

# Business "Neutralism" on the Missouri-Kansas Border: Kansas City, 1854-1857

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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, IN 1855 AND 1856, HAD A GOOD MANY ugly features. Most were incidental to its rapid growth, but some of the worst were due to frequent disruption of the town's affairs by the agitation over Kansas Territory—an agitation which might well have brought the rapid growth to a dead stop. When a congressional committee arrived on the scene to investigate these disorders, there was some doubt that its deliberations could safely take place in Kansas City.<sup>1</sup> One English journalist described the situation in these terms:

I shall never forget the appearance of the lawless mob that poured into the place . . . . The hotel in Kansas City where we were, was the next [it was rumored] that should fall; the attack was being planned that night.<sup>2</sup>

The great danger was that capitalists might hesitate to invest in such a community. Urban ambition might cover over for a time the rawness of the frontier boom town, but to no good purpose if political violence interrupted investment and growth, causing the ambitions of the town and the town itself to wilt and die. The town's leaders during the middle 1850's were caught in a cross-current of business and politics that gradually brought them to a kind of public neutralism in the border conflict.

Kansas City was incorporated as a municipality in February 1853 when perhaps sixty or seventy voting residents out of a population of about four hundred accepted a charter offered by the state legislature.<sup>3</sup> Successive waves of frontier enterprise had built up a cluster of warehouses and vigorous businesses along a levee on the right bank of the Missouri River just east of its junction with the Kansas River. The fur trade, missions to Indian tribes, government annuities paid to the Indians, trade with New Mex-

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Special Committee to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas, House Reports*, 34 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 200 (Serial 869), 112, 118.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Gladstone, *The Englishman in Kansas; or, Squatter Life and Border Warfare in the Far West* (New York, 1857), 40-42.

<sup>3</sup> Kansas City Ordinance Record Books (office of the city clerk, Kansas City, Mo.), A, gives the vote in the first city election but not that for the charter.

ico, and the outfitting of migrants to Oregon and California contributed to the settlement's growth, as they had to that of the older communities which Kansas City was soon to eclipse: Westport, four miles to the south, and Independence, twelve miles to the east.<sup>4</sup> According to most accounts, the move for incorporation arose out of untoward incidents which made a tighter system of police and courts seem desirable. Milton J. Payne, mayor of Kansas City during the border troubles, remembered differently. He held that the developing interest in statehood for Kansas had awakened Kansas City merchants to the new opportunity at their doorstep. This interest, he wrote many years later,

was the harbinger of the greater civilization and of the unparalleled development of . . . the trans-Missouri States. The far-sighted men of the town of Kansas at once saw that their future needs required city organization. They consequently applied to the General Assembly, and . . . obtained a charter for the city of Kansas.<sup>5</sup>

Payne's accuracy about incorporation is not at issue here; the point is that he quite accurately relates the birth of Kansas City's urban expectations to the opening of Kansas and Nebraska. When farmers and town promoters moved into the new territories they created an agricultural hinterland certain to be exploited by Kansas City—or by Leavenworth or St. Joseph or some other river town. The prospects for business seemed unlimited, but the development which opened up the new opportunities—the settlement of Kansas and Nebraska—also produced a political crisis as Missouri was violently shaken by the bitter politics of slavery extension. Kansas City businessmen, most of whom were Southerners, were confronted by the painful necessity of measuring interests against sentiment.<sup>6</sup>

Proslavery sentiment was especially strong in the counties along the Missouri River bordering Kansas where there were profitable hemp and tobacco farms. In the six westernmost of these counties, in 1850, 23.5 per cent of the population was slave as against 13 per cent in the state as a whole. Jackson County, which in-

<sup>4</sup> Charles N. Glaab, "Business Patterns in the Growth of a Midwestern City," *Business History Review*, XXXII (Summer 1959), 156-74; William H. Miller in *The History of Jackson County . . .* (Kansas City, Mo., 1881), 413.

<sup>5</sup> Milton J. Payne, "City of Kansas: Early Municipal Government," in Howard L. Conard (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri . . .* (6 vols., New York, 1901), I, 616.

<sup>6</sup> See Elmer Leroy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858," *Kansas Historical Collections*, XV (1919-1922), 385; and James Malin, *Grassland Historical Studies . . .* (4 vols., Lawrence, Kan., 1950), I, 102-17.

cluded Kansas City, listed 3,944 slaves in 1860, just over 17 per cent of its population.<sup>7</sup> As the emigrant aid societies and free state leaders trumpeted the importance of assuring that Kansas be a free state, many western Missourians mobilized to repel the anti-slavery invasion. For years they had regarded Kansas as their own, having traveled around in the territory trading with Indians or through it on the way to New Mexico. Now in 1854 they were eager to stake out land claims. As was usual in American land rushes, some of the Missourians had already selected and prepared their claims before it was legal for them to do so.<sup>8</sup>

In the view of these western Missourians, free state politics and Eastern imperialism were combining to despoil them of their rightful heritage. The Westport *Frontier News* sounded the tocsin:

Freemen of the South, pioneers of the West . . . This is the twelfth hour of the night—birds of darkness are on the wing . . . the battle will soon commence. Arouse, and fight a good fight! Let the eagle of victory perch upon your banners. Steady, men! Forward!<sup>9</sup>

Although the proslavery struggle enlisted sympathies and brought a few volunteers from all parts of the South, most of the burden was carried by the Missourians, and most of the organizing was done in the vicinity of Kansas City. One contemporary wrote of the border troubles in 1855 that “the excitement is confined chiefly to Platte, Clay, and Jackson” counties. Within a month after Massachusetts granted the first charter to an emigrant aid society, Westport citizens organized the first society pledged to support slavery in Kansas.<sup>10</sup> Territorial Governor John Geary of Kansas later described to President Franklin Pierce a plan hatched in Westport for a 1,000-man invasion of Kansas and identified that town as headquarters for the aggressive proslavery interest. Understandably, Westport became known as “one of the most

<sup>7</sup> Allen Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (2 vols., New York, 1947), II, 302; Joseph C. G. Kennedy (comp.), *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, 1864), 281; Harrison Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri* (Baltimore, 1914), 17n, citing a manuscript tax book.

<sup>8</sup> William Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas* (Boston, 1856), 15; report from St. Joseph, Mo., cited in Nevins, *Ordeal*, II, 309n; testimony on claims of Westport residents is in *Report of the Special Committee*, 4-5, 11-12, 144-47, 213-16, 232.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (New York, 1892), 102-103. Note also the remark of a witness before a congressional committee, after the first territorial election, that the Missourians “said they had a right to vote here, that this country belonged to Missouri . . .” in *Report of the Special Committee*, 129.

<sup>10</sup> Nevins, *Ordeal*, II, 310; *Report of the Special Committee*, 904.

violent border towns," and Independence was not behindhand in the campaign.<sup>11</sup>

Kansas City, bracketed by these two older communities, might well have taken the same course. Of thirty-nine Kansas City businessmen of the period who were prominent enough to have left records, thirty-one had come originally from south of the Ohio River, and a good many of them owned slaves.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence that there was any significant antislavery opinion in Kansas City before the end of 1855. Quite the reverse. Its newspaper poured scorn upon New England and all its progeny. Johnston Lykins, a former Indian missionary who later became a projector of railroad plans for Kansas City and for a time its acting mayor, had some kind of a land claim near Lawrence and argued publicly in Kansas his right to cross into the territory in order to cast a proslavery ballot in the territorial elections. His son while a deputy postmaster at Lawrence stored food in his log house for the large numbers of Missourians who came over on voting day. Members of the McGee family whose sizable enterprises embraced both Kansas City and Westport had at least two Kansas land claims and were prominent in the proslavery cause; Jeff Buford's volunteers from Georgia were entertained at E. M. McGee's hostelry which lay between the two towns.<sup>13</sup>

Although for the most part a Southern community, Kansas City did not follow the path set by Westport and Independence. The border troubles posed a knottier problem for Kansas City than for its two neighbors. Smaller and younger than either, Kansas City had western ambitions which they did not seriously share. Within two years of the opening of Kansas Territory, Kansas City's business leaders had subsidized a newspaper, used it to broadcast a detailed plan for railroad promotion (which predicted fairly well the network which now centers in Kansas City), and were conducting a vigorous search for capital for their urban proj-

<sup>11</sup> P. O. Ray (ed.), "Some Papers of Franklin Pierce, 1852-1862," *American Historical Review*, X (October 1904, January 1905), 126, 353; Phillips, *Conquest of Kansas*, 116. See also W. D. Overdyke (ed.), "A Southern Family on the Missouri Frontier: Letters from Independence, 1843-1855," *Journal of Southern History*, XVII (May 1951), 233.

<sup>12</sup> Biographical card file, Archives of the Native Sons of Kansas City (office, Native Sons of Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo.). The cards are arranged alphabetically by family name and contain documented references to all available sources of information. Evidence of slaveownership is from the manuscript 1857 city tax assessment list, in possession of Miss F. B. Ford, Kansas City, Mo.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of the Special Committee*, 950, 134-37, 158-59, 11-12, 144-47; *Kansas City Enterprise*, March 10, May 5, 1856; Sara Robinson, *Kansas; Its Interior and Exterior Life* (Boston, 1856), 281.

ects and enthusiastically discussing the future in metropolitan terms.<sup>14</sup> In the view of these men, violent conflict in the hinterland served only to interrupt more profitable activities and seriously to threaten the city's prospects. More disturbing were signs of dissensions within the city itself; the Kansas City boosters needed a community which was at least in appearance united and progressive. The struggle for Kansas made this image very hard to preserve. The problem was that they were Southerners seeking trade from the West and investment from the East. The sources of investment and, more and more, the Kansas trade were controlled by free state partisans while Kansas City and its neighbors remained largely proslavery.

The business leaders of the town did not, however, let their Southern sympathies blind them to their economic interests. They were not so foolish, for example, as to attempt to keep the New England Emigrant Aid Company out of Kansas City. One of the New Englanders' aims was the economic development of Kansas; it was on the basis of the same development that Kansas City expected to grow. There were also the Company's direct investment in Kansas City and the freight-handling business which its program brought to the levee. According to an accounting in 1857, the New England Emigrant Aid Company had disbursed altogether \$127,000, of which about \$14,000 was spent in Kansas City. Most of the \$14,000 went for the purchase of the American Hotel, which the Company leased to a series of proprietors with the understanding that they would accommodate the Company's Kansas-bound migrants. The hotel, a brick building four and a half stories high with rooms, dormitory space, and restaurant capacity to take care of 150 or more people, was crowded during periods of heavy emigration. These emigrants, regardless of their politics, were customers for Kansas City's businessmen.<sup>15</sup> Charles Robinson, who came out to Kansas City as agent for the Emigrant Aid Company, recalled "several quiet, civil, and accommodating businessmen," who "welcomed Free State men with as much cordiality as pro-slavery, and some of them with more." This is not

<sup>14</sup> Glaab, "Business Patterns," and his "Visions of Metropolis: William Gilpin and Theories of City Growth in the American West," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XLV (Autumn 1961), 21-31.

<sup>15</sup> Russell K. Hickman, "Speculative Activities of the Emigrant Aid Company," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, IV (August 1935), 255n; *Report of the Special Committee*, 884-85; Laura Coates Reed (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sarah Walter Chandler Coates* (Kansas City, [1902]), 106. Mrs. Coates arrived in the city in 1856 and shortly afterward wrote a short memoir which this book quotes in its entirety. The manuscript is now in the Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Mo.

surprising, as one of the men Robinson referred to got annually \$7,000 to \$10,000 in freighting business from the Company.<sup>16</sup>

The American Hotel was not popular with proslavery partisans, of course. When some of them plotted to destroy it, rumors of the plot spread widely. The St. Louis *Intelligencer* carried a story that the Emigrant Aid Company was thinking of taking its custom out of Kansas City, especially if the hotel was mobbed. Significantly, this story was reprinted in the Kansas City paper, and its editor, emphasizing the business character of the hotel, assured all readers that it was in no danger. If it was not in danger, it was because steps had been taken to meet the threat to an important Kansas City business: Leading citizens met about the matter several times; Mayor Payne went as an emissary to the hotel's enemies to negotiate for its safety; and on one or two occasions local men stationed a guard around it.<sup>17</sup>

The threat to the hotel, itself an important element in the town's business structure, exemplified a broader, more serious threat to the future of the community. St. Louis newspapers continued to print stories (sometimes reprinted in the Kansas City *Enterprise*) describing unruly mobs and dangerous roads around Kansas City and Westport, commercial uncertainty, and business stagnation.<sup>18</sup> The town's reputation was endangered; it would have been disastrous for Kansas City to be identified by Easterners as a wild, roaring center of riot and mob action. Commerce did not thrive on political agitation and armed conflict. After one riotous incident in Kansas the editor of the *Enterprise*, Robert T. Van Horn, noted simply, "should this state of things continue to increase for a few days our business transactions must necessarily be checked somewhat." Then came the attack on Lawrence and the Osawatomie massacre. This was "bleeding Kansas." All during the summer of 1856 armed bands marched, countermarched, and plundered. "Trade . . . which amounts to thousands of dollars weekly is entirely annihilated," wailed Van Horn; "the Territory is under a state of siege, and all intercourse suspended."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Kansas Conflict*, 68-70; testimony of Jesse Riddlesbarger in *Report of the Special Committee*, 844-46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1092-93; Kansas City *Enterprise*, December 8, 1855, January 19, 1856; Reed, *In Memoriam*, 123; Robinson, *Kansas*, 276. The hotel problem was ultimately solved by its sale to less controversial owners. See Kansas City *Enterprise*, June 7, 1856.

<sup>18</sup> See quotations in Craik, "Southern Interest," 361-62, and Robinson, *Kansas Conflict*, 157-58. See also Kansas City *Enterprise*, September 13, 1856.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, December 8, 1855, August 23, 1856.

Property in Kansas City was unsafe during much of this grim period. As border tensions mounted, stories circulated about the quantities of arms which free state interests were sending into Kansas Territory. Proslavery men of the vicinity now and then waylaid wagons and broke open shipping cases to check their contents. On March 22, 1856, seven men boarded the steamboat *Genoa* at the Kansas City levee, opened some boxes consigned through the local firm of Simmons and Leadbetter, and, finding nothing more ominous than a piano, disappeared. In July, a wagon loaded for the New Mexican trade by Kansas City's two biggest businessmen, Hiram Northrup and J. S. Chick, was stolen just outside of Westport. Later in the year, a new route into Kansas through Iowa avoided Kansas City, and it was estimated that 20,000 took this route in 1857.<sup>20</sup>

One clear possibility was that some other ambitious river town would profit from Kansas City's embarrassments. A group of free state Kansans, including Robinson, platted the town of Quindaro across the river (now part of Kansas City, Kansas) so that there would be "one spot . . . where a free state man could land and be protected." Kansans began to ask that shipments be sent them via Leavenworth, where border ruffianism was not approved.<sup>21</sup> Leavenworth, indeed, was the real threat. Laid out as early as 1853 by proslavery Missourians but taken over by the free state interests within two years, it grew even more rapidly than Kansas City as the two competed desperately for metropolitan supremacy.

Kansas City's editor, Robert Van Horn, did his best to turn the conflict over slavery into the more serviceable channel of urban rivalry. The men who had boarded the *Genoa*, for example, although probably from Independence, or from Lexington on down the river, were acting—according to Van Horn—in the interest of Leavenworth. "It was necessary for Leavenworth," he growled, "that it should be done in Kansas City."<sup>22</sup> The editor was expressing much more than his own view of the situation. Temporarily down in his luck in 1855, Van Horn had been invited to Kansas City by a group of business leaders to edit a newspaper in their collective interest. Eminently qualified for the job, he succeeded

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, August 2, 1856; Craik, "Southern Interest," 372; Robinson, *Kansas*, 293.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson's reminiscence in *Kansas City Journal*, February 17, 1882; Robinson, *Kansas*, 293; Craik, "Southern Interest," 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Kansas City Enterprise*, March 29, 1856.

so well that the businessmen paid half the cost of his printing plant. For twenty years Van Horn was in a special sense the representative of Kansas City in local, state, and national politics as well as in journalism, expressing what was, in effect, the position of the city's power elite at any given time.<sup>23</sup>

Kansas City businessmen saw very clearly what faced them, and a remarkable business realism characterized their reaction. "The merchants of Kansas City are very tired of the past state of things," one free state migrant wrote to his father, "and will do what they can undoubtedly for quiet." Charles Robinson's wife was more explicit. The border troubles had deeply affected these men, she wrote, "for through their pockets, their feelings had been reached."<sup>24</sup>

The business leaders of Kansas City took steps to suppress each new outburst of lawlessness, as they had done when the American Hotel was in danger. Immediately after the boarding of the *Genoa*, twenty of the town's leading merchants met and issued an announcement to the public. Among these men were several whose pro-Southern sentiments drove them out of Kansas City when the Civil War began a few years later. Nevertheless, they now condemned the "unlawful and sinister act" and offered their collective and personal guarantee that "property consigned to us *shall* be protected . . . at the peril of our lives." The theft of Northrup and Chick's New Mexico wagon led to the organizing of a local vigilance committee, "after the fashion of San Francisco."<sup>25</sup>

Important newcomers had been arriving with money at their call. Kersey Coates, of a wealthy and prominent Philadelphia Quaker family, came in 1855 to represent a land-buying syndicate in his home town. Coates had strong antislavery feelings and was closely associated with the leaders of the Kansas free state movement. Thomas Swope, a wellborn Yale graduate, came west in 1856 with cash, looking for profitable real estate opportunities. These men, and others like them, traveled about in the area and considered carefully before deciding where to sink their capital. The decisions they made could do much to determine the final outcome of the region's urban competition. "I saw," wrote the man who had been marshal in Kansas City during the border

<sup>23</sup> See Theodore Brown, "Robert Thompson Van Horn and the Growth of One Frontier," *Trail Guide* (Independence, Mo.), October 1961, 1-15.

<sup>24</sup> "Letters of John and Sarah Everett," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, VIII (May 1939), 154; Robinson, *Kansas*, 293.

<sup>25</sup> *Kansas City Enterprise*, March 29, August 2, 1856.



troubles, "that it would not do to drive such men . . . away from town."<sup>26</sup>

While Westport and Independence were attracting nationwide attention in 1855 with their proslavery mass meetings, Kansas City was holding similar meetings for a very different purpose. In the first Kansas City mass meeting, which was called by business leaders on December 14, 1855, a committee of seventeen prominent entrepreneurs was named to prepare resolutions "expressive of the position and policy of the citizens of Kansas [City], touching the important aspect which public feeling and action has assumed in the border counties of Missouri." A second meeting, six days later, duly ratified the resolutions which had been drawn with painstaking care. The resolutions identified their sponsors as Missourians and as proslavery in politics, but at the same time law-abiding citizens. Strangers, "from whatever portion of the Republic as of the world [they] may hail," would be protected in all their constitutional rights if they too abided by the law. In the last three resolutions, the Kansas Citians announced "that where a community will tamely submit to rude external interference, both its character and self-respect have been relinquished"; they invited proslavery friends to settle in Kansas as "the only practicable and *legitimate* means of controlling her future institutions"; and they urged that the whole set be published in the *Enterprise* "and all other papers that may see proper to insert them."<sup>27</sup>

Van Horn, the editor of the *Enterprise*, played a leading part in both meetings and very likely wrote the resolutions. His editorial position throughout the difficulties was cautious and well-expressed. "Frankly and decidedly pro-slavery," he had written, "we desire to be effectively and intelligently so."<sup>28</sup> The implied contrast with the irresponsible enthusiasm of Westport and Independence is clear. The delicacy of the whole situation, which the resolutions reflected, lay in Kansas City's need to protect two reputations. One was local. It would not do for the townsmen to make themselves violently hated by other western Missourians. The other was national. The same men simply could not afford to alienate the sources of migration and investment.

There were more public meetings in 1856, and each followed

<sup>26</sup> Reed, *In Memoriam*, 113-14n, quoting Howe's reminiscences many years after the event. For Coates, Swope, and others see Glaab, "Business Patterns," 169-71.

<sup>27</sup> Kansas City *Enterprise*, December 15, 22, 1855.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, February 16, 1856.

roughly the same course as the first. It assembled under business sponsorship, chose committees to draft resolutions (always to the same effect), ratified the resolutions, and sent them off to Eastern papers. One of the resolutions was almost poignant: "We call upon our neighbors and pro-slavery brethren in Jackson County to co-operate with us in support of the laws of our country."<sup>29</sup>

Kansas Citians who testified before a congressional committee which investigated the border troubles individually took much the same position. They were anxious to see Kansas settled: they deplored violence; they argued that the free state interest sent at least as many well-armed transients into Kansas to vote as had the Missourians. Colonel E. C. McCarty, trader on a large scale in the New Mexico business, told the committee that the men in Kansas City would accept the outcome of any bona fide election in Kansas, whether for or against slavery. Once he had invited five Emigrant Aid Company men to his home and had told them, he said, "that I wanted them to see how Missourians lived, and as there would be a very great intercourse between the citizens of Missouri and those of Kansas, that we ought to live on terms of friendship, and cultivate a feeling of good neighborhood."<sup>30</sup>

Van Horn used the newspaper to promote order and to call for a sensible policy in defense of Kansas City's tangible interests, which were in themselves neither pro- nor antislavery. He tried to avoid sensationalism. In fact, he was asked by one reader, "why does not the Enterprise give us more news?" The reason was clear. He had earlier written that papers in the East and elsewhere did all they could "to feed the morbid feelings of an excited public, and it is the duty of those who control the primary channels of Kansas news to be well-advised . . . before they unwittingly minister to this pestilent disposition to detract from our good name."<sup>31</sup>

Van Horn liked best to find evidence that the border troubles were over. He felt fairly sure in November 1855 that "the reign of lawlessness in Kansas has seen its culmination." About a year later he wrote, "we feel safe in saying that the troubles are ended." At the end of 1856 he printed one letter from Kentucky and another from Pittsburgh, both descanting upon Kansas City's prospects. The first said, "Let peace and quiet reign and your city

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, July 5, 1856, also August 16, 1856. One such meeting was held in Westport, largely under Kansas City auspices. *Ibid.*, September 20, 1856.

<sup>30</sup> The testimony of the Kansas Citians is in *Report of the Special Committee*, 835-62. The McCarty quotation is from *ibid.*, 855-56.

<sup>31</sup> Kansas City *Enterprise*, September 13, 1856, December 1, 1855.

will receive a large accession next spring if all signs fail not"; and the second said, "Your City and State will receive large accessions to the population in the Spring if wise counsels prevail."<sup>32</sup>

Not content with scolding and exhorting, Van Horn sought to defend his neighbors against the charge of "border ruffianism," a charge which seems to have cut deeply. A border ruffian, after all, was a man of violence who threatened the social order and the security of property; he was unfit for the discipline of urban life and highly unpromising material for participation in economic development. According to a letter which the *Enterprise* carried, the people so stigmatized were quite different and not ruffian at all. The typical western Missourian to be seen in Kansas City's crowded streets was "a daring, athletic, fearless specimen of the genus homo, of grenadier height, with the shoulders of an Atlas and a Yankee Sullivan fist." Ordinarily "mild, peaceful, harmless, rollicking [and] good-humored," this maligned fellow when aroused was, to be sure, a tremendous fighter, as he had demonstrated to his country's profit in the Mexican War; but, the war over, he "cleans himself up, dresses like a gentleman, takes his drink, and quickly becomes as social and good-natured as ever." The so-called border ruffians were actually "kind, social, hospitable and liberal . . . honest, talented, well-informed, and shrewd." These rollicking specimens (of grenadier height) would not dream of interfering forcibly with anyone else's politics. A free state Kansan whose child had become very sick while in Kansas City wrote that he and his ailing family had been well treated by the "border ruffians" there, and had been told by them when he expressed his antislavery views, "That's right, vote just as you think—we wish every man to enjoy his opinion."<sup>33</sup>

At the Democratic national convention in Cincinnati in 1856, Van Horn introduced himself from the platform as a "border ruffian" who had never killed an abolitionist, burned down a house, or even voted in Kansas. He then described the whole of the border troubles as no more than a matter of disputed land claims.<sup>34</sup>

Many Kansas Citians would have liked to agree with the editor. They would have been happy to see the whole issue so easily disposed of, for it had disarranged their plans and, so to speak, had set their hopeful community on edge. During the summer of 1855,

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, November 24, 1855, September 20, December 20, 1856.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, September 20, August 9, 1856.

<sup>34</sup> Cincinnati *Columbian*, reprinted in Kansas City *Enterprise*, June 7, 1856.

one of the city's early mayors had written a revealing letter to his son:

This morning we have all been to church . . . and heard a good sermon, and afterwards ate a good dinner, so you see we have sometimes both spiritual and physical food, even in this land of, so-called, Missouri ruffians . . . [If you come to Kansas City] it would be judicious to have little to say on the slavery question . . . There are many who are very sore on that subject and who soon get excited.

Our incipient city does not grow as yet, though there is some prospect of its taking a start this season . . . I do believe that when the political troubles of the nation become settled this city will not be only in name but in reality . . .

A few more words on national politics, and the writer concluded, "What the end will be, no man can tell."<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, no man could then have told. In spite of the avidity with which Van Horn noted every sign that the border troubles might be subsiding, in spite of their apparent disappearance in Kansas City's vicinity after 1856, the end was farther off than anyone cared to realize. Kansas City's effort to hold a center position excited widespread hostility. To Westport, Kansas City's moderation was pusillanimous and the town itself "an abolition hole"; to the free state leaders, it was a hotbed of proslavery activities.<sup>36</sup> The occurrence of the border troubles and the rise of the city's immediate hinterland coincided, and each process may have helped to obscure the significance of the other. It is possible, as one of the city's early historians suggested, that the border troubles helped prepare Kansas Citians for the ordeal of civil war which was to follow.<sup>37</sup> At any rate, Kansas City's leadership had oriented itself so as not to lose hold of the main chance in the 1850's; it was to do so again under infinitely more difficult circumstances during the 1860's.

<sup>35</sup> John Johnson to William Johnson, July 8, 1855, in possession of Miss F. B. Ford, Kansas City, Mo.

<sup>36</sup> *Kansas City Enterprise*, January 12, 1856, January 17, 1857. The *Westport Border Times* for these dates was not available to the author.

<sup>37</sup> T. S. Case, *History of Kansas City* (Syracuse, N. Y., 1888), 70.