
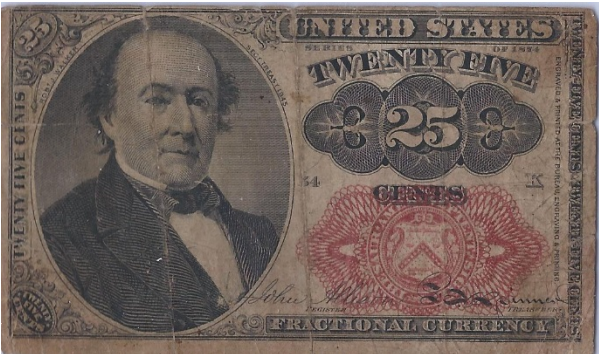


Chapter 246 – Governor Robert Walker Sent To Solve The Problems In Kansas

	<p>Dates: March – May, 1857</p>	<p>Sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert J. Walker Becomes The Fourth Territorial Governor In Kansas • Walker Gets Off To A Shaky Start In Kansas
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Date: March 1857

Robert J. Walker Becomes The Fourth Territorial Governor In Kansas



Robert J. Walker (1801-1869)

In response to Geary’s departure, Buchanan will turn to 55 year old Robert J. Walker, a trusted Democrat, former U.S. Senator, and a successful Secretary of the Treasury under James Polk. His pro-Southern credentials are also well established. After practicing law in Pittsburgh, he moves to Natchez, Mississippi, becomes a slave owner and trader, and supports nullification in 1832 along with aggressive policies toward territorial expansion.

On the face of it, the diminutive Walker (five feet tall and one hundred pounds) looks up to the task, despite inheriting two diametrically opposed political parties, each with its own legislature, and each claiming to represent the will of the Kansas people:

- One group, the Pro-Slavery forces, now operating as members of his Democratic Party, have been chosen in an annual election on October 6, 1856, boycotted by their opponents. They are scheduled to meet in September 1857 at the town of Lecompton to write an official state constitution.

- They are opposed by the Free State Party, whose “renegade” legislature has reconvened at Topeka on January 7, 1857, after being disbanded by Colonel Sumner and his U.S. troops back on July 4, 1856.

Buchanan’s instructions to Walker are quite clear: first, shut down the Topeka operation for good; second, get the Lecompton body to write a Constitution that has Kansas admitted to the Union as a Slave State, both to restore order there and to cater to his Southern base.

There are, however, genuine risks associated with the President’s plan.

One is that the Lecompton document might prove so controversial that it alienates his support among the northern wing of his Democratic Party. This concern is particularly relevant in the U.S. House, where he will need solid northern support to pass a bill to admit Kansas.

Another risk is even more troublesome. It involves the long-standing Democratic Party promise to rely on “popular sovereignty” to resolve all conflicts related to slavery in the new territories. If there is a dispute, “let the people decide” in a fair vote, with majority rule. This pledge has been a central party plank since Lewis Cass and Stephen Douglas fashioned it in the campaign of 1848 – and Buchanan himself supports it outright in the 1856 race.

Thus Americans have been led to expect that the Lecompton Constitution will be voted on by the people of Kansas before it applies for admission as either a Free State or a Slave State.

But now this poses a problem for Buchanan and his Southern backers. It is a growing fear that the majority of those actually residing in Kansas oppose the presence within their borders of not only slaves, but *all* blacks, and will thus vote in favor of a Free State designation.

The prospect of an election loss sets the wheels in motion within Buchanan’s cabinet and among his Southern supporters to find a plausible alternative to a popsov vote.

While this thinking is in process, Robert Walker heads off to Kansas.

Date: May 1857

Walker Gets Off To A Shaky Start In Kansas

Walker arrives in Kansas on May 27, 1857, taking over from Acting Governor Daniel Woodson. His welcoming address manages to upset both sides in the disputes.

He slams the Free Staters as a mix of fanatical abolitionists – “who would threaten not only Kansas but the Union” – and utter hypocrites eager to ban all Negroes from ever residing in their state.

He then dismisses their opponents for engaging in dangerous warfare over land whose climate is unfit for slavery and cotton.

He also calls upon Topeka to cease its operations and try to win “official seats” in the October election of a new legislature -- and then promises that any Constitution written by the Lecompton delegates will be voted on by all Kansans before submission to Washington for statehood.

Both of these declaration will soon come back to frustrate Buchanan’s wishes.