

Kansas Statehood and the Frontier Guard

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Kansas became the 34th State in the Union on January 29, 1861 when President James Buchanan signed the Kansas Admission Bill.

President-Elect Abraham Lincoln left his home in Springfield, Illinois on February 11, 1861 to travel to Washington D.C. for his inauguration. Lincoln was in some considerable danger as he traveled, and at least three assassination plots are known. Lincoln's security was under the watchful eyes of Allen Pinkerton, who must have been beside himself as Lincoln made at least 70 "whistlestops" on his journey - and speeches at many of them. In Philadelphia on February 11, Lincoln held up the new American flag with the new Kansas star. Lincoln ended up arriving at Washington, by carriage, in the middle of the night on February 23, in disguise and under cover, when a plot to stab him at the railroad station was discovered.

Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States on March 4, 1861.

On April 4, 1861 James H. Lane and Samuel Pomeroy were elected as the first United States Senators from Kansas. Lane and Pomeroy, as well as many other Kansas political aspirants seeking Federal appointments, traveled almost immediately to Washington. There they became known as the "Kansas Desperadoes."

On April 12, 1861 Fort Sumter, S.C. was attacked, and surrendered to secessionist forces two days later.

Thus Lane, Pomeroy and the others arrived at Washington as things began to heat up. Virginia passed a secession ordinance on April 17, and Maryland was in revolt. Washington, the United States Government and the White House were thought to be vulnerable as they were surrounded on all sides by secessionist forces.

Even Washington had its share of secessionist sympathizers. Lane and Pomeroy were almost mobbed in front of their hotel in Washington when they persisted in making speeches on a soapbox in favor of Lincoln and the new administration. But Lane quieted the crowd when he screamed "I have a hundred men from Kansas in this crowd, all armed, all fighting men, just from the victorious fields of Kansas." The cocking of the several pistols was said to be convincing.

On April 18, 1861 General Winfield Scott and Secretary of War Cameron asked Lane to use his Kansas men for the protection of the President. Lane was appointed General of the new Frontier Guard. That night all Kansas men who could be located, plus whoever else could be persuaded, were marched to the White House and set up headquarters in the luxurious East Room. There, under the spectacular gaslights of the East Room, the Frontier Guard donned uniforms, armed themselves with new muskets and began drilling. Not all of the recruits had previous military experience, and the mysteries of military accoutrements were the source of much glee. The portly Pomeroy, who could not find a belt big enough to cover his ample girth, described the scene as "a blending of masquerade and tragedy, of grim humor and realistic seriousness...a combination of Don Quixote and Daniel Boone altogether impossible to describe."

The Frontier Guard remained in the White House for about a week and Lincoln remained safe. About 120 men served in the Frontier Guard; an estimated one-half were from Kansas.

The Frontier Guard was then assigned to guard the shipyards and bridges over the Potomac River into rebellious Virginia. One Frontier Guard "reconnaissance" into Virginia was to result in what is said to be the first capture of a rebel flag. Lane had the flag (we are told it was a "Virginia-Palmetto Southern Star") stretched across the street in front of his hotel with a large placard attached proclaiming "Captured by the Frontier Guard."

The Frontier Guard received the personal thanks of President Lincoln, and disbanded about April 26, 1861. Lane, made quite bold by his military and political successes, was back in Kansas by early May and giving some thought to resigning his Senate seat and organizing an invasion of the southern states. He was urging Kansans to "pitch" into western Missouri especially Westport, Kansas City, Independence, St. Joseph and Weston.