

Henry Hiatt

While Martha Parker acknowledged that she has no *proof* that the Steele, Jessee, and White families were involved in the Underground Railroad, and that they fall into that gray area mentioned in the introduction, there can be no doubt about the life work of free-thinking, freedom-loving abolitionist, Henry Hiatt.

In his book, *My Belief and Reasons Therefor* [sic], Henry writes:

The remembrance of no part of said work gives me more pleasure than that of making two trips to Topeka in a close-covered wagon, in which was secreted each trip two colored men – slaves – on their way to Canada. Starting at sunset, leaving them at Colonel Richie's at midnight, and returning home by sunrise in the morning, Richie hauling them to the next station, and so on.

Henry was born December 30, 1815, in Warren County, Ohio, the son of Anna Clary and Silas Hiatt, both strict Quakers. Although raised a Quaker, attending meetings regularly, he was eventually excommunicated from the Church, for he had a habit of questioning and arguing about anything he could not understand and had many discussions with the Elders about policies or habits he thought senseless. Despite only two months of formal schooling, Henry was an avid reader and was taught at home. His great interest in education, fostered by his Quaker upbringing, would come to fruition later in life when he founded a school in Kansas.

While a young man of twenty-one, Henry took an active interest in the Washington Temperance Society, organized by six reformed drunkards who, with the aid of a few early converts, were having great success in lecturing throughout the States and obtaining simple pledges of abstinence from the use of all intoxicating beverages. Henry chided the Quaker Church for turning against the Temperance Movement (with few individual exceptions). He charged that in the first years they would neither open the doors of their churches for meetings nor in any way countenance total abstinence. This was his first lesson against the church. Years later, Henry admitted that the church did an about-face and took hold of the Temperance cause. Henry saw education as the only remedy to remove the mountains of superstition and ignorance about stimulants prevalent during the time. He advocated that people settle the question in their own way by a referendum.

During this same era, the anti-slavery question followed Temperance as another and still more disturbing issue in the States, both north and south. Henry states: "Having inherited a deep sympathy for these in bonds as being bound with them I could do no other than give a portion of my life work and means to assist the slaves of the South in obtaining their freedom."

Henry and Fanny's five eldest children were born in Indiana. On April 26th, 1856, when Henry was twenty-seven years of age, he left Indiana and moved with Fanny to Kansas. He made arrangements with a party coming overland to bring the livestock, and he brought the family and all other possessions by boat from Cincinnati, Ohio. They landed at Independence, Missouri, near Westport. The home they

had built in Cincinnati was knocked down in sections and brought with them to Bloomington, Kansas Territory, where it was reassembled approximately ten miles southwest of Lawrence, between the Wakarusa River on the north and Rock Creek on the south. He selected that location for its abundance of large and valuable timber, and here Henry Hiatt formed a partnership with P.R. Berkau and Shubal Swain. Together they erected their steam sawmill.

The site of the sawmill can be seen on the 1857 Territorial Map in the northeast quarter of Section 23 (now a part of the Bloomington East Park operated by the Army Corps of Engineers).

On June 2, 1892, Henry penned a lengthy letter to F. C. Adams, Secretary of the State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas:

Your communication of January 12 was duly received, but have delayed having doubts of my ability to recollect circumstances and dates transpiring more than one third of a century since, that could at all interest the reader of today. It is true I witnessed and was cognizant of many exciting and some tragical deeds during my first two or three years' residence in Kansas, some of which you doubtless have on record.

He tells of being annoyed by the border ruffians, first encountering them while hauling overland from Kansas City his household goods, cottage home and sawmill machinery to Bloomington. His friends had advised him not to risk his life and team, the latter which he would surely lose. He told them he never carried arms and would give them no cause to abuse him, and besides, they needed the machinery at the sawmill.

Starting from Independence with a team of oxen, drive by his 12-year-old son, and a team of horses, the Hiatts stayed at the Indian Blue Jacket Hotel about half-way and arrived in Kansas City the next day without disturbance from the ruffians. Kansas City merchants also warned him of the dangers of passing the border ruffian camp. The party came within two miles of the camp and stopped to rest at a Baptist church, which had a well. While there, a group of ruffians, having been routed from their camp by the Governor, came marching up and halted to drink at the well, where they lounged around for half an hour before starting for Missouri.

I mingled with them freely, and endeavored to hire a couple of them to help in the construction of our mill. I found them pleasant and sociable fellows, who under more favorable circumstances would make good citizens. My load consisted of a sheet iron smokestack, 45 feet long and 2 feet in diameter, flattened at one end with a slight angle to stand on the furnace, giving it the appearance of a huge cannon.

Later on my way home, I met five ruffians each armed with a carbine, two revolvers and a large bowie knife. They were returning from a marauding trip in the Territory. Had I been at all frightened, I would have received rough treatment. As soon as the leader was near enough to speak, he began swearing as none but a ruffian could, saying I had the d---d biggest cannon he ever saw. "Yes siree," I replied at once, "just give me enough ammunition to load it, and I can do up the whole business at once." After a big haw, haw, he said, "By God, that would kill every d---d abolitionist in the state in one shot. You can go on, you are all right on the goose, "and feeling sure I was thoroughly pro-slavery allowed me to pass unmolested.

Soon after this a company of some fifty ruffians took possession of a house partially fortified (Ft. Saunders) by a stone fence, some three miles distant from my residence on the high prairie on Washington Creek which was lined with a hundred acres of brush and young timber, affording large facilities for hiding or escape. They remained in possession of said house a month or more in July and August 1856, doing little or no mischief that I now recollect until they were visited by a Major from Massachusetts, who was stopping in Lawrence, his name was Starr Hoyt. He was a guest at my house, and being a freemason, he believed he could visit their camp and be permitted to leave without injury, and would doubtless have succeeded if all at the camp had been freemasons. He was followed by two or three who murdered him and partially buried him within a mile of the camp, where he was found three days later and brought just past my house where I saw but could not have recognized him.

The neighbors were immediately aroused and some 400 armed men were soon en route for the camp, led by General Lane, determined to punish the murderous invaders of the territory. The guards were on the lookout and saw Lane's army approaching and vacated the house with the greatest possible celebrity, and dispatch, leaving behind them provisions, muskets, trunks, robes, and blankets in the house and scattered throughout the thick brush, under cover of which they escaped.

Before said camp was routed, old John Brown of Harper's Ferry notoriety stayed at my house overnight. Certain rumors just received led our milling company to anticipate an attack that night from said camp, but our fears were allayed by the presence and advice of old Mr. Brown, who said he would show us how to make a substantial fortification in twenty minutes by rolling into proper place a few large saw logs in our mill yard, behind which three or four armed men with loaded shotguns or muskets could defend the place against attacks...In the latter part of August, 1856, the roads through which Lawrence obtained her supplies from the river were blocked by border ruffians, so it became necessary for me to go to Lecompton for flour. Arriving there at noon on Saturday, I found the town full of border ruffians and I was made a prisoner in half an hour and thrust into a low tent with half a dozen others previously arrested.

Mr. Hiatt relates in detail his week's imprisonment at Lecompton and his brush with death at the hands of the ruffians. General Lane and 400 armed men started for Lecompton to rout the border ruffians who were securely holed up in the basement of the new capital. The National Guard was sent to intercept General Lane and prevented a bloody fight. When a Capt. Hampton released the prisoners, one border ruffian was thwarted in his attempt to shoot Henry Hiatt and two other prisoners by the misfire of a gun cap. Through the efforts of Capt. Hampton, Henry Hiatt regained his team with a shower of abuse from the man claiming it. He arrived home with his flour on Saturday evening, having spent a week in detainment. While Henry was imprisoned in Lecompton, his wife and mill partners, becoming alarmed about an army of some fifty men marching through in the direction of the Hiatt house, packed the more valuable household goods in trunks and boxes and buried these in the corn field.

While Henry fought against slavery and all its evils, he was dismayed at the actions of some of his free-state neighbors toward a few neighboring pro-slavery families. A French-Canadian family by the name of LaHay had settled in the Sigel community (north half of Section 17 and south half of Section 8) on the Wakarusa River. The two half-sections were located between Yates' Crossing and McGee's Crossing. Toussaint LaHay, a man of wealth and influence, built a nicely furnished house consisting of three or four rooms, plastered, painted, and set upon a raised foundation. The house was one of the nicest in the country at that time, possibly built as early as 1855. Henry and Fanny Hiatt attended the wedding of LaHay's daughter in that home. Sometime in 1856 a party of free-state men robbed the LaHay home of furniture and clothing and burned it to the ground. Toussaint was not intimidated by this outrage, and immediately put up a log-pole hut with a dirt floor, where he lived until he built a new frame house, better than the first.

Henry was very indignant about this action by the free-state settlers. He had called on the LaHay family earlier and expressed his desire to be neighborly with them. Henry told Toussaint that it was only the circumstances of their upbringing that made one an abolitionist, and the other a pro-slaver. Toussaint was pleased with the overtures of friendship, and they got along well together.

In another incident, on the night of September 7, 1856, some of Henry's free-state neighbors went across the Wakarusa about three miles, drove a three-year-old steer out of a herd belonging to a pro-slavery man, and butchered it. Soon after, another party of free-state neighbors, among them A. Curtis (who lived just south of Hiatt and was once a member of the legislature) and Alex Love, went at night into the house of Mrs. G. W. Ward, an elderly woman. Her husband, who had been elected to the First Territorial Legislature by Missouri invaders, apparently had fled the house under duress and was seeking protection elsewhere; thus Mrs. Ward was alone in the house and was ordered out of it by the party of free-staters. They threw her bed and household furnishings into a pile on the floor and lit it on fire, first selecting for themselves such articles of bedding as they could carry away. Mrs. Ward, being powerless to protect herself, witnessed the burning of all her effects, and then walked miles to the house of friends for shelter and protection. The burning was followed by plundering: the carrying off of all the chickens, the butchering of a pig or two in the pen, and the theft of the only cow, which was offered for sale in the neighborhood; the invaders also divided into a share apiece his green corn in the field. The latter was suddenly yielded to the owner when he returned in time to gather it in the fall. Sometime after the fire Mr. Ward returned and rebuilt the house, remaining a year or two until he could sell it, going south before the war. Hiatt wrote in a letter to the Kansas State Historical Society on February 6, 1897, that atrocities committed by free-staters "...tended more or less to thwart efforts of those honestly laboring for freedom tempered with justice, and correspondingly strengthened the hands of those laboring to extend the institution of slavery."

In 1857, Henry sold his sawmill interest to his partners and moved about seven miles to the southwest. Shortly after selling his interests, the mill burned down and all he ever received for his share was enough native sawed lumber to build his new home, which was two stories and quite large for a pioneer house of those times. Most of its interior was finished with walnut; the doors on a large cupboard over the fireplace were made of solid walnut slabs. Henry's new home (on the southeast quarter of Section 2) was also visited by John Brown, who overnighted there while waiting for a broken wheel on his wagon to be replaced. He left the broken wheel with Henry, who years later gave it to the Kansas State Historical Society. Unfortunately, the home was completely destroyed by fire in December 1938, and all records, relics and many antiques were lost. The home was occupied the last fifteen years by Hiatt's only bachelor son, Ollie.

The home was on the stage line between Lawrence and Emporia and carried a sign HIATT HOUSE, as it was a regular stop for a change of horses and rest for the passengers, as well as for meals. Water was not plentiful, so horses and other livestock were taken to a spring more than a mile to the north, near Elk Creek, usually by the Hiatt daughters.

Besides establishing the town of Twin Mound, building a mill, and erecting buildings for the post office and store, Hiatt recognized and proclaimed the need for educational facilities. He drew up the necessary documents to found the Twin Mound Harmonic College, the goals for which would embody the following principles:

AN EDUCATION WHICH SHALL BE HARMONIC; WHICH SHALL CULTIVATE THE BODY AS WELL AS THE MIND; TEACH HEALTH, EQUAL TO MORALS; AND RIPEN THE WHOLE BEING INTO STRENGTH, EFFICIENT USEFULNESS AND HAPPINESS.

AN EDUCATION WHICH SHALL BE OPEN TO ALL, AND WHICH SHALL BELSS ALL, REGARDLESS OF PECULIARITIES OF NATURE, OR DISTINCTION AND PREJUDICES OF MEN; WHICH SHALL BE AS FREE TO THE COPPER HUE OF THE WEST, OR THE DARK SKIN OF THE SOUTH, AS THE PALER FACE OF THE EAST OR NORTH, AND WHICH IN PARTICULAR, SHALL EVERY WAY PLACE WOMAN BY THE SIDE OF HER EQUAL BROTHER, MAN, AND THUS HELP ATONE FOR THE LONG WRONG DONE HER.

AN EDUCATION WHICH SHALL TEACH SCIENCE, AND NOT SECT; FACTS AND LAWS, AND NOT DOCTRINES; NATURE, AND NOT CREED; TRUTH, AND NOT AUTHORITY; THE LIVE PRESENT, AND NOT THE DEAD PAST AND

AN EDUCATION UNTO FREEDOM, WHERE NO MIND SHALL BE SHACKLED, OR A THOUGHT FETTERED, AND NO ASPIRATION REPRESSED; BUT THE WHOE SHALL BE SELF-MOVED AND SPONTANEOUS, AND ROUNDED OUT TO A FULL AND PERFECT INDIVIDUAL....

WHAT ENEMY OF SLAVERY WILL LIVE HERE IN A TERRITORY JUST WRESTED FROM ITS GRASP, AND IN THE CONFINES OF A STATE SOON TO BE RESCUED FROM ITS THREATS?

Henry offered several selling points to get friends to support the fulfillment of his dream. He stressed the ideal setting in the County of Douglas, Territory of Kansas, with its scenic mounds, its proximity to a great stage route, soon to be superseded by a railroad. Hiatt truly believed that all in all, it promised to be a profitable investment. Unfortunately, his dream to establish a college failed, for reasons not fully known. Perhaps Henry's vision for an educational institution at this location was not supported as a result of his views, some of which were rather unorthodox for this period in history. Also, he was in competition with the university at Lawrence. Whatever the reason his college at Twin Mound never came to fruition, his interest in public education never faltered. He gave land for a one-room stone schoolhouse to be located just across the road from his home. Built in 1865, it replaced an earlier log cabin school.

In 1880 the mill, store, post office and all their contents were destroyed by fire. The only things salvaged were the two "mill stones" of Vermont granite which now mark the grave of Henry Hiatt in the Twin Mound Cemetery, where he was placed after his death on February 27, 1900. Abby lived on to the age of ninety-two before dying on April 20, 1928.

Henry closed his book, *My Belief and Reasons Therefor*, with the following sentiment:

It has been my desire through life to so live and work that I might leave this world better than I found it, and feel assured that in some degree success has crowned my efforts. Numerous mistakes have been made and errors committed during a long and eventful life, which was a natural result of my heredity and environments, but the amount of sorrow and suffering was small when compared with the large amount of comfort and enjoyment realized through life. And I am content to return my mental and physical body to their original elements to replace the substance and nourishment required to build up and sustain through life my mental and physical organization.

I have finished my work. It has been done well, in accordance with the mental and physical capacity which I alone could use. I shall rest in peace. My last advice is this: Look after and aid those who are in need.

Friends, farewell,
HENRY HIATT
(date unknown)