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# THE SHARPS RIFLE EPISODE IN KANSAS HISTORY

By

W. H. ISELY

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REPRINTED FROM THE

*American Historical Review*

VOL. XII., NO. 3

APRIL, 1907



Gift.  
" H. Russell.  
7 May 1907

## THE "SHARPS RIFLE EPISODE IN KANSAS HISTORY

THE Kansas struggle was indeed the prelude to the Civil War. The first armed conflict between the North and the South began, not at Fort Sumter in 1861, but on the Wakarusa and at Lawrence in 1855. The desperate strife for the possession of this virgin soil was the necessary introduction to the awful carnage of the sixties. Many leaders on both sides foresaw with remarkable clearness that an impending crisis was at hand and that Kansas would be a decisive factor in the approaching conflict. Senator Atchison of Missouri, writing in September, 1855, to his Southern friends who were gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the battle at King's Mountain, fervently solicited their aid, saying that "the [Kansas] contest . . . is one of life and death, and it will be so with you and your institution if we fail . . . the stake the 'border ruffians' are playing for is a mighty one . . . in a word, the prosperity or the ruin of the whole South depends on the Kansas struggle."<sup>1</sup> Horace Greeley, but a few months earlier, with equal prophetic vision, wrote his celebrated "Rising Cloud" editorial,<sup>2</sup> predicting that the great battle between Freedom and Slavery was at hand; that the little cloud hovering over a handful of people in the far West foreshadowed the coming storm; that the distant rumble of the tempest could already be heard, and that the mischief there brewing was not alone for Kansas. No wonder that both sides in this great controversy threw themselves into the contest with such impetuous intensity, such determination and abandonment, often forgetting or ignoring the most vital principles of right action, and yet rising to such lofty exhibitions of heroism, courage, patience, self-sacrifice, and suffering as to move every section of the nation to proffer aid and sympathy. "Bleeding Kansas" became a familiar cry in every hamlet; its echoes reverberating across the Atlantic aroused the compassion of Europe. Lady Byron, sending sixty-five pounds to Mrs. Stowe, requested that the money be spent, not in the purchase of arms, but for the relief of those who had "resisted oppression at the hazard of life and property".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 12, *New York Tribune*, November 2, 1855, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 12, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, November 14, 1856.

It is the purpose of this article to deal with only one phase of this dramatic chapter—the output, source, and distribution of Sharps<sup>1</sup> rifles, “Beecher Bibles”, and other arms furnished to Kansas emigrants during the free-state struggle. The New England Emigrant Aid Company was accused by politicians and pro-slavery partizans of having initiated the policy of arming. A large portion of the press and the non-resistance, Garrisonian abolitionists joined in the cry of condemnation. “Sharps Rifles” became a by-word for dispute and controversy. It absorbed the attention of the United States Senate. Congress appointed committees to discover how, when, and by whom arms were sent to Kansas. It vexed the national executive, and when Thaddeus Hyatt, W. F. M. Arney, and Edward Daniels called on President Pierce, demanding protection for Kansas settlers, the committee was given a cold rebuff and informed that “Bibles rather than . . . Sharps rifles” should have been sent to Kansas.<sup>2</sup> State political conventions likewise denounced the policy; such a convention at Lexington, Missouri, in 1855, charged the New England Company “with recruiting armies and hiring fanatics to go to Kansas”.<sup>3</sup> But Sumner warmly defended the Emigrant Aid Company on the floor of the Senate.<sup>4</sup>

The officers of the company also entered a general denial. Its secretary, Thomas H. Webb, in reply to an inquiry from Sumner, wrote that “the company had never sent, or paid for sending guns, cannon, pistols or other weapons to Kansas . . . The company had sent saw mills, grist mills, various kinds of machinery, also Bibles and a great variety of religious, literary and scientific books.”<sup>5</sup> Amos A. Lawrence, treasurer, and Anson J. Stone, assistant treasurer, both testified before a Congressional investigating committee that the company had never employed any of its capital for firearms.<sup>6</sup> A few men openly favored arming the colonists, among whom Henry Ward Beecher stands as the most celebrated. He is reported in the *New York Tribune* as saying that “he believed that the Sharps rifle was a truly *moral* agency, and that there was more moral power in one of those instruments, so far as the slaveholders of Kansas were concerned, than in a hundred Bibles. You

<sup>1</sup> Erroneously spelled “Sharpes” and “Sharp’s”. One Christian Sharps was the inventor of the gun; and “Sharps” is the correct form.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Tribune*, September 3, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

<sup>5</sup> Manuscript Letter-book of New England Emigrant Aid Company, March 14, 1856.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Special Committee on the Troubles in Kansas*, Serial 869, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., House Report 200, pp. 878, 880, 886.



might just as well . . . read the Bible to Buffaloes as to those fellows who follow Atchison and Stringfellow; but they have a supreme respect for the logic that is embodied in Sharps rifles."<sup>1</sup> From this date Sharps rifles became popularly known as "Beecher Bibles".

As a rule free-state advocates did not speak so frankly. The question of arms forced itself before the Cleveland convention, assembled in June, 1856, to devise means for Kansas relief; but the sentiment expressed by the majority was opposed to such a policy. Dr. Vincent of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, did take the position that Kansas farmers needed "rifles and revolvers"; and Colonel Nichols, a Kansas representative, insisted that protection of life and property was the first great need, that "men will not plow when they expect to be shot in the furrow, they will not build while the incendiary stands ready to apply the torch". But C. W. Younglove of Cleveland, in opposition to such views, said "that Ohio looked to the ballot box rather than to the cartridge box as the remedy for the troubles in Kansas"; while D. Wright of Albany "wanted to hear no talk" about sending armed men to the territory.<sup>2</sup> It however seems probable that those favoring armed resistance to domination of the border ruffians generally remained silent, but worked all the more vigorously to secure such ends. At any rate the various Kansas aid committees, shortly after the adjournment of this convention, began issuing to the thousands of individuals contributing aid a handsome lithographed certificate, probably designed by William Barnes of Albany, which contained in a conspicuous place the following significant clause from the Federal Constitution: "A well regulated Militia being necessary to the Security of a FREE STATE the Right of the People to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed." Thus in spite of presidential proclamations, indignant politicians, enraged Missouri slaveholders, demagogues, theorists, timid but well-meaning citizens, and the strenuous effort of regular troops, detailed to intercept arms sent across the territorial borders, a large supply was constantly passing into Kansas.

Before detailing how these arms were secured, and how and by whom sent to Kansas, it will be well to recall some historical facts, well known, but essential to this entire subject. Stephen A. Douglas, able, ambitious, unscrupulous, startled the nation in January,

<sup>1</sup> *New York Tribune*, February 8, 1856, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> These quotations are from a pamphlet, loaned by Hon. William Barnes, describing the proceedings of the Cleveland and Buffalo conventions of June and July, 1856, pp. 3-4.

1854, by proposing to apply squatter sovereignty to the Kansas-Nebraska country, a territory already consecrated to freedom by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. In May his bill became a law. The abrogation of the Missouri Compromise was complete; Slavery had scored another great triumph; the opposition was paralyzed. But Eli Thayer of Worcester, Massachusetts, came forward as the man of the hour. He would checkmate the pro-slavery programme by colonizing this new territory with free-state men. To accomplish this end he at once chartered the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company, later rechartered as the New England Emigrant Aid Company, with an authorized capital stock of one million dollars. He secured the assistance and co-operation of many of the ablest men of New England and New York, among the most active being Amos A. Lawrence, Edward Everett Hale, Dr. Samuel Cabot, J. M. S. Williams, Horace Greeley, C. J. Higginson, George L. Stearns, Dr. S. G. Howe, and John Carter Brown.

While the company afforded no direct pecuniary aid to the emigrant, it widely advertised the advantages of the new territory; it organized the emigrants into companies, securing for them mutual aid and protection; travel rates to those going under the auspices of the company were reduced one-half; it established, in advance of emigration, town-sites, such as Lawrence, Topeka, Osawatomie, Manhattan, Hampden, and Wabaunsee, and at these points erected sawmills, grist-mills, school-houses, and churches. These company towns at once became the great free-state centres in the territory. Opposition to the Douglas measure was universal throughout the North, and the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa furnished a larger proportion of free-state settlers than any other section; yet it was this New England company that supplied the plan and the organization and gave the direction and inspiration to the whole free-state movement; and when the prairies of Kansas were swept by fire and sword, it was to the Boston society that the afflicted pioneers first turned for protection, comfort, and material relief.

Dr. Charles Robinson, S. C. Pomeroy, and Charles H. Branscomb were employed to serve the Emigrant Aid Company in Kansas. Pomeroy was the head representative and the purchasing agent for the company. Robinson, however, soon developed as the real leader in general affairs. He was well fitted for such grave responsibility, for he had been through the California troubles, and was by nature shrewd, cool, determined, and an able judge of men and of the future. While other leaders had important and often more picturesque parts, it was the mind of Robinson

that shaped the free-state programme; it was Robinson that stood as the chosen leader of the band of men and women as heroic as the founders of Plymouth and as brave as the farmers who stood in line at Lexington. In August, 1854, the present town-site of Lawrence was established. During that fall seven companies were sent from New England; by June of the following year eleven more entered the promised land. These companies consisted each of from ten to more than two hundred persons. These early settlers were sober, industrious, God-fearing; they generally came unarmed, interested only in peaceable husbandry and in the establishment of a free state.

The easiest approach to the territory was by steamboat through Missouri. As boatload after boatload of detested Yankees and Northern settlers passed up the tawny river, the naturally hospitable Missouri slaveholder was surprised, astounded, then disturbed; and as the volume of Northern emigration swelled in numbers, his soul was filled with fury and bitter hatred. Even at the present day different sections of the Union seriously misjudge each other; but in 1854 an impassable gulf intervened between free and slave sections. They could never fairly comprehend each other's motives. To the slave-owner the "peculiar institution" was God-ordained; it was inextricably bound up with his whole industrial and social system. By what principle did these "pauper" laborers and abolition fanatics dare to approach the borders of western Missouri and disturb the already unstable equilibrium of a slave community? Had it not been agreed that Nebraska should be a free state and that Kansas should be a slave state? Was not this a fair proposition? If threats and bluster would not deter these Northern interlopers, then more serious measures must be employed. In June, 1854, before a single Eastern colony had set foot on Kansas soil, the *Platte County Argus* declared that

they [Northern emigrants] must be met, if need be, with the rifle. We must meet them at the very threshold and scourge them back to their caverns of darkness. They have made the issue, and it is for us to meet and repel them, even at the point of the bayonet.

Prompt steps were taken to put this programme into practice. In October, 1854, an unsuccessful effort was made to drive Robinson and his associates from Lawrence.<sup>1</sup> In November the first territorial election was held. Seventeen hundred and twenty-nine<sup>2</sup> armed Missourians crossed the border and elected Whitfield delegate to Congress. In the meantime Reeder was appointed governor.

<sup>1</sup> Frank W. Blackmar, *The Life of Charles Robinson* (Topeka, 1902), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas* (Boston, 1885), p. 41.

The census taken under his direction in February, 1855, gave the total number of voters in the territory as 2,905.<sup>1</sup>

On March 30, 1855, occurred the election for members to both branches of the territorial legislature. This election was of supreme importance. A committee appointed by Congress to investigate it reported that with a fair election the free-state party would have had a majority in both branches.<sup>2</sup> But unprincipled leaders, at the head of a motley, unwashed mob of ruffians, drunk with bad whisky and armed with cannon and every variety of small arms, overran the border and turned impending defeat into a glorious victory, electing to the legislature every pro-slavery candidate save one. Out of a total of 6,307 votes,<sup>3</sup> 4,908 were cast by residents of Missouri. The upholders of slavery were jubilant; the friends of freedom dismayed.

The second Missouri invasion left Kansas prostrate and completely in the hands of the pro-slavery power. According to the dominant crowd at Washington, squatter sovereignty was working successfully. But the free-state settlers indicated no intention of giving up the field. Robinson, prompt in action, boldly proposed to repudiate the "bogus" legislature, arm the free-state people, and defend the sacred rights of the citizens of Kansas. On April 2, only three days after the election, Robinson wrote to Eli Thayer,<sup>4</sup> describing very completely the Missouri outrages, and appealed for arms:

Our people have now formed themselves into four military companies, and will meet to drill till they have perfected themselves in the art. Also, companies are being formed in other places, and we want *arms*. Give us the weapons and every man from the North will be a soldier and die in his tracks if necessary, to protect and defend our rights. . . .

Cannot your secret society send us 200 Sharps rifles as a loan till this question is settled? Also a couple of field-pieces? If they will do that, I think they will be *well used*, and preserved. I have given our people encouragement to expect something of the kind, and hope we shall not be disappointed. Please inform me what the prospect is in this direction.

If the Governor sets this election aside, we of course must have another, and shall need to be up and dressed.

In great haste,

Very respectfully,

C. ROBINSON.

To Hon. Eli Thayer, Worcester, Mass.

<sup>1</sup> Serial 869, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., House Report 200, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Blackmar, *Life of Robinson*, pp. 131-133.

On April 9 Robinson wrote an almost identical letter to Edward Everett Hale,<sup>1</sup> one of the most active members of the Emigrant Aid Company, strongly urging that two hundred rifles and two field-pieces be sent at once to Lawrence. But, not satisfied with the uncertainties of correspondence, he now despatched George W. Deitzler, who was in his employ as clerk of the Emigrant Company, with a second letter to Thayer again asking for rifles. Mr. Deitzler, who later attained the rank of brigadier-general during the Civil War, described the result of this mission in a letter written for the "Old Settlers' Meeting" in 1879, in which he tells of his appointment by Robinson and his trip to Worcester and Boston, and how he got the desired Sharps rifles:

Within an hour after our arrival in Boston, the executive committee of the Emigrant Aid Society held a meeting and delivered to me an order for one hundred Sharps rifles and I started at once for Hartford, arriving there on Saturday evening. The guns were packed on the following Sunday and I started for home on Monday morning. The boxes were marked "Books." I took the precaution to have the (cap) cones removed from the guns and carried them in my carpet sack, which sack would have been missing in the event of the capture of the guns by the enemy. . . .

I have not referred to this transaction from any motives of personal vanity, but simply to revive a feeling of gratitude toward Mr. Thayer and his associates for the kind and patriotic assistance rendered by them to the free state people from the beginning to the end of the great struggle which terminated, happily, in the overthrow of American Slavery, and to show how promptly they gave attention to the business which took me to Boston. Those rifles did good service in the "border war." . . . It was perhaps the first shipment of arms for our side and it incited a healthy feeling among the unarmed free state settlers, which permeated and energized them until even the Quakers were ready to fight.<sup>2</sup>

The Boston end of this transaction appears in the following letter from the secretary of the New England aid society which has but recently come to notice:<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Charles Robinson, No. 3 Winter St.  
BOSTON, May 8th 1855.

Dear Sir:

Mr. Deitzler presented himself at this office on Wednesday last, with a letter from Mr. Thayer relative to a certain business intrusted to him; no one in this *village* having received any advices.

We were busily occupied in getting ready for special meeting No. 2,

<sup>1</sup> MS. private letters in possession of Edward Everett Hale.

<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Glead (editor), *The Kansas Memorial, a Report of the Old Settlers' Meeting held at Bismarck Grove, Kansas, September 15th and 16th, 1879* (Kansas City, Mo., 1880), pp. 184-185.

<sup>3</sup> From MS. Letter-book of New England Emigrant Aid Company, vol. I., p. 146.



called by special invitation to see if we could raise funds for more Mills; still considering the exigencies of the case we ventured to lend a helping hand to help forward the movement, although by so doing we pushed out for the time being, as we apprehended would be the case, our legitimate business. I eventually arranged, with the aid of Dr. Cabot, so as to take the risk of ordering, in all one hundred machines, at a cost of about three thousand dollars, taking our chances hereafter to raise the money. I shall obligate myself to the subscribers to return these in due time or a satisfactory equivalent therefore, should they on trial be approved and meet with purchasers. You will therefore govern yourself accordingly and deliver them to none but trustworthy individuals. . . .

I am free to say, had your letter [a letter received after the arrival of Deitzler, describing some of the factious conditions in Lawrence] arrived forty-eight hours earlier, myself and others would have been little, if at all disposed to exert ourselves, as we have done, at so much expense of time and money, to procure machines for the improvement of Lawrence. Rather we should have seconded the suggestion of one of our most influential coadjutors, which was to advise you and other friends to quit L., abandon it to its impending fate, and seek a location at another spot, where more harmony and good will would be likely to prevail. . . .

We shall await with much interest further intelligence from you in relation to the matters herein referred to. Please telegraph us the result of the election at the earliest moment, and write us the details before the intelligence becomes stale. Hoping that all will yet come out right, I remain,

Yours truly,

THOMAS H. WEBB.

This first shipment of rifles soon reached Kansas. A correspondent for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*,<sup>1</sup> writing from Lawrence, May 23, states that intense excitement was produced in the minds of pro-slavery people by the arrival "of five boxes of *books*, which, on being opened, proved to be, instead of books, one hundred of Sharps rifles". Threats and imprecations were loud and long. The Emigrant Aid Company was denounced as trying to overawe Western men. Even James H. Lane, who had but recently come to Kansas and was still in sympathy with the pro-slavery element, urged sending the rifles back to Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> They never went back. The very name "Sharps rifle" was to become a term to sober the border ruffian and give him serious pause. This breech-loading rifle was a new invention and extremely effective;<sup>3</sup> in comparison, the Missourian was poorly armed, carrying either a squirrel-rifle, a heavy buffalo-gun, or a clumsy army musket. This difference in

<sup>1</sup> Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1898), p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 15, 1855, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> The Sharps rifle "is one of the very oldest successful guns of the breech-loading class, and the first in which a vertically sliding breech-block was employed." E. H. Knight, *American Mechanical Dictionary*, s. v. Rifle.

armament probably explains why the free-state bands, though usually outnumbered, were invariably victorious in all open fighting.

Several other letters have been found in reference to this first shipment of arms, but give little additional information. The following extract from a letter written July 15, 1855, by Amos A. Lawrence, treasurer of the Emigrant Aid Company, to Franklin Pierce, however, shows how thoroughly this rich Boston merchant had entered into the Kansas struggle. He boldly tells the President that since the government had given no protection to the settlers in Kansas and since "they must defend *themselves*; and therefore many persons here who refused at first (myself included) have rendered them assistance, by furnishing them the means of defense."<sup>1</sup>

But Robinson was not satisfied with one hundred rifles, and stirred up his kinsman, Lawrence, who on July 20, 1855, writes to the secretary, Thomas H. Webb: "When farmers turn soldiers they must have *arms*. Write to Hartford and get their terms for one hundred more of the Sharps rifles at once."<sup>2</sup> Here is the beginning of the second installment of rifles. About the same time James B. Abbott was sent from the territory on a mission similar to the one which carried Deitzler to Boston. These letters tell the story:<sup>3</sup>

LAWRENCE, July 26, 1855.

Mr. Thayer—Dear Sir: The bearer, J. B. Abbott, is a resident of this district, on the Wakarusa, about four miles from Lawrence. There is a military company formed in his neighborhood, and they are anxious to procure arms. Mr. Abbott is a gentleman in whom you can place implicit confidence, and is true as steel to the cause of freedom in Kansas. In my judgment the rifles in Lawrence have had a *very good* effect, and I think the same kind of instruments in other places would do more to save Kansas than almost anything else. Anything you can do for Mr. Abbott will be gratefully appreciated by the people of Kansas. We are in the midst of a revolution, as you will see by the papers. How we shall come out of the furnace, God only knows. That we have got to enter it, some of us, there is no doubt; but we are ready to be offered.

In haste, very respectfully yours, for freedom for a world,

C. ROBINSON.

Upon the above letter appear the following two indorsements, which tell their own story:

OFFICE OF THE NEW ENGLAND EMIGRANT AID COMPANY,  
No. 3 Winter street, BOSTON, Aug. 10, 1855.

Dr. Charles Robinson, within mentioned, is an agent of the Emigrant

<sup>1</sup> William Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence* (Boston, 1888), p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, vol. I-II. (Topeka, 1881), p. 222.

Aid Company, and is worthy of implicit confidence. We cheerfully recommend Mr. J. B. Abbott to the public.

C. H. BRANSCOMB, *Secretary pro tem.*

Boston, August 11, 1855.<sup>1</sup>

Dear Sir: Request Mr. Palmer to have one hundred Sharps rifles packed in casks, like hardware, and to retain them subject to my order. Also to send the bill to me by mail. I will pay it either with my note, according to the terms agreed on between him and Dr. Webb, or in cash less interest at seven per cent. per annum.

Yours truly,

AMOS A. LAWRENCE.

Mr. J. B. Abbott, care of A. Rogers, Hartford, Conn.

A second letter to Abbott is as follows:

Boston, August 20, 1855.<sup>2</sup>

My Dear Sir: This installment of carbines is far from being enough, and I hope the measures you are taking will be followed up until every organized company of trusty men in the Territory shall be supplied. Dr. Cabot will give me the names of any gentlemen here who subscribe money, and the amount—of which I shall keep a memorandum, and promise them that it shall be repaid either in cash, or in rifles, whenever it is settled that Kansas shall not be a province of Missouri. Therefore, keep them in capital order, and above all, take good care that they do not fall into the hands of the Missourians after you once get them into use.

You must dispose of these where they will do the most good, and for this purpose you should advise with Dr. Robinson and Mr. Pomeroy.

Yours truly,

AMOS A. LAWRENCE.

Mr. James B. Abbott, care of A. Rogers, Hartford.

Among the Lawrence papers can still be found the identical memorandum above mentioned giving a full list of these subscribers; the memorandum is indorsed in the handwriting of Mr. Lawrence as follows:

Money received from various persons to make up the sum expended by me for rifles for the defense of the Kansas settlers. \$2,670 or thereabouts. Aug. 24, 1855.

The list of subscribers, in the writing of Dr. Cabot, is as follows:

Dr. Cabot	240	Henry Lee	50
Cunningham Bro.	100	P. S. Crowell	25
Wendell Phillips	100	Gerrit Smith	250
J. M. Forbes	300	W. R. Lawrence	100
J. Bertram	100	Calvin Hall	50
G. Howland Shaw	100	L. B. Russell	25
Sam A. Eliot	100	E. R. Hoar	25
Theo Lyman	100	Sam Hoar	50
		A. A. Lawrence	955

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

In the same collection is also a brief note dated September 25, 1855, from J. M. S. Williams, another very prominent director of the company, in which he says he "encloses a check for one hundred dollars for the Kansas 'Books'".

Abbott, after securing the order for one hundred rifles from the officers of the Emigrant Aid friends, proceeded to Hartford, Providence, and New York City for the purpose of getting one hundred additional guns, but could raise only enough funds to purchase seventeen rifles.<sup>1</sup> The entire lot was hurried to Kansas, to be used if need be in the October election for delegates to the Topeka Constitutional Convention.<sup>2</sup> These rifles were intended only to defend the rights of the settlers against Missouri interference. On August 10 Lawrence had written Robinson, approving resistance to bogus laws, but counselled that no resistance should be made to the federal government,<sup>3</sup> a policy consistently followed by Robinson and the Boston society throughout the entire struggle.

Major Abbott spent several weeks in New York City. On August 18 he wrote Amos Lawrence:

I came to this city yesterday and have seen some of the gentlemen to whom I have letters. They all seemed to favor the measure after a little *hesitation* and I doubt not we shall be able to get something here that will not only strengthen the hearts but the hands of our friends in Kansas.<sup>4</sup>

Greeley, Field, Priestly, Elliot, and Perkins are named as giving assistance. But he seems to have especially interested Frederick Law Olmsted, the well-known writer of antislavery literature, whom he appointed "Acting Commissioner" to raise funds for the Kansas cause, sufficient in amount to purchase another hundred Sharps rifles. Olmsted secured only about four hundred dollars, which, on the advice of a veteran army officer, he invested in a howitzer and some ammunition.<sup>5</sup> The gun left New York in October; it reached Lawrence in December at the beginning of the Wakarusa war. On May 21, 1856, at the sacking of Lawrence, this gun was carried off by Captain H. T. Titus and his South Carolina men. Captain Samuel Walker, of the Lawrence guards, pledged himself to its recovery within six months' time. Well did he keep his promise. On August 16 he stormed Fort Titus, captured its commander, and then extorted from Governor Shannon a stipulation

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society*, I.-II, 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence, *Life of Lawrence*, pp. 99-101.

<sup>4</sup> Amos A. Lawrence Collection of MS. letters.

<sup>5</sup> *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society*, I.-II, 224.

that the howitzer, which had not yet been retaken, should be exchanged for his distinguished prisoner.<sup>1</sup> During the troubles in southeastern Kansas, some years later, the howitzer was brought into prominent service, and in 1861 was carried by Lane into Missouri.<sup>2</sup> The gun is now on exhibition in the rooms of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, and is known as the Abbott Howitzer.

The next phase of the rifle question comes under the direction of Dr. Samuel Cabot, perhaps the most active Boston director of the Emigrant Aid Company. He rarely missed attending the weekly executive committee meetings of that organization. The executive committee seems to have appointed him as a special committee on "rifles" during the summer of 1855, but the only notice found is in a letter by Webb to Lawrence, dated January 29, 1856,<sup>3</sup> stating that "Dr. Cabot is treasurer of the Rifle fund." He was a man of few words, but active and influential; he was in thorough harmony with the policy of arming the prairie colonists and devoted much of his professional time to this service. A very few of Dr. Cabot's papers still exist, and are now in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The most important number in this collection is a small account-book, which contains no comments; all accounts are in the writing of Dr. Cabot, and on one cover, in pencil, also in the hand of Dr. Cabot, appears the single but significant word "Rifles". This account-book was clearly intended for personal use, hence some of the memoranda\* are indefinite; but the main features are clear and complete. The name of every donor, with amount given, is listed. The first collection was made in August, 1855, the last one September 18, 1857. About \$12,500 passed through Dr. Cabot's hands for the defense of the free-state people in Kansas. The bulk of these contributions came from New England, a few from New York state, and \$2,500 from the Kansas National Aid Committee. Under expenditures, it appears that the largest sums were paid to Palmer and Company, agents for Sharps rifles; the various items, including a draft for \$2,500 to Pomeroy, aggregating about \$8,000 and good for about 325 rifles. Of the remainder, one thousand is paid to A. A. Lawrence on the previous rifle account, and the balance is expended for revolvers, bowie-knives, ammunition, and general expenses.

One of the bills of account of the Sharps manufacturing com-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>3</sup> Amos A. Lawrence Collection.



pany is still preserved among the Cabot papers.<sup>1</sup> This bill was drawn on S. C. Pomeroy, purchasing agent of the Emigrant Aid Company in Kansas; but the rifles listed in it were for a long time in the hands of the "enemy". Along with four breech-loading cannon, these rifles were originally placed in the care of David Starr Hoyt, of Deerfield, to be conveyed by him to Kansas Territory.<sup>2</sup> While he was on board the river steamboat *Arabia*, a letter written by Hoyt to his mother, announcing his successful departure from St. Louis and describing how his precious guns were safe in the hold of the vessel, fell into the hands of the captain of the *Arabia*. The letter was read by the captain to the passengers, many of whom were border ruffians, and created intense excitement. A mob took possession of Hoyt and his companion, William B. Parsons, and voted to throw them into the Missouri River, but were persuaded from this course by Charles Keurney of Westport. When the boat tied up at Lexington, it was surrounded by a thousand armed Missourians. Hoyt was ordered by the leaders of the mob to sign a surrender of the arms, but although repeatedly threatened with death, he positively refused; the arms were then forcibly removed. All that Hoyt could show S. C. Pomeroy, whom he met some hours later in Kansas City, was a schedule indorsed "Taken from D. S. Hoyt the following described property, to be delivered to the order of Wilson Shannon, Governor of Kansas Territory, or his successor in office". The guns, however, were useless, as Dr. Calvin Cutter had carried the breech-blocks to Kansas by a different route, an action characterized by the border ruffians as a "d—— Yankee trick".

Hoyt at once returned to St. Louis, libelled the *Arabia*, and collected the full value of the arms given up by the officers of the boat

<sup>1</sup> "Hartford, Ct., March 19, 1856.

Gen'l Sam'l C. Pomeroy.		
To Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Co.,		
For 100 Carbines,	@ \$30	Dr. 3,000.00
Less 10 %		300.00
		<hr/> 2,700.00
" 29 Sharps Primers	@ \$1 1/8	32.62
" 20 Bullet Moulds (Box 50 c)	@ \$1	20.50
" 10 Boxes	@ \$2	20.00
		<hr/> \$2,773.12
By draft on S. Cabot, Jr., 1 day sight	\$1,286.56	
" this amount allowed as agreed	200.00	1,486.56
		<hr/> \$1,286.56 "
Balance due		

The bill also contains a complete list of the numbers of each rifle.

<sup>2</sup> A full account is given in "David Starr Hoyt", by William B. Parsons, *Kansas Magazine*, II. 42-45.

at Lexington. Several weeks later the brave Hoyt was treacherously murdered near Fort Saunders by his inveterate enemies, but the rifles continued to make history. The Boston gentlemen were naturally anxious to secure possession of this property, but felt a little awkward and embarrassed. "If we were not officers of the Emigrant Aid Company we could get them by suit," wrote Lawrence, "but whether we can do so by proxy remains to be seen." In 1857 Governor Geary signed an order for these arms, but it was only after a lengthy suit, brought in 1858-1859, in the name of the law firm of Knox and Kellogg, St. Louis, that the company's agents finally recovered them.<sup>1</sup>

Probably owing to the recent foray of John Brown into Missouri, the company seemed loath to forward these rifles to Kansas, finally doing so on the solicitation of Martin F. Conway, who had taken Pomeroy's post as the general Kansas agent. Only one paragraph of his letter, March 10, 1859, in reference to this matter need here be inserted:

I am not absolutely sure that we shall have no further use for arms in Kansas, though the probability is in that direction. This skin hunting business may engender a strife with Missouri. We cannot tell what [a] day or an hour may bring forth in this matter. But even supposing Kansas out of the question, the arms had better be here than in Boston, or even in St. Louis, for if they are needed against the Slave Power, I take it that the first point of need will be South and Southwest of us.<sup>2</sup> I shall therefore, dispatch an order for them. I do not see how they would be in greater danger here than in St. Louis.<sup>3</sup>

Thus these rifles were finally brought to Kansas. John Brown's raid into southwest Missouri had invited retaliatory raids into Kansas. Hence after several urgent requests these particular rifles were transferred in 1860 to James Montgomery and employed by him in the Fort Scott troubles.<sup>4</sup>

Eli Thayer probably gave more money for arming Kansas settlers than any other person: according to his own testimony he contributed \$4,500 "for the purchase of rifles and cannon".<sup>5</sup> Only a portion of his expenditures have been traced; the Cabot account shows a donation by Thayer of five hundred dollars. In 1855 he sent two cases of Millbury rifles to Kansas, containing forty guns, and valued at one thousand dollars.<sup>6</sup> At a public meeting, February 9, 1856, in the city hall of Worcester, Thayer assisted in raising

<sup>1</sup> See Cabot Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Probably referring to the secret efforts of the Emigrant Aid Company to inaugurate antislavery colonization in Texas.

<sup>3</sup> Cabot Collection.

<sup>4</sup> See Montgomery letters, Cabot Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Eli Thayer, *The New England Emigrant Aid Company* (Worcester, 1887), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of T. W. Higginson, Cabot Collection.

money for the purchase of twenty-three Sharps rifles, he himself contributing ten of this number.<sup>1</sup> The minutes<sup>2</sup> of the executive committee of the free-state party at Lawrence reveal still further activity by Thayer in this business. But it is impossible to catalogue all the arms furnished directly or indirectly by the directors of the Emigrant Aid Company. Enough has been given to show the great activity of the members of this organization and the large scale on which arms were furnished to the free-state people.

Through the efforts of Thayer a Connecticut Kansas colony was organized in New Haven, including many Yale graduates; and it started west on March 31, 1856. A few days before, a farewell service was held in North Church, Henry Ward Beecher delivering the address. Professor Benjamin Silliman presided at this meeting, and at its conclusion stated that no provision had been made for properly equipping the party with arms: he therefore appealed to the audience to provide fifty rifles. Beecher promptly responded, agreeing to give \$625, which would pay for half the number, if the other half should be given by those present.<sup>3</sup> The full amount was soon secured. On the following day the senior class of Yale College purchased an extra rifle for Hon. C. B. Lines, the leader of the party. On the day of departure Beecher was again present and presented each man in the company with a Bible and a Sharps rifle.

"We gratefully accept the bibles," said the leader of the colony, "as the only sure foundation on which to erect free institutions. . . . We . . . accept the weapons also, and, like our fathers, we go with the bible to indicate the peaceful nature of our mission and the harmless character of our company, and a weapon to teach those who may be disposed to molest us (if any such there be) that while we determine to do that which is right we will not submit tamely to that which is wrong." "We will not forget you," said [Mr.] Beecher. . . . "Every morning breeze shall catch the blessings of our prayers and roll them westward to your prairie home."

The combined stupidity and criminality of Pierce, in permitting the sacking of Lawrence and the wide-spread reign of murder and pillage in the territory, created a passionate feeling of indignation throughout the North. The ashes of Lawrence, the outpost of freedom, and the blood of the fallen in Kansas must be avenged. "Money, Sharps rifles, recruits," was the angry cry. The *New York Tribune*, on the suggestion of a subscriber, announced that it would receive one-dollar subscriptions for Kansas relief; in a very

<sup>1</sup> Eli Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade* (New York, 1889), p. 176; *New York Tribune*, February 15, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society*, VII. 525.

<sup>3</sup> Gleed, *The Kansas Memorial*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Spring, *Kansas*, p. 165.

brief time over \$22,000 was subscribed, most of it in dollar sums.<sup>1</sup> Aid committees sprang into existence in almost every Northern village. These in turn were consolidated into state committees. How far all these organizations furnished arms cannot at present be determined. The committees in Massachusetts, New York, and Wisconsin were exceptionally active. No account has been found of the expenditures of the Wisconsin committee. The Kansas Committee of New York published a full report, and according to this report \$643.37 was expended for Sharps rifles. In the secretary's minutes of April, 1856, of that organization there appears a letter to Pomeroy stating that the committee had purchased twenty-five Sharps rifles, thus corresponding with the treasurer's report.

The Kansas State Committee of Massachusetts had been gradually evolved from a subcommittee of the Emigrant Aid Company. As it developed, it finally came under the efficient management of George L. Stearns. This committee raised over \$48,000 and a large amount of clothing for Kansas sufferers. The treasurer's report of this committee is among the Emigrant Aid Company's papers, and records the fact that five thousand (\$4,947.88) dollars was expended for two hundred Sharps rifles. But these rifles never reached Kansas: they were consigned to the National Committee and by them transported to Tabor, Iowa. Before they could be taken to Kansas, Geary, with the co-operation of the free-state leaders, had established peace, and such military bands as were not incorporated into the state militia were either disarmed or driven from the territory.

John Brown now entered as an applicant for the Tabor rifles; his fighting on the border had given birth to plans destined to bear final fruit at Harpers Ferry; but his application was refused by the National Committee lest he might use them in another expedition into Missouri.<sup>2</sup> Brown, however, had strong sympathizers at Boston, and, on the demand of the officers of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, which had originally furnished these arms, the Tabor rifles were restored to the Massachusetts committee<sup>3</sup> and then turned over by its president to John Brown. In due season, these two hundred Sharps rifles, originally intended for the defense of the free-state people in Kansas, were carried by Brown to the neighborhood of Harpers Ferry<sup>4</sup> and there captured by the Maryland militia-men.

The organization of the Kansas National Aid Committee came as

<sup>1</sup> *New York Tribune*, January 23, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Serial 1040, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., Senate Report 278, pp. 245, 247.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-249, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 51, 236-237.

a climax to the various state efforts to aid the free-state cause. The movement for a national committee was general, but exceptionally vigorous in Ohio; final organization was effected at Buffalo in July, 1856. Thayer and Barnes planned the details of this committee; Thaddeus Hyatt was chosen president; and the committee had headquarters in Chicago, with Harvey B. Hurd as secretary and Horace White as assistant secretary. At the only general meeting of the committee, held in New York City, January, 1857, it was reported that two thousand emigrants and fifty tons of clothing had been sent to Kansas; and that the committee had raised and expended ninety thousand dollars in the direct aid and support of the free-state cause.<sup>1</sup> The men composing the two thousand emigrants were generally armed, many of these arms being furnished by the National Committee; but since no printed report was ever made of its expenditures, it is impossible to give details. Fortunately there exists the testimony of Horace White, given before the Harpers Ferry Congressional investigating committee, in which he states that the National Committee expended about ten thousand dollars for arms.<sup>2</sup> This then must be accepted as the amount spent by the Chicago organization for arming purposes.

At least one free state furnished arms direct from its arsenal for fighting in Kansas. Iowa had sent many of her sons to the territory and, being so near the border, was materially interested in the conflict. Governor Grimes had also written President Pierce that Iowa could not remain indifferent to the treatment of the free-state people in Kansas. In the spring of 1856 pro-slavery warriors patrolled the Missouri River and excluded Northern emigrants from that great highway. Emigration was now forced to follow the wagon-road through Iowa and Nebraska; and in August, 1856, some five hundred persons had collected in southwestern Iowa, preparatory to crossing into Kansas. This is the so-called "Jim Lane Army"; for though Lane had only a small part in collecting these men, he understood thoroughly the art of self-advertisement, and by means of Eastern newspaper correspondents was given credit for the "whole thing". Thaddeus Hyatt and Dr. S. G. Howe, on behalf of the National Committee, forced Lane from his assumed leadership,<sup>3</sup> not even permitting him to accompany the party into the state. Richardson had gathered an army of border ruffians to intercept these emigrants from Iowa; and while most of the incoming free-state men carried arms,

<sup>1</sup> *New York Tribune*, January 27, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Serial 1040, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., Senate Report 278, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Tribune*, August 11, 1856; see also *Transactions of Kansas Historical Society*, VIII, 308-309.



there was a large need for an extra supply. Robert Morrow of Lawrence, one of the leaders, now applied to Governor Grimes for additional arms; and his own statement tells what was accomplished:

[The Governor] said if I could get them without compromising him I could do so. I had letters to some good friends of Kansas; they got the keys to the arsenal, and in the night we loaded up three wagons with 200 stands of arms, and they were put into Colonel Eldridge's train and brought into Kansas.<sup>1</sup>

Geary in the meantime had been made executive of the territory. He promptly ordered out five hundred regulars, dispersed Richardson's army, and captured two hundred and forty free-state men under Eldridge, who claimed to be *bona fide* settlers and were set free by the Governor and permitted to keep their individual arms; but the other implements of war, enumerated in the following report by the United States marshal,<sup>2</sup> he retained:

Three boxes of navy-revolver pistols, all new, viz.: 6 six- and 5 five-shooters; 12 Colt's, navy size; 24 Colt's, navy size; 4 boxes fixed ball cartridges; 1 bag caps; a small lot rifle cartridges; 1 box, 10 Sharps rifles; 145 breech-loading muskets; 85 percussion muskets; 115 bayonets; 61 common sabres; 2 officers' sabres, 1½ kegs of powder; 61 dragoon saddles; 1 drum.

The party had also started with a field-piece, but on hearing of the approach of Cooke's dragoons buried the cannon in a well, where it remains to the present day. While the party was loath to give up these arms, its members had no intention or desire to resist Uncle Sam. A year later Governor Denver, rather against his will, was persuaded to restore this entire capture of arms to Eldridge and his men.

Very little has been found as to the arming of parties from Missouri and the South. Nearly all the pro-slavery fighting men came from western Missouri, which had long been the frontier, and whose inhabitants invariably possessed arms of some sort. The following extracts from W. M. Paxton's *Annals of Platte County* explain how some of the pro-slavery men secured arms for the invasion of Kansas:

Nov. 27, 1855. Liberty Arsenal was surprised and taken by sixty pro-slavery men, who took a large supply of arms and ammunition. Two wagon-loads were brought to Platte City and hid under the Baptist church, then just finished.<sup>3</sup>

May-20, 1857. A squad of thirty five men was raised in Platte, and crossed at Delaware, taking two brass six-pounders. They were organized as Missouri militia, and armed by the state. They went to Lawrence by way of Franklin.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 608.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County, Missouri*, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

When Jones and Atchison attempted to destroy Lawrence in December, 1855, their army of fifteen hundred invaders was partially equipped from the state armories at Independence and Lexington. Colonel J. M. Buford, who left Montgomery, Alabama, in April, 1856, with three hundred followers, came to Kansas unarmed. On leaving Mobile the members of the party were presented each with a Bible, intended as a rebuke to Beecher. Buford originally intended to have his men go armed, but gave up the plan in deference to President Pierce's proclamation of the previous February.<sup>1</sup> Each man carried only a revolver and a bowie-knife. The expedition reached Kansas late in April; and, under the pro-slavery administration of Shannon, Buford's men were promptly enrolled as members of the Kansas militia, armed, and paid from the territorial treasury.<sup>2</sup> Companies formed in Missouri were equipped in like manner from the Kansas armory. It was these troops that sacked Lawrence and later established themselves at Franklin, Fort Saunders, Hickory Point, and Bull Creek. During August and September they were driven from these fortified stations by armed free-state bands. But the arms issued to the Buford and Missouri companies were never returned. Geary seems to have suspected as much and called on Cramer, inspector-general, to report the disposition of territorial arms; the awkward position of the inspector is seen from his report, dated Leecompton, K. T., October 2, 1856, of which a portion reads:<sup>3</sup>

As I have stated to your Excellency a short time since, the arms were received here upon the eve of an outbreak, and were furnished the different corps of the militia in a hurried and informal manner, and the captains of the different companies never appeared at my office to give bond according to law. . . .

A large portion of the arms issued to the militia have been captured by the insurgents, though what number I have not been able to ascertain. . . .

Hoping the above may be satisfactory under the present circumstances, I respectfully submit it.

THOMAS J. B. CRAMER,  
*Inspector General, Kansas Militia.*

His Excellency John W. Geary.

A tabulation of the arms furnished to free-state settlers in Kansas, so far as can be ascertained, is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Walter L. Fleming, "The Buford Expedition to Kansas", *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*, IV, 174-175.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society*, IV, 592.

Date	Furnished By	Articles	Cost
May, 1855	New England Emigrant Aid Co.	100 Sharps <sup>2</sup> rifles and ammunition	\$3,000.00
August, "	New England Emigrant Aid Co.	100 " " " "	2,670.00
" "	Abbott	17 " " " "	425.00
Sept., "	Olmsted	1 howitzer " "	400.00
" "	Thayer	40 Millbury "	1,000.00
1855 and 1856	Cabot Account <sup>1</sup>	Sharps rifles, revolvers, etc.	12,443.63
Feb., 1856	Thayer and others	23 Sharps rifles	575.00
March, "	Beecher " "	51 " " "	1,275.00
" "	Thayer " "	4 breech-loading cannon	1,330.00
April, "	New York Kansas Committee	25 Sharps rifles and ammunition	943.37
July and August, 1856	National Kansas Committee	Arms and ammunition	10,000.00
August, "	T. W. Higginson <sup>2</sup> parties	Arms	364.38
" "	Massachusetts Kansas Committee	200 Sharps rifles	4,947.88
Sept., "	State of Iowa	200 muskets (value estimated)	4,000.00
Total,			\$43,074.26

The above list is far from complete. It probably contains some duplication; but it is under, rather than above, the true amount. Arms were furnished from Wisconsin and also probably by associations in Ohio; the town of Grinnell, Iowa, raised sufficient funds to purchase fifteen rifles;<sup>3</sup> similar reports were announced from other centres, but not on evidence sufficiently definite to be here included. The total amount raised for arms by the various Northern associations must have exceeded fifty thousand dollars. To this amount should then be added the value of arms carried to Kansas by private individuals; but the determination of such amounts does not come within the limits of this paper.

An examination of all the data herein given shows how extensively every section of the North was involved in supplying arms to the free-state forces in Kansas. In recent years various persons have been credited with the first honors in this business, but there is only one association that can claim first place—the directors and officers of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. These officers under oath denied that the company had ever sent arms to the territory.<sup>4</sup> Technically, this was probably true, as none of the funds subscribed for the company's stock was thus expended; but practically the company was directly responsible for arming Kansas emigrants. It was the company's agent, Robinson, who applied to its chief director for arms; it was the company's executive committee

<sup>1</sup> From Cabot account-book.

<sup>2</sup> From personal account-book of Colonel T. W. Higginson.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Tribune*, July 16, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> Serial 869, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., House Report 200, pp. 884, 886.

that voted to send the first hundred Sharps rifles sent to the territory; evidence is all but conclusive that these first hundred rifles were partially paid for from donated funds already in the hands of the company's treasurer; it was through the company's agents that these and other arms were purchased, and on them the bills were drawn; and finally the arms were consigned to the company's agents in Kansas and distributed under their supervision. Moreover it was the officers and friends of the company that supplied more than half the arms sent to Kansas, and sent them out in such season as to afford the maximum of protection to those fighting for the free-state cause; many of the arms sent out by other organizations either never reached the territory, or arrived too late to be of real service.

Were the New England Emigrant Aid Company and other organizations justifiable in sending arms to Kansas? Rather, would any other course have been weak and cowardly? The New England company probably understood the exact conditions in Kansas better than did even the administration in Washington. Each week scores of letters from every important point in the territory came to the Boston office, and the most important were carefully read to the directors by Secretary Webb at the weekly executive meeting. The gentlemen that constituted this directorate were sober, honest, patriotic men; they could hardly be called abolitionists. They had induced their friends and neighbors to go to Kansas; when the crisis came, they stood by their compatriots with manly courage and openly informed the President at Washington that they had sent arms to Kansas.<sup>1</sup> The policy adopted by the New England Emigrant Aid Company was indorsed and followed a year later by every Kansas aid committee in the North. The arming of the free-state settlers was not an act of aggression, but purely a measure for protection and defense. The winning of Kansas was a great and important victory for Freedom. Here the slave power received its first stunning defeat, a defeat in which Sharps rifles were decisive factors.

W. H. ISELY.

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, *Life of Lawrence*, p. 95.





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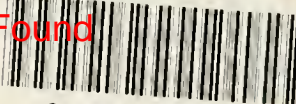
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