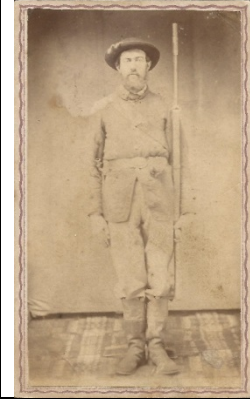


Chapter 245 – Governor Geary’s Resignation Is Another Set-Back In Kansas



Dates:
March 1857

Sections:
• Kansas Governor John Geary Resigns His Position

Date: March 12, 1857

Kansas Governor John Geary Resigns His Position



On March 12, 1857, five days after the *Dred Scott* decree is announced, President Buchanan’s attention is back on Kansas, when John Geary resigns as Territorial Governor of Kansas.

In hindsight he cites two reasons for withdrawing after only six months of service: first, unreliable support from the Pierce administration; second, the demoralizing effects of watching the “depravity” exhibited by both sides in the fight.

I have learned more of the depravity of my fellow man than I ever before knew...I have thought my California experience was strong, but I believe my Kansas experience cannot be beaten.

But Geary will be judged the most capable of the six Governors in the history of “bloody Kansas.”

A Typical Kansas Militiaman

When he arrives on the scene two sizable and well-armed militias are on the verge of waging open warfare. His response is immediate and unequivocal. As in Mexico, he mounts up and rides to the action, confronting and ending the threat to Lawrence on September 15, only six days after taking office.

Unlike his wavering predecessors, no one doubts his pledge to lead U.S. troops against either side should the need arise. While this does not totally stamp out further vicious individual acts of vengeance, it does put a one year hold on prospects for any large-scale battles and casualties.

Unfortunately Governor Geary is less successful at converting reduced violence into a lasting political solution.

While the Free-Staters never fully trust him because of his reputation as a Democrat and a Buchanan backer, he remains true to his pledge to be “politically impartial.”

This includes irritating the Pro-Slavery side by vetoing legislation he finds improper, and also refusing to confirm William Sherrard, a particularly volatile native of Virginia, to succeed Samuel Jones as Sheriff of Douglas County, which includes the town of Lawrence. Sherrard is outraged, threatens to assassinate Geary, and fires his revolver at a hearing on February 18, 1857 to review his case. In the resulting melee, he is shot and killed in the room by one of Geary’s representatives at the meeting.

As he departs, Territorial Kansas is left with two legislatures, two Governors and magistrates, two sets of laws on the books – a recipe for ongoing civil disorder.

On March 12, 1857 Geary hands the temporary reins back to acting Governor Daniel Woodson, for his fifth and final stint as interim stand-in.

Key Events In Kansas Around John Geary’s Term As Governor

1856	Milestone
July 4	Col. Edwin Sumner disbands Topeka (Free-State) legislature
September 9	John Geary begins his term as Governor
September 13-14	Battle of Hickory Point
September 15	Geary and U.S. troops stop pro-slavery militia threat at Lawrence
October 6	Annual election of Kansas legislators is boycotted by Free-Staters Pro-Slavery representatives remain in power at Lecompton
1857	
January 7	Topeka legislature reconvenes in defiance of prior shutdown
January 11	Law and Order Party now called the National Democrats
January 12	New legislators meet at Lecompton
January 19	Geary denies appointment of Sherrard as Sheriff
February 18	Sherrard killed after firing his gun during a hearing
March 4	James Buchanan becomes President
March 20	Governor Geary resigns
May 24	New Governor Robert J. Walker arrives in Kansas

John Geary’s story does not, however, end with Kansas. When the Civil War breaks out he rejoins the army, rises to the rank of Major General and performs admirably in numerous battles in the eastern theater. He then becomes Governor of Pennsylvania, serving from 1867 to 1873, before dying suddenly of a heart attack three weeks after leaving that office, at 53 years of age.

Sidebar: The Baffling Array Of Territorial Governors In Kansas

The Kansas Territory will have six official Governors and four Acting back-ups between its original organization in 1854 and its admission as a State. President Franklin Pierce names the first three: Reeder, Shannon and Geary; James Buchanan the final three: Walker, Denver and Medary.

Acting Governor Daniel Woodson also plays a sizable role during the early, most violent period, as a supporter of the Pro-Slavery side.

Ironically the Free-Stater’s designated Governor, Dr. Charles Robinson MD, imprisoned for treason in 1856, becomes the state’s chief officer after its admission to the Union in 1861 as the 34th member.

Governors Of The Kansas Territory: 1854-1861

Appointed	From:	To:
Andrew Reeder	July 7, 1854 June 23, 1855	April 17, 1855 August 16, 1855
Wilson Shannon	September 7, 1855 July 7, 1856	June 24, 1856 August 18, 1856
John Geary	September 9, 1856	March 12, 1857
Robert Walker	May 27, 1857	December 15, 1857
James Denver	December 21, 1857 July 30, 1858	July 3, 1858 October 10, 1858
Samuel Medary	December 18, 1858 September 15, 1859 June 16, 1860 November 26, 1860	August 1, 1859 April 15, 1860 September 11, 1860 December 17, 1860
Acting		
Daniel Woodson	April 17, 1855 August 16, 1855 June 24, 1856 August 18, 1856 March 12, 1857	June 23, 1855 September 7, 1855 July 7, 1856 September 9, 1856 April 16, 1857
Frederick Stanton	April 16, 1857 November 16, 1857	May 27, 1856 December 21, 1857
Hugh Walsh	July 3, 1858 October 10, 1858 August 1, 1859 April 15, 1860	July 30, 1858 December 18, 1858 September 15, 1859 June 16, 1860
George Beebe	September 11, 1860 December 17, 1860	November 26, 1860 February 9, 1861
As A State		
Charles Robinson	February 9, 1861	January 12, 1863