

By the Kansas State Historical Society

TERRITORIAL CHARACTER: DAVID ATCHISON

David Atchison was a U.S. Senator from Missouri. He supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The act allowed the people of Kansas to decide on the issue of slavery in their state. Atchison was pro-slavery. He wanted Kansas to become a slave state. Atchison never lived in Kansas but actively supported the proslavery forces in the state.

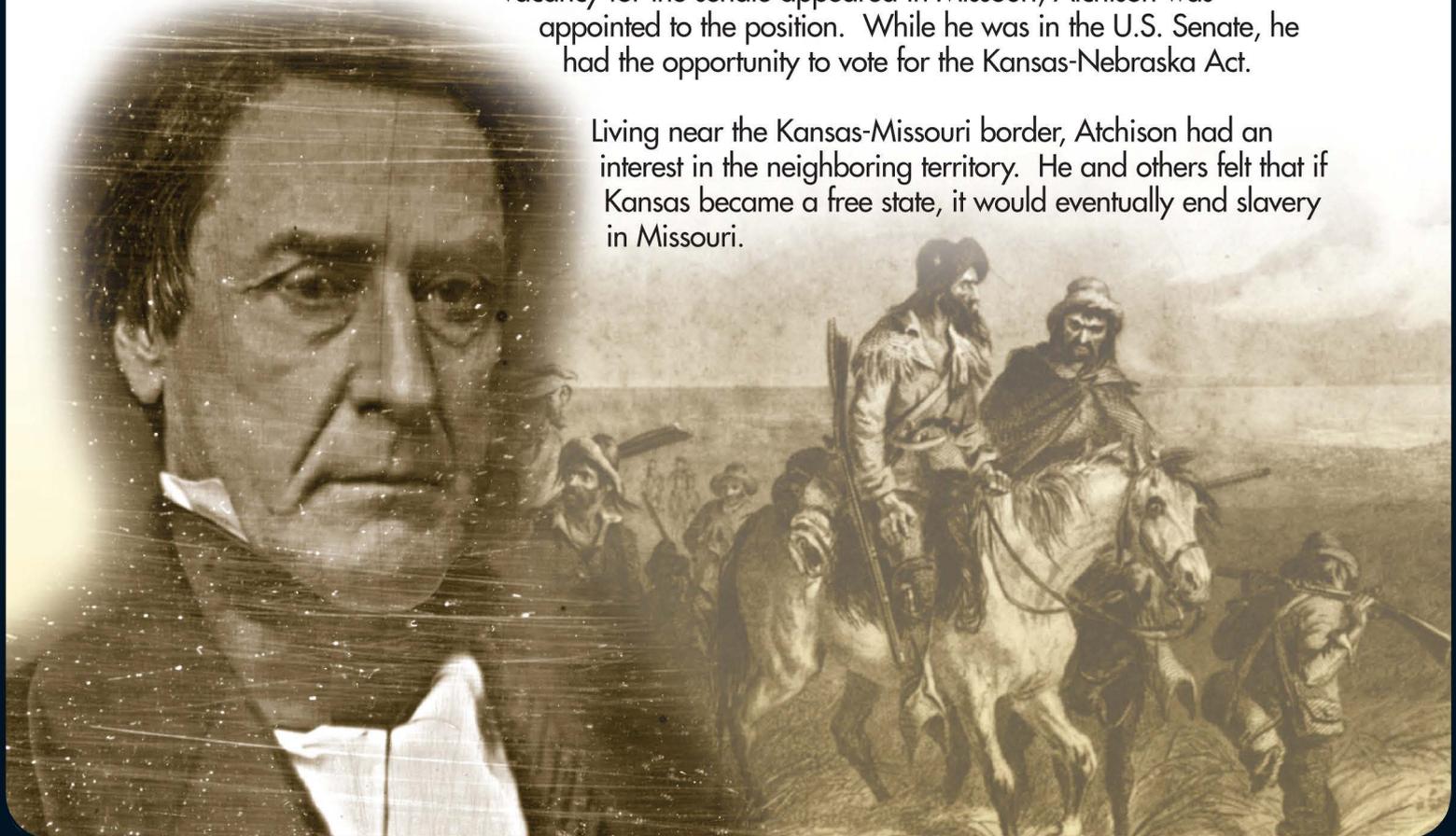
What did David Atchison do before Kansas became a territory?

David Atchison was born and raised in Kentucky. He became a farmer and a lawyer. Eventually, he moved to western Missouri. In Missouri he served in the state legislature. Later he became a judge then a U.S. senator.

Why did he have an interest in Kansas?

Originally, U.S. Senators were appointed rather than elected as they are today. When a vacancy for the senate appeared in Missouri, Atchison was appointed to the position. While he was in the U.S. Senate, he had the opportunity to vote for the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Living near the Kansas-Missouri border, Atchison had an interest in the neighboring territory. He and others felt that if Kansas became a free state, it would eventually end slavery in Missouri.





DAVID
ATCHISON

1807 born

"Old Kickapoo" is the name given to this cannon that was used by proslavery forces.

What was his role in Kansas Territory?

Once Kansas Territory was open for settlement, many western Missouri towns formed secret organizations. These "self defense" organizations, as they were sometimes called, wanted to see slavery spread into Kansas. Atchison and his partner, Benjamin Stringfellow, traveled from town to town recruiting proslavery Missourians to help them in Kansas.

Stringfellow was a fellow southerner who had moved to western Missouri. He also was a lawyer and politician. Atchison and Stringfellow recruited and supported the "border ruffians." This was the name given to Missourians who crossed over the border to vote in Kansas elections. This was illegal. It is estimated that Atchison and Stringfellow recruited 5,000 proslavery Missourians to cross the border.

The voting fraud that was encouraged by Atchison and Stringfellow led to the first legislature of Kansas being proslavery. This was called the Bogus Legislature.

1830 moved to Missouri

1843 appointed U.S. senator
from Missouri

1854 border ruffians first vote
in Kansas elections

1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act

1855 Bogus Legislature created

1861 Kansas statehood

1886 died