



THE ARABIA INCIDENT

PHILLIP R. RUTHERFORD

WITHIN a year of the founding of the New England Emigrant Aid Company as a means of helping secure Kansas to the ranks of the free states, the settlers whom it had assisted were begging the agents of the company for arms to defend themselves against their Proslavery rivals. From the beginning, the directors were adamant in their stand that the company could not become involved in supplying guns, even to their friends, but concluded that the members of the company, as private individuals, could do as they wished.

Dr. Samuel Cabot of Boston became head of this "private" gun-running group that in one way or the other soon involved almost all of the company's investors. These men saw no conflict, or claimed to see none, in their role as members of a group solely interested in helping Free-State men get to Kansas, and possibly making a profit in the bargain, on the one hand, and soliciting money for arms as private individuals on the other, even if the guns they were buying were being conveyed to Kansas for the very settlers that the company was sending. They were drawing a fine line between their

two endeavors, a line so fine that it blurs and disappears on close inspection. The events detailed here add further weight to the opinion that the members of the company realized that they were playing a semantic and sophistic game all along, even when they argued to all who would listen, including the United States senate and house of representatives, that they had ". . . never invested a dollar in cannons or rifles, in powder or lead, or in any implements of war."¹ Regardless of their convenient moral and political stand, money was quickly raised in response to the pleas of the Free-Soil Kansas settlers, and 100 Sharps carbines were purchased in May, 1855, and another 100 in August, and shipped to Kansas.

By the end of the year, the members of the aid company were well pleased with the impression that their carbines had made on the Missouri "border ruffians" operating in Kansas, this pleasure based, no doubt, on reports such as the one from James B. Abbott on November 3:

The arrival of your one hundred Rifles on the 1st Monday of Oct, the day of the Election call, by the (Mo) legislature,

Title-page photo: A shipment of 100 Sharps carbines like this one destined for Free-State settlers in Kansas was discovered and confiscated by Proslavery sympathizers on board the river steamer *Arabia* in March, 1856.

1. *To the Senate and House of Representatives, In Congress Assembled*, pamphlet by the executive committee of the New England Emigrant Aid Company in response to a report made to the senate by the chairman of the committee on territories.

had a most wonderful and Magic effect upon the Missourians, who came up to vote. The first noticeable change produced by the discovery of so many deadly weapons in town, was their bringing the voice down to a soft whisper from what was before more in accordance with a low coarse bullying desperado. Also there seemed to be a remarkable change in their feature from a high rum collar to a light pale and through the day after this occurrence you would have mistaken them for gentleman they were so affable and polite. Perhaps Dr. Cabot [a medical doctor] could explain the principle of this change.

Amos Lawrence, the financial father of the organization, stated in a letter of December 18, 1855: "Those shining pacificators Sharpe's Rifles—12 shots in a minute—in hands of good & true 'Free State' men, have wonderfully cooled the ardor of the border Missourians."² On February 12, 1856, he wrote, ". . . perhaps it was the proceeds of that money, which, more than anything, saved them [the Free-State men] last December. But now that the Missourians learn that their '800' Sharp's rifles was actually only 200, they are the more determined than ever to drive out our people."³

Obviously more guns, especially the redoubtable Sharps, were needed. On February 8 Eli Thayer, the original founder of the company, wrote to Dr. Cabot that he had had a note from Charles Robinson, the soon-to-be Kansas Free-State "governor," that an attack on Lawrence was imminent, and if the company was going to send aid, it had better hurry. Thayer further stated, "I am confident we will raise 100 Sharps rifles here within this week. Frances Wayland Jr. will keep you informed. 23 have been subscribed." On February 12 Wayland wrote Cabot,

General Pomeroy [the principal Kansas agent for the company] who left Worcester yesterday morning informed me that you were expecting to receive from various sources contributions to the fund for furnishing Dr. Robinson with rifles. He further informed me that you were to telegraph to him tomorrow at Hartford giving him the amount for which he might draw on you (at 30 days) in payment for rifles. I now write to you in fulfillment of my promise to him, that you may rely on receiving from me in the course of fifteen days \$1500—Fifteen Hundred Dollars.

2. Amos A. Lawrence to Giles Richards, "Amos A. Lawrence Misc. File," manuscript dept., Kansas State Historical Society. All unfootnoted references and quotations are taken from approximately 125 unpublished letters and documents now in the hands of the author. The majority are addressed to Dr. Samuel Cabot and were initially found for sale at a flea market in New Hampshire a few years ago. All direct quotations are as found in the letters with no attempt at spelling or punctuation corrections except where indicated by brackets. All emphases in the quotations are the original letter writers'.

3. Amos Lawrence to James Lawrence, February 12, 1856, "New England Emigrant Aid Co. Papers" ("NEEACP"), Microfilm Roll 4.

The money was no doubt a godsend to the perpetually money-short organization. Only about \$1,300 more had to be raised to buy the carbines. The extra money was either soon raised or very firm promises were made, as the following invoice shows (Sharps had already had some minor trouble in the past in their dealings with the aid company, and would have more in the future, so they wanted to be quite certain that they would get their money at the agreed upon time):

HARTFORD, CT., February 15, 1856⁴

GENL. SAML. C. POMEROY

To SHARPS' RIFLE MANUFACTURING CO.

For 90 Carbines, 32 bore, brown, & accts. @	
\$30	2700.00
10 dr 32 Bayt.	
attachmt. & accts @ \$32½ ⁵	325.00
	<hr/> 3025.00
Less 10% is	302.50
	<hr/> 2722.50
10 Sabre bayonets, @ \$5½	55.00
50M Sharps Primers, @ \$1½	56.25
	<hr/> \$2833.75

Cr

By Dft. this date @ 15 days sight on

S. Cabot Jr. \$2500.00

Cash

This amt. allowed as agreed .. 278.75—\$2833.75

Nos.

[The serial numbers of the guns followed.]

In a letter of the same date General Pomeroy informed Cabot that he had made a purchase of "one hundred Rifles bayonets-swords etc" and that Cabot should pay the Sharps company according to the terms. A postscript stated that they had already been sent to Springfield, Conn., in care of David Starr Hoyt.

Although Hoyt, a native of Deerfield, Mass., had been a hero in the Mexican War, he did not strike one of his acquaintances as looking much like a military leader, being "short, small, wrinkled," and totally insignificant in appearance, especially when he was wearing a worn-out buffalo coat he was fond of. But when he shed the coat, he was changed "from a

4. This is the correct invoice for the Sharps shipment involved in the Arabia incident, not the one listed by W. H. Iseley in his "The Sharps Rifle Episode in Kansas History," in *American Historical Review*, Lancaster, Pa., v. 12, no. 3 (April, 1907), pp. 546-566. The invoice he quoted is dated March 19, 1856, at least five days after the carbines were stolen from the steamboat. This same error has been perpetuated by Winston O. Smith in *The Sharps Rifle, Its History, Development and Operation* (New York, William Morrow & Co., 1943), pp. 14-15, and C. Mead Patterson in "John Brown's Sharps," *The Gun Report*, Akron, Ohio, May, 1959, pp. 21-25.

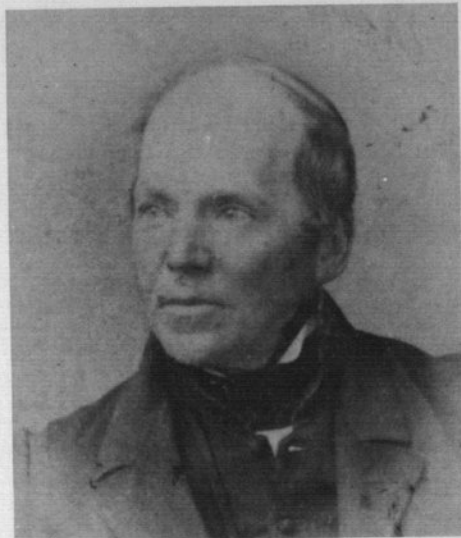
5. This original invoice conflicts with a statement by Richard E. Hopkins in *Military Sharps* (San Jose, Cal., 1967), p. 6, that the carbine and sword-bayonet was sold to "Lawrence in Kansas at a price of \$18.00."

clodhopper" to a hero. His low voice could warm "into a terrible earnestness, and his eyes shot lightning."⁶ Hoyt had been around. After the Mexican War, he settled in Chester, Ill., and left there in 1852 to hunt gold in California. Being a surveyor and civil engineer by profession, he joined a military expedition in June of 1853 that was mapping a northern route for the Pacific railroad. He then returned to Massachusetts.⁷

In the early days of February, 1856, Hoyt attended a lecture given by General Pomeroy to raise money for guns, met him afterwards, and discussed with him the best route for conveying arms to Kansas. On February 6 Hoyt wrote Pomeroy to tell him of a better plan than the one he had suggested at their first meeting. It consisted in packing the weapons in boxes bought from German emigrants and others made from rough barnyard fences, shipping them to southern Illinois, buying good horses and ramshackle wagons, covering the boxes with ragged cloth, and "emigrate to Santa Fe or the Great Salt Lake via southern Missouri" or steer northerly and "accidentally touch at Lawrence." After discussing the merits of his plan, Hoyt volunteered to accompany the guns for only his expenses.⁸ Whether he decided to go to Kansas just as a lark, in keeping with his soldier-of-fortune image, or whether he had strong feelings for the cause of a free Kansas is debatable. If, however, his vitriolic descriptions of the Proslavery Missourians in his later letters are any indication, he was firmly in the Free-State camp.

Amos Lawrence had great faith in Hoyt, as he wrote to Robinson in Kansas on February 14: "Mr. Hoyt will hand you two pistols, from which please take that which you prefer, and accept it as a present from me. . . . Hoyt seems to be a young man of the right stamp for service. His pluck lies deep down. Give him the other."⁹

It was probably on February 19 that Hoyt had a final meeting in Worcester, Mass., with Wayland, Dr. Calvin Cutter, Thayer, Martin Stowell, and possibly Dr. Cabot to talk over the



Amos Lawrence (1814-1886), leading Boston merchant and philanthropist, was treasurer of the New England Emigrant Aid Company.

final plans for the trip. Upon finishing the discussions, he met William B. Parsons, John Dean, and a Mr. Pickett, who were to be his companions on the expedition and under his command, and William Crutchfield, who was going with Dr. Cutter to Kansas by another route. After giving them a proper, rousing revolutionary speech, he went with them to a warehouse where they began packing six breechloading cannon furnished by Thayer (furnished so hastily that they had not yet been fitted with percussion locks or proof-fired), 54 Hall military rifles, 100 Sharps carbines, sabre bayonets, percussion caps, tape primers, a good supply of cartridges and cannonball moulds.¹⁰ Possibly having a premonition of trouble, Hoyt removed the breechblocks of all the carbines, numbered them, and packed them in trunks belonging to Cutter and Crutchfield.¹¹ They would be carried by stage, so if Hoyt were robbed, "the scoundrels will

6. William B. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," *Kansas Magazine*, Topeka, v. 2, no. 1 (July, 1872), p. 43.

7. Geo. H. Hoyt manuscript, "Geo. H. Hoyt Misc. File," manuscript dept., Kansas State Historical Society.

8. David Starr Hoyt to S. C. Pomeroy, February 6, 1856, "NEEACP," Roll 1.

9. Amos Lawrence to Charles Robinson, February 14, 1856, *ibid.*, Roll 4.

10. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," pp. 42-43.

11. This information, in Hoyt's own hand, disagrees with Smith's opinion (p. 15) in *The Sharps Rifle* that it was Dr. Cutter's idea to remove the breechblocks. Also Samuel A. Johnson's contention in *The Battle Cry of Freedom* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1954), p. 165, that the locks, rather than the breechblocks, were removed, is incorrect. He undoubtedly based his statement on an incorrect one made by Amos Lawrence in a letter of April 25, 1856, to Giles Richards, "Amos A. Lawrence Misc. File."

make but little by the operation." In addition, the Hall rifles and four of the cannon were sent separately.

Not everyone was apprehensive: Dr. Cabot wrote Bradford Wood on the 16th that ". . . one lot has started & I feel very sure will get through safe."¹² Edward Everett Hale, the well-known Unitarian clergyman, author, and member of the organization, did have reservations, however. After talking to Hoyt before he left for Worcester, he feared that something might go wrong and suggested an alternate route.

On February 20 Hoyt telegraphed Cabot from Springfield, Conn., by the Union Telegraph Company that he had engaged three men (Dean, Parsons, and Pickett) and that "part goods go tomorrow." (The men dealing in the various arms shipments were usually quite circumspect in their speaking of weapons, as they feared the "slave dogs" would find them out. In fact, they did not even trust the mail and so used women's bustles to carry their important correspondence.) The next day, he again telegraphed that he was starting with his men, "one hundred goods and two Thayers goods." Also on the 21st are two other communications to Cabot, one from Wayland and another from Hoyt by way of S. P. Pond. The first simply told that Hoyt's party got off safely with "100 rifles and 2 cannon, being in all 13 packages" and goes on to discuss future arms purchases. The second again informed Cabot that Hoyt started at 2:00 p.m. with "100 goods and 2 of Thayer's cannon" and that the other four cannon would be expressed to St. Louis.

On February 22 Hoyt wrote Dr. Cabot from New York, telling of his party's safe arrival, discussing freight rates, shipping by boat, and enclosing a secret code that he had devised for telegraph use. He also said, correctly as it turned out, "I shall get to St Louis probably without difficulty and there may have to repack and disguise more thoroughly even than I expected." They did repack in St. Louis, putting every two former gun crates into one new one, resulting in nine "tool chests."¹³

Before leaving New York, Hoyt instructed Parsons to have some business cards printed for "L. A. Morton & Co., dealers in brass and

iron castings, mill machinery, belting, etc.; also, agents for Kendall's celebrated lubricating oil, 314 Elizabeth St., New York." A blank space was left on the cards on which they wrote "F. E. Hunt & Co., St. Louis, Mo." While L. A. Morton did not exist, Hunt did, as the St. Louis shipping agent for the aid company.¹⁴ In fact, Dr. Thomas Webb, chief secretary and workhorse of the company, had already prepared for Hoyt's arrival in St. Louis by sending a letter of introduction for him to Hunt and Company on February 14.¹⁵ Webb sent them another letter of introduction on February 28, this time for S. N. Simpson, another of the company's Kansas agents, stating that he was to be given any boxes addressed to Hoyt.¹⁶ This communication was doubtlessly necessitated by the uncertainty obvious in Hoyt's February 22 New York letter as to just how the arms might arrive, due to possible problems enroute.

At St. Louis Hoyt departed from the plan that he had suggested to Pomeroy on the 6th, as he indicated he might do in his letter from New York: "I must study hard at St Louis on the information there to be obtained before I decide on the means of travel beyond." The ice having cleared from the river while he was there was probably the cause for his change of plans, as it would be much easier and quicker to get the weapons to Kansas by boat than overland. He, Parsons, and at least one of the other two men boarded the river steamer *Arabia* after having their boxes billed as "freight" by Hunt,¹⁷ using more business cards, marked this time "D. S. Hoyt, Leavenworth." As the boxes were being loaded, the *Arabia's* clerk, remarking on their weight, said to Hoyt, "What have you got in those boxes, Sharpe's rifles?" Hoyt replied, "I wish I had," as the rest of the party held their breath, but nothing more was said.¹⁸

All went well for a few days, until a letter Hoyt had written his mother was either stolen from his cabin or out of his pocket, a letter that he claimed later that he had "not determined to mail at all." The letter was given to the captain of the boat, who stood on top of a dining table

14. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," p. 43.

15. Dr. Thomas H. Webb to F. A. Hunt, February 14, 1856, "NEEACP," Roll 2.

16. Webb to F. A. Hunt & Co., February 28, 1856, *ibid.*

17. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 165.

18. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," p. 44.

12. Cabot to Wood, February 16, 1856, "William Barnes Collection," manuscript dept., Kansas State Historical Society.

13. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 165.

while reading it to the assembled passengers and crew, all of whom were of Proslavery persuasion. The part of the letter that interested them was the following:

STEAMER "ARABIA,"
MISSOURI RIVER,
March, '56.

DEAR MOTHER:

We have thus far been successful, and the guns and ammunition are safe in the hold. The boat is crowded with Border-Ruffians, but they are of the better sort and treat us well, little knowing who we are. They are entertaining angels unawares. I am very glad that I took the buffalo-coat, for it has been very cold.

Yours, affectionately,

STARR

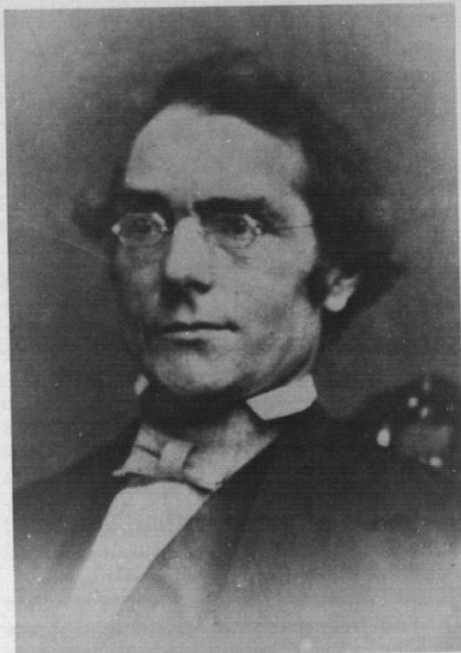
The reference to the coat was what tied the cargo directly to Hoyt, as everyone on the boat had seen him wearing it. Hoyt and Parsons were seized together, as they occupied the same cabin,¹⁹ but not before Hoyt had a chance to destroy papers that would have linked the aid company, at least indirectly, to the arms. He wrote Cabot on April 2:

"Your name is not known in Missouri in connection with this matter. . . . I threw letters & papers accounts journal and receipts etc overboard into the Missouri River to save your name and the names of others from falling into violent hands. And no name East of the Mississippi River has been obtained from me or my papers or party to my knowledge.

One might say the passengers did not act precipitously, as they democratically voted on what should be done with their prisoners. The decision was to throw the weapons and their owners in the river. Attempting to brazen it out, Hoyt told them that they could throw the guns overboard, but it would be difficult to throw the owners over, as they lived in Lawrence. The passengers felt that Parsons and Hoyt would do just as well. Some had meanwhile gone below to check out the cargo and came back bearing a Sharps, missing, of course, its breechblock. Parsons said later that they must have never seen a breech-loader before, as they asked how to fire it. The passengers were told that they would be glad to demonstrate it, if someone would go to Lawrence and get a breechblock.²⁰ They quickly con-

19. *Ibid.*

20. The mostly Eastern-educated Free-Soilers had little respect for the "dumb" and "crude" Missourians and Southerners, ignoring the fact, of course, that was later proved in the Civil War, that



Thomas H. Webb (1801-1866) was chief secretary and workhorse of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. He helped organize many companies of settlers for Kansas territory.

cluded that this was a "d_____ Yankee trick" and then decided to put Hoyt ashore and make him walk. Charles Keurney, a passenger from Westport, Mo., prevailed on the captain to carry Hoyt on, but the group insisted on him signing a surrender of the arms, which he refused to do, even when they threatened to kill him. Evidently word of this incident somehow preceded the steamer, for when it docked in Lexington, Mo., it was met by a thousand

their adversaries had grown up with guns and were able to use them with facility. Parsons's anecdote sounds a little too much like Mrs. Charles Robinson's diary entry of late March, 1856, to be believable. The guns would be worthless to the ruffians "for the slides are understood to be in another place, and it will puzzle them quite as much to use a rifle open at both ends, as it did the one they threw away in December as useless because there was no ramrod!"—Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 96. Nichols mistakenly says that Mrs. Robinson's comment was made only on the basis of rumor because no shipments had been seized until late June when a \$4,000 shipment of Sharps was stolen. The error on the value of the Sharps is no doubt based on Lawrence's letter of April 25, 1856, previously mentioned. The amount could only have been \$4,000 if the cannon were included.

armed men, who had determined to hang the gun runners. A committee of six Lexington men was sent aboard to negotiate. Hoyt and his men would be handed over to the mob if Hoyt would not surrender the arms, but again he refused. After the weapons were landed, the committee finished its business by giving *their* receipt: "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," and following was a list of the property.²¹ As he stated to Dr. Cabot in his April 3 letter, Hoyt finally accepted the receipt to keep from ". . . having to fight for [my] life against 60 to 70 passengers on the boat and the city of Lexington besides, while [I] had only *two* men besides [myself] on whom [I] could rely and [I] separated from them." When he arrived in Kansas City a few hours later, all he had to show Pomeroy was the receipt, two cannonball molds, and six cannon breechpins that he had somehow managed to save.

The Proslavery men now had, besides the cannons and accoutrements, 100 new Sharps carbines that were useless without their breechblocks. Demonstrating that they might not be quite as backwards when it came to weapons as the Free-Soilers assumed, one of them contacted the Sharps company in Hartford. On July 3, about three and one-half months after the robbery, Cabot received a letter from James M. Burell, who had been informed, that

The Sharps Rifle Co have received letters from Missouri, asking them if they will send out slides etc for 100 Rifles. A reply has been sent, that it cannot be done. The Rifles must come here to be fitted etc etc etc. If they come here, *I shall know it at once*. I do not think they will. If you wish any more information upon the subject as to who wrote etc etc etc, I will procure it. . . . When bad men unite, the Good must combine! Kansas must be saved.

Evidently Cabot asked for more information, for another letter soon came from Burell, dated July 21: "Nothing more as yet about the Rifles. The letter of enquiry as to whether the Co. would furnish the 'slides' was signed 'E. Winsor' and dated 'Lexington,' Missouri." The slides were never shipped to Missouri, and the rifles were never returned to the company. The company's reply that they had to have the guns to hand-fit the slides was a complete fabrica-

tion. Sharps carbines were made of interchangeable parts, and new breechblocks would have slipped right in. This incident does help to demonstrate the closeness with which Sharps worked with the aid company, as they were excellent customers during 1855 and 1856.

The arms were seized probably on March 12 or 13 and aid company headquarters in Boston was immediately notified by Hunt and Company. On the 14th, when the letter of notification was written to Webb from Hunt, details of the robbery were still sketchy. Hunt said that a lawsuit would recover the guns, and it should be initiated in the name of Hoyt. He warned to be more cautious in packaging in the future and added a postscript, saying he was sending a clipping from the paper describing the incidents and ended by stating, "such gross carelessness is inexcusable."²²

The news of the theft must have been quickly telegraphed to Boston, because also on the 14th Dr. Cabot wrote R. A. Chapman, a Springfield, Conn., lawyer, asking for legal advice. Some of his questions were as follows: since the rifles were in his name, should the suit be in his name or should he sell out (on paper) to someone not connected to the aid company and let him bring suit; where should the suit be filed; were Hoyt and the other three men witnesses enough or were others needed; if the *Arabia's* officers were involved, could the steamer be seized and be made liable for damages? Cabot also told him that the suit could be more important than the weapons:

Feeling as I do that if this occasion be properly used our arms may fight better for Kansas at Lexington Mo than they could at Lawrence KT I cannot neglect any . . . effort without risking my future peace of mind. It seems to me that if we can demonstrate to the country and to the world that Western Mo is under the control of a band of highwaymen & that the laws of civilised lands are inoperative in that region we take a long step towards a rapid change in these fillibustering attempts & give a chance for the law loving & lawabiding citizens of Mo to speak out boldly & put down these Ruffians.

Chapman wrote back to Cabot on March 17. He said that since he was not familiar with Missouri law, he hesitated to answer the questions, but he did recommend that Cabot should retain his brother-in-law Samuel Knox of the law firm Knox and Kellog in St. Louis: ". . . his sympathies are strongly with us."

²² F. A. Hunt Co. to Dr. Thomas H. Webb, March 14, 1856, "NEEACP," Roll I.

21. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," pp. 44-45.

He did, however, advise that the suit should be in Hoyt's name rather than in Cabot's.

The aid company wanted the arms back, but was afraid that it might be embarrassed by them, as it had always claimed, of course, to have had no hand in shipping guns to Kansas. Amos Lawrence piously but revealingly said, "If we were not officers of the Emigrant Aid Co (wh. takes no part in such matters and ought not) we cd get them by a suit: but whether we can do it by proxy remains to be seen."²³ By April 3, Hoyt had evidently received instructions from Cabot, as he had already seen Knox.

Mr. Knox of the firm of Knox & Kellog (lawyers) to whom I have shown the papers I brought down the river says the case is perfectly good on our side-against the Lexington men and he thinks also against the steamboat for 1 year. He advises to bring two suits; one in the U. S. Circuit Court at St. Louis against the six Lexington men who gave me the receipt for damages and value of the Arms, etc *Not to replevy* the property, as we should have to give security for twice the amount ourselves [which the Company was in no financial condition to do]. 2nd a suit in the court of common pleas against the Boat. . . . Mr. K. . . . says you can sue as owner or I can sue as agent in possession. . . . I am perfectly willing it should be carried on in my name if it is thought best. . . . This suit or these suits I am told can be conducted without my being present. I might be in Kansas or in Massachusetts The Missourians are very anxious to prove the arms to have been sent by the Emigrant Aid Society and if I should sue they would be disappointed in not obtaining any information on the subject.

By the same letter, it can be seen that the robbery was even worse than first reported, for in addition to the carbines, cannon, accoutrements, and ammunition, "the large kegs and some other apparatus of 6 cannons" were also lost.

Hoyt's ardor was not dampened, however, as he further wrote, "Still the Free State men & women & children of Kansas *are in danger* and *need* all the *Arms* and *assistance* that can possibly be obtained. 2,000 Sharps Rifles and 1,000 U. S. Muskets with *Bayonets* are needed by the free state men *today* with as many cartridge boxes, bullet moulds, and good supply of powder & lead." In a fiery letter of June 11, he attacked Pomeroy for his nonresistance policies at the sack of Lawrence on May 21 which led to the surrender of other unissued Sharps carbines and the Abbott howitzer,²⁴ a field piece which had been donated by Fred-

erick Law Olmsted, noted author and designer of Central Park in New York. He called for ". . . not necessarily Sharps Rifles but old U. S. Muskets with *Bayonets* & cartridge boxes at a cost of perhaps 4 dollars apiece. Sharps Rifle is better but costs too much. . . . I should like to buy 20,000 U. S. Musket caps (hat caps) in St Louis for \$1.60 pr thousand. We need a ton of Rifle powder and 4 tons of lead."

For a time, feelings ran high within the company over the loss of the guns. James Burell, writing Cabot from Cleveland, Ohio, on May 28, said:

Excuse me for seeking an outlet for my feelings by writing to you. . . . There is a general feeling that mistakes have been made by attempting to send arms etc via Missouri River to Kansas. Gov. Reeder [former governor of Kansas territory] told me in February, that if the attempt was made the arms etc would be taken by Missourians. To say the least, he has proved to be a true prophet. I blame no one. Men who have taken their lives in their hands & gone to suffer for Liberty in Kansas will not be blamed by me even if they should mistake. . . . It is even a relief to have the privilege of finding fault. . . . No more mistakes *can safely be made in this matter.* . . .

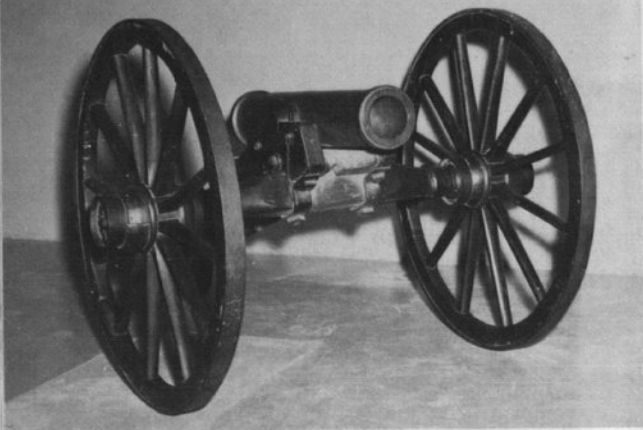
On June 18 S. N. Simpson attacked Hoyt in a letter to Cabot, no doubt remembering the lost guns, but decrying something else. "Mr. Hoyt the Sharps Rifles man should not be trusted. He talks against your best men and has no consideration." He was undoubtedly referring to Hoyt's opinion of Pomeroy's capitulation at the destruction of Lawrence.

The law suits were soon initiated in Hoyt's name, and according to Parsons; 50 percent over the value of the guns was collected from the company owning the *Arabia* due to the connivance of her officers in the robbery.²⁵ Hoyt never lived to see the return of the weapons. He went to Lawrence from St. Louis and joined the Free-State militia in which he was commissioned major. On or about August 12 he was on some kind of mission to the Proslavery-held "Fort Saunders," about 12 miles southwest of Lawrence, which was to come under immediate attack by Free-State forces. Although numerous people claimed to know the circumstances of his mission and his death, they do not agree. One said that he went to stop the fighting; another said that he went to reconnoitre; another said that he went as a spy, pretending to have a sack of grain to grind at

23. Amos Lawrence to Giles Richards, April 25, 1856, ²³Amos A. Lawrence Misc. File.

24. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 159.

25. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," p. 45.



Abbott howitzer surrendered by Samuel C. Pomeroy, principal Kansas agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Company, during the sack of Lawrence May 21, 1856, in an attempt to avert greater calamity.

the mill; another said he went to try to arbitrate the fight; and another said he went on a "friendly mission."²⁶ Parsons said that he went in under a white flag and while returning under its protection was murdered by the men with whom he had parleyed. "Such was the boasted chivalry." As Parsons has the date wrong (he says June) and was probably not there, he no doubt gives a hearsay account.²⁷ Regardless of the intent of the mission, Hoyt seemed to believe that his Masonic affiliation would protect him. One account of his death which has the ring of truth, if not the reason for his mission, is related and signed by George H. Hoyt, a kinsman of his.

He [D. S. Hoyt] was a high Mason, and had been assured by U. S. officers that his mission would be attended by perfect safety. He went alone and unarmed, and it is said was received by the Ruffian commanding with outward manifestations of respect of the high toned and chivalrous invaders. [A man] by the name of Bucher, from Jackson County Missouri, followed him from the camp and having shot him through the back & disfigured his face with nitrate of silver,²⁸ partially covered his mutilated body with dirt, in which condition it was shortly afterward discovered by friends. . . . History would not be "vindicated" were these brief notes abandoned without the remark, that one of his assassins was shot near Westport Missouri, in 1861 by a near relative of the subject of this narrative. The assassin was named Phillip Bucher, and he died while describing the murder of Major Hoyt. The writer of these lines was present.²⁹

The killing of Hoyt so enraged the Free-State men that their leaders had difficulty restraining them from attacking "Fort Saunders" immedi-

26. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 199.

27. Parsons, "David Starr Hoyt," p. 45.

28. A letter from an unknown person to Edward E. Hale on August 24, 1856, "NEEACP," Roll 1, states "The head of poor Hoyt was so battered by clubs or the breech of muskets to be just recognizable."

29. Geo. H. Hoyt manuscript, "Geo. H. Hoyt Misc. File." The last line of this quotation seems to imply more than it says.

ately, instead of waiting until all was in readiness.³⁰

With the death of Hoyt, the suit to regain the guns was going to be more difficult. On March 6, 1857, Knox and Kellog wrote to Cabot, advising him to settle out of a court. The attorneys had talked to the lawyer for the Lexington men, and they had agreed to return the arms and pay all the court costs, if Cabot would give "a bond of indemnity against all liability to the owner of the property in question." If the settlement was not made, the Lexington men would claim in court that they acted as peace-makers in the matter and took the arms at Hoyt's request to save him and his property from the fury of the mob. Knox and Kellog said that they were certain that the defendants could prove this contention by half the citizens of Lexington, whether or not it happened to be true. Also, it would probably be impossible to ascertain who actually stole the guns, as the witnesses would undoubtedly place the blame on "irresponsible men or men who are dead or have removed out of the States," and too, it might be difficult to prove that Cabot actually owned the arms with Hoyt dead.

On August 25 Cabot sent a letter to James B. Abbott, enclosing another to be delivered in reply to the lawyers. In it he told them that they had his letter of a year ago stating how much he was willing to compromise (which must have been little). If the robbers were unwilling to accept his terms, he wanted the suit to immediately proceed for the return of the arms and for damages for the delay. If the guns had already been returned, Abbott was Cabot's agent, and they could be given to him.³¹

30. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 199.

31. Cabot to Abbott, "Abbott Collection," manuscript dept., Kansas State Historical Society.

The suit continued, and after other correspondence, the law firm wrote on November 16, 1857, that the suit in the U. S. circuit court had been dismissed, and the rifles would soon be returned, with the damages appraised by three disinterested parties.³² Feet must have been heavily dragged, for Knox and Kellog wrote Abbott on July 17, 1858, that they did not yet have the rifles, but when they got them, they would deliver them to M. F. Conway of Lawrence, another agent of the company. Although they had heard nothing lately, they had been assured that the return agreement would be carried out.³³

Naturally Cabot and the aid company did not trust the defendants, and for good reason. Besides knowing that they were spiritually bankrupt because they were Proslavery and that they were thieves because they had stolen the guns, they had also reneged on the agreement stated in their receipt to Hoyt, that the guns would be returned upon the request of the governor of Kansas territory. Governor Geary, the successor to Shannon, had signed an order for them in 1857, and they had not been returned.³⁴

Finally at St. Louis in 1859, the guns were returned to the aid company. They remained in that city for a while, as Cabot was reluctant to send them to Kansas because of the public uproar over John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry and the fact that Brown and his men had had with them 200 Sharps carbines that were at least loosely connected to the aid company.³⁵ M. F. Conway, at the urging of General Pomeroy, finally convinced Cabot that even if the weapons were no longer needed in the territory, they would be safer there than in St. Louis. Also, they might be needed southwest of Kansas,³⁶ no doubt referring to the company's tentative plans to colonize Free-Soil

settlers in Neosho (Indian territory) and West Texas. The guns remained in Conway's hands until at least February 13, 1860, when he testified before a U. S. senate committee investigating the Harper's Ferry raid.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, upon obviously being reunited with their breechblocks, which had not been inserted in nearly four years, Conway turned the guns over to James Montgomery, a local "Jayhawker," who used them in the later trouble around Fort Scott.³⁸

Thus ended a chapter in the history of "Bleeding Kansas." Whether or not the loss of the *Arabia* arms had any real effect on the outcome of the struggle is difficult to say; it is evident, however, that the weapons shipments did not stop, only their manner changed. The aid company purchased another hundred carbines on March 19, and yet another hundred on June 16, 1856. These guns were not sent out in large shipments as had been done previously (with at least one disastrous result, as we have seen) but were handed individually to the settlers leaving from the East who were going to use them.³⁹ Using this method, there was never another major loss of weapons by the company. As to their contention that they had never been involved in purchasing any weapons to arm the Free-State Kansas settlers, the facts seem to prove otherwise. If only one or two members had, on their own, sought to raise money for guns and sent them to Kansas entirely independently of the company, the company's assertion could be accepted. But when there is provable, systematic involvement by many members and agents of the company on all levels, their denials may be discounted. Like the 200 Sharps carbines before them and like the 200 after them, the arms which were stolen from the *Arabia* belonged to the New England Emigrant Aid Company.

32. Knox and Kellog to Abbott, *ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. Isely, "Sharps Rifle Episode," p. 559.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 559.

37. *Senate Committee Report 278* (Serial 1040), 36th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 201-213.

38. F. B. Sanborn, "The Early History of Kansas," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Boston, Third Series, v. 1 (1907-1908), p. 227.

39. Johnson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 165-166.