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# From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands Into Kansas, 1854-1865

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by Richard B. Sheridan

AS IT IS WELL KNOWN TO STUDENTS of American history, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854, repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and built upon the Compromise of 1850. It created two new territories, Nebraska and Kansas, in place of one. It led to the negotiation of cession treaties whereby some Native Americans, or portions thereof, were allowed to remain within Kansas, but the greater number were relocated in territories outside Kansas. Moreover, the principle of squatter sovereignty which had been established by the Compromise of 1850 was extended to both territories, in which the majority of white settlers were authorized to form and regulate their domestic institutions, especially the institution of chattel slavery.

Missourians first pushed across the border to claim choice lands under the terms of the Preemption Act of 1841. Their proslavery leaders perceived the necessity of flooding Kansas with slaves and establishing a slave state. Settlers from New England and the Ohio Valley followed, motivated by the same land hunger as the Missourians but determined to withstand slavery and found a free state. For a time the struggle resulted in victory of proslavery forces who waged guerrilla warfare throughout Kansas Territory and sacked free-soil Lawrence. Reprisals were led by John Brown, James Lane and others, whose forces plundered and killed pro-

slavery settlers, running off their slaves to freedom in Canada. Kansas was born in a struggle for liberty and freedom, a struggle that raised the curtain on the Civil War and sounded the death knell of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

The contest for possession of the Territory of Kansas has been told many times from the standpoint of white Americans who were involved in the struggle. On the other hand, much less is known regarding the black people and their role in overturning slavery, both in the antebellum and Civil War years. This paper, in five parts, is concerned with the blacks of Missouri and Kansas. The first section deals with the growth of slavery in Missouri and the flight of fugitives to Kansas Territory, especially the free-state stronghold at Lawrence. Part two takes up the problems of disposing of the contraband slaves who flocked to Union army camps throughout the South, and especially in the state of Missouri. The third section examines evidence regarding the size and geographical distribution of contraband population of Kansas, their work, education and social life, and part four deals with the recruitment and deployment of black soldiers from Kansas in the Civil War. The last section summarizes and concludes with a brief examination of

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1. James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), vii-xvi, 1-99; Roy F. Nichols and Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Stakes of Power, 1848-1861* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 47-59, 66-69; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 199-224, 297-327; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 97-118; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 113-15, 120, 126-28; William E. Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963); Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958); James C. Malin, "The Proslavery Background of the Kansas Struggle," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10 (December 1923): 285-305; James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1942); G. Raymond Gaeddert, *The Birth of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1940).

the plight of the black people of Kansas in the postbellum period. Much of the evidence regarding the contrabands and black soldiers was generated by the colorful exploits of James Henry Lane, who was both U.S. senator from Kansas and a military commander in Kansas and Missouri during the territorial and Civil War periods.

### I

The slave economy of the western counties of Missouri, which was a small affair in the early decades of the nineteenth century, became of increasing importance in the years leading up to the Civil War. According to John G. Haskell, a resident of Lawrence, Kansas, who had seen military service in Missouri, the early western Missouri slaveholder was a poor man; his wealth at the time of settlement "consisted mainly in one small family of negro slaves, with limited equipment necessary to open up a farm in a new country." Owing to such factors as poor transportation facilities and limited market outlets, the typical farm was small when compared with the cotton plantations of the deep South, agricultural production was diversified, and almost all food, clothing, and shelter was of local production. Slavery in these circumstances was much more a domestic than a commercial institution. "The white owner, with his sons, labored in the same field with the negro, both old and young. The mistress guided the industries in the house in both colors. Both colors worshipped at the same time, in the same meeting-house, ministered to by the same pastor."<sup>2</sup>

From its near-subsistence stage, the farm economy of western Missouri grew slowly at first, but more rapidly as the Civil War approached. New markets were opened with the growth of steamboat traffic on the Missouri River, the relocation of Indian tribes from east of the Mississippi River to the territory west of Missouri, the establishment of new military posts, railroad construction, and the opening of Kansas to white settlement. Besides a variety of foodstuffs, Missouri farmers supplied these new markets with transport animals—oxen, horses, and mules. Rising farm profits led, in turn, to in-migration, land settlement, and lively markets for farming tools and implements and especially black slaves. By the eve of the Civil War there were a considerable number of medium to large slaveholdings. Hemp, which was used in ropemaking, came to be grown

on slave plantations of some size, although its culture was mostly restricted to the Missouri River counties.<sup>3</sup>

The slave population of Missouri increased from 3,011 in 1810, to 9,797 in 1820, and to 25,091 in 1830. It then more than doubled to 57,891 in 1840, grew to 87,422 in 1850, and reached 114,931 in 1860. That a disproportionate number of these slaves were concentrated in the Missouri River and western border counties is the finding of Harrison A. Trexler. He writes that

The large and excessively rich Missouri River counties from Callaway and Cole to the Kansas line—Boone, Howard, Chariton, Cooper, Saline, Lafayette, Ray, Clay, Jackson, and Manitou—contained 34,135 slaves in 1850 and 45,530 ten years later. The whole series of counties along the Kansas border from Iowa to Arkansas—Atchison, Buchanan, Platte, Jackson, Cass, Jasper, and the rest—had 20,805 bondsmen in 1850, while in 1860 they contained 29,577.

The total of the Missouri River and western border counties was 54,940 in 1850 and 75,107 in 1860, or 62.8 percent and 65.3 percent, respectively, of all slaves in the state.<sup>4</sup>

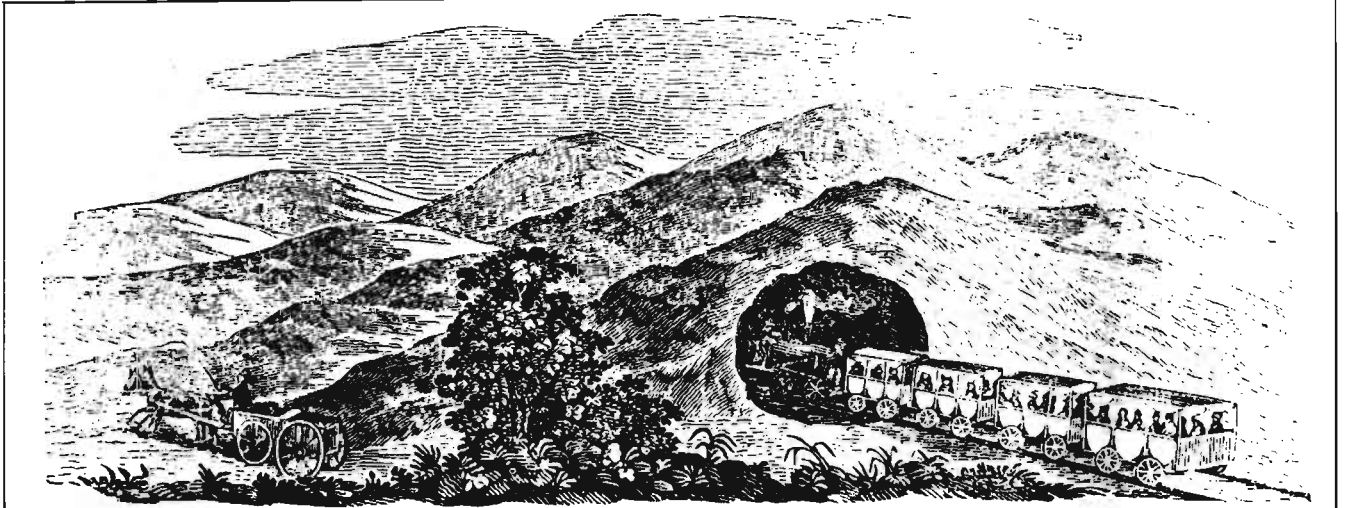
Slaves who planned to permanently abscond from their masters in Missouri had several modes and courses of escape. They might be aided by relatives or friends who had successfully escaped from slavery and returned to aid others. They might be aided by white people in Missouri and elsewhere who held strong views against slavery. Free coloreds are reported to have taken fugitives under their protection, written passes, given instructions and directions, and provided temporary board and lodging. The so-called Underground Railroad was a secret system to aid fugitives bent on flight to Canada, by transporting them from station to station along well-defined trails or routes. Some slaves managed successful flight solely by their wits and luck. Slaves escaped as stowaways on steamboats. Others stole small boats or built rafts to speed their flight to freedom. The coming of the railroad furnished a new means of escape. Prior to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the runaway slaves from Missouri headed for the two contiguous free states of Iowa and Illinois, and thence northward to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

2. John G. Haskell, "The Passing of Slavery in Western Missouri," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1901-1902* 7 (Topeka: State Printer, 1902), 28-39.

3. *Ibid.*, 32-33; Harrison Anthony Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ser. 32, no. 2 (1914), 9-56.

4. Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri," 10-13.

5. *Ibid.*, 178-79, 203-4.



## LIBERTY LINE.

### NEW ARRANGEMENT—NIGHT AND DAY.

The improved and splendid Locomotives, Clark and Lundy, with their trains fitted up in the best style of accommodation for passengers, will run their regular trips during the present season, between the borders of the Patriarchal Dominion and Libertyville, Upper Canada. Gentlemen and Ladies, who may wish to improve their health or circumstances, by a northern tour, are respectfully invited to give us their patronage.

SEATS FREE, *irrespective of color.*

Necessary Clothing furnished gratuitously to such as have "fallen among thieves."

"Hide the outcasts—let the oppressed go free."—*Bible.*  
 For seats apply at any of the trap doors, or to the conductor of the train.

J. CROSS, Proprietor.

N. B. For the special benefit of Pro-Slavery Police Officers, an extra heavy wagon for Texas, will be furnished, whenever it may be necessary, in which they will be forwarded as dead freight, to the "Valley of Rascals," always at the risk of the owners.

Extra Overcoats provided for such of them as are afflicted with protracted *chilly-phobia*.

*Just prior to the Civil War, the Underground Railroad was increasingly active in bringing slaves out of Missouri. "Stations" in Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois moved these former slaves to freedom. This 1844 Chicago Western Citizen advertisement thinly disguised its purpose by announcing the "Liberty Line" with "regular trips" running "during the present season between the borders of the Patriarchal Dominion and Libertyville, Upper Canada."*

Much greater opportunities for escape came with the filling of Kansas with free-soil settlers. By 1857 the problem was so great that both the federal and state governments were appealed to for protection of slave property in Missouri. Bills were introduced into the Missouri General Assembly to provide special patrols in the counties on the Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas borders. After the Kansas struggle had resulted in a victory for the antislavery forces, writes Trexler,

the golden age of slave absconding opened. Escapes apparently increased each year till the Civil War caused a general exodus of slave property from the State. The enterprising abolition fraternity of Kansas—Brown, Lane, Doy, and the rest—seemingly made it their religious duty to reduce the sins of the Missouri slaveholder by relieving him of all the slave property possible.

In 1855 one editorial writer asserted that "ten slaves are

now stolen from Missouri to every one that was spirited off before the Douglas bill."<sup>6</sup>

The raids into Missouri to free slaves struck terror into the minds of slaveholders and contributed indirectly to black flight from bondage. John Brown is known to have made several such raids and to have escorted a group of fugitives from Kansas to Canada in 1859. Less well known are the guerrilla chieftains James Montgomery and Dr. Charles R. Jennison whose bands of "Jayhawkers" terrorized proslavery settlers in southern Kansas and made raids across the border into Missouri. According to George M. Beebe, acting governor of Kansas Territory, it was the purpose of these guerrilla chieftains

6. Ibid., 202-4.

to shelter fugitives owing service to southern states, and to kill any who should assist in attempting to enforce the fugitive-slave law; stating that they acted upon a settled conviction of duty and obedience to God. In short, their professions were the exact counterpart of those of the late notorious John Brown, in conjunction with whom they formerly acted.<sup>7</sup>

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, the Underground Railroad was increasingly active in helping slaves escape from Missouri. The Rev. Richard Cordley, Congregational minister and historian of Lawrence, Kansas, said that the Underground Railroad line ran directly through Lawrence and Topeka, then on through Nebraska and Iowa. He had been told by people who ought to know "that not less than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of slaves passed through Lawrence on their way to liberty during the territorial period." Cordley, himself, together with his wife and members of his congregation, harbored a slave named "Lizzie," about whom he wrote an interesting account of their efforts to secrete her from a federal marshal and his deputies and see her safely on the road to Canada.<sup>8</sup>

James B. Abbott, who was active in the antislavery movement in Kansas, said that fear of being sold to planters in the deep South prompted the slaves of Missouri

to secure their freedom before the difficulties were increased and the opportunities were gone, and so it is not at all strange that hardly a week passed that some way-worn bondman did not find his way into Lawrence, the best advertised anti-slavery town in the world, and where the slave was sure to receive sympathy and encouragement, and was sent on his way rejoicing either by himself or with others, as the circumstances seemed to suggest was most wise.

Abbott asserted that the slaves across the border were far from the least interested party in the Kansas conflict. Indeed, they were early taught "the places and men to shun, as well as the places and men to trust."<sup>9</sup>

Col. J. Bowles was another Lawrence resident actively engaged in the Underground Railroad. On April 4, 1859,

he wrote a long letter to Franklin S. Sanborn, a leading abolitionist at Concord, Massachusetts. Bowles claimed that during the previous four years he personally knew of "nearly three hundred fugitives having passed through and received assistance from the abolitionists here at Lawrence."<sup>10</sup>

The Underground Railroad intensified the Missouri slaveowners' resentment toward the free-state settlers of Kansas. Moreover, it carried a growing number of passengers through Lawrence and other stations in Kansas because of the fears of both masters and slaves. Indeed, it has been asserted by Wilbur H. Siebert "that the Underground Railroad was one of the greatest forces which brought on the Civil War, and thus destroyed slavery."<sup>11</sup>

## II

Opportunities for blacks to escape slavery increased during the Civil War as Union armies invaded the South. Although some Union generals returned slaves when they escaped to Union camps, on grounds that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 required that the fugitives be returned to their masters, other commanders refused such surrender lest the slave property contribute to the armed rebellion. Declaring the slaves who escaped to his camp contraband and liable to confiscation by the laws of war, Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, whose forces occupied Confederate territory in Tidewater Virginia in 1861, established a precedent which was followed by other Union generals as the war expanded into the South. In March 1862 an act of the Union government "declared contraband slaves—those belonging to persons in rebellion—henceforth and forever free," and on January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation which declared forever free the slaves in the rebellious states.

Blacks who first escaped to the Federal lines were eagerly recruited for a variety of occupations. They built fortifications, served as teamsters, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, hospital attendants, officers' servants, and employees of the commissary and quartermaster departments. Many of those who had skills settled in cities as barbers, draymen, carpenters, blacksmiths, servants, seamstresses, nurses and cooks, of whom a large number conducted businesses of their own. In rural areas they

7. George M. Beebe, Acting Governor, to President James Buchanan, dated LeCompton, Kansas Territory, November 26, 1860, "Governor Medary's Administration," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1889-1896* 5 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Co., 1896), 632.

8. Richard Cordley, *A History of Lawrence, Kansas: From the First Settlement to the Close of the Rebellion* (Lawrence: E. F. Caldwell, 1895), 162-64, 183; Richard Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1903), 122-36.

9. James B. Abbott, "The Rescue of Dr. John W. Doy," *Kansas Historical Collections 1886-1888* 4 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1890), 312-13.

10. This letter is printed in Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1898), 348; it is undocumented.

11. *Ibid.*, 358. For a critical essay on the Underground Railroad legend, see Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 190-94.

# HARPER'S WEEKLY.

A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

Vol. V.—No. 236.]

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1861.

SINGLE COPIES SIX CENTS.  
\$2 50 PER YEAR IN ADVANCE.



James Lane and his forays into Missouri received front page coverage from Harper's Weekly in November 1861.

became tenant farmers or were employed as farm laborers and woodchoppers.<sup>12</sup>

The influx of contrabands into Kansas must be seen against the background of the Civil War on the Western Border. In Missouri the question of secession was decided by an elected convention that voted eighty to one against immediate secession. When Gov. Clairborne F. Jackson repudiated President Lincoln's call for troops and intrigued to gain control of the federal arsenal at St. Louis, he and the legislature were ousted and Hamilton F. Gamble, a Lincoln supporter, was elected provisional governor. Meanwhile, Jackson, Sterling Price, another former governor, and other southern loyalists formed a breakaway government. After an ordinance of secession was adopted, the breakaway government was admitted to the Confederate States of America.<sup>13</sup>

In Kansas, after years of political rivalry between proslavery and free-state factions, free-state delegates framed an antislavery constitution at the Wyandotte Convention. It was ratified by a large majority on October 4, 1859. After Lincoln's victory, Kansas entered the Union under the Wyandotte Constitution on January 29, 1861. Charles Robinson was elected governor, and Martin F. Conway congressman. On April 4 of the same year the Kansas legislature elected Samuel C. Pomeroy and James H. Lane to the U.S. Senate.<sup>14</sup>

James Henry Lane (1814-1866) was a remarkable leader whose actions as a military commander and politician were responsible for the influx of large numbers of slaves into Kansas and their recruitment into black regiments. It is uncertain whether he was born in Kentucky or Indiana, but the latter state is usually given as his birthplace. He studied law and went into politics at an early age. He served as colonel of a regiment in the Mexican War, after which he was elected lieutenant-governor of Indiana and later represented that state in the U.S. Congress. In 1855 he went to Kansas Territory where he soon became a leading politician and military leader of the free-state forces. Lane was a man of boundless energy, great tenacity of purpose and personal magnetism, and possessed of oratorical powers of a high order. Wendell Holmes Stephenson characterizes Lane as "a radical, an enthusiast, a direct-actionist, who tolerated no halfway measures." Moreover, "he was rash, hot-headed, daring, persistent, subtle, provocative, warm-hearted, magnetic." He was called the

"Grim Chieftain," a tall, thin, stern-visaged man, who, like Cassius, bore "a lean and hungry look." It was said of Lane that no man ever had firmer friends or more bitter enemies. Lane was an ardent supporter of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, and, as a U.S. senator, a close personal friend of the wartime President. He took his own life in 1866, in a fit of depression after losing political support in Kansas and being accused of involvement in fraudulent Indian contracts.<sup>15</sup>

Lane was appointed a brigadier general of volunteers by President Lincoln in June 1861. He proceeded from Washington, D.C., to Kansas to raise volunteer regiments under the authority of Congress, at a time when Confederate armies had won several important battles. In Missouri, Gen. Sterling Price and his Missouri National Guard secession army had defeated Gen. Nathaniel Lyon and his Union army at the Battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10, 1861. The Grim Chieftain worked fast to meet the threatened invasion of Kansas by a force some ten thousand strong under General Price. Lane marched with his hastily gathered troops to Fort Scott, Kansas, near the Missouri border, where Price was expected to attack. On September 2, Lane sent twelve hundred mounted men to Dry Wood Creek, twelve miles east of Fort Scott, where a brisk skirmish was fought with Price's advance-guard. Price decided to discontinue his advance into Kansas upon learning that Lane was waiting to give battle, and turned north toward Lexington, Missouri.<sup>16</sup>

"As Lane's 'Kansas brigade' marched through Missouri," writes Stephenson, "a 'black brigade' marched into Kansas." Two of Lane's chaplains wrote long accounts of the slaves who flocked to Lane's brigade and of their march into Kansas. In his *The Gun and the Gospel*, Chaplain Hugh Dunn Fisher tells of the trek of the black brigade. While the Kansas brigade rested at Springfield and on the march to Lamar, Lane's camp was "the center of attraction to multitudes of 'contrabands' and refugees." Lane sent for Fisher the second day out of Springfield, explaining the imminent danger of attack and the helpless condition of the great multitude of blacks. He asked Fisher, "Chaplain, what can we

12. Louis S. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 3-7, 11-26, 31-40, 120-25.

13. Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership*, 1-47.

14. Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1913), 257-67.

15. James Henry Lane's chief biographer is Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Kansas Historical Publications: The Political Career of General James H. Lane* 3 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1930). Other biographies are: John Speer, *Life of Gen. James H. Lane, "The Liberator of Kansas"* (Garden City, Kan.: John Speer, 1897); William Elsey Connelley, *James Henry Lane, The "Grim Chieftain" of Kansas* (Topeka: Crane and Co., 1899); Albert Castel, "Jim Lane of Kansas," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 12 (April 1973): 22-29.

16. Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 105-10; Thomas A. Belser, Jr., "Military Operations in Missouri and Arkansas, 1861-1865," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1958), 1:177-79.

do to relieve the army of these contrabands, without exposing them to their enemies?" Whereupon, Fisher replied that "all the men were in the army, and the women and children in Kansas needed help to save the crop and provide fuel for winter, and I advised to send the negroes to Kansas to help the women and children." Lane's laconic reply was "I'll do it."<sup>17</sup>

When the Grim Chieftain's brigade arrived at Lamar, forty miles southeast of Fort Scott, he directed his three chaplains, Fisher, Moore, and Fish, to take charge of the refugees and escort them to Fort Scott.

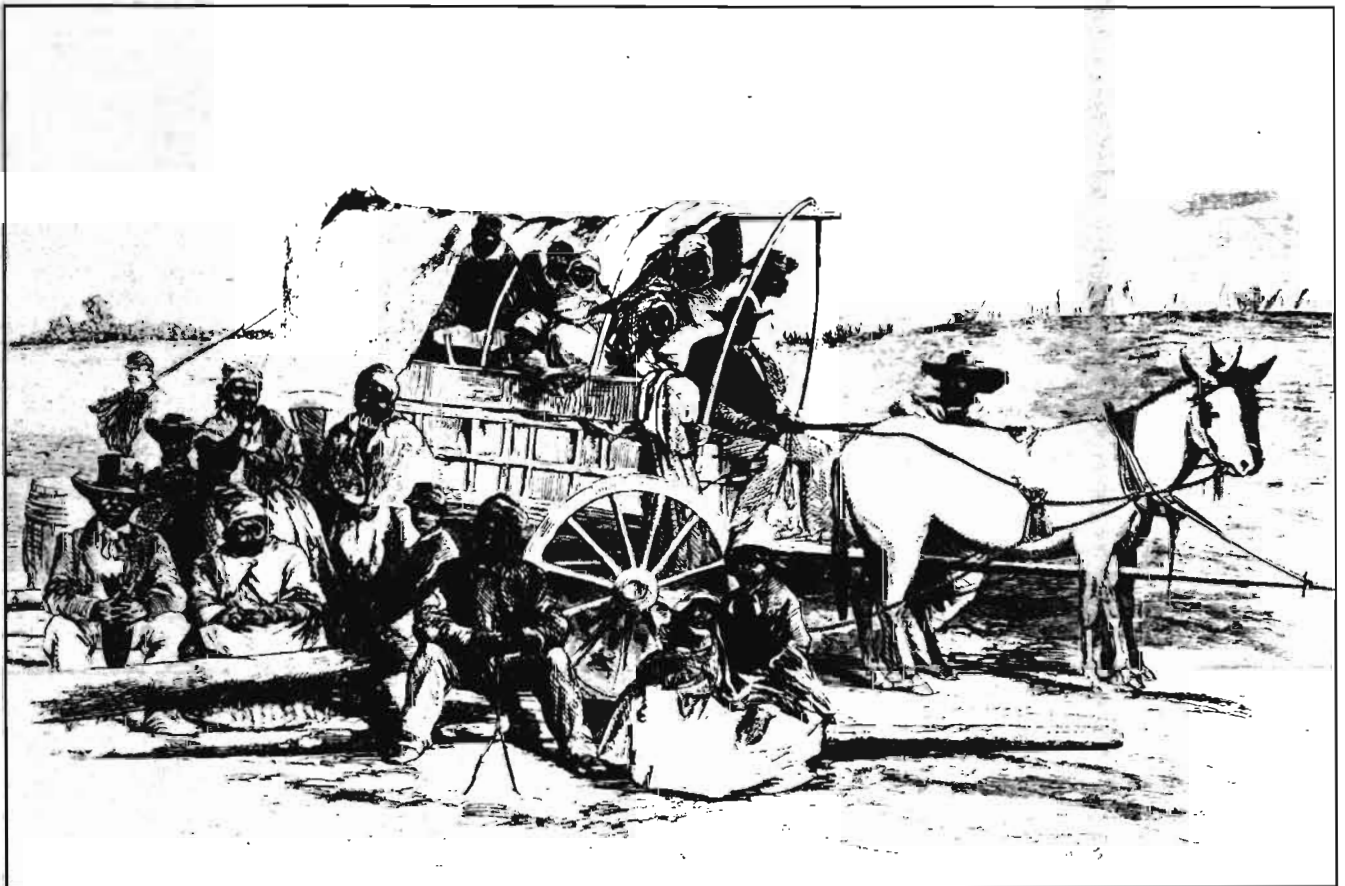
Next morning early there was a stir in the camp. Fourteen men were detailed as an escort to save us from falling into the hands of the guerrillas. We had a wagon

load of almost useless guns. I picked out about thirty negroes and armed them, the first negroes armed during the rebellion. We divided this company, and also the white escort, and placed half as an advance guard with orders to "scout well," and the other half as a rear guard with orders to keep well up, and by no means to allow a surprise. Such a caravan had not moved since the days of Moses.

It was a nondescript emigration. They traveled day and night, eating only cold food until they came upon a small herd of cattle, of which three were killed and hastily broiled and eaten.

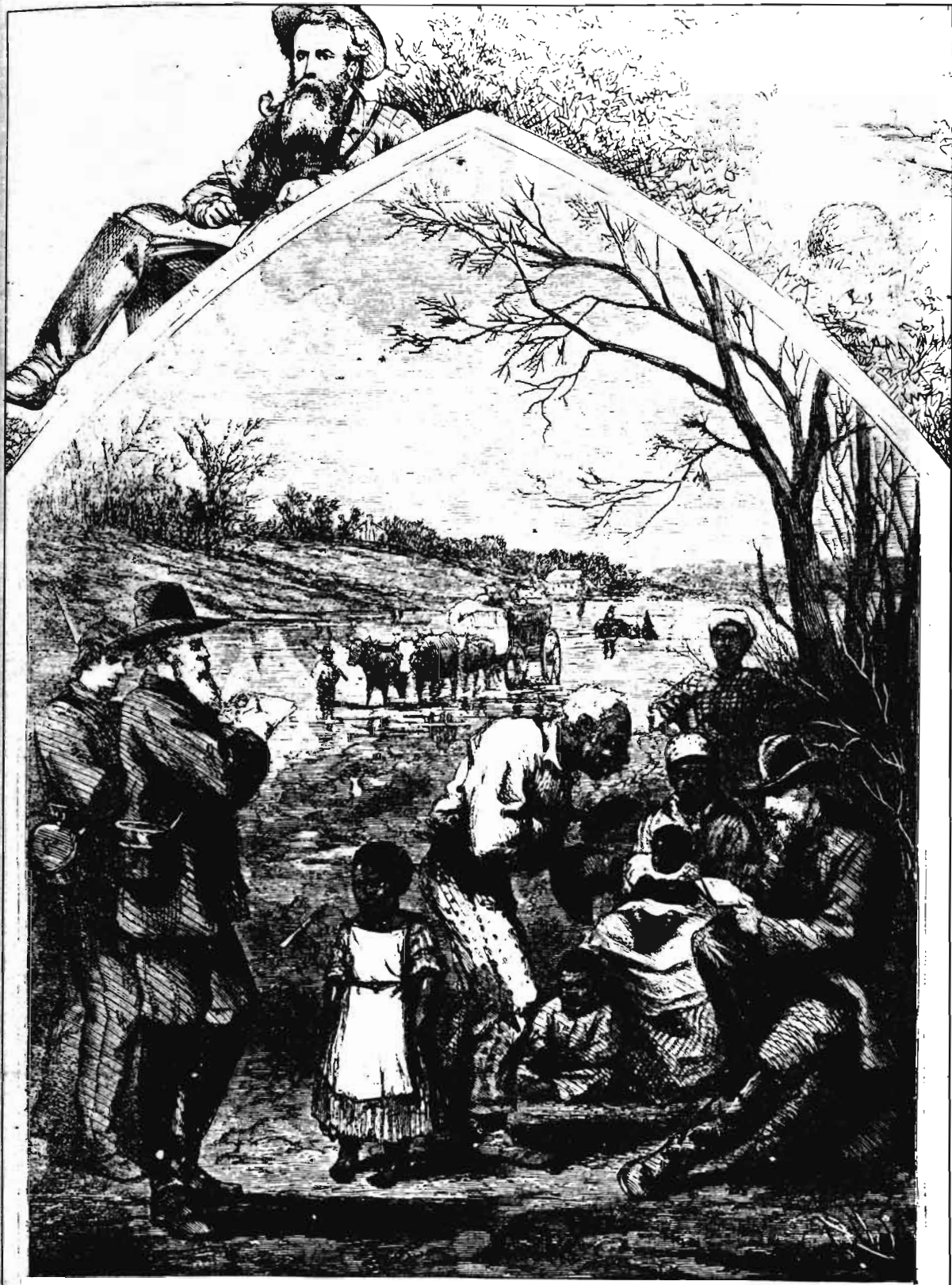
When they reached Kansas, Fisher halted the caravan and drew the refugees up in a line. He raised himself to his full height on his war horse, "commanded silence, and there under the open heavens, on the sacred soil of freedom, in the name of the Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and by the authority of General James H. Lane, I proclaimed that they were 'forever free.'" Immediately

17. H. D. Fisher, *The Gun and the Gospel: Early Kansas and Chaplain Fisher* (Chicago: Kenwood Press, 1896), 42-43, 155-56; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 126.



When Union troops marched into Confederate territory, escaped slaves flocked to the federal camps. In March 1862, the Union government declared contraband slaves free, and more blacks sought federal camps after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Harper's *Weekly* gave considerable space to the story of the contrabands. As illustrations, the publication offered "Contrabands Coming into Camp in Consequence of the Proclamation" and a depiction of reporters recording "Contraband News" (in this case, Harper's artist added himself to the scene).





CONTRABAND NEWS.

the blacks "jumped, cried, sang and laughed for joy." Fisher claimed that they were the first slaves formally set free. He said it occurred in September 1861, long before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was issued.<sup>18</sup>

Fisher's account was largely substantiated by that of Chaplain H. H. Moore. In a letter to John Speer, editor of the *Lawrence Republican*, Moore told of the motives and circumstances of individual slaves who came into the camp, some of them bringing valuable mules and wagons. "Our colored teamsters and servants act as so many missionaries among their brethren," he wrote, "and induce a great many to come into camp. It cannot be denied that some of our officers and soldiers take great delight in this work, and that by personal effort and otherwise, they do much towards carrying it on. None but such as are decided in their wishes to obtain freedom, are brought into camp." Moore went on to say that there were 218 fugitives, including several children, forming a train a mile long. The train camped on Dry Wood Creek for the night, when some members of the party stole grain from a "traitor's" cornfield and "killed one of his cattle for beef." The blacks became excited when they sighted the distant hills and bluffs of Kansas. When they crossed the line they gave "three hearty cheers for Gen. Lane, the Liberator."<sup>19</sup>

After he returned to Washington, Lane told the Senate of the success of his policies and actions in Missouri and Arkansas. In a speech of May 15, 1862, he claimed that 4,000 fugitive slaves from Missouri and Arkansas were then being fed in Kansas, and two months later he said the number had increased to 6,400. In a speech to the New York Emancipation League in June he said that he had himself "aided 2,500 slaves to emigrate" during the year, and a month later he told the Senate that at one time he had 1,200 blacks in his brigade.<sup>20</sup>

Later in the Civil War several groups of contrabands were brought from Arkansas to Leavenworth on steamboats. After the victory of the Federals at Helena, Arkansas, on July 4, 1863, the camps were overrun with blacks seeking freedom. Chaplain Fisher was ordered to take control of large numbers of contrabands, who left that port and neighboring ports in three steamboats, and scatter them "throughout Missouri, Illinois, Iowa

and Kansas, sending some of them as far as Ohio." Fisher said he had intended to go in charge of the slaves on the *Sam Gaty*, but at the last minute decided to go by rail instead to prepare for their reception at Leavenworth. Unfortunately, the *Sam Gaty* was captured by a band of guerrillas or bushwhackers at Napoleon, Missouri. Nine black men were killed and seven black women were shot, but none killed. The guerrillas searched the boat for Chaplain Fisher and would not be satisfied that he was not on board until they had killed three white men in his stead. When the *Sam Gaty* arrived at Leavenworth, hundreds of people assembled on the levee to welcome the survivors. Fisher said that the whole party of contrabands was promptly provided with homes in good families.<sup>21</sup> Among other contrabands who arrived by boat, one Lieutenant Colonel Bassett is said to have returned to Kansas from a military campaign in Arkansas with over six hundred black refugees on board four steamboats.<sup>22</sup>

It would be misleading to leave the impression that all of the contrabands entered Kansas under the auspices of Union military units. Many of them, perhaps the greater number, came of their own volition, either crossing along the land border or the approximately seventy-five mile stretch of the Missouri River which separates Missouri from Kansas. Writing in February 1862, the editor of the *Atchison Freedom's Champion* adopted an attitude of mock sympathy for Missouri slaveowners whose property walked away, saying

The beloved darkies, the cherished possession of the secesh, are constantly arriving in Kansas from Missouri—they come singly, by pairs, and by dozens. . . . We acknowledge that it must be very trying to the feelings of our Missouri brethren to have those which they have brought up from infancy, or in whom they expended large sums of money, to thus forsake them at the first opportunity, and frequently not only take themselves away, but also a valuable horse or mule. We repeat that all this must be very trying, but all the consolation we can give them is that "such are the fortunes of war," and we trust that hereafter they will learn wisdom and not invest large sums of money in property of this description, for every day's experience only tends to convince us that it is a very uncertain species of riches, and although not taking "wings," nevertheless frequently takes "legs" and is lost forever.<sup>23</sup>

18. Fisher, *Gun and Gospel*, 155-57.

19. *Lawrence Republican*, November 21, 1861.

20. *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d sess, pt. 3, May 15, 1862, p. 2149, pt. 4, July 10, 1862, p. 3235; *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), 3:742-43; for Lane's New York speech, see *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, June 12, 1862; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 127.

21. Fisher, *Gun and Gospel*, 164-69; *Freedom's Champion*, Atchison, April 4, 1863.

22. [J. B. McAfee], *Official Military History of Kansas Regiments During the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion* (Leavenworth: W. S. Burke, 1870), 61-63.

23. *Freedom's Champion*, February 8, 1862.

Slaves even walked across the Missouri River to freedom in Kansas when the ice was thick enough to support their weight, as was reported to be the case in February 1863 when contrabands in considerable numbers crossed over on the frozen river and enlisted in the Union army.<sup>24</sup> A few reportedly swam across the river at some peril to their lives, while others came on skiffs and ferries. One group that arrived by ferry at Wyandotte was said to consist of "poor, frightened half-starved negroes... men and women with little children clinging to them, and carrying all of their earthly possessions in little bags or bundles, sometimes in red bandana handkerchiefs."<sup>25</sup>

The exodus continued at a rapid pace until the end of hostilities. Writing from Glasgow, Missouri, to Gov. Thomas Carney of Kansas, on August 24, 1863, B. W. Lewis said that hardly a night passed but what from two to a dozen slaves left their masters. Having incurred heavy costs in policing his own slaves, Lewis proposed "to sett [*sic*] all our Negroes free who may desire it and put them on a Boat and pay their way to some point in your State." Those who preferred to stay, he said, would be paid wages. Lewis asked the governor to advise him if there would be any objection to his sending the slaves to Kansas. Though Lewis' proposal was no doubt unique, it was symptomatic of the despair of Missouri slaveholders regarding the viability of the peculiar institution. That the slave population of Missouri was seriously eroded by the flight of blacks during the turmoil and destruction of the Civil War can be demonstrated by population statistics. In fact, only 73,811 slaves remained in the state in 1863, as compared with 114,931 in 1860, or a decline of thirty-five percent. The loss was probably greater in a qualitative sense than the statistics indicate, since the greater part of the fugitives were reportedly able-bodied males and females capable of performing heavy field labor.<sup>26</sup>

### III

The influx of contrabands was significant from the standpoint of the numbers involved and their impact on the economy and society of wartime Kansas. Table 1 shows that the black population increased from 627 in 1860 to 12,527 in 1865, or from 0.6 percent to 8.8 percent

of the Kansas population. The influx may have been as great as 15,000, since many black soldiers from Kansas were out of the state when the census of 1865 was taken. Although blacks came to Kansas in growing numbers after the Civil War, and especially in the late 1870s and early 1880s when the "Exodusters" arrived from the South, the white population increased even more rapidly. Thus, the blacks declined as a percentage of the total population—to 4.7 in 1870, 4.3 in 1880, and 3.5 in both 1890 and 1900. In the twentieth century the black population of Kansas increased from 3.5 percent of the total in 1900 to 5.4 percent in 1980. It is therefore noteworthy that the influx during the Civil War years raised the black population of Kansas to its highest level in relation to whites and Indians.

Not only did the blacks constitute a larger proportion of the total population of Kansas; they were also highly concentrated in certain towns and counties, as shown in Table 2. Eight of the thirty-seven counties that were enumerated in 1865, contained 77.5 percent of the black population, and the three leading counties—Leavenworth, Douglas, and Wyandotte—contained 55.5 percent of the blacks. Although it lacked a town of any consequence, Wyandotte County had the third largest black population in 1865, with nearly half as many blacks as whites.<sup>27</sup> The Kansas census of 1865 shows that seven towns contained 37.6 percent of all blacks in the state, and that four towns—Leavenworth, Lawrence, Atchison, and Fort Scott—contained 33.4 percent. There was one black to every three whites in Fort Scott, a ratio of one to four in Osawatomie, one to five in Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Mound City, and one to seven in Atchison and Topeka. In the eight most populous counties, females accounted for 52.3 percent and males for 47.7 percent of all blacks in 1865. It is significant that four of the leading towns—Lawrence, Topeka, Mound City, and Osawatomie—had been stations on the Underground Railroad. More or less protection was afforded the contrabands who came to Kansas by the Missouri River, the Union military establishments at Fort Scott and Fort Leavenworth, and the antislavery and aboli-

24. W. M. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County, Missouri* (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1897), 337-38.

25. Pearl W. Morgan, ed., *History of Wyandotte County, Kansas and Its People*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911), 1:232.

26. Records of the Governor's Office, Correspondence Files, Administration of Gov. Thomas Carney, 1863-64, box 2.1, folder 14, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society [hereafter cited as KSHS]; Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri," 206-7.

27. Recent excavation by archeological consultant Larry Schmits and his firm, Environmental Systems Analysis, Inc., has revealed artifacts from Quindaro, an abolitionist river port on the Missouri River in Wyandotte County, Kansas. Founded in 1857 with help from the New England Emigrant Aid Society, the town served as a major port of entry for freed and escaped slaves and free-soil settlers. The town grew rapidly to a population of about two thousand, but by 1862 was a ghost town. John Reynolds, assistant state archeologist with the Kansas State Historical Society, who toured the site, said that the findings were much more extensive and significant than most expected. *Kansas City Times*, July 16, 1987, p. 10A.

TABLE 1

**GROWTH OF KANSAS POPULATION, 1860-1900,  
DISTINGUISHING WHITES, BLACKS, AND INDIANS**

RACE	1860	1865	1870	1880	1890	1900
White	106,390	127,261	346,377	952,155	1,376,619	1,416,319
Black	627	12,527	17,108	43,107	49,710	52,003
Indian and other races	189	382	914	834	1,679	2,173
Total Population	107,206	140,170	364,399	996,096	1,428,108	1,470,495
Percentage White	99.2	90.7	95.1	95.6	96.4	96.3
Percentage Black	0.6	8.8	4.7	4.3	3.5	3.5

Source: U.S. Censuses, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900; Kansas 1865 MS. Census,  
Vol. 10, Compendium of Statistics Reported to the Legislature,  
Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society

TABLE 2

**BLACKS IN THE LEADING KANSAS TOWNS AND COUNTIES,  
1865, COMPARED WITH THE TOTAL POPULATION**

	Blacks In Town Population	All Blacks In County	Total Town Population	Total County Population
Leavenworth (Leavenworth County)	2,455	3,374	15,409	24,256
Lawrence and North Lawrence (Douglas County)	933	2,078	5,401	15,814
Wyandotte County	—	1,504	—	4,827
Atchison (Atchison County)	432	613	3,318	8,909
Fort Scott (Bourbon County)	359	787	1,382	7,961
Mound City (Linn County)	270	690	1,494	6,543
Osawatomie (Miami County)	138	409	750	6,151
Topeka (Shawnee County)	118	257	958	3,458
Totals	<u>4,705</u>	<u>9,712</u>	<u>28,712</u>	<u>77,919</u>

Source: Kansas 1865 MS. Census.

tionist sentiments of the townspeople and rural inhabitants.<sup>28</sup>

The "Black Brigade" was brought to Kansas chiefly to supply much needed farm labor. As more and more contrabands arrived in the state, many were dispersed over the countryside and employed as rural wage laborers. After several wagons loaded with contrabands had passed through two of the border towns in January 1862, one editorial writer predicted that the coming crop season would find "Kansas better provided with free labor than any of the Western States." Later in the same year the editor of the *Fort Scott Bulletin* made a tour of the Neosho River valley. He observed that cultivated farms were springing up on all sides, and "almost every farm was supplied with labor in the shape of a good healthy thousand dollar Contraband, to do the work while the husbands, fathers and brothers are doing the fighting."<sup>29</sup> Another journalist noted that black labor, mostly that of fugitives from Missouri, was largely responsible for producing the bountiful Kansas harvest of 1863. He said that large quantities of labor were needed to harvest the wheat, since very little machinery was used on Kansas farms and the crop needed to be taken off quickly once it had ripened. Even Senator Lane was reported to have used contrabands to build a fence around his Douglas County farm and to experiment with the growing of cotton with free black labor.<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not the contrabands settled on farms or in the towns depended upon several circumstances. Relatively few arrived with sufficient wealth and experience to begin as farmers. The overwhelming majority depended upon wage employment, and as the demand for farm labor was to a large extent seasonal, the contrabands' chances of obtaining work was contingent upon their arrival in Kansas during the crop season. If they arrived in the winter months the towns were most likely to supply the means of subsistence.

28. *Kansas 1865 MS. Census*, vol. 10, Compendium of Statistics reported to the Legislature, Archives Department, KSHS. In a Report of the Committee on Freedmen to the General Association of the Congregational Churches of Kansas in June 1865, two ministers wrote, "that there are not less than fifteen thousand freedmen in Kansas. Most of them have become free since the commencement of the war. They are most numerous in the eastern part of the State, especially in and near the larger cities and villages." *The Congregational Record*, 7 (June 1865):13.

29. *Osawatimie Herald*, reprinted in the *Conservative* (daily), Leavenworth, January 25, 1862; *The Fort Scott Bulletin*, November 29, 1862.

30. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, May 27, 1863; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 132-33.

"Contrabands in large numbers are fleeing from Missouri into Kansas and especially into Lawrence; 131 came into Lawrence in ten days, yesterday 27 had arrived by 2 P.M.," wrote John B. Wood of Lawrence to George L. Stearns in Boston on November 19, 1861. Continuing, he said, "thus far they have been taken care of, as the farmers needed help." He warned, however, that the hundreds, if not thousands, who were employed in harvesting the crops would soon be unemployed, and they would gather in Lawrence for the inhabitants to feed and clothe with the assistance of the "friends of humanity at the East." The contrabands came to Lawrence by the scores and hundreds, according to Richard Cordley. For a time their numbers and needs threatened to overwhelm the inhabitants. "But they were strong and industrious, and by a little effort work was found for them, and very few, if any of them, became objects of charity," said Cordley.<sup>31</sup>

Recalling her girlhood experiences with the contrabands of Lawrence, Agnes Emery wrote that at the beginning and through the years of the Civil War "a veritable army of slaves drifted into Lawrence as if by instinct, to a sort of haven." She told of the contrabands who worked for the Emery family on their hilltop farm near Lawrence as follows:

"Old Mary" could get up a breakfast that we did not know was possible. She could cook in such a manner as to make food of many plants that we did not know existed. "George" who lived in our barn was trustworthy and devoted to our interests. We always felt perfectly safe to know that he was near enough [to] protect us if the need arose.... Emily Taylor came two days each week, for years and years, to do our laundry. She also helped in sickness and in deaths. I well remember the day she came to tell us of the death of President Lincoln. Everyone in our family was depressed by the news.<sup>32</sup>

Besides helping the contrabands secure a livelihood, Lawrence citizens made a concerted effort to teach the newcomers to read and write. While the children attended the public schools, adults were encouraged to join classes after working hours. S. N. Simpson, who started the first Sunday school in Lawrence in 1855, established a night school for contrabands which met five or six nights a week for two hours in the courthouse. Classes were taught by a corps of volunteer teachers who were described as women and men of

31. John B. Wood to George L. Stearns, November 19, 1861, Papers of George Luther Stearns and Mary Elizabeth Stearns, Manuscripts Department, KSHS; Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, 137-38.

32. Agnes Emery, *Reminiscences of Early Lawrence* (Lawrence: 1954), 20-21.

culture, character, and consecration. About one hundred adults, entirely ignorant of their letters, applied themselves earnestly to the simple lessons given in the spelling books. Study and recitation were interspersed with the singing of familiar hymns. In the course of a few weeks several of the blacks were able to read with some fluency and were ready to commence with figures.<sup>33</sup>

The contrabands who came to Lawrence were a church-going people. Cordley said that a Sunday school was organized and Sunday evening services were conducted for them at the Congregational Church. They outgrew this facility, and, about one year after their arrival, the new Freedmen's Church was dedicated on September 28, 1862. It was described as "a fine comfortable brick Church," believed to be the first one ever erected in the United States for fugitive slaves. Cordley said the church was "filled with an attentive congregation of 'freedmen'—all lately from bondage, and all neatly dressed as a result of their short experience of free labor."<sup>34</sup>

After the difficult period of first arrival when white paternalism was most conspicuous in the adjustment to freedom, the contrabands encountered racial hostility and reacted by drawing on their own latent but slender resources in an effort to build a viable black community. Agnes Emery recalled that the freedmen did their share in becoming good citizens. "They were kind to each other in times of illness and misfortune, their demands were few, they were strong, eager, and willing to work, and soon made themselves useful in the community." After meeting in white churches and then in the inter-denominational Freedmen's Church, the blacks "divided into various ecclesiastical camps" with their own preachers. They met together to celebrate such anniversaries as the Fourth of July, slave emancipation in the British West Indies, and, beginning in 1864, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In 1864 the black women of Lawrence organized the Ladies Refugee Aid Society to collect food, clothing, and money to assist freedmen who had fallen on hard times.<sup>35</sup>

The occupations of 624 blacks in Douglas County are shown in the 1865 census, of which 349 lived in Lawrence and North Lawrence, and 275 in rural parts of the county. Soldiering was the leading occupation of the blacks in Lawrence and North Lawrence, where 95 were so designated. Following behind the soldiers were 85 day laborers. Of the 92 female workers, 49 were domestics, 27 were employed at washing and ironing or as washerwomen, 7 worked as housekeepers, 6 as servants, and 3 as cooks. In all, some 270 blacks or four-fifths of the town total, were unskilled laborers. The other one-fifth consisted of skilled and semiskilled workers. There were 23 teamsters, 8 blacksmiths, 6 porters, 4 barbers, 3 hostlers, 3 woodcutters, 2 stonemasons, 2 draymen, 2 rock quarriers, and one each of distiller, saloonkeeper, miner, harnessmaker, brick moulder, coachman, carpenter, shoemaker, printer, and preacher.<sup>36</sup>

The high ratio of rural to urban black workers, or 44.0 percent of all workers, may possibly be explained by the fact that the census was taken on May 1, 1865, when much farm labor was needed. There were 145 blacks designated as farmers, 59 as laborers or day laborers, and 31 as farm laborers. Although these occupations are not defined clearly, it seems reasonable to assume that almost all of the blacks so designated performed agricultural wage labor. Thirteen other farmers and one other farm laborer were residents in Lawrence and North Lawrence. The remaining rural males consisted of 10 teamsters, 6 soldiers, 4 brickmakers, and one each of porter, blacksmith, and schoolteacher. The rural females consisted of 9 domestics, 5 servants, 1 washerwoman, and 1 employed at washing and ironing.<sup>37</sup>

As the oldest town in Kansas, Leavenworth and the nearby federal fort by the same name was the largest population center in Kansas in 1865. Its growth was largely a result of its steamboat and overland wagon transport facilities and its place as a mobilization and supply center. The towns of Atchison and Leavenworth were first settled primarily by Missourians whose sympathies were proslavery. By 1858, however, Leavenworth had a free-state majority and the town hosted a state convention that adopted a radical antislavery constitution, which, although nominally approved by popular vote, was defeated by the U.S. Congress. Within months of the outbreak of the Civil War, Leavenworth had become a cosmopolitan town with inhabitants from all quarters of the Union and refugees and fugitives from the rebel states. A soldier from Wisconsin wrote home

33. *Lawrence Republican*, January 2, 1862; Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, 138-44; Cordley, *History of Lawrence*, 182-85.

34. *Lawrence Republican*, October 9, 1862; Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, 144-49.

35. Emery, *Reminiscences of Early Lawrence*, 20; Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, 145; *Lawrence Republican*, July 20, August 7, 1862; *Kansas Daily Tribune*, Lawrence, December 25, 1863; Kathe Schick, "Lawrence Black Community" (unpublished manuscript, Watkins Community Museum, Lawrence), Chapters 1 and 12, cited by Marilyn Dell Brady, "Kansas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, 1900-1930," *Kansas History* 9 (Spring 1986): 19-30.

36. *Kansas 1865 MS. Census*, Vol. 3, Douglas County.

37. *Ibid.*



This night scene entitled "Negroes Leaving Their Home" illustrated Harper's 1864 announcement that "hundreds of thousands of poor, outraged creatures are coming weekly into the Union lines at all points in the field."

in February 1862, saying, "The city is full of 'contrabands,' alias runaway negroes from Missouri; of whom it is said there are a thousand in the neighborhood.— They are of all ages and characters, pious Uncle Toms and half-ape Topseys."<sup>38</sup> Five months later, in an editorial entitled "Our Colored Population," the black population of Leavenworth was estimated at fifteen hundred, almost all of whom were newcomers and the great majority fugitive slaves from Missouri. These people, with scarcely a single exception, had arrived at Leavenworth "wholly destitute of the means of living." As they came in large numbers, and many of them in mid-winter, suffering among them was inevitable.<sup>39</sup>

38. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 7, 1862.

39. *Ibid.*, July 8, 1862. For the autobiography of Henry Clay Bruce, a slave who escaped from his master in Brunswick, Missouri, and, together with his intended wife, came to Leavenworth, Kansas, and lived there for some years, see H. C. Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man* (York, Pa.: P. Anstadt and Sons, 1895; reprinted New York, 1969); The author is indebted to William Lewin for calling his attention to this book.

Compared with Lawrence, Leavenworth had a more formal and extensive organization to provide for the contrabands' welfare. On February 5, 1862, some of the town's white leaders met with their black counterparts at the First Colored Baptist Church to "take into consideration measures for the amelioration of the condition of the colored people of Kansas." Prominent white leaders in attendance were Col. Daniel R. Anthony, Dr. R. C. Anderson, and Richard J. Hinton. The black community was represented by the Rev. Robert Caldwell of the Baptist church, Lewis Overton, a teacher in a black school, and Capt. William D. Mathews, a free mulatto military officer. Several months later, Charles H. Langston, a free mulatto schoolteacher, became a prominent leader in the black community. Hinton, a prominent journalist and abolitionist, had interviewed John Brown and his chief aide, John Henrie Kagi, during their stay in Kansas in 1858. At the Leavenworth meeting Hinton presented a plan of organization for the Kansas Emancipation League, which was approved. Anthony was elected president, Dr. Anderson, treasurer,

Hinton, chief secretary, Overton and Caldwell, members of the executive committee, and Mathews, superintendent of contrabands. Dr. Anderson told the audience of the origin of the scheme for sending an agent East to lay before the public the condition of the contrabands and to solicit aid. Before the meeting adjourned, a committee submitted a skeleton constitution and by-laws which were adopted.<sup>40</sup>

The Kansas Emancipation League's second meeting was held on February 10, 1862. After the minutes of the preceding meeting and the formal constitution and by-laws were read and approved, Richard Hinton "brought to the attention of the League the constant attempts at

kidnapping which occur daily in this city." This matter was taken into consideration by a committee that was directed to work with police and military officials to provide protection to the black residents of Leavenworth and the state of Kansas. The object of the league, it was agreed, should be to "assist all efforts to destroy slavery, but more especially to take supervision and control of the contraband element so freely coming to our State." Furthermore, it was "the object of the League to encourage industry, education and morality among these people, to find them employment and thus make them a benefit and not a burden to the State which shelters them." As superintendent of contrabands, Captain Mathews was instructed "to take charge and provide for their temporary wants and in every way look after their interests."<sup>41</sup>

40. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 8, 1862; Richard Warch and Jonathan F. Fanton, eds., *Great Lives Observed: John Brown* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 41, 53-56; Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, 126-28.

41. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 12, 1862.

**KANSAS EMANCIPATION LEAGUE;  
TO THE  
FRIENDS OF IMPARTIAL FREEDOM.**

Our name indicates the purpose of this organization. The hour has past for elaborate argument in regard to that enormous crime whose results are visible in civil strife. War teaches in such startling language that none not wilfully blind can fail to read its import—that Union is impossible and Freedom a myth while Slavery exists. Liberty deals with Human, and not alone with National life. In it is no geography—no race—no color.—Man is more than all. We seek results only. Therefore, and primarily we work to overthrow Slavery, remove evil effects from the nation, and especially to elevate the victims into self-respecting men and women. This, then, is our special work. It lies at our door and waits for our hands.

Kansas was honored in being the instrument whereby this continental tide of despotism was first stayed. Here we learnt that Slavery must, by its own laws, culminate in force. A territory large as a continent was saved, and a people educated into the conviction that there can be no peace without justice. Out of Kansas came Harper's Ferry—the sacrifice of a great hero—the culminating point of the century. In whose especial grandeur our common humanity is glorified. It is the glory and triumph of our State that her citizens have met the death of those who die for man. The Nation sees how the key-note—FREEDOM—which our grand prelude struck so gloriously. The Nation hears how the grand chorus of sorrow and gladness, sacrifice and triumph, the centuries have prepared for these hours. This strife is but the drift of the ages. It cannot only cease when recognizing the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man—the Union shall arise, disenthralled—redeemed—triumphant—embodying in its national life the equal rights of Man.

it in regard to that enormous crime whose results are visible in civil strife. War teaches in such startling language that none not wilfully blind can fail to read its import—that Union is impossible and Freedom a myth while Slavery exists. Liberty deals with Human, and not alone with National life. In it is no geography—no race—no color.—Man is more than all. We seek results only. Therefore, and primarily we work to overthrow Slavery, remove evil effects from the nation, and especially to elevate the victims into self-respecting men and women. This, then, is our special work. It lies at our door and waits for our hands.

But honor brings duties. One there is about us now. It was true for Missouri in '54,—that Kansas a Free State, Missouri a Slave State, Kansas cannot remain Slave. It is now true for Kansas,—that Missouri a Slave State, Kansas cannot remain Free. Events have made our border the beacon-light to the oppressed, and the necessities of the war have brought—seeking Liberty and suppliants for personal evils and misfortunes of a system which has embruted them. They are to be lifted out of the slough, made manly and useful, and through all the opportunities which this revolution brings, valuable to the nation, to the State, and to themselves. Common humanity, if nothing else, would forbid refusing that refuge they seek in Kansas.

they are found throughout our border counties. Fortunately for them they come at a time when our farms and workshops are denuded of labor. Our young men are fighting for the Union. Farmer, mechanic, laborer, and professional man alike are serving Liberty in the armed ranks. Hence the State. Our next harvest will be larger through their labor. This would have been more generally true, had there been from the onset an intelligent supervision as to means and methods of attacking Slavery; as to measures to be used in preventing evils which some perceive likely to grow from sudden changes in institutions at all, while to others it may seem a question of migration and seperation of the

We have thus thrown among us nearly four thousand "contrabands." They throng our towns, their borders, and they are found throughout our border counties. Fortunately for them they come at a time when our farms and workshops are denuded of labor. Our young men are fighting for the Union. Farmer, mechanic, laborer, and professional man alike are serving Liberty in the armed ranks. Hence the State. Our next harvest will be larger through their labor. This would have been more generally true, had there been from the onset an intelligent supervision as to means and methods of attacking Slavery; as to measures to be used in preventing evils which some perceive likely to grow from sudden changes in institutions at all, while to others it may seem a question of migration and seperation of the

Friends:—This is the special work we find to do. It is a practical question. We may differ as to means and methods of attacking Slavery; as to measures to be used in preventing evils which some perceive likely to grow from sudden changes in institutions at all, while to others it may seem a question of migration and seperation of the

as to means and methods of attacking Slavery; as to measures to be used in preventing evils which some perceive likely to grow from sudden changes in institutions at all, while to others it may seem a question of migration and seperation of the

Organized early in 1862 at Leavenworth, the interracial Kansas Emancipation League gave aid and encouragement to the contrabands who were arriving in growing numbers.



Beginning on February 13, 1862, and continuing for several months, the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* ran an advertisement of the Labor Exchange and Intelligence Office established by the Kansas Emancipation League at the drugstore of Dr. R. C. Anderson on Shawnee Street. All persons in need of black workers, including hotel waiters, porters, cooks, and chambermaids were asked to apply at this office. Furthermore, laborers were supplied for such jobs as woodsawing, whitewashing, teaming, etc., at the same office. About a month after the first advertisement was printed the Labor Exchange general agent reported that good work had already been accomplished, and that "over one hundred colored men have been sent from our city to labor on farms and that the demand for this kind of labor is still constant and pressing."<sup>42</sup>

Although the Labor Exchange and Intelligence Office helped to reduce the number of contrabands who were dependent upon the league, it by no means eliminated unemployment since many of the laboring men not only had large families but were unable to work as a result of sickness and exposure. For these people the league appealed for assistance in Leavenworth and elsewhere. Early in May 1862, Richard Hinton authored a printed circular which stated the problems encountered by the league and appealed to "friends in other states" for material support. One copy of this circular at the Kansas State Historical Society has a handwritten note, probably appended by Hinton, that states that the first money contributed to the league came from George L. Stearns, the Boston merchant who supplied John Brown with money for his abolitionist crusade.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV

Soldiering was the chief occupation of able-bodied male contrabands in the war years from 1862 to 1865, and it was General Lane who led the campaign in Kansas to organize black regiments and recruit black soldiers. In a speech at Leavenworth in January 1862, Lane recalled that contrabands who came into his camps in Missouri had played at soldiering after their evening meal; he said they took to military drill as a child takes to its mother's milk. "They soon learn the step, soon learn the position of the soldier and the manual of arms." He urged the government to arm the blacks, citing as precedents the use of black soldiers in the armies of George Washington and Andrew Jackson.<sup>44</sup> At



In 1864, Harper's ran these "before and after" drawings of a newly escaped slave soon transformed into a Union soldier "endowed for the first time with his birth-right of freedom."

42. *Ibid.*, February 13, 15, March 15, 1862.

43. *Ibid.*, March 15, 1862; [Richard J. Hinton], *Kansas Emancipation League; To the Friends of Impartial Freedom* (Leavenworth: 1862).

44. *Conservative* (daily), January 29, 1862.

a time when President Lincoln was calling for 300,000 volunteers, Lane was appointed commissioner of recruitment for the Department of Kansas. He was authorized to appoint recruiting officers, arm and equip volunteers, establish camps of instruction, and arrange for the procurement and transportation of supplies. Lane assumed that his recruiting commission, issued by the War Department in July 1862, entitled him to enlist blacks as well as whites.<sup>45</sup>

Arriving at Leavenworth on the 3d of August, Lane appointed recruiting agents and disposed of related matters. That he took speedy action is indicated by a *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* advertisement that appeared three days later. It announced that all able-bodied colored men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five had an opportunity to serve in the First Kansas Regiment of the "Liberating Army," and said that one thousand such men were wanted. It went on to say that "Ten Dollars Per Month will be paid, and good quarters, rations and clothing provided." A similar advertisement in an Atchison newspaper promised that, in addition to the pay and rations, a certificate of freedom would be issued to each black volunteer, as well as freedom for his mother, wife, and children.<sup>46</sup>

Recruiting and training proceeded at a fast pace in the weeks following Lane's initial appeal for black volunteers. An item in a Leavenworth newspaper on August 28, said the colored regiment had received one hundred recruits within the previous twenty-four hours. At Mound City some one hundred fifty black recruits were drilling daily, and more were reported to be on their way to the camp adjoining that town. North of the Kansas River approximately five hundred blacks had been enlisted within a short time. They were instructed to rendezvous by September 10 at Camp Jim Lane, near Wyandotte bridge. Capt. George J. Martin returned from Wyandotte to Atchison on September 12, and reported the regiment to be six hundred strong, with daily additions from Missouri. "The men learn their duties with great ease and rapidity," he said, "and are delighted with the prospect of fighting for their freedom, and give good earnest of making valiant soldiers." On October 17, 1862, the First Kansas Colored Infantry was organized near Fort Lincoln, in Bourbon County.<sup>47</sup>

45. Ira Berlin, ed., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867; Series II, The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 6, 9, 37, 67-71; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 127-32.

46. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 6, 1862; *Freedom's Champion*, August 16, 1862.

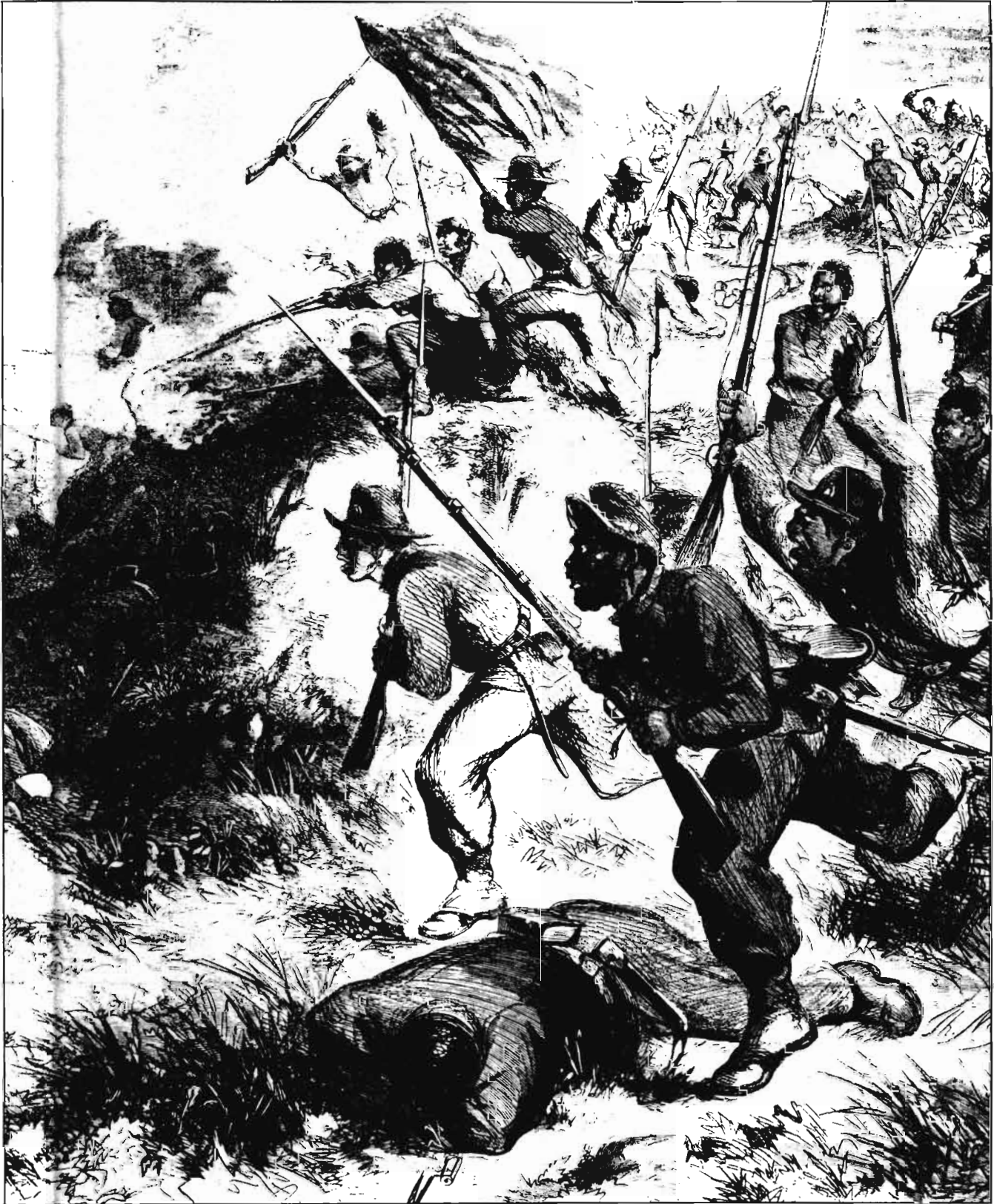
47. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 28, 1862; *Freedom's Champion*, September 13, 1862; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 129; Daniel W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1875), 325.

There is evidence that not all of the blacks recruited into the regiment entered voluntarily. One Missourian wrote to President Lincoln, complaining that a party of some fifteen Kansans had entered Missouri to "recruit Negroes for General Lane's Negro brigade." They forcibly took possession of some twenty-five blacks and about forty horses. However, a company of militia captured eight of the Jayhawkers and recovered all the blacks and horses. Another incident involved a recruiter for the contraband regiment at Hiawatha, in the northeast corner of Kansas. On August 21, 1862, he announced that he would pay "two dollars per head for buck niggers—that is, for every negro man brought over from Missouri, he will pay two dollars to the person bringing him across."<sup>48</sup>

That the black regiment's fighting qualities brought honor to Afro-Americans in Kansas and elsewhere is well documented. Writing from Fort Africa, Bates County, Missouri, on October 30, 1862, a *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* correspondent told of a campaign against a notorious band of bushwhackers. In a sharp engagement in which some two hundred thirty black troops were pitted against about six hundred bushwhackers, "The men fought like tigers, each and every one of them, and the main difficulty was to hold them well in hand.... We have the guerrillas hemmed in, and will clean them and the county out," said the correspondent. Gen. James G. Blunt wrote an account of the Battle of Honey Springs, near Fort Gibson in Indian Territory, on July 25, 1863. Soldiers of the First Colored Regiment "fought like veterans, with a coolness and valor that is unsurpassed," he wrote. "They preserved their line perfect throughout the whole engagement and, although in the hottest of the fight, they never once faltered. Too much praise can not be awarded them for their gallantry." The general, who was battle-hardened from long campaigns, judged the blacks to be "better soldiers in every respect than any troops I have ever had under my command." General Lane, who continued to support the enlistment of blacks, often paid tribute to their fighting ability.<sup>49</sup>

48. Edward H. Samuel to President Lincoln, dated Liberty, Missouri, September 8, 1862, quoted in *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1 (1885), 13:619; also quoted in Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 130; *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, August 21, 1862, quoted in Grant W. Harrington, *Annals of Brown County, Kansas* (Hiawatha: Harrington Printing Co., 1903), 32.

49. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, quoted in *Lawrence Republican*, November 6, 1862; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, November 9, 1862, August 6, 1863; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 132; Dudley Taylor Cornish, "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (May 1953): 426. Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*. Foreword by Herman Hattaway (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 69-78.



*James Lane actively recruited blacks into military service. His efforts and the contributions of these soldiers were recognized in Harper's illustration of "a detachment of First Kansas Colored Volunteers who attacked and routed a band of rebels."*

Beginning in June 1863, a second Kansas black regiment was recruited and molded into an effective fighting unit by Col. Samuel J. Crawford, afterwards governor of Kansas. Besides the Kansas regiments, a black brigade was recruited and sent into action. Altogether, a total of 2,083 black soldiers were recruited, or approximately one-sixth of the black population of Kansas in 1865. Kansas lived up to its radical tradition by recruiting the first black troops to engage in military action against confederate forces.<sup>50</sup>

The black military achievement was even more remarkable when it is considered that the soldiers faced great obstacles in the form of race prejudice and bureaucratic procrastination and delay. General Lane received blacks into the First Kansas Colored Regiment under what he thought was congressional authority, only to be informed that such recruitment had to have presidential authority which was not forthcoming for several months. As a result, this regiment was not mustered into the service until January 13, 1863. Instead of soldiering, the troops were first put to work building fortifications and in fatigue duty. This led to anger, disillusionment, and, for a time, numerous desertions. Lane had promised his black recruiting officers that they would be commissioned as officers of the companies they recruited, but this was denied and white officers were appointed in their place. Even after the regiment was mustered in, payment of the troops was delayed until June 1863. Furthermore, the Union government defaulted on its pledge to pay black recruits at the same rate as whites—actually three dollars less per month than white soldiers and a deduction of three dollars for clothing. "Not until 1864," writes Dudley Taylor Cornish, "and then only after furious debate in the army, in the press and in congress, did Negro soldiers finally get what amounted to equal pay for equal work." Race prejudice raised its ugly head, as is indicated by the advice given by an editorial writer for the *Fort Scott Bulletin*. He advised that the black regiment be kept away from Kansas troops which were then in the field for "with one exception, there is not a Kansas regiment from which they would not have as much to fear as from the rebels."<sup>51</sup>

While the black soldiers felt insulted and betrayed by the government's delay and discrimination in matters of mustering into service and pay, the dependents they

left behind in Kansas suffered real hardships. In Leavenworth, the public was urged to subscribe clothing, food, and money to the wives and children of the men in service. When it was discovered that a group of blacks planned to hold a bazaar to raise money for a charitable cause outside the town, a public meeting of colored citizens was called. It was resolved, that since the great majority of the black population was poor, and that many continued to arrive in Kansas "destitute of money, clothing and bedding," that the blacks should be urged *not* to send money out of town but "to do all within their power to relieve the poor and suffering among us, and urge our friends here and elsewhere to aid us in this good work."<sup>52</sup>

## V

Kansas Territory attracted a small group of ardent abolitionists who, with moral and material support from the East, established stations and conducted "passengers" on the Underground Railroad to freedom. When the Civil War commenced, contrabands from Missouri made straight for these stations and other places of refuge and opportunity for employment. As the editorial writer of the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* pointed out, "These freed men settled in various parts of the State, guided by their interests, inclination or supposed safety, our city and Lawrence being the principle [*sic*] points of location."<sup>53</sup>

Kansas became more Negrophilic during the Civil War when the contrabands supplied much needed labor to harvest crops and perform a variety of tasks in rural and urban areas. Most importantly, black men volunteered for military service and made a notable contribution. Unfortunately, race prejudice and bureaucratic delay and discrimination brought great hardships to the families of black servicemen and proved to be a serious obstacle to progress on the road toward racial integration.

Before the Civil War had ended, much of the cooperative effort that had characterized the Kansas Emancipation League and other organizations broke down and the black and white communities tended to go their separate ways. In Leavenworth, for example, the black community held public meetings to protest the treatment accorded black soldiers; the Suffrage Club was organized to agitate for an amendment to the Kansas Constitution which would extend the franchise to

50. Cornish, "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War," 426-27; Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 422-23.

51. *Fort Scott Bulletin*, July 26, 1862; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, May 19, June 7, 1863; Berlin, *Freedom*, 37, 44, 68-73; Stephenson, *Political Career of General James H. Lane*, 127-132; Cornish, "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War," 424.

52. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 4, 1862, December 24, 1863.

53. *Ibid.*, July 8, 1862.

black males. Beginning in October 1863, the Kansas State Colored Convention met annually in the leading cities to debate and act upon such issues as equal suffrage, the right to serve in the state militia, the right of trial by a jury of political equals, and the abolition of discriminatory practices by the proprietors of stages, railroad cars, barber shops, hotels, saloons, and other public institutions.<sup>54</sup>

In the face of an overpowering Negrophobic white majority, the blacks of Kansas turned more and more to their own cultural heritage, to their schools, churches, lodges, mutual aid societies, and the celebration of anniversaries that marked their progress from slavery to freedom. One such celebration was the emancipation

of the slaves in the British West Indies on August 1, 1834. On August 1, 1864, the black community of Leavenworth and vicinity began their celebration of West Indian emancipation with a procession headed by the Colored Battery of Capt. William D. Mathews, followed by the Sabbath schools, and the Suffrage Club. Not less than two thousand people met at Fackler's Grove where a fine dinner, interesting speeches, and splendid music were enjoyed.<sup>55</sup>

It is ironic that when the U.S. Supreme Court came to consider race discrimination a century after Kansas Territory had been a staging ground for civil war on the issue of chattel slavery, it was a case brought by a black Kansan against the school board in the state's capital city that overturned court-enforced segregation and ushered in the Civil Rights Movement. KH

54. *Ibid.*, July 10, 21, August 22, September 13, October 11, December 24, 1863, January 15, February 4, 10, 1864, October 20, 1866; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 16-35.

55. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, July 31, August 2, 1864.