

Experiences of N. W. Spicer in Kansas

I am a Native of Susquehanna Co. P.A. I am a Carpenter & Joiner by Trade. I was receiving \$40. per month in Spring of 1856 when the news reached me of the Kansas difficulties & I determined to have a hand in the operation myself. I immediately went to Chicago where after some delay I joined a Company of Emigrants bound for the "Land of Promise" & on the 17th day of June we all started on the Car intending to take the river route for the Territory. At my exit from Chicago I had \$60. The Company of which I was a member were promised, our passage free & \$30 in money or its equivalent in provisions when we should have reached our destination. A Sharpe Rifle was also promised us. After reaching Alton we took passage on the Missouri River Steamer, "Star of the West". In about 4 days we reached Leavenworth City, on the borders of the territory. Before we reached this point we encountered considerable opposition, having our guns taken from us by a large force.

But here the Spirit of mobbery & Ruffainism increased to such a degree that we were compelled to return on the same boat. There were 75 men when we set out from Chicago. On our return from Leavenworth & when we were ready to pursue the Overland Route there were about 30 of the original number left. These kept on their way through Iowa & Nebraska & after a tedious journey of many weeks on the 13th day of Aug we reached Topeka the Free State Capital of the Territory. Before we had time to pitch our tents a messenger arrived from Lawrence bringing information of the difficulties at Franklin that had occurred the day previous & bringing intelligence that the Enemy were assembling in large forces at Fort Saunders near Washington Creek. This was a strong hold occupied by the Enemy in harassing by plundering & robbing from the Free State settlers in the neighborhood. Large numbers had already assembled of the Free State men within three miles of the Fort. And this messenger requested all who could to repair to the spot to reinforce them.

In less than half an hour from the time the message arrived the Chicago Co were prepared & ready to start. We traveled nearby all night & on the 14th at 2 o'clock we reached the general Encampment of Free State men. During the day a Scouting Party under Capt Shombree started from Camp to reconnoitre the ground of the Enemy & also find & bring in the murdered remains of Hoyt who we had been informed was assassinated by the gang in the Fort the day before. They returned late in the P.M. bringing in the mutilated remains of the Murdered man. When the corpse was exposed the men seemed indignant & swore revenge.

Next morning the men wished to be led to the Fort. But Lane deeming it imprudent (or rather I should say Capt Cook who had not yet undisguised himself) sent the same scouts out again who returned about 11 o'clock. Cook wished to postpone the attack until next morning. But the men becoming so enraged at the suggestion he changed the programme that he had made and arranged that the attack should be made in the P.M. At 2 o'clock the whole number of about 500 accordingly set out for the Fort. Before they had got in sight, the enemy fled leaving 40 guns, the horse of the murdered Hoyt & such other plunder in our possession. We returned to our Encampment and after dispatching a hasty supper started for Laurence. But before all of the men had left the Camp, intelligence reached us of new difficulties at Lecompton. We immediately changed our course & steered for this place. We marched until about midnight when we arrived in the vicinity of Judge Wakefield's. Here we encountered a gang of Horse

Thieves headed by a desperado under the appellation of Col Titus. This gang finding themselves closely pressed by our advance scouts at once fired upon them which was returned with such success as to wound & kill two of their men. One of their number was taken Prisoner. Also two of their horses were left on the ground which were secured by our party. We stopped for the night about a mile from where this occurred.

During the night Titus fearful that we would attack him in his house which was a mile south of Lecompton on the Laurence road, sent a dispatch & caused the whole force in town to come to his defence. They returned however early in the morning. At daybreak the horsemen under Shombree learning the state of affairs with the horsemen under his command started in advance of the Main body to surprise Titus & his men & take them prisoners. They rode so close to the house that they were fired upon unawares. Several men were badly wounded. Capt Shombree mortally. One of the men in the house was killed by a return fire. Soon the whole force came up. The Cannon was stationed in front about 50 rods from the house. The Chicago Sharp's Riflemen diagonally from it below & covered by a rail fence. After a few discharges of the Cannon & rifles a white Flag was suspended from a window when the firing ceased. All who were in the house 19 in number were taken prisoners. Their horses, arms & munitions were also taken, when the whole force took up their march for Laurence.

The reason why the Company did not pursue their journey to Lecompton was on account of the U. S. Troops interfering. Directly after Gov. Shannon came to town which was the Sunday following Col Eldredge addressed the men assembled numbering over 500. He stated that as they of Lawrence would probably be subject to an attempt on the part of our Enemies to invade the Town again it would be necessary to have men for her defence & that if the Chicago Company would relinquish for the time being the project of locating thier Claims & remain & be ready against any emergency to fight if necessary, he as Agent of the Committee would be responsible for their support – The men on account of this promise, therefore remained.

During our sojourn here we were constantly active. Some of the men of the Chicago Company went to Ossawatimie. Others assisted in bringing grain & hay in Lawrence. At one time we went to Topeka under Col Harvey's Command to bring arms & other munitions that were in charge of Mr Moore to Lawrence. About this time as I had been a scout & was pretty active, when the Regiments were made up I was given the office of Adjutant – Prior to this I had been elected 1st Lieutenant of the Chicago Co. My father is a Military Officer & I had learned the discipline under him—At one time during the Company's stay at Lawrence, Assistance was called for from the people on little Stranger Creek toward Leavenworth – In this Campaign we took between 30 & 40 horses & mules & surprized & took a Company of Carolinians who were on thier way to reinforce a Company of Pro Slavery men at Atchison. We immediately released them & returned on our horses to Lawrence – Two nights we ambushed in the woods about 100 in number. Nothing of importance however occurred at either time excepting a heavy Thunder Shower. we managed by rolling our guns up in our blankets to keep them dry.

We had not been returned from this Expedition long enough to become rested before we were summoned to March to Hickery Point. We were successful in our Mission until our return when we were all surprized & taken prisoners by the U. S. Troops to Lecompton. After being detained about a week I, with some others, passed the guard & made our way to Lawrence.

Soon after I escaped a Militia Co. was formed for its protection which I joined. Was elected orderly Sergeant. This officer receives for his services \$20. per month. My time is now expired & I intend settling on a Claim. I have no means except what I draw for my services (two months in the Militia. During the Summer & Fall I was obliged to expend what means I brought with me for the necessaries of life such as food clothing &c. I am now destitute of clothing Bedding &c suitable & necessary for the winter – I am determined however to stay in Kansas & fulfill the object of my coming – which is to assist & if possible make Kansas a Free State.

Lawrence K. T. Dec 6th 1856

From the archives of the Kansas State Historical Society. “R. S. Griffethe, N. W. Spicer, and J. A. Harvey Testimonies.” Spicer later served with the First Kansas Volunteers in the Civil War (see accompanying photograph).