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LECOMPTON, KANSAS

SUMMER 1994

CHARLES ROBINSON, FIRST GOVERNOR OF KANSAS



In 1854 Kansas was organized as a Territory. Whether it would enter the Union as a Slave State or a Free State became a great controversy. It turned Kansas Territory into a battleground between proslavery and antislavery forces.

One of the outstanding participants in that struggle was Charles Robinson. He was born in Hardwick, Mass., July 21, 1818. He descended from sturdy New England stock. His father, Jonathan Robinson, was a farmer, a zealous antislavery man, of decided religious views, who traced his ancestry to John Robinson of Plymouth Rock fame. His mother was Huldah Woodward of a New England family. There were ten children in the family, six boys and four girls, for whom the parents desired as good an education as was possible at that time.

Their home was a most hospitable one - to and from it friends came and went. There were two cousins who visited frequently, especially when Charles was home, due to his constant joking and keen repartee. He also often planned little home concerts which were a joy to

the guests. He loved nature and enjoyed straying off by himself to sit by a brook to catch the music as the water rippled over the stones.

The religious life of the home was well regulated. Their minister was always welcome and every Saturday evening the mother gathered the family around the dining table to study the Sunday School lesson.

Charles was born with a strong will and a defiant temper. When he was about sixteen, he came to the conclusion that his will must be controlled and he must not yield to his temper again, and this had a great effect on his later life when he was embroiled in political turmoil. He attended church regularly, sang in the choir and played the clarinet. He was questioned by a minister some years later as to his beliefs; he did not join a church but upheld them all as agencies of good.

His father was zealous concerning the education of his family, so Charles was sent to a private school. Later a William Stone taught in a near-by school and lived with the Robinson family. He inspired Charles to go on to school. At the age of 17, he attended Hadley Academy. After a year there, he entered Amherst Academy where he was to support himself by doing school carpentry. He then entered Amherst College. His eyes failed him there and he walked forty miles to see a Dr. Twitchel for treatment.

The doctor offered him the opportunity to study medicine with him. After remaining with Dr. Twitchel for six months, he attended medical lectures at Pittsfield, Mass. He then studied with a Dr. Gridley until his training was complete.

He commenced his practice at Belchertown, Mass. in 1843 and soon had a large practice. At that juncture he was summoned to attend the daughter of Myron A. Lawrence, who had been badly injured from a fall upon

some step so violent that her spine was injured. Several physicians had tried unsuccessfully to help her and her present physician, Dr. Gridley, came to see her, bringing Dr. Robinson along. He introduced them and then turned her over to him. Gridley recommended the use of leeches. Dr. Robinson used them once, but they disappeared and he procured a galvanic battery which he used on her spine. With this treatment she quickly recovered, and years later became his wife.

In the spring of 1845 he went to Springfield, Mass., and opened a hospital practice. He then extended his practice to Belchertown, Mass. In 1843 he met and married Sarah Adams. They had two children who died in infancy, and his wife passed away in 1846. He was then so broken in spirit that he left his position and moved to Fitchburg, Mass. to be with his brother, Cyrus.

It was his cure for sorrow to indulge in active work for others. His love of music led him to become the first bass singer in Rev. David's church. He also sang in the choir. There were a number of young men just starting the practice of law and medicine, so he organized a group, of which he was a member. It was there he became convinced that people should be temperate in all living, choosing only nourishing food and no intemperate drinks. He was soon overburdened in his practice and while wondering what to do next, he heard of a proposed trip to California, so he applied for the position of doctor for the group. On March 19, 1849 he started with the first company from Boston. They traveled by railroad and canal to Pittsburgh, then by steamer to Cincinnati, St. Louis and finally to Westport Landing (Kansas City). At Cincinnati, Robinson bought a beautiful cream-colored horse, which became his companion and pet throughout the trip.

Many classes of people boarded the ship and they became acquainted with people from Missouri and the South and were introduced to the freedom and recklessness of frontier life, which helped them in their later adjustment there.

Upon arriving in Kansas City, Mo., dissension arose in the group, so it was divided into two units. As a result, all equipment and supplies had to be evenly divided. Robinson was a member of one committee that was selected, and it took them five weeks to make the change, so they were delayed in starting their long journey to California. Cholera again broke out and nine people died before it was controlled. While they were

waiting to start, Robinson, who had bought a clarinet in Cincinnati, and a young friend who played the flute, entertained the group with their music.

They were finally ready to start West on May 10, 1849. The proposed journey was 2,000 miles long, and they were to travel in schooners drawn by oxen, mules, horses or go on horseback. There were many wild experiences as the group was composed of inexperienced drivers and untrained animals and on ill-defined roads. A schooner was frequently stuck in the mud and there were endless delays for want of discipline and order.

The group did not approve of Sunday travel, but on the first Saturday of their journey, darkness arrived before they reached water, and they had to stop. The next morning one of the horses got away and was found only two miles away at the Wakarusa river. The people and animals desperately needed water, so the group agreed to break the Sabbath rule and go for water. They traveled to the river, and after all had been serviced, the majority thought they should continue traveling, some did not. The majority won and as they traveled on, a severe injury to an animal caused them to have to stop for the day. The "nay sayers" then said it was a judgment of God against Sunday travel, so it was never used again.

As they traveled, they passed through the new town of Salt Lake City and on to the Platte river. There Dr. Robinson and his "cream" horse went looking for a place to cross, as there was much dangerous muck and quicksand. He and his horse plunged into the river, the horse passed a small island, but then it floundered into



MRS. CHARLES (SARA) ROBINSON, 1864

deep water and Robinson fell off. Robinson returned toward the island, but the horse moved to the opposite shore. It saw Robinson trying to get on the island, and immediately returned to help him. By that time, Robinson had gotten on the island, and the horse stood over his prostrate form until he was able to mount and ride to the further shore. This little act endeared the horse very much to its owner; the horse was so docile it did not have to be tethered, and it followed Robinson around the camp.

The company reached Sacramento on the 12th of August, 1849 - after 94 days of traveling. Robinson was now in good health, and the company disorganized. Some entered the mines and some sought land. Robinson soon abandoned the mines and went to Sacramento where he and some others started a boarding house. He practiced his medical profession there and also found food for the starving.

A Swiss man named Sutter had the largest land grant in the area of over a thousand square leagues near Sacramento, due to a map blunder; Sacramento was founded on Sutter's land. The court ruled that if Sutter signed grants of land, they were legal. In the winter of 1849, settlers flocked there, bought land and put up shanties and tents for places of abode.

One day as Robinson watched, a representative of Sutter put out some of the shack tenants and burned the huts. The court backed him and that inflamed the so-called "squatters." They then organized and planned to meet and defy Sutter's denying them "squatters" rights. The next day they marched through and on down "N" street in the area. The leader was Maloney and he requested that his ride be on Robinson's horse. He led the group through the squatter's areas and then turned to go through a wealthier section. As they entered the principal business district, they were attacked by the sheriff and a posse. The Marching group turned and fired on them, killing one and badly injuring the sheriff. A Mr. Harper happened to pass by and suddenly pulled out his revolver and shot Robinson in the chest, just below the heart. Robinson shot back, but no damage was done. Robinson then fell to the ground and both sides ran away, leaving him there.

He lay on the ground for some time unconscious, and when he came to, found himself alone and unable to rise. He crawled to a nearby house for help, and when physicians came, they treated him, but thought he would die anyway. They took him to a prison ship out

in the Sacramento river and left him, thinking he'd be dead the next morning. When they returned, he was much better. They told him Maloney had been killed as well as the horse he rode (Robinson's).

When he had sufficiently recovered, he again met with the squatters and later those against slavery. He was encouraged to run for the legislature, which he did, and they voted not to prosecute him with the squatters.

As soon as his health was restored, he took a steamer for Boston, by way of the Isthmus of Panama. He left California July 3, 1851. On the 5th day out, they were wrecked on the coast of Mexico. They carried all of their gear ashore and camped there for two weeks, hoping a boat would come by. Finally a Mexican appeared and told them where to go for help. After weeks they finally got a boat to the Isthmus, which they walked across and got passage there to New York. Robinson reached his home at Fitchburg September 9, 1851.

He soon became editor of the Fitchburg News and practiced medicine. He also renewed his friendship with Sara Lawrence and they married October 30, 1851, and settled there. She was a great assistance to him as if he were on a medical call and the newspaper printer needed more material; she would pick up her pen and produce it.

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill threw the territory open for settlement and the North and South vied with each other in sending emigrants under the law of "Squatter Sovereignty." The Emigrant Aid Company of New England was formed and meetings were held in the Boston area. One day Eli Thayer addressed a group of them at Chapman Hall, and asked at the close of the ceremony if any person present would be willing to go to Kansas. Robinson walked up to the podium and signed his name to the membership paper. Thayer noted the signature and his quiet-self reliant manner, and asked him if he was the Charles Robinson who had gone to California. His reply being in the affirmative, he was asked if he would go to Kansas to live. Then, "would your wife be willing to go?" Robinson said, "I've no doubt of it."

He was then asked to come back the next day and meet the directors of the Society. The result of that meeting was that Robinson agreed to leave Boston June 28, 1854 to make his future home in Kansas. He closed his medical practice and his relations with the newspaper and took charge of the officers in the Emigrant Aid

Society, in connection with Charles Branscomb of Holyoke, Mass., and Samuel Pomeroy of Southampton, Mass.

The object of the Emigrant Aid Society was to aid emigrants in their journey to Kansas Territory and their settlement there. It was thought their investments in land and the building of hotels and other business might someday be obtained for their investments there, however, the dominant idea was settlement of the Territory. Speeches and addresses were made throughout the North and soon enough money was raised to start settlement there.

In June 1854, Robinson and Charles Branscomb were sent to explore Kansas Territory and to select a site for a settlement. Robinson went as far as Leavenworth but Branscomb went directly to the present site of Lawrence, a place that Robinson had greatly admired when he passed through on his way to California. He had been especially impressed with the large hill, later called Mount Oread. Robinson met him there and Mount Oread became the center of their attention.

Soon a group of twenty-nine emigrants was sent out from Boston and were met by Robinson at St. Louis, who then took them by steamboat to Kansas City, arriving July 28, 1854. They traveled by foot to their destination with an ox team and wagon to carry the baggage. They arrived at Mt. Oread July 21st and put up 25 tents. They laid out claims, but in a few days moved their tents closer to the river. Soon many of the claimants returned to Massachusetts for their families, and so the site was ultimately populated with the subsequent settlers.

From 1854 to 1858 there was continuous trouble between the Slavery faction in Missouri and the Free State people from the East. A Free State meeting was held at Big Springs and a decision was made to hold a Constitutional Convention in Topeka. It was held, a Constitution was written, then presented to the people for votes - it passed easily as the "slave state" people did not vote. On January, 1856, Charles Robinson was elected Governor under that Constitution.

President Pierce denounced the Topeka government as a rebellion, so a grand jury was called to investigate the proceedings. As they were doing so, Dr. and Mrs. Robinson decided to go back to Massachusetts on May 9, 1856, for help. They took a boat for St. Louis, and then were to take one from there to Massachusetts. The boat was stopped at Lexington, Missouri and Robinson

was removed from the boat and taken back to Lecompton, where he was to be tried for treason, due to his part in the Topeka Convention. He was taken first to Leavenworth where he was jeered, then he was taken to Lecompton where he was met by an angry mob who wanted to hang him, but his captors silenced them by saying he was a member of the local lodge and deserved a fair trial. He was then taken to Camp Sackett, an army camp about 3 or 4 miles southwest of Lecompton.

The camp was a very informal one and the prisoners were allowed to bring their wives and families with them. The wives cooked for their husbands; one even brought her cook stove. Much of the food consisted of wild fruits and game provided by the soldiers. During their stay a Col. Walker attacked Fort Titus and burned it, taking some prisoners. The soldiers watched from nearby hills but did not interfere.

The Free State prisoners were kept in the camp until September, 1856, when Governor Geary freed them. However, they had to put up \$3,000 bail that they would not again write a Constitution without proper procedure. As they could not provide the bail until the next day, they had to stay until it was done. This angered James Lane and he collected an "army" of several hundred Free State men to go to Lecompton to free them. They set up their cannons and themselves on the hill just east of Lecompton and fired on the town. But the Camp Sackett army heard them and came to Lecompton and persuaded them to leave. Robinson was soon released as were the other prisoners.

Governor Medary came to Kansas Territory in 1859 and immediately said it was time to scrap the Topeka, Lecompton and Leavenworth Constitutions and try anew. The Legislature, which was now "Free State", called for the Convention to be held in Wyandotte, which is now Kansas City, Kansas. The Convention met for twenty-four days, wrote a Constitution, submitted it to the people October 4, 1859, and it passed 10,421 to 5,530 against.

Charles Robinson was then elected Governor, but his troubles were not over. To obtain much needed money, bonds were issued. An agreement was made with a bond agent that he could have a commission of all over 60% of their real value, but a minimum of 70% had been previously set. When it became known of the agreement, the Secretary of State J.W. Robinson, George W. Hill and Governor Robinson were indicted for treason. They were tried and Governor Robinson was

acquitted, but the other two were declared guilty and removed from their positions.

Charles Robinson served as Governor from 1861-1863, and his career was marked by strong upright services, and though beset by more difficulties than all Governors in the state's history, his administration was clean and progressive. He later served as State Senator for two terms and headed many organizations and committees. He died August 17, 1894 at the age of 76.

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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

LIFE MEMBERS

Jerry Schmitt, by wife Marge Schmitt
Lynda Berendsen
Philip E. and Nelda (Easum) Hodson
Carol B. Francis
Janie (Russell) Grandstaff
Rosalie M. (Rogers) Banks
Mary (Kibbee) Soefaert
C. Gene Kreipe

MEMORIAL LIFE MEMBERS

Melvin C. Maness, by wife Muriel Maness
Lionel H. Rogers, by daughter Rosalie Banks

-- COMMENTS FROM OUR PRESIDENT, Paul Bahnmaier --

The Lecompton Historical Society would like to thank the Perry-Lecompton School District, the City of Lecompton and the Northeast Kansas Education Center for the tremendous black-top drive improvement to the museum's east entrance.

TERRITORIAL DAY will be June 25th. The parade will be at 11 a.m., with other events planned for all day. We hope to see you there.

The Historical Society recently held a community fund-raiser for the Lecompton Volunteer Fire Department. The event which raised \$1,066 included Blue Grass music by the Calhoun County and Bluestem bands. The money raised will purchase a ventilation ejector fan. Thanks to Rich McConnell and Ron Meir for being in charge of this event.

Mae Holderman has made a very large and beautiful Afghan and has donated it for a raffle, with proceeds going to the Volunteer Fire Department. Tickets are \$1,00, and for more information, contact Helen Norwood.

Recently a high school student from California was visiting her grandparents in McLouth on spring break.

She asked her grandparents to take her to Lecompton because she had been studying about Lecompton in her U.S. history class. This just proves how our history is so important to the United States.

Thanks to the following who have placed the following items in Lane Museum:

An 1844 document by Phyllis Martin.

An antique cooking stove by Jack Collins.

A unique church similar to St. Peters Catholic church at Big Springs made of match sticks, by Pat and Aurelia Istas.

World War II artifacts from the estate of Raymond "Rocky" Rothwell by Ginger Rothwell.

Eisenhower clippings and a music program from 1885 that has Ida Stover's name, by Wilma Shippers.

Three Thomas Lee Hardware calendar plates, by Bill and Georgia Wingfield.

Lecompton high school pompons from Joyce Behlke.

Lecompton high school memorabilia from Margaret Noe.

A TRIBUTE TO A WONDERFUL LADY
By Members Of The Lecompton Historical Society

Standing in a brisk northern wind Friday afternoon, April 29th, along with nearly a hundred others huddled around the burial site of Julia Springer, we could not help but reflect back on her life and how much she meant to the Lecompton Historical Society.

In 1976, while she was President of the Historical Society, the question continued as to "Where would we get the money for the tremendous undertaking of renovating the Lane University building?"

Up to that point the Historical Society had held chili suppers and ice cream socials, and still our treasury wasn't large enough to take on such a huge project.

Julia had an answer for raising more funds! It was 1976, the year our country was celebrating its 200th birthday when she found a source for patriotic pewter pendants...A Minuteman, a flag, and 3 other small pewter figures, all hanging individually from a chain to be worn around a person's neck, and to be sold for \$5.00 each.

She ordered a supply of the pendants and successfully enlisted members of the Society as a sales force to sell them, resulting in a profit of over \$5,000.

With Julia's inspiration and leadership, and help from many other people, enough public and private funding was secured to complete the project. Dedication was set for 1982, at which Julia Springer gave the Welcome and sang the "National Anthem."

As we left Julia's service, we felt a very lonely spot in our hearts, even though for the past 8 years after suffering an aneurysm, she had literally been taken from us then. Julia and Forrest Springer were an inspiration to all of us. May their spirit and dedication to Lane University Museum and Lecompton live on!

Friday, June 15, 1855
The Town of Lecompton

Of the many fine town sites on the Kansas river, none is more beautifully situated or offers greater inducements to the pioneer than Lecompton, which is situated on the South side of the Kansas river - opposite the mouth of the largest tributary (Grasshopper river) some fifty miles from its confluence with the Missouri river. The site of Lecompton was selected by the proprietors, after having traveled extensively through the Territory, as one of the finest and most beautiful locations for a town in the interior of Kansas. The survey of the town has been made with great care, and its streets laid off on a most liberal scale. The natural advantages of Lecompton are unsurpassed by any town in Kansas. On and around the premises have been found large quantities of limestone, limpid and gushing springs, and every natural advantage that could be desired.

The country around Lecompton is fertile and unsurpassingly lovely, and must eventually become, if we may be allowed the use of a trite phrase, the Garden Spot of Kansas.

One great advantage Lecompton possesses over her rivals, is the great body of tall and heavy timber directly in her vicinity. This together with her fine water power, will be the means of expediting her growth. We hear of many buildings going up at Lecompton, and if we should judge of her future by her present prospects, we

should feel safe in predicting a rapid growth, for her hiring the present summer and ensuing fall. Any desired information of Lecompton can be had by addressing Hon. Dan'l Woodson, or J.A. Halderman, Esq., Westport, Mo.

Saturday, August 15, 1855
Lecompton

The young, thriving and beautiful town of Lecompton - of which we have frequently spoken on previously occasions - has been designated by our Legislature as the permanent seat of Government of this Territory. We do not believe that a more desirable, beautiful or eligible point could have been selected for the location of the Capital. Beautifully situated on the Kansas river, opposite the mouth of its largest and best timbered tributary, surrounded by a country rich in agricultural and mineral resources, accessible by all principal roads in our Territory, the town of Lecompton possesses every natural advantage necessary to make it the largest and most beautiful inland town in our Territory. The situation of the town site is unsurpassingly beautiful, while its streets, squares and reservations have been made on the most liberal and unobjectionable scale.

From the KANSAS WEEKLY HERALD
Leavenworth, Kansas

**JOIN YOUR NEIGHBORS AT TERRITORIAL DAY,
SATURDAY, JUNE 25th.**

-- OBITUARIES --

Edwin Peter Hildenbrand

He died November 14, 1993. He was born January 29, 1902, the son of George and Wilhemia "Minnie" Neis Hildenbrand. He attended Lawrence Business College and was a farmer and stockman. He was a member of the Stull Church of Christ. He married Rosa Roller in 1924. She died in 1987. Survivors include a daughter, Margie, two sisters, Dorothy Moss and Naomi Nelson-Adair. Burial was at Stull. His family donated many artifacts to Lane Museum.

Fred LePort Spangler

He died February 27, 1994 in Elmhurst, Illinois. He was born in 1896, the son of H.W. and Nancy Messenheimer Spangler. He was a civic leader in Elmhurst, and lead the establishment of the industrial park for which a street carries his name. He worked for National Van Lines and was active in the First Congregational Church of Christ. He is survived by a daughter, Margaret, five grandchildren and four great grandchildren. His wife Iva preceded him in death. Other survivors include Maybelle Hall, Henrietta Anderson, Sara Walter and Nellie Brown.

Alice Carr Clark

She died April 3, 1994 in San Bernardino, California. She was born to Harry and Mae Carr. She was a homemaker and married Thomas Clark in 1948. He died in 1992. Survivors include four sons, Larry, Danny, Rick and Duane, a sister, Ruth Wyatt and brother, Harry, and ten grandchildren.

Grace Brasher

She lived in Alexandria, Louisiana died April 3, 1994. She was born September 18, 1906, the daughter of Frederick and Sarah Truan Bertschinger in Dillon, Kansas. She was a school teacher and worked for the Farmer's Home Administration, and was active in the First United Methodist church and other organizations. She is survived by eleven nieces and nephews, Fritz, Homer, and Hedger McLanahan, Harold Bertschinger, Frederick Shaw, Alice Lee Lewis, Ruth Schirmer, Philip Briggs, Phyllis Thurston and Norma Jean Windburn. Burial was in Alexandria. Grace was proud of Lane Museum and had donated several artifacts to it.

(Continued on Page 8)

..... Please Clip and Mail With Your Check

THE LECOMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kansas 66050, is a non-profit corporation for the preservation of historical sites. We are eager for continued membership and new members.

Dues are \$4 per year for individual membership and \$6 for a couple's membership. The dues from December to December. Life membership is \$50 per individual. Contributions are tax deductable. Checks should be made payable to the Lecompton Historical Society, and mailed to Mrs. Iona Spencer, 1828 E. 100 Road, Lecompton, KS 66050.

- \$4 Annual Individual Membership
- \$6 Annual Couple's Membership
- \$50 Individual Life or Memorial Membership
- Other Contribution \$ _____

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Wilma Scott Morris

She died April 13, 1994 at Lecompton. She was born the daughter of Boyd and Cora Alice Moore Scott. She attended schools in Chicago and Washburn University in Topeka. She was a dietitian at Kansas University and was an active member of the Lecompton United Methodist church. Her hobbies were cooking, gardening and crocheting. She also had a tremendous sense of humor and was musically talented. At one time she was in the opera in Chicago. She represented everything good about Lecompton. She married Howard Morris in 1919, who preceded her in death in 1977. Survivors include a son, Bob, five daughters, Virginia Hathaway, Ann Smith, Carol Kibbee, Nancy Howard and Mary Sue Christmas; a sister, Alice Lee Blake; twenty-six grandchildren, forty-seven great grandchildren, and two great great grandchildren. She was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.

Julia M. Springer

She died April 27, 1994. She was born in Lecompton November 3, 1906, the daughter of Charles and Rosena "Winnie" Hill Sehon. She was employed as an economist for Kansas Power and Light company and was a member of Trinity Lutheran church where she sang in the choir. She served on the steering committee which formed the Lawrence Chapter of AARP and had been on the Board of the Douglas County Council on Aging and the

Douglas County Board of Appeals. Julia was active in many social and musical organizations and provided leadership in restoration of Lane University Museum. Her reputation for being involved in worthy projects was extremely important in fund raising, and her enthusiasm was an inspiration to everyone; Lane Museum is a monument to her. She and her husband contributed many artifacts in addition to giving much of their time to operation of the museum. She married Forrest Springer in 1945 who preceded her in death in 1991. Survivors include a daughter, Phyllis Martin in Topeka, a step-daughter, Joanne Schneider, two step-grandchildren and four step-great grandchildren. She was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.

Harley M. "Bud" Dark

He died April 28, 1994. He was born January 1, 1909 at McLouth, the son of Samuel and Mary Dark. He graduated from Lecompton high school and attended Strickler's Business College. He was foreman of the maintenance department at Forbes Air Base and a veteran of WW II. He also was an excellent carpenter. A member of VFW Post No. 852, his survivors include two nephews, Steve Sindt and Bob Dark, four nieces, Doris Sindt, Geraldine Harrell, Lura McAlexander and Mary Green. He always took pride in being from Lecompton.

.....
President - Paul Bahnmaier

Secretary - Marie Traxler

Treasurer - Alice Clare (Sally) Wright

Typesetter & Editor - Chuck Wright

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Historical Writer - Sara Walter

Genealogical Writer - Iona Spencer

Illustrator - Ellen Duncan
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The Lecompton Historical Society

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