and its mission. Thayer's recollection of his conversation with Greeley is critical in understanding Thayer's thinking. He felt that the support of the *Tribune* would bring the Whig and Democrat parties closer together due to the company and its role in the Kansas conflict. He believed that without the struggle in Kansas there would not have been the Republican party. Thayer felt that the Republican party did gain its life and strength

⁴Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 40.

only through the Kansas contest.⁵

After Thayer informed Greeley of his plan and explained that the only opposition to it would be the Garrisonians, the editor decided to support the company agenda. He wrote about Thayer and the company in editorials entitled "The Plan Of Freedom." The first Plan of Freedom editorial appeared in the *Tribune* on May 29, 1854. It informed the public about the company plan for organized emigration and the importance of gaining Kansas as a free-state.⁶

The Emigrant Aid Company gained much support due to Greeley's exceptional editorials. While the editorials helped the Emigrant Aid Company by promoting the opportunities in Kansas, they also united the North into a single focused action. Greeley wrote: "Here is abundant opportunity for all who have money to invest or a heart to labor in the great cause of freedom."⁷ That cause was to support organized emigration to Kansas which was in direct opposition to the South's wish to gain Kansas as a slave state. Greeley wrote in his editorial of May 31, 1854 that the North needed to rally in defense of freedom against the

⁵Ibid., 48.

⁶Horace Greeley, *The New York Tribune*, May 29, 1854 reprinted by Eli Thayer in *The Kansas Crusade*, 50.

⁷Ibid., 49.

slave power.⁸ He meant his words to inspire the North but they were incendiary to the South:

To whole crowds of slave-drivers and traitors, backed by a party organization, a corrupt majority in Congress, a soulless partisan press, and administered with its paid officers armed with revolvers and sustained by the bayonets of a mercenary soldiery, will all together prove totally insufficient to cope with an aroused people.⁹

It was this type of propaganda that helped to create a united North and deepened the sectionalization between the North and South. Greeley's only intent was the unification of the North not alienation of the South. Greeley wrote, "The integration of the Northern sentiment was brought about by the Kansas contest and the means that sustained it."¹⁰ The *Tribune*, working in accordance with the company agenda, came to recognize the importance of Kansas. Thayer and Greeley did not want disunion but their unifying of the North under one issue caused greater polarization between the two sections.

The company succeeded in getting support and, despite its critics, maintained its resolve to send emigrants to

⁸Greeley, *The New York Tribune*, May 31, 1854 reprinted by Eli Thayer in *The Kansas Crusade*, 50.

⁹Ibid., 50.

¹⁰Greeley, *The New York Tribune*, May 29, 1854. Reprinted by Eli Thayer in *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 20.

Kansas. The company agents had more to worry about than criticism when they entered Kansas. The emigrants not only had to be concerned about the Missourians but also about their reception by speculators, Indian traders, and criminal elements that would come from northwestern Missouri. Many Kansas businessmen saw the company presence and its intent on creating a free labor system that employed company men to build and run company mills and businesses in Kansas as a threat to their own business ventures. So the Kansas businessmen saw the company emigrants as much of a threat as Missouri farmers did.¹¹ Rumors circulated that the company's business practices were not fair. The *Worcester Journal*, of Worcester, Massachusetts, contended that the company took the best locations to settle and that company agents monopolized the lumber trade.¹² It cited its sources as letters from outraged emigrants complaining about the company and its monopolizing of the lumber trade.¹³ Again rumors were a detriment to the emigrants arrival because it gave the wrong impression of them and the company's

¹¹Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood*, 83.

¹²Anonymous, Letter written in response to article written in the *Worcester Journal* dated Lawrence, Kansas, January 10, 1855, reprinted in *The Herald of Freedom*, January 13, 1855.

¹³*Ibid.*, *The Herald of Freedom*, January 13, 1855.

intentions. Rumors were also a problem once the company was established in Lawrence.

Rumors flew that the Emigrant Aid Company would take Kansas through violent means and steal the territory away from the border Missourians.¹⁴ The deliberate misrepresentation of the New England Emigrant Aid Company by the southern press and rumor mill added to the problems that faced the emigrants when they reached Lawrence. The press set up the free-state emigrants and the proslavery Missourians as enemies before the two groups ever met, thus creating an atmosphere ripe for conflict. The two groups already held opposing views which put them at odds; thus the press only fueled the anger and resentment of the border Missourians and Southerners.

The company presence added to the potential for violence but due to the lawlessness of the territory there probably would have been violence over town sites, conflicting claims and over the issue of slavery in the territory without it.¹⁵ The company emigrant presence was not the sole reason that violence erupted but they were a contributing factor. The New England Emigrant Aid Company emigrants walked into a hostile situation in which they were

¹⁴Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood*, 83.

¹⁵Ibid., 84.

ill-prepared for what they had to face. The company helped them to emigrate but did not tell them about the violence that they would encounter.

The New England emigrants that reached Kansas were questioned as to what their political affiliations were. There were constant exaggerations as to how many emigrants that came into the territory. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* reported that an Indian agent by the name of a Mr. Vanderslice heard that there were twenty thousand emigrants on their way from Massachusetts with the intention of creating a free-state settlement.¹⁶ There was constant reporting in the southern press of thousands of emigrants on their way from New England. A Mr. Grable, who was a free-soil agent, supported the accusation that every emigrant was questioned about his political affiliations and threatened with vengeance from proslavers if he was tainted with the idea of free-soilism or free-statehood.¹⁷

Southern propaganda focused on the town of Lawrence, settled by the company since it was its headquarters and a free-state center. Lawrence became the site for much of the violence that occurred in Kansas between the free-state and

¹⁶*The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*, "Slavery in Kansas", July 22, 1854. 3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

proslavery forces. The southern press was not the only propaganda machine at work in Kansas. The company used the northern press as a tool to reach the public with its views in much the same way that the southern press did. The company organ and voice in the territory was its newspaper, *The Herald of Freedom*. It was edited by G.W. Brown and funded from a loan by company trustees and published in Lawrence. This newspaper spouted the company position from its inception and glorified the company and its work in Kansas. It was responsible for manipulating settlers' feelings very much like the Missouri papers did.

Brown wrote in one article how he tried to get the southern press to be more courteous in its writing since the border papers accused everyone living in Lawrence of being the most vile of characters.¹⁸ Brown felt that the proslavery press should follow his example but he was not above using the rival papers' own words to make them appear in a bad light. *The Herald of Freedom* printed this section from the *Leavenworth Herald*:

Lawrence is a vile sink hole of infamy and vagabondism—a settlement inhabited almost exclusively by negro-stealers and fanatics, and which has been justly designated the hot-bed of fanaticism, Abolitionisms,

¹⁸*The Herald of Freedom*, "The Border Press", May 13, 1855, 4.

and all the other damnable and pernicious isms.¹⁹

This quote taken from an article in the southern press served two purposes. It showed the animosity that proslavery Missourians felt toward the free-state town of Lawrence. It also showed the willingness of the *Herald of Freedom* to emphasize to its readers not only in Kansas but also in the North that the proslavery side was ill-mannered and uncivilized. It showed their irrational support of slavery to the North which was meant to incense the northern antislavery sensibilities. This was Thayer's intention from the beginning as a method to keep the North unified behind his company and his plan.

Thayer and the company could only succeed if people emigrated to Kansas. This is why the *Herald of Freedom* was a useful tool for the company. The *Herald of Freedom* propaganda made the territory inviting for all to come and settle. It wrote of the company placing "impregnable forces throughout the debatable land, against which the forces of slavery may battle in vain."²⁰ The company portrayed itself to prospective emigrants to be the one beacon of hope for Kansas to become free not only in the territory but also to

¹⁹Ibid., 4.

²⁰*The Herald of Freedom*, "Kansas Emigrant Aid Society", May 3, 1855. 1.

the North. The emigration movement of the company attracted the attention of the North as nothing else had and earned the enmity of the South.²¹ The *Herald of Freedom* echoed Thayer's belief that the company was the one factor in Kansas that would lead to free state success and would go down in history as such. The newspaper's bias reiterated Thayer's belief in his company's greatness. It was the belief that no enterprise had met the needs of creating a free-state in Kansas as the company had and no other measures taken could compare with the Emigrant Aid Society and its attempt at making Kansas free.²²

The *Herald of Freedom* became a target of Garrison's because of its affiliation with the Emigrant Aid Company. Garrison criticized the newspaper and accused it of "not being a *Herald of Freedom*."²³ G.W. Brown felt that his newspaper had been unjustly accused by the *Liberator* of being a propaganda machine and recopied an article from the *Liberator* with its own defense. Garrison attacked the *Herald of Freedom* and vocalized his objectives. He felt the paper was a fraud because it denounced the immediate

²¹Ibid., 1.

²²*The Herald of Freedom*, "Kansas Emigrant Aid Society", May 3, 1855, 1.

²³Garrison, *The Liberator*, July 13, 1855, 1.

abolition of slavery as a destructive force to the interests of all concerned and concluded that the paper was decidedly of a proslavery spirit.²⁴

There were many in the territory who felt that the only thing that the company did was create animosity between the border Missourians and the free-state emigrants. The company philosophy was attacked by abolitionists for not holding the strongest anti-slavery beliefs constantly throughout its period in Kansas. Charles Stearns, a Garrisonian, observed that the main reason that slavery would not exist in Kansas was because the emigrants did not want to live next to free blacks and that was their only motivation for supposedly portraying themselves as holding antislavery views.²⁵ This was not the last time that their reasons for going to Kansas were questioned. Stearns called for radical abolitionists to come to Kansas so that it could become a true free-state and not one in name only. The Emigrant Aid Company propaganda portrayed itself as a protective force in the territory and that the proslavery element was not a threat. Stearns saw things differently and felt that the proslavery faction was very much alive and

²⁴Garrison, *The Liberator*, July 13, 1855.

²⁵*The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*, "Things in Kansas", January 27, 1855, 1.

the company was not telling the truth. He wrote:

I have already been threatened by public men with a coat of tar and feathers, for daring to say that the emigrant aid company, of Boston, has misrepresented the state of affairs here.²⁶

Stearns called for abolitionists to come to Kansas because the company was not doing anything productive for the free-state cause. The southern press denounced the company for being in Kansas at all since it was responsible for bringing in emigrants to steal their territory away.

Missourian's fear of invasion by abolitionists into Kansas was ever present. They also feared an influx of New Englanders into their state as well. Opponents of emigration believed that if the New England states could send an army of abolitionists into Kansas, they had the same right to transport them into Missouri.²⁷ Missourians were apprehensive of the New England emigrant influence in their state and in the territory of Kansas. They felt that a colony of New Englanders would not only arouse alarm to those living in Missouri but also to the Missourians who had emigrated to Kansas.²⁸ The company boasted that they had

²⁶*The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*, "Things in Kansas", January 27, 1855, 1.

²⁷ Wm. B. Napton, Sterling Price, M. Oliver, S.H. Woodson, "The Wrong of Free Emigration", *The Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*. October, 6, 1855, 1.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 1.

enough emigrants to outvote the Missourians in upcoming elections.²⁹ Its presence worried Missourians and to ensure they would not be outvoted in the territorial legislature election they came across the border, voted and left. Critics in the territory believed that if the company had never made those claims than not one Missourian would have crossed the border.³⁰ The company presence caused problems on all sides and it was attacked from all sides. Members were also accused of partaking in violence themselves.

Thayer spoke out against his critics and consistently attacked the Garrisonians and other staunch abolitionists. They accused his company of being a detriment to the cause, a minor element in Kansas and that it was just a profit-making scheme. Thayer reasoned that the Garrisonian abolitionists opposed the movement and tried to defeat it because the loss of Kansas would strengthen the North's disunionist sentiment.³¹ Oliver Johnson, a Garrisonian abolitionist from New York, responded in defense of the abolitionists. He charged that Thayer invited an armed conflict since he sent Sharps rifles with the emigrants thus

²⁹Charles Stearns, "State of Affairs in Kansas," *The Liberator*, July 4, 1855, 1.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 1.

³¹Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 41.

inviting a physical conflict rather than promoting a moral difference in views.³² The abolitionists reviled Thayer even though he wanted Kansas free because he did not want equality for freed slaves. Thayer was at odds with abolitionists since he wanted to stop the expansion of slavery but did not want to abolish it where it already existed. Therefore, in their eyes, how could he possibly claim Kansas as being free.

This is the reason the Garrisonians believed that Kansas would never be a truly free state even if it entered the Union under a free-state banner. They felt that such a state would be a compromise to the slavery system rather than a strong free-state and that its place in the Union would quiet the North since Northerners would feel as if they had acquired a victory over the South.³³ Thayer felt that without the presence of the Emigrant Aid Company, Kansas would fall to the Border ruffians and if that had happened it would have benefitted Garrison. This opposition from Garrison continued throughout the company's existence.

³²Oliver Johnson, *The Abolitionists Vindicated in a Review of Eli Thayer's Paper on the New England Emigrant Aid Company*(Worcester, Massachusetts: Franklin P. Rice, 1887), 12.

³³Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade*. Reprinting of a Garrisonian statement issued and adopted at a conference in 1856, 101.

The Liberator reprinted the speech of Wendell Phillips, a close friend and associate of Garrison, in which he argued that Kansas would fall to slavery. He wondered why he should care about a squabble at the ballot box in Kansas.³⁴ This was an effort by Garrisonians to try to de-emphasize the role of the company in Kansas and the importance of its role to the continuation of the Union. Thayer used this statement as a way to show the importance of the company and to rebuff the abolitionists. He felt that there would not have been a contest at the ballot box if the company was not there since if not for the company slavery would have won with no opposition.³⁵ Thayer thought that the main reason that the abolitionists magnified the dangers of emigration and tried to destroy support for their work was to end the movement.³⁶ If the emigration movement ended it would have bolstered the Garrisonian's drive for disunion, gained more subscribers for the *Liberator* and increased attendance at antislavery disunion conventions, all of which would have led to anarchy.³⁷ Thayer saw the company as the means

³⁴Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*. Reprinting of Wendell Phillip's speech from *The Liberator*, September 28 and August 10, 1855, 109.

³⁵Ibid., 110.

³⁶Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 109.

³⁷Ibid., 102.

which saved both Kansas and the country from Garrison's disunionist views.

Despite the opposition the company faced in Kansas by proslavery Missourians and the criticism it endured from Garrison it never wavered in its cause to make Kansas a free state. To this end the company created important free-state centers in Lawrence and Topeka. It offered territorial leadership in company agent Charles Robinson. The company's true contribution lay in the fact that it brought free-state ideas to the territory as well as the means to implement a free-labor system. While it did help with the free-state cause it was not the only reason that Kansas became a free-state. The company had little to do with the settling of Kansas since only about 2,000 emigrants emigrated with the company and a third returned east.³⁸ The North and South observed the struggle in Kansas closely because it emphasized the growing sectional problems over the slavery issue. The arrival of the first company party attracted the attention of both North and South with both sides watching the struggle between freedom and slavery about to begin in Kansas.³⁹

³⁸*The New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers: 1854-1909*, ed. Joseph W. Snell (Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, 1967), microfilm.

³⁹Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 73-74.

Although there is little argument that the New England Emigrant Aid Company helped Kansas to become a free-state the company must bear the responsibility of causing great animosity from the border Missourians who saw it as an invasion. The company's role in the violence that ensued must be examined before its true role in history can be assessed. The company's impact was more negative than positive in the Kansas conflict and its actions must be examined. Its propaganda became a force which helped to polarize the North and South since *The Herald of Freedom* became known to Northerners as the voice of Kansas.

Chapter Four

Analysis of Company Actions in Kansas

The company presence had an impact in Kansas because it gave a focus for both proslavery Missourians and northern abolitionists. Its approach helped to determine the opinions of North and South. This propaganda helped to increase the chasm that was growing between North and South over the explosive issue of slavery. It gave the southern and northern press objects to make into heroes or villains coming to the territory to cause trouble. Company critics claimed the company's sending of Sharps rifles was an example of their agents' willingness to resort to violence at the company's bidding. The truth is that the company did have an impact on making Kansas a free-state but it was not solely responsible as Thayer believed. Company agent Charles Robinson's leadership was an important factor toward free-state success and he was the main reason that the company made any impact at all. He led the free-state faction and helped to quiet some of the violence that the proslavery border ruffians were aiming at the town of Lawrence.

The town of Lawrence was the company's greatest influence in Kansas. It was the headquarters for the free-

state faction and was primarily composed in the beginning of New England emigrants. The company built mills for lumber and grist which again strengthened their free labor system and threatened the slavery system. Lawrence also had three free-state newspapers including, *The Herald of Freedom*, the company organ first printed in Kansas, January 1855. Two other Lawrence newspapers, the *Kansas Free State* and the *Kansas Tribune* opposed slavery but were hostile toward the Emigrant Aid company.¹ *The Herald of Freedom*, began with company money and was clearly used for company propaganda and this may have encouraged the other newspaper's hostilities.

The Herald of Freedom was not held in high esteem by the settlers because Editor Brown "was too narrowly partisan, too violent and indiscreet in his writing."² The settlers could not trust the paper since they felt it only reflected the views of Brown and the company. The emigrants needed to know the truth about what was happening throughout Kansas and the *Herald of Freedom* only reported company propaganda which sought to entice New Englanders to emigrate by allowing them to believe how safe Kansas was. This is how the company propaganda reached the settlers in Kansas

¹Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 89.

²Ibid., 90.

and the North and it was thought to be the voice of the free-state movement in Kansas.³ The high visibility and belief that the company was a force in Kansas can be attributed to its great propaganda machine. This propaganda helped to add to the sectionalization of the North and South. Senator J. A. Bayard of Delaware said: "Whatever evil, or loss, or suffering, or injury, may result to Kansas, or to the United States at large, is attributable, as a primary cause, to The Emigrant Aid Society of Massachusetts."⁴ The company was a highly visible element in Congress as well as in the southern and northern press. The volatile situation increased due to the *Herald of Freedom's* articles and editorials. The reality of the *Herald of Freedom* was that it caused conflict with the proslavery faction and deliberately antagonized the southern press. The *Herald of Freedom's* editorials reflected the view of the editor, G.W. Brown and his remarks furthered company propaganda and reflected his feelings toward the proslavery faction which angered the southern press.

Politics in Kansas in 1855 was a complicated situation. Governor, Andrew H. Reeder of Kansas, divided the territory into districts and had a census taken to determine the

³Ibid., 90.

⁴Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 32.

number of legal voters for the upcoming elections for the legislature. The election was set for March 30, 1855. The proslavery side had denounced Reeder as a traitor because they heard rumors that the Governor had an agreement with the company to delay the election so that they could send more eastern emigrants to Kansas to vote in violation of the spirit of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.⁵ There was never any evidence that showed that the company knew or that it intended to send people west merely to vote. Yet their presence as an organized group allowed the Missourians to fear that the New England Emigrant Aid Company emigrants would outvote them. As a result of this fear Missourians came across the border in droves to vote and leave. It was this constant influx of settlers that caused them serious alarm and aroused the anger of the Missouri border ruffians.⁶ The fear of emigrants flooding the territory was a factor in their decision to vote illegally but they may have taken this action with or without the company's presence. The proslavery Missourians wanted Kansas to be a slave state and would have resented any group that opposed that goal.

The proslavery Missourians, out of distrust for the

⁵Ibid., 99.

⁶Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 183.

Emigrant Aid Company settlers, decided to go over the border and vote. As a result the free-state men felt that this was a "bogus" legislature and would not recognize it. The "bogus" elections helped to strengthen the Lawrence association, which was composed of Emigrant Aid Company settlers and was led by Robinson. Three days after the election he had organized the men of Lawrence and wrote to Thayer asking for two hundred Sharps rifles.⁷ Edward Everett Hale, one of the company founders, agreed that by the spring of 1855 the emigrants would have to fight for their rights and he wrote that one hundred Sharps rifles were sent from the company office and were received in Lawrence in May.⁸ There is some conflict as to the total number of rifles that were sent to the company emigrants but it is safe to assume it was between one and two hundred.

After the election proslavery candidates carried every district but one and of the 6,318 votes cast it turned out that 4,908 had been fraudulent.⁹ As Samuel A. Johnson notes, according to testimony given during the Howard investigation: "Almost every Missourian questioned insisted

⁷Ibid., 104.

⁸Edward Everett Hale, Untitled manuscript, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers*.

⁹Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 101.

that he and his fellows had gone into Kansas to counteract the influence of the Emigrant Aid Societies."¹⁰

The Lawrence men received the rifles for what they claimed to be for the defense of the settlers. Yet Leverett W. Spring, writer and professor at the University of Kansas, believed Robinson's actions were designed more for violence than defense. The emigrants supporting a free Kansas needed arms to protect the new elections which were scheduled for May 22, but according to Spring it was the "first stroke in the projected scheme of anti-Missouri operations."¹¹ The rifles sent from Thayer and Lawrence were seen by the Missourians as proof that they were going to make Kansas free by force.

Proslavery Missourians decided to protect their interests in the same way-with weapons and violence. Their subsequent actions were spurred on by the arms received by company men in Kansas and by company agents acting as leaders in the free-state movement. The proslavery Missourians felt that the company settlers were ready and willing to fight for a free-state in Kansas. Robinson's actions helped to escalate an already tense situation. While promoting his own political interests, he was also

¹⁰Ibid., 101.

¹¹Spring, *Kansas*, 60.

speaking company propaganda. The proslavery Missourians saw him as the company spokesman and felt that the company was a threat far worse than they had anticipated when the first emigrants began to arrive. Robinson represented the company in Kansas and his actions were a reflection upon the company. Had it not been for Robinson using his position as company agent and free-state leader who opposed the illegal elections Kansas would have continued with its proslavery legislature.

Robinson wrote to Thayer asking for Sharps rifles to be sent for defense. Robinson's letter of May 25, 1855, stated that, "it looks very much like war, and I am ready for it and so are our people."¹² Kansas was a territory filled with violence and most of it was directed at the town of Lawrence which besides being the most important free-state town was also the Emigrant Aid Company's headquarters. Thus, the town of Lawrence was constantly under siege due to its importance to the free-state cause. The Emigrant Aid Company felt that without rifles they could not withstand an attack from the Missourians.

Robinson and the free-state emigrants knew that they needed to be prepared for attack once their opposition to

¹²Don W. Wilson, *Governor Charles Robinson of Kansas*(Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975), 21.

the newly elected legislature was revealed. The free-state party would not follow the "bogus legislature" and so proslavery Missourians believed that they were inciting violence against the federal government by not following federal law. "These rifles were needed in self defense, and not for offensive war against the federal government, and were so used."¹³ The Sharps rifles were sent in boxes that were marked books and received by the free-state citizens of Lawrence.¹⁴ The troubles in Kansas allowed President Pierce to blame the company for the ensuing violence in the territory. It was in a January 24, 1856 address to Congress made by the president in which he blamed all of the problems on the emigrant aid societies.¹⁵

Kansas citizens needed the territory to be stabilized in legislature and leadership but that was not to be. President Pierce removed Governor Reeder on July 2, 1855 and replaced him with Wilson Shannon of Ohio, who took office on August 15, 1855. Pierce stated that he removed Reeder because he had speculated in Indian lands but it was more likely because he had denounced the proslavery legislature as an illegal body. Shannon listened to his proslavery

¹³Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict*, 123.

¹⁴Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 98.

¹⁵Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood*, 114.

advisors with their exaggerated accounts of company free-state activity and ordered the state militia to invade Lawrence.¹⁶ They found company agents and emigrants numbering 600 men, 200 of whom were armed with Sharps rifles and led by Charles Robinson. While the company has been accused of resisting the United States government there is no proof of that. Emigrant Aid Company agents felt it was their duty to defend themselves but said that they did not encourage resistance to the United States authority.¹⁷ Eli Thayer commented, "We contemplated no violence unless to repel violence we were all for the Union and the Constitution."¹⁸ Thayer did not believe in disloyalty to the government or disunion and so he supported the need for company emigrants to defend themselves. At no time did he see their opposition to the "bogus" legislature as an act of rebellion against the federal government.

Company leaders felt that by their actions they gave the free-state cause the strength and the leadership that it needed to succeed. They never saw their actions as an escalation of violence, which it was. Company emigrants and agents did what was necessary to try to gain Kansas as a

¹⁶Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, 98-99.

¹⁷Ibid., 102.

¹⁸Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 167.

free state and so they opposed the legislature that they felt was illegal. They were not disunionists and that was one of the reasons that Thayer had problems with Garrison because of his disunionist views. So while the charge of disobedience to the government swirled around the Emigrant Aid Company there is no proof that they ever intended to resist the federal government in any way. Their resistance to the proslavery legislature was based on their conviction that it was an illegally elected body and therefore they should not follow it.

While the company fought against the legislature and the charge that they resisted the government the company founders were dealt another problem. The proslavery faction charged company men with being involved with John Brown. Brown had come to Kansas to visit his sons who had settled near Osawatomie. He was a rabid abolitionist and resorted to violence on several occasions during his stay in Kansas. He and his men massacred five men near Pottawatomie Creek on May 24, 1856 and were involved in the Battle of Black Jack on June 1, 1856. The Battle of Black Jack was a confrontation between Brown and his men and a group of border Missourians. The Missourians were a part of a group called the Westport Sharpshooters recruited from the Missouri town of Westport. They were led by Captain H.C.

Pate who was a corespondent for the *Missouri Republican*. They went after Brown after they heard of the massacre at Pottawatomie. They looted the town of Palmyra and then tried to loot the city of Prairie City. They encountered Brown the next day and surrendered after a short fight. This was just one example of the type of violence occurring in Kansas. It was also an example of the how Brown's actions affected the company. The shadow of Brown was always connected with the company and its founders because of the prevailing belief that they supported him and his violent actions.

Suspicion persisted that the company was responsible for Brown being in Kansas. In fact, the company's involvement with John Brown was minor. Lawrence gave Brown money to come to Kansas but the charge that he or other members of the company supplied his weapons cannot be substantiated. Thayer acknowledged that Amos A. Lawrence gave Brown the money to pay his fare to go to Kansas in 1855 but the company did not give him any other support.¹⁹ Lawrence did not deny that he gave Brown money or that he gave him his first letter of introduction and then asked Robinson if Brown could work for the company in some

¹⁹Thayer, *The Kansas Crusade*, 190.

capacity.²⁰ Robinson would not employ him because he feared his actions and said "he [Brown] would as soon as shoot a United States officer as a "border ruffian."²¹

Thayer had also been accused of providing arms to Brown in the form of Sharps rifles. Historian Stephen B. Oates points out that Brown was found to have three experimental guns given to him by Thayer.²² Yet there was not much proof as to whether the Sharps rifles that Brown used in his attacks came from the company. There was no record of any transaction in the company account books that linked their weapons to Brown. Thayer and Lawrence did their best to keep their previous encounters with Brown as quiet as possible.

Charles Robinson, like Thayer, did not claim to be an abolitionist but he was strong in his antislavery views. "This institution [slavery] is an unmitigated curse to all connected with it, intellectually, morally, physically, pecuniarily, socially, and politically."²³ If he had been an abolitionist Thayer would not have associated him with his company since he was proud of the fact that there were

²⁰Ibid., 192.

²¹Ibid., 193.

²²Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood*, 205.

²³Wilson, *Governor Charles Robinson*, 19.

no abolitionists among them. He was the element that helped to make Kansas a free state while consistently following the company program. Without Robinson the company would have been a stagnant and useless presence in the territory. Robinson's activities with the company's blessing helped to create conflict with the proslavery Missourians and prolonged the violence in Kansas. He was the one who asked for weapons to be sent to Kansas to be used in defense. The emergence of company emigrants having weapons gave the federal government and Missourians the wrong idea. They felt that their suspicion that the company had come to Kansas to take it by force was coming true. While his intentions may have been to use the weapons for defense it helped to escalate an already tense situation.

Robinson was elected territorial governor in 1856 under the extralegal Topeka convention which was called by the free-state party to oppose the proslavery legislature. This was a very complicated time in the Kansas political structure and Robinson was in the middle of it. While trying to lead the free-state party an indictment came down from the proslavery grand jury in Leecompton for his arrest on the charge of treason on May 5, 1856.²⁴ Robinson tried to flee and was taken to Westport Missouri and held until he

²⁴Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 157.

could be transferred to Leavenworth and later to Leecompton to be imprisoned with other free-state leaders. It was during this time of imprisonment that proslavery Missourians raided the town of Lawrence. After the sack of Lawrence as it came to be known John Brown felt the need to retaliate against the proslavers. He went to Pottawatomie Creek and the massacre ensued. These events marked the beginning of the border wars and did little to improve public support for either side.²⁵

Charles Robinson resigned from the company in late September, 1856 but never lost the support of the company trustees in him or his activities in Kansas. Robinson was elected under the Topeka convention to be territorial governor and later he became governor of the newly admitted state of Kansas in 1861. Amos A. Lawrence wrote of him in 1857, "Governor Robinson is more reliable than any other man who has gone to Kansas, so far as my experience with him and others has enabled me to form an opinion."²⁶ Robinson always worked in the best interests of the company and himself.

The company and Robinson involved themselves in violent activities of the territory. Robinson, worked on the

²⁵Wilson, *Governor Charles Robinson*, 44.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

company's behalf and imported Sharps rifles for the defense of its settlers but in reality this action caused them to become the target for angry proslavery Missourians. The company endured suspicion of treason from the federal government when company members refused to support the bogus legislature. The company made its presence known in the territory by its antagonistic actions toward the proslavery faction and its member's involvement in the free-state cause. The company was willing to do what was necessary to achieve its goal of making Kansas a free-state and that included violence.

Conclusion

Company Impact in Kansas

The New England Emigrant Aid Company formed with the belief that organized emigration would save Kansas for freedom. The company sought to send emigrants to Kansas to settle and to return a profit to its investors. It turned out to have a greater impact on Kansas and the country than anyone had intended. Eli Thayer and his idea of organized emigration garnered different results from what he, himself, had anticipated. Thayer believed, as did all of the men that formed the company, that emigration would save Kansas. The problem with their idea was that they did not take into account the repercussions that would ensue from their crusade in Kansas. They did not particularly give thought to the opposition that their emigrants would encounter or to the fact that the Kansas conflict would be felt throughout the nation.

The company was a failure at emigration since more than half of the people they sent did not settle in the territory but returned east. They did not send a great number of emigrants with the highest estimates of between 2000-2500. The company never returned a profit and most of its investors never recouped their initial investment.

However, the company did many positive things in Kansas. It was company agents that were the most prominent free-state leaders and company settlements became important free-state centers. The company built mills and employed emigrants introducing a free labor system into the territory. It was the company that formed the core of the free-state movement in Kansas and that was an important factor in the continuation of the movement until Kansas entered the Union as a free state in 1861. The most important thing that the company accomplished was that it brought to the forefront the conflict in Kansas and accentuated the slavery issue as the primary issue between the North and the South. Unfortunately that was also one of its negative aspects.

The Emigrant Aid Company was in some important ways a great detriment to the cause of making Kansas a free state. While they were the most active and vocal participants in the free state cause in Kansas they also helped to bring the conflict to a head. The company agents and emigrants became the primary adversaries of the proslavery Missourians. Kansas was a volatile place and conflict was inevitable but the company's presence deliberately made matters worse in the territory through their actions and the propaganda of its newspaper, the *Herald of Freedom*. Their plan for

organized group emigration appeared to Missourians to be an invasion from the North. Proslavery Missourians saw them as abolitionists who wanted to take territory that was rightfully theirs. They became the focus for the Missourians' hatred and violence.

Company propaganda intentionally agitated the southern press and the proslavery Missourians. While antagonizing the border Missourians that same propaganda was also working in the North. It was responsible for nationalizing the Kansas conflict and creating Northern support for the free-state cause.¹ The northern press helped to polarize both sections because in unifying the North under one cause it put the South on the defensive. Company propaganda made a negative impact on the territory and emphasized the growing sectionalization between North and South. It was company boasts that led the Missourians to cross the border to try to out-vote their supposed high number of emigrants. The election fraud helped to create problems between the free-state cause and the proslavery Missourians which culminated in violence and the eventual border wars. All of these elements factored into the problems which continued in Kansas. Everything connected with the company escalated events in the territory.

¹Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 302.

The arrival of Sharps rifles was a controversial action on the company's part. The company men said they only wanted them for defense but the proslavery Missourians did not know that nor would they have believed it. They assumed that the company was about to take the territory by force which was something that they had always feared. The company's actions played right into the Missourians' fears and prompted them to take action of their own. The company's relationship to John Brown also called into question its activities in Kansas. It could never be proven that some of Brown's weapons came from the Emigrant Aid Company but the suspicion followed the company throughout its time in Kansas. All of these factors contributed to the suspicion as to whether the company was as non-violent as it claimed to be. If there were records linking company men and Brown they no longer exist. The company men's actions in the territory were controversial and led to much criticism. The company became the target for abolitionists and the southern press.

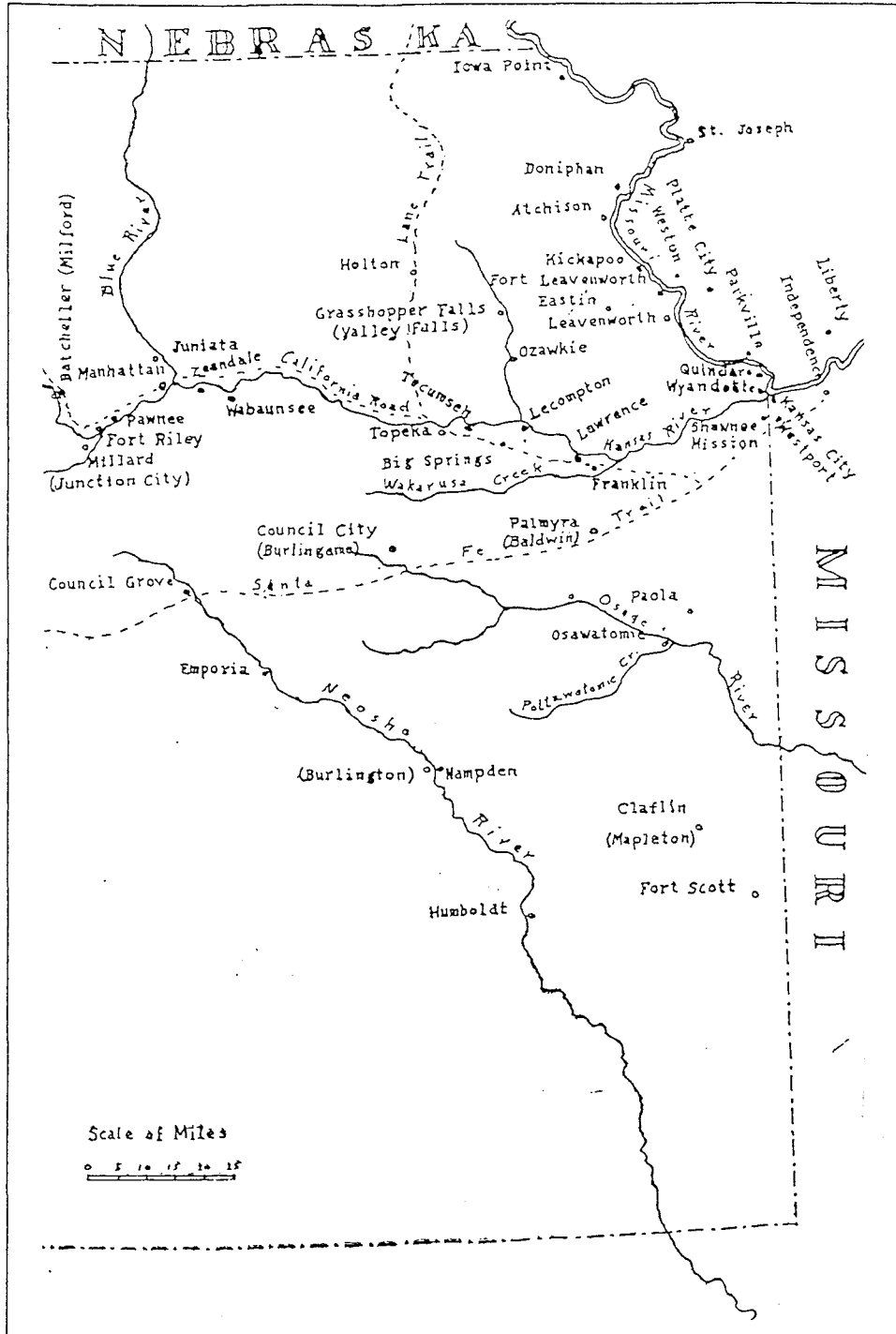
The company caught criticism from all sides because it was a catalyst for change. Most people misunderstood the purpose of the Emigrant Aid Company and that is why it had such a negative impact. While the company helped to bring the crusade for free statehood to Kansas its presence helped

to bring the conflict to a violence end. Border Missourians saw them as a group which would take their territory by force. They saw them as abolitionists who would make Kansas a haven for fugitive slaves. The southern press saw them as the ultimate enemies to their cause and wanted them out of the territory. The abolitionists did not think they were doing anything worthwhile in Kansas since they did not believe that the company was fighting to make Kansas truly free. The company, to them, was just creating a compromising state. The North saw the company emigrants as saviors to a great cause and rallied behind them. The company gave Northerners the means to take action and this helped to create tensions which would lead to conflicts between North and South.

Thayer did not want to polarize the North and South but regardless of the consequences he and his company intended to make a difference in Kansas. They were complicated men and so their company and its purpose was tainted with suspicion and doubt. Regardless, it did make an impact in Kansas and put it on the road that led to statehood as a free state. The company presence in Kansas did put a halt to slavery and so it did raise tensions and violence ensued. The company reflected an extremely complicated period in the territory and its history. It is not easy to name one thing

that the company did that could have made a more positive impact. The only positive thing that could be said about them is that Thayer, and his company men held a firm resolve to make Kansas free and despite everything they encountered they never gave up or gave in to opposition.

Their presence did have a negative impact on the Kansas territory but they were the catalyst for change. It was negative because it brought the slavery issue to the forefront of the country's attention. The company emigrants were a threat to the proslavery Missourians and this was the factor that led to violence between the two groups. Their influence may have been minimal in the process of creating the state of Kansas but without them, their controversial measures, and their firm resolve there would not have been a contest at all. Their actions may have had negative results but they at least did something that made a difference. The New England Emigrant Aid Company, despite its problems, deserves a place in history because it helped to shape the future of Kansas and impacted the country as a whole.



Settled Area of Kansas Territory
 From Samuel A. Johnson, The Battle Cry of Freedom, 2.

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