

## The New England Emigrant Aid Company

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Singularly important in the development of the "Free State" effort in Kansas Territory was the New England Emigrant Aid Company (NEEAC). The company was organized in Massachusetts by Congressman Eli Thayer who, with Amos Lawrence, became the leading lights of the effort.

The company's purpose was to encourage emigration of "Free Staters" to Kansas Territory by securing reduced railway and steamboat fares to Kansas, and by investing capital in mills, hotels, towns and other accoutrements of civilization in Kansas. Thayer stated he expected to need \$5,000,000 for the effort.

On July 17, 1854 a first party of 29 male emigrants left the Boston railway station for Kansas Territory. After arriving at St. Louis they traveled up the Missouri River on the steamboat *Polar Star* and disembarked at the Town of Kansas (present-day Kansas City). By July 29 the party had arrived at a location in present-day Douglass County, Kansas near the Wakarusa and Kansas Rivers. They camped that night on a large hill they called Mount Oread, after the school Eli Thayer taught at in Massachusetts. The settlement the emigrants formed was first called Wakarusa, but they realized that name meant "hip deep" in the Indian language and so they quickly renamed the new settlement Lawrence, after Amos Lawrence.

The NEEAC soon owned and operated hotels in The Town of Kansas (the Gillis House renamed The American) and in Lawrence (The Eldridge) for newly-arrived emigrants. The company operated mills at Lawrence, Topeka, Manhattan, Claflin, Balcheller, Atchison, Waubensee, Burlington and Osawatomie. The towns of Lawrence, Topeka and Osawatomie were basically NEEAC company towns, and Manhattan (originally New Boston) was formed by company agents.

The NEEAC financed newspapers in Lawrence, Atchison and Quindaro. The also bought out the pro-slavery *Squatter Sovereign* of Atchison and turned it into a "Free State" newspaper.

The NEEAC organizing efforts in Kansas Territory were not received enthusiastically in all parts of the country. The Platte County (Mo.) Self Defensives were dedicated to preserving their economic investments in slavery by ensuring its expansion into Kansas. Members of the Platte County Self-Defensives wore lapel pins made of hemp, and a password was required - often "Sound on the Goose" - to attend the secret meetings. The Self-Defensives conducted a number of trials of suspected abolitionists and forced their exile. It was perhaps the Self-Defensives who posted reward posters offering \$1,000 for the person of Eli Thayer.

The best estimates are that NEEAC never raised more than \$140,000, nor aided many more than 1,000 settlers to immigrate to Kansas Territory. But the efforts of the NEEAC were widespread and long-lasting, and certainly pivotal in the long struggles that were ahead. Most NEEAC agents remained in Kansas and were influential for many years to come. Agent Charles Robinson became territorial Governor of Kansas. Chief financial agent Samuel "Pom the Pious" Pomeroy became Mayor of Atchison, one of the first U.S. Senators from the state, president of the Kansas Valley Bank and president of the Atchison and St. Joseph Railroad.

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