

Blue Lodges ^[1]

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New England Emigrant Aid Company. Image by Barry McGee, 2006 courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society. ^[2]

See also: [Exodusters](#) ^[3]; [Farmers' Alliance](#) ^[4]

Blue Lodges were secret groups organized to defend slavery and the "southern way of life" in response to the [Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854](#) ^[5]. The new law, sponsored by [Senator Stephen A. Douglas](#) ^[6] of Illinois and supported by [President Franklin Pierce](#) ^[7], allowed settlers in the Kansas and Nebraska territories to decide for themselves whether to permit slavery, striking down the [Missouri Compromise of 1820](#) ^[8], which had designated Missouri as the legal boundary of the institution.

The 1854 legislation prompted groups on both sides of the issue to hurriedly recruit homesteaders for Kansas. The [New England Emigrant Aid Society](#) ^[9] sent hordes of free-state settlers to the territory, whereas the pro-slavery forces had less success in finding southerners, other than Missourians, who were willing to move there. Consequently, pro-slavery leaders from Missouri organized Blue Lodges in North Carolina and other southern states where their supporters met secretly to raise money and recruit volunteers to rush to Kansas and vote illegally as settlers. Promising "free ferry, a dollar a day, and liquor," the Blue Lodges set up bogus communities, which were little more than places for the phony settlers to gather just before an election. Blue Lodge members wore a bit of hemp in their lapels and used the password phrase, "Sound on the goose."

In the 1855 election, illegal pro-slavery voters from Missouri and other states captured the first Kansas territorial legislature and legalized slavery. Free-state settlers, knowing they had been cheated, met in Topeka to draft an antislavery constitution and elect their own governor and representatives. Kansas now had two governments, neither legitimate. Rather than call for a new, legal election, Pierce chose to support the pro-slavery territorial legislature. The sporadic bloodshed between the opposing groups quickly escalated into gun battles, rampant pillaging, torture, and murder. "[Bleeding Kansas](#)" ^[10] foreshadowed the terrible destruction to come when the nation fell into civil war in 1861.

Reference:

Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (2004).

Additional Resources:

[Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, etc.](#) ^[11]

State Library of Kansas, encyclopedia, Blue Lodge: #

PBS: Bleeding Kansas: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2952.html> ^[10]

Image Credit:

New England Emigrant Aid Company. Image courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society. Available from <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/new-england-emigrant-aid-company-sign/10231> ^[2] (accessed July 6, 2012).

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Authors:

[McGee, Barry](#) ^[17]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[18]

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Links

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