

THE BUFORD EXPEDITION TO KANSAS

By the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed by Congress in 1854, the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska were organized and thrown open to settlement with the proviso that all questions relating to slavery were to be decided by the people of each territory when it should be ready for admission into the Union as a state. The South conceded and the North was sure of the admission of Nebraska as a free state. In the case of Kansas it was doubtful if the anti-slavery party would ever be strong enough to control the elections, but the leaders at the North intended to make a fight to secure Kansas. Consequently there was great excitement in different sections of the country, especially at the North, where, almost before the bill became a law, Emigrant Aid Societies were formed whose object was to assist emigrants opposed to the institution of slavery to go to the territory and settle in order to be ready to vote at the proper time. In this movement of importing men the North had nearly two years the start, the South being confident that no exertion would be necessary in order to secure Kansas as a slave state. So there was very little pro-slavery emigration into this "debatable land" before late in 1855 except from the neighboring state of Missouri.

The first territorial elections were in favor of the Southern party, but the Emigrant Aid Societies in the Northern states kept pouring men and arms into the territory until late in 1855 the outlook was gloomy for the pro-slavery cause.

Pro-slavery Emigrant Aid Societies were now organized in Missouri, and soon other similar societies were formed in the remaining Southern states. Missouri appealed to her sister states in the South to come to her assistance. For two years she had borne the burden alone and would still do her utmost for the integrity of the South.

"But the time has come when she [Missouri] can no longer stand up single-handed, the lone champion of the South, against the myrmidons of the North. It requires no foresight to perceive that if the 'higher law' men succeed in this crusade, it will be but the beginning of a war upon the institutions of the South, which will continue until slavery shall cease to exist in any of the states, or the Union is dissolved.

"The great struggle will come off at the next election in October, 1856, and unless at that time the South can maintain her ground all will

be lost. We repeat it, the Crisis has arrived. The time has come for action—bold, determined action. Words will no longer do any good; we must have men in Kansas, and that by tens of thousands. A few will not answer. If we should need ten thousand men and lack one of that number, all will count nothing. Let all then who can come do so at once. Those who cannot come must give their money to help others to come. . . . We tell you now, and tell you frankly, that unless you come quickly, and come by thousands, we are gone. The elections once lost are lost forever.’¹

With Kansas a free state, Missouri and the states west of the Mississippi would soon be abolitionized, then Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, until finally slavery would be shut up in a few states on the Gulf and South Atlantic.²

In all sections of the country, during the fall and winter of 1855, there was excitement and agitation over the Kansas question. The South was now thoroughly canvassed by agents of the pro-slavery Emigrant Aid Societies. Bands of men were made ready to start for the territory in the early spring. Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia took the lead among the slave states in the work of sending men to Kansas to settle and vote for the interests of the South.

In Alabama the first body of pioneers for Kansas was enrolled by Thomas J. Orme, who on November 18, 1855, made this proposition: “If the people of Alabama will raise \$100,000.00, I will land in Kansas 500 settlers. I have over one hundred volunteers now.”³ Nothing resulted from Orme’s proposition, but on November 26, 1855, Major Jefferson Buford, a lawyer of Eufaula, who had served with distinction in the Indian War of 1836, published the following call:

Aid to Kansas. Col. Buford’s Propositions.

“To Kansas Emigrants—

Who will go to Kansas? I wish to raise three hundred industrious, sober, discreet, reliable men capable of bearing arms, not prone to use them wickedly or unnecessarily, but willing to protect their sections in every real emergency. I desire to start with them for Kansas by the 20th of February next. To such I will guaranty the donation of a homestead of forty acres of first rate land, a free passage to Kansas and the means of support for one year. To ministers of the gospel, mechanics, and those with good military or agricultural outfits, I will offer greater inducements. Besides devoting twenty thousand dollars of my own means to this enterprise I expect all those who know and have confidence in me and who feel an interest in the cause, to contribute as much as they are able. I will give to each contributor my obligation that for every fifty dollars contributed I will within six months thereafter place in Kansas one bona fide settler, able and willing to vote and fight

¹ An appeal to the South from the Kansas Emigration Society of Missouri, published in the Southern newspapers. *Advertiser and Gazette* (Montgomery, Ala.), 1855.

² *Charleston Mercury*, 1855.

³ *Advertiser and State Gazette*.

if need be for our section, or in default of doing so, that I will on demand refund the donation with interest from the day of its receipt. I will keep an account of the obligations so issued, and each successive one shall specify one emigrant more than its immediate predecessor,—thus: No. 1 shall pledge me to take one emigrant; No. 2, two; No. 3, three, etc., and if the state makes a contribution it shall be divided into sums of fifty dollars each and numbered accordingly. Here is your cheapest and surest chance to do something for Kansas,—something toward holding against the free-soil hordes that great Thermopylae of Southern institutions. In this their great day of darkness, nay, of extreme peril, there ought to be, there needs must be great individual self-sacrifice, or they cannot be maintained. If we cannot find many who are willing to incur great individual loss in the common cause, if we cannot find some crazy enough to peril even life in the deadly breach, then it is not because individuals have grown more prudent and wise, but because public virtue has decayed and we have thereby already become unequal to the successful defense of our rights.

J. BUFORD.¹

November 26, 1855.

In a letter written near the close of December,² Major Buford describes the prospective settlers whom he had already enrolled as “honest, clever, poor young men from the country, used to agricultural labor, with a few merchants, mechanics, printers, and carpenters.”

The organization of the party was to be military, with officers corresponding to those of the regular service, the officers below the rank of captain to be elected by the emigrants. By a majority vote a company could expel a member. Four places of rendezvous were appointed: Eufaula, Silver Run (now Seale), Columbus, Ga., and Montgomery. A date was set for assembling at each of these places, and the issue of rations began on that day.³

On his return Buford was to make a report giving the name and place of enrollment of each settler, and showing where in Kansas he was left. Contributions were asked for and those who could not contribute in cash were asked to do so in notes, thus:

Cross Road P. O., Barbour Co., Ala., January 1, 1856.

One year after date I promise to pay to Jefferson Buford ——— per head for every emigrant he may take to Kansas within that time, provided that I shall in no event be liable to pay over ——— dollars.

(Signed) _____⁴

¹ Published in the *Eufaula Spirit of the South* and copied on request in other Southern papers. The time of departure was subsequently changed to a date about the first of April, when the rivers should be free from ice.

² *Eufaula Spirit of the South*, copied in *Advertiser and State Gazette* of December 29, 1855.

³ *Alabama Journal*, February 1, 1856.

⁴ Letter from Buford in *Advertiser and State Gazette*, December 29, 1855.

January 7, 1856, forty plantation slaves were sold by Major Buford in Montgomery (at the average price of seven hundred dollars), and the proceeds put into the fund for defraying the expenses of the expedition. Donations were coming in, and Wm. L. Yancey was appointed to receive contributions. The state was thoroughly canvassed by Buford and others during the month of February.¹ Alpheus Baker made some of his wonderfully persuasive speeches in Georgia and South Carolina in the interest of the crusade. William L. Yancey, Henry D. Clayton, LeRoy Pope Walker and Henry W. Hilliard delivered addresses to the people of Alabama, calling for good and true men to protect Southern rights on the Kansas battleground. Representative F. K. Beck of Wilcox County introduced a bill in the state legislature to appropriate \$25,000 for the purpose of aiding emigrants to settle in Kansas. The bill was referred to the Committee on Federal Relations, and was never reported upon.²

Early in January Major Buford made a speech in Montgomery before the state legislature in which he explained his plans for securing Kansas to the South. A citizen of Worcester, Massachusetts, Wm. T. Merrifield, was in Montgomery at the time and heard of the designs of Buford. He at once returned to Massachusetts, told Eli Thayer, the originator of the Emigrant Aid Societies, about Buford's plans, and arranged with him to send men to oppose this Southern force. One hundred and sixty-five men well armed with Sharp's rifles (Beecher's Bibles)³ were sent to Kansas for this purpose.⁴

It was intended that the Buford party should go armed, but in March Major Buford announced that in deference to the President's proclamation,⁵ and in consonance with the true designs of the expedition, it would go unarmed.⁶

The Eufaula contingent left that place on March 31, accompanied by Alpheus Baker, who at all resting-points made addresses of encouragement to the men. Passing through Columbus, Ga., and taking with him a company of fifty men from that town, Major Buford reached Montgomery on April 4. There were now collected here about four hundred men, of whom one hundred were

¹ Buford's appointments were: Cahaba, Woodville, Benton, Lowndesboro, Mt. Willing, Greenville, Valleyton, Troy, Elba, Geneva, Daleville, Newton, Waterford, Columbia, Franklin, Abbeville.

² *Advertiser and State Gazette*, January 13, 1856.

³ "Border Ruffian" name for Sharp's rifles.

⁴ *Worcester Spy*, 1887. See Thayer's *Kansas Crusade*.

⁵ President Pierce, February 11, 1856. See *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, V.

⁶ *Advertiser and State Gazette*, March 1, 1856, from *Eufaula Spirit of the South*.

from South Carolina, fifty were Georgians, one was from Illinois, one from Boston, and the rest were Alabamians. The *Alabama Journal* of this date characterizes the emigrants collected in Montgomery as a superior class of young men, quiet, gentlemanly, temperate. Later some members of the party seem not to have deserved this praise.

On Saturday, April 5, Major Buford formed his men in line in front of the Madison House, and made a speech to them urging that they abstain from intoxicating liquors, and conduct themselves as gentlemen and good citizens. They were then marched to the Agricultural Fair Grounds and organized into a battalion of four companies under temporary officers, and Buford was elected *General* of the force. Saturday night a meeting of the citizens of Montgomery was held in Estelle Hall, and addresses were made by prominent gentlemen. Major Buford explained that he had undertaken this mission in order to settle Kansas with good and true Southern men who would uphold the right of their native land in the new country which was to be their future home. He was followed by other prominent speakers who declared that the fate of the South depended on the success or failure of the efforts now being made to save the new territory for the South. Resolutions were passed thanking the men who had so nobly responded to the call upon them for the defence of Southern rights against Northern aggression.

The battalion attended divine service on Sunday at the Baptist church. After the sermon the pastor, Rev. I. T. Tichenor, proposed that since some ministers at the North had been raising money to equip emigrants with Sharp's rifles, they present each man of Buford's battalion with a more powerful weapon—the Bible. The necessary amount was subscribed at once; it being found that there was not a sufficient number of Bibles in Montgomery, the money was turned over to Major Buford, who was to purchase them at some point on his route.

The next day the emigrants were marched again to the Baptist church where Rev. Mr. Tichenor on behalf of his congregation presented a handsome Bible to Major Buford, a song written by a lady of Montgomery was sung by the crusaders, and then the Rev. Mr. Dorman of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, offered up a prayer asking the blessings of heaven for Buford and his men.¹ It was noticed that the battalion carried two banners with inscrip-

¹ Full accounts of the stay of the Buford party in Montgomery will be found in the Montgomery papers, April 4-9, 1856. See also Joseph Hodgson's *Cradle of the Confederacy*.

tions on them. One had in large letters upon it: "*The Supremacy of the White Race*," and on the reverse side was: "*Kansas, The Outpost*." The second banner had the simple legend: "*Kansas*." The Montgomery company wore silk badges with the inscription: "*Alabama for Kansas—North of 36° 30'. Bibles—not Rifles*." From the church the battalion marched to the wharf and after speeches from Alpheus Baker and Henry W. Hilliard the emigrants boarded the steamer *Messenger* and departed for Mobile, followed by the cheers of five thousand people and the booming of cannon.

A stop of two days was made in Mobile and an election of officers was held. In Montgomery the party had been divided into four companies and Buford made General. The officers elected now were: B. F. Treadwell, Colonel; Major L. F. Johnston, Quartermaster-General; Captain E. R. Bell (of S. C.), Adjutant-General; John W. Jones (Auburn, Ala.), Surgeon; Gordon, Brown, Andrews, Jernigan (of Ga.), Captains.¹ On April 11, the command was marched to the bookstore of the Messrs. McIlvaine, where each man was supplied with a Bible, and then to the wharf to embark on the steamer *Florida* for New Orleans. At New Orleans a few additional emigrants were picked up and the battalion was divided for making the trip up the Mississippi in the steamers *America* and *Oceana*.

St. Louis was reached on April 23 and a stop was made for one day.² The people of St. Louis rated Buford's enterprise very highly, and regarded him as the best friend of Kansas in the whole South.³ As the party was leaving St. Louis on the steamer *Keystone* for Kansas City, a thief broke into a trunk belonging to Major Buford and stole from it \$5,000. It was believed that one of the emigrants was the thief, but the money was not recovered.⁴ The next stop was made at Westport, where the men were equipped for settlement in Kansas, and on May 2 they passed over the line and scattered about the country seeking desirable locations for homesteads.

The arrival of Buford with settlers from the South greatly encouraged the pro-slavery leaders and alarmed the free-state men.

¹ *Mobile Register*. Also letters from members of the party to the Montgomery papers.

² While at St. Louis Buford addressed a communication to Col. Wm. Walker, provisional governor of "Kansas Territory," an organization attempted by Wyandotte Indians previous to the white settlement, asking permission to settle a portion of his men, who should be carefully selected from the party, on the Wyandotte Reservation. The writer has a certified copy of this letter made by G. W. Martin, Secretary of the Kansas Historical Society.

³ Letter from A. B., Jr., dated St. Louis, April 23, 1856, to the *Advertiser and State Gazette*.

⁴ *St. Louis Herald*, April 26, 1856.

“Our hearts have been made glad,” wrote one of the Southerners, “by the late arrival of large companies from South Carolina and Alabama. They have responded nobly to our call for help. The noble Buford is already endeared to our hearts; we love him; we will fight for him and die for him and his noble companions.”¹ On the free-state side, ex-Governor Reeder writes in his diary: “There have come to the territory this spring three or four hundred young men, including Buford’s party, who evidently came here to fight, and whose leaders probably understood the whole program before they left home.” Before the party left Westport there was a meeting of the citizens to make the presentation to Major Buford of a fine horse, with fine saddle and bridle.² Nearly half a century later an old citizen of Westport writes: “The people of Westport were glad to see Buford’s men come. They were doubly glad when they went away finally.”

By May 7 the colonists had scattered over different portions of the territory with the intention of locating permanently as citizens, and Buford was seeking some central location for himself in order that he might maintain communication with the members of his colony.³ Blue Jacket on the Wakarusa was suggested to him as a desirable place in which to settle.

The emigrants had not yet settled permanently, or at least few of them had done so, but were seeking favorable locations for claims on the government lands before pre-empting their quarter-sections. Most of them were destined never to make their homes in Kansas, for at the very time when they came over the border there was trouble again between the territorial government and the free-state settlers at Lawrence. Indictments had been found by the Douglas County grand jury against a number of free-state men living at Lawrence, and the United States marshal feared to undertake their arrest without a strong posse. So on May 11 he summoned the citizens of Kansas to appear in Lecompton in force sufficient to execute the laws.

In response to this call for men, Buford gathered his colonists, some of them at Lecompton, but the greater part of them at Franklin, where they were enrolled and armed by Governor Shannon as territorial militia.⁴ Buford’s force at Franklin numbered four hun-

¹ Manager of Lafayette County Emigration Society.

² *Border Times* (Westport), May 3, 1856.

³ Letter from J. M. Thompson, Liberty, Missouri, to General Strickler, of Kansas (copy in possession of writer).

⁴ Letter to *Alabama Journal* of May 31, from a former printer on that paper (Wilson?). Also Mrs. S. T. L. Robinson’s *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life*; J. F. Rhodes, *United States*.

dred men, and was under the direction of United States Marshal I. B. Donelson.

Captain E. R. Bell of South Carolina, one of Buford's officers (Adjutant-General), was sent with a company of men to intercept arms and armed men and prevent them from getting into Lawrence, which was preparing to withstand a siege. May 16, he captured a wagon loaded with guns and sabres. Three days later he was notified that three wagons loaded with arms would attempt to cross a bridge near where he was stationed. Taking volunteers from the companies at Franklin, Bell went with thirty-six foot-soldiers and five mounted men to catch the wagons. The mounted men reached the bridge first and drove off a sentinel party of free-state men stationed there. These men warned the drivers of the wagons and they escaped. Shortly after the mounted men reached the bridge a free-state man came up and attempted to cross. He was halted "by order of the United States Marshal." "I do not recognize that authority," he said, and tried to force his way across, presenting a pistol at the guards. He was "halted" three times and was then fired upon and wounded.¹ The next day ten of Buford's men carried G. W. Brown, editor of the *Herald of Freedom*, as a federal prisoner to Lecompton. Two of these men on their return to Franklin were fired upon by a party of free-state men and one of the Southerners was shot through the arm. The other Southerner killed the man who had shot his comrade, and then, followed by a volley, assisted the wounded man to escape.

On May 20, the marshal began gathering his forces, to assemble before Lawrence. On the morning of May 21, early risers in Lawrence were astonished to see a force of soldiery drawn up on Mount Oread, a high hill near the town. Buford did not arrive until eleven o'clock. His men carried the banners that had been brought from Alabama. These banners seem to have offended some good citizens of Lawrence worse than the sack of the town and the destruction of property. The force investing Lawrence was Kansas territorial militia under the command of United States Marshal I. B. Donelson and Deputy-Marshal Fain. The latter with a small party entered the town and made several arrests, meeting with no resistance. He then returned to the militia assembled outside of the town and declared the posse disbanded. Samuel J. Jones, Sheriff of Douglas county, immediately summoned the entire body to assist him in serving some writs.

The Free State Hotel in Lawrence had been used during the Wakarusa War as a place of armed rendezvous, and each of the

¹ Letter from Captain Bell dated Franklin, May 20, to *Charleston Courier*, copied in *Alabama Journal*, June, 1856.

newspapers had published articles of an inflammatory and seditious nature denying the legality of the territorial government. Consequently the grand jury of Douglas County had declared them "nuisances," and as such had recommended their abatement.¹ To "abate" them was the intention of Sheriff Jones. He marched his posse to the foot of the hill and formed a hollow square. Ex-Senator Atchison and others addressed the party, declaring their intention to destroy the hotel and the two printing-presses. Major Buford and many others of the sheriff's posse protested against this outrage, and endeavored to dissuade the sheriff from carrying out his designs. In a "Memorial to the President from the Inhabitants of Kansas" dated May 22, the prominent citizens of Lawrence state that "Col. Buford of Alabama also disclaimed having come to Kansas to destroy property, and condemned the course which had been taken;" that he used his influence to restrain the sheriff, and expressed his disapproval of the outrage in the strongest terms.²

After the destruction of Lawrence the Alabamians again separated, some going back to Lecompton with Buford; others camped on Bull Creek near Paola, not far from the scene of the John Brown murders, and a third party camped near Dutch Henry's Crossing, where they were visited by John Brown, who passed for a federal surveyor. He mingled with the men, heard their plans to catch him, and made his arrangements accordingly.

Civil war broke out in Kansas after the murder of the pro-slavery settlers by John Brown. Col. Sumner in command of United States troops took the field and dispersed or drove out of Kansas all armed bodies of men. All of Buford's men who were in arms were forced to go back into Missouri, most of them returning to Westport. At this time Buford bought twenty-five horses for the use of his men at Westport. These horses were used in their trips to Kansas afterward, and became well known as "Buford's Cavalry."³

The events leading up to and following the raid on Lawrence and the murders by John Brown had greatly demoralized the Buford settlers. Unable on account of the hostility of the anti-slavery party to make homes for themselves in Kansas, they were

¹ J. N. Holloway's *History of Kansas*.

² The full text of the Memorial is given in Charles Robinson's *Kansas Conflict*.

³ Letter to *Alabama Journal* of July 2, dated Westport, June 15, from Wilson, a former printer on that paper. He writes: "Very nearly the last man of us is flat broke. Impossible to get work in the territory. Clothes are giving out, and some of the boys are returning home. Some are going to stay and see it out. Major Buford is preparing a statement of expenditures to show to the South. He has spent his fortune on this enterprise and will not have a cent left for his children. However, he relies on the sympathy of friends at home to assist him out, and take care of us poor devils until the question is settled and Kansas becomes a State."

forced to live on the country by contributions made by sympathizers with their cause or forced from their enemies. On the night of June 4 a number of Alabamians at Franklin were attacked by a free-state company, who broke into the stores Buford had provided for the settlers and carried away provisions, arms, ammunition, etc. Four of Buford's men were wounded in this fight. Two of the Montgomery company (Powell and Vickers) with three Georgians were sent by Buford for a wagon and returning were captured by the free-state men, robbed of their arms, and tortured several hours before being released.¹

The first week in June a large part of Buford's men accompanied General Whitfield into Kansas to protect pro-slavery settlers who were being driven from their homes. The governor however ordered all armed parties to disband, and Col. Sumner again sent the Alabamians back to Missouri. On this expedition into Kansas Captain Jernigan was captured by free-state guerrillas, but was released by United States troops.

Buford himself spent the first part of June in Westport and Kansas City consulting with the pro-slavery leaders, and endeavoring to devise some plan to support the failing cause of the South in Kansas. Alpheus Baker and Major L. F. Johnston had returned to Alabama soon after reaching the territory, for more men and more money. Now, on June 21, Buford and others sent an appeal to the South for more emigrants to check the abolitionists in their efforts to drive the pro-slavery party from Kansas.²

June 26, Buford left the territory on a mission to the South in the interest of Kansas. He visited Washington and the principal cities of the slave states. In Washington he remained several weeks endeavoring to interest the Southern leaders in his scheme for the colonization of Kansas. Robert Toombs, R. M. T. Hunter, J. B. DeBow and other prominent Southerners gave him valuable aid in forwarding his projects.³ After an absence of several months spent in trying to arouse the South to a sense of her danger, Buford returned to Kansas late in 1856.

Meanwhile all had not gone well with the colonists he had left behind. Numbers had returned to Alabama after the first troubles in the territory in May. A state of civil war existed for months after the Brown murders and the raid upon Lawrence. The pro-slavery settlers lived in constant fear for their lives. Under such

¹ Letter to *Advertiser and State Gazette*, from W. W. Cook, Westport, June 3.

² *Alabama Journal*. Letter from J. M. Buford of Portland, Oregon, a brother of Major Buford. Professor Spring's *Kansas*.

³ Letters belonging to Major Buford's daughter. Copies in possession of writer.

unfavorable conditions the Buford party disbanded. A good number enlisted in the United States troops stationed in Kansas, some of them went over to the other side and became free-state partisans,¹ others made their way south again, while one party remained during the fall at Westport. They were encamped near the home of Col. McGee, an ardent states-rights man, who, however, reports himself as having suffered much from disorderly pro-slavery friends.

In December Buford was at Westport and made preparations to return to Alabama in the spring. He published an account of the receipts and expenditures of his expedition in the *Westport Star of Empire*. The figures were as follows :

Cost of enterprise.....	\$24,625.06
Contributions	13,967.90
Leaving a loss of.....	\$10,657.16

These figures show the expenditures and losses of the Buford enterprise only. None of the expenses of the Clayton and other colonies or his own expenses and losses from theft are reckoned in this account. The loss was borne by Major Buford.

January 12, 1857, Buford with others signed an address to the South in behalf of the National Democratic Party of Kansas. This is the last appearance he makes in the affairs of the territory.

More clearly than any other man Buford had foreseen the results that must follow the admission of Kansas as a free state. He gave his fortune to the cause, and worked long and faithfully to arouse the South to the impending danger, but his prophetic voice was not fully heeded. His colonization plan was a failure financially and politically. The institutions of the South could not be transplanted to Kansas. The question that he hoped to have settled by votes in Kansas was finally decided by bayonets on a hundred bloody battle-fields in the South.²

WALTER L. FLEMING.

¹ J. M. Buford; Von Holst.

² After his return from Kansas Buford lived at Clayton, Alabama, where on August 28, 1861, he died suddenly of heart disease. "At the time of his death not one scrap of the history of the expedition, of the number of men enlisted in it, or their names, places of residence, or anything pertaining to it could be found. He had deposited them all in some bank or other place of security in Washington City of which he told no one. No trace of his papers could be found after his death. He was a very secretive man, and seldom informed any one of his plans or purposes."—J. M. Buford.