

By the Kansas State Historical Society

TERRITORIAL CHARACTER: JOHN BROWN

John Brown was a radical abolitionist. He felt strongly that slavery was wrong and should be abolished. He was a controversial character. He justified violence to bring an end to slavery.

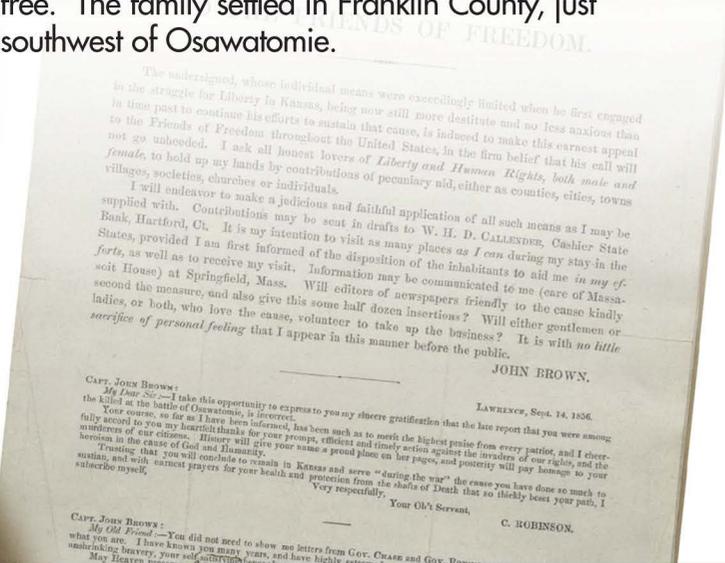
What did John Brown do before he came to Kansas Territory?

John Brown was born in Connecticut but he grew up in Ohio. His family was deeply religious and his father strongly opposed slavery. As an adult, Brown moved around the eastern portion of the United States. He worked as a farmer, tanner, wool salesman, and land speculator. He never was financially successful. He married twice and was the father of twenty children.

No matter what was going on in John Brown's life, he found time to work against slavery. He worked to protect runaway slaves from their owners. Brown planned to lead a war to free all slaves.

Why did he come to Kansas Territory?

Five of John Brown's sons had moved to Kansas Territory. The Kansas-Nebraska Act had given the people of Kansas the right to decide on the issue of slavery in the territory. Proslavery forces in Missouri were crossing the border trying to make Kansas a slave state. John Brown and his sons saw an opportunity to make Kansas Territory free. The family settled in Franklin County, just southwest of Osawatimie.





The artist Samuel Reader painted this picture of himself (far right) meeting John Brown and his son and leading them to a camp on Pony Creek.

What was his role in Kansas Territory?

John Brown became a national figure because of his actions in Kansas. It was here that he used violence to help stop the spread of slavery.

Lawrence was the center of much of the free-state activity. When pro-slavery forces attacked the city, Brown chose to retaliate. Brown and his men attacked proslavery settlers along Pottawatomie Creek. They dragged five men from their homes and brutally killed them. Brown continued to participate in skirmishes against proslavery forces. When Missourians attacked the town of Osawatomie, Brown defended the city. This gave him the nickname, "Osawatomie Brown."

John Brown had been helping slaves long before he came to Kansas Territory. But in Kansas, Brown was able to participate in the border warfare between Kansas and Missouri. Brown attacked two Missouri farms. He took the farmers' property and freed their slaves. Brown took those slaves over a thousand miles to Canada to see that they were freed.

John Brown continued his fight against slavery after he left Kansas Territory. He led a raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. He and his men wanted to get guns to give to slaves. He was caught and convicted of treason. John Brown was executed, becoming a larger-than-life figure.

**JOHN
BROWN**

1800 born

1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act

1855 came to Kansas Territory

**1856 Pottawatomie Creek
Massacre**

**1857 attacked two proslavery
farms in Missouri**

**1859 left Kansas Territory for
last time**

**1859 died due to
hanging**

1861 Kansas statehood