

Chapter 184 - Kansas Experiences Its First Fraudulent Election

Time: October 7, 1854

Andrew Reeder Becomes The First Governor Of The Kansas Territory

To hopefully quell the rising tensions over slavery in Kansas, Franklin Pierce appoints Andrew Reeder as the first Territorial Governor.

According to the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, his term is to last for three years during which time he must reside in the territory, oversee all governmental activities, appoint magistrates, and serve as commander-in-chief of the militia.

He is to be supported by a Secretary, charged with maintaining official records, three judges to man the territorial courts, and other administrative assistants as needed.

One of his most important duties is to establish a fairly elected territorial legislature, and to support the activities required to gain admission to the federal union. The guidelines for this are as follows:

- Once the population reaches 5,000 free male inhabitants, they would elect a territorial legislature.
- All representatives must have lived in the U.S. for at least three years and own 200+ acres of local land.
- Their term of office would run for two years.
- One representative would be elected for every 500 residents, up to a total of 25.
- As the population expanded over time, the legislature would decide on a new target above 25.

With the state legislature in place, it would choose a “non-voting representative” to send to the U.S. Congress.

When the total population reached 60,000 residents, the legislature would write a State Constitution, which would be sent to Washington for its approval to join the Union.

All this sounds straight-forward on paper, except that the 1787 Northwest Ordinance applies only to territories east of the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio River. Not to Kansas!

Under the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the path to admission will rest on popular sovereignty, a vote by residents on a constitution which includes a Free State vs. Slave State declaration.

What Andrew Reeder is about to realize as Governor is that the exact steps associated with “pop-sov” are poorly defined, and that he will be responsible for clarifying and executing them as he goes along. In effect then, Kansas represents a “test case” for popular sovereignty in practice.

The stakes are particularly high, since the outcome will set a precedent for whether or not slavery is likely to expand in the west. As the settlers in Kansas struggle with this issue, the whole nation will soon be watching.

What they will witness over the next four year is an experiment in territorial governance that is forever known as “Bleeding Kansas.”

Time: October 7, 1854

Reeder Arrives In Kansas To Begin His Term

On the face of it, Governor Andrew Reeder seems like a safe choice for the job. He is a loyal Democrat from Pennsylvania and one, like Pierce, who is sympathetic toward the South, as well as a vigorous advocate of popular sovereignty. If the people of Kansas vote to declare it a Slave State, then Reeder will back their decision.

He is also an aggressive land speculator, having acquired some 1200 acres along the Kansas River at 90 cents apiece.

Reeder arrives by boat at Ft. Leavenworth on the Missouri River on October 7, 1854, accompanied by public officials who will oversee the orderly formation of the government. Among them are three Illinois men, Israel Donalson acting as U.S. Marshal, John Calhoun as Surveyor General, and Thomas Cramer as Treasurer. Legal affairs will rest with Chief Justice, Samuel Lecompte of Maryland and U.S Attorney Andrew Isacks of Louisiana. The position of Secretary belongs with Daniel Woodson, a Virginian by birth.

The party is greeted warmly by a reception at the fort, with Reeder offering a few remarks, including a reference to the mounting tension between pro and anti-slavery factions and a vow to put down any attempts to resolve it through violence. His words here will prove prophetic regarding his own fate:

I pledge you that I will crush it out or sacrifice myself in the effort.

Reeder’s ultimate charge lies in preparing Kansas to enter the Union as a new state.

Instead of beginning here with the election of a territorial legislature as outlined in the Northwest Ordinance, he decides to first elect someone to represent Kansas in the U.S. House, as a non-voting member.

To prepare for this, he tours the territory, divides it into some 30 counties, and arranges voting precincts within each. With that done, he sets November 29, 1854 as the election date.

Time: November 29, 1854

Atchison’s “Missouri Ruffians” Steal A Kansas Election For A Congressional Seat



Border Ruffian Ready For A Fight

Among those intending to vote in the Kansas elections are the anti-slavery “New England Emigrants,” currently few in number but rumored to grow to 20,000 in the near future.

This fires up U.S Senator David Atchison, Benjamin Stringfellow and members of the Platte County Self-Defensive Association who intend to do whatever it takes to make sure that the first Kansas representative to appear in the U.S. House is pro-slavery.

Three candidates vie for the congressional seat.

The first is thirty-six year old John Wilkins “J.W.” Whitfield, who serves in the Mexican War before moving to Independence, Missouri as agent to the Pottawattamie tribe. Whitfield, who later becomes a General in the Confederate Army, is the stoutly pro-slavery candidate.

Then there is John Wakefield, the only actual resident of Kansas in the race, and an opponent of slavery, and Robert Flenneken, who is said to also favor Free State status.

As the election nears, Governor Reeder re-asserts the first principle of popular sovereignty – that qualified voters must all be current residents of Kansas.

But Atchison, Stringfellow and their pro-slavery Missouri allies pay no heed to his mandate. On November 29, 1854 they flood across the river into Kansas and stuff the ballot boxes in favor of their candidate, J.W. Whitfield, who wins with a 79% majority.

Rigged Vote For Kansas Congressional Representative (11/29/54)

Candidates	Slavery Call	# Votes	% Total
John W. Whitfield	Pro	2,258	79%
Robert Flenneken	Anti	305	11
John Wakefield	Anti	248	9
Others		22	1
Total		2,833	100

Reeder is aware of the invasion from Missouri, and a subsequent congressional inquiry will show that upwards of 60% of the votes are fraudulently cast. But after some hesitation he goes ahead and confirms the results, hoping to avoid controversy.

Thus the first attempt at delivering on the promise of popular sovereignty proves a charade, and it will soon be followed by a repeat performance when the time comes to elect a legislature.