HISTORY MADE THERE.

Famous Leavenworth Hostelry Built by Southerners.

Topeka Capital.

The Planters' House in Leavenworth, one of the oldest hotels in Kansas, was sold at auction this week. The sale recalls border days and war times, for there is probably no other hostelry in the West that has been the scene of as many picturesque and historic events. Once a four-story brick building of fresh and imposing appearance, today it is deserted and dismantled, with windows and doors nailed up. In the early days and during the period of heavy traffic by steamboats on the Missouri River it prospered and made money for its proprietors, but gradually the steamboats withdrew before the encroachments of the railroads and with the disappearance of steamboats went the popularity of the old Planters'.

The hotel is situated on streets known in territorial days as Main and Water streets, within a block of the levee and close to the mercantile houses of ex-Gov. Thomas Carney and others, where wagon trains were fitted out for the old Santa Fe trail and the plains. The site of the hotel gives a fine view of the river and the bottoms of Platte County. It was the second hotel eoected in Leavenworth, the first being the Leavenworth House, at the corner of Main and Delaware streets. The Leavenworth House was looked upon as a free State or abolition hotel, and those who patronized it were supposed to favor making Kansas a free State. Southerners and pro-slavery advocates looked upon it with disfavor and finally their dislike of the house resulted in an organization to build a Southern hotel to be called the Planters' House.

In November, 1855, a subscription list was started by H. P. Johnson, known as "Hog" Johnson, who was killed during the battle of Morristown, in 1861, while commanding the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. One condition at the head of the subscription paper was that the "hotel should be controlled by Southern men and on exclusive Southern principles." When this paper was presented to Territorial Democrats it met with strong opposition and they refused to contribute. Among the number was H. Miles Moore, the pioneer from whom was secured much of the information in this article. Mr. Moore and Mr. Johnson had a heated discussion over the anti-abolition provision and their differences of opinion came near being settled with pistols.

Enough money was secured to make a good start, and Mr. W. H. Russell, of the wagon freighting company of Russell, Myers & Waddell, furnished the remainder. The main building was erected in 1856, and the hotel was run on "exclusive Southern principles," that is, no known Free Soilers were received as guests, until 1858, when it was sold to Len T. Smith and Jey Rice. The latter still lives in Leavenworth. Messrs. Smith and Rice were from Michigan, and Free Soilers. They ran the hotel seven years and made money, except during 1863, when there was a great drought. The policy of the new proprietors was to entertain all comers, pro-slavery or abolitionists, provided they paid their bills and acted like gentlemen. When they announced their free-for-all policy they lost from both sides for a time. The abolitionists were mad because they accepted pro-slavery men as guests, and the Southern sympathizers were offended because Messrs. Smith and Rice were at heart Northern abolitionists. But the house was run in first-class style and it soon had plenty of patronage.

The presence of two classes of guests, each bitterly contemptuous of the other, gave use to a unique plan of conducting a bar. The barroom and billiard hall were in the basement and two kinds of political bartenders were on duty night and day. One was an abolitionist, the other of course was pro-slavery, while a "free nigger," as Mr. Rice puts it, broke the ice and did a porter's work. By this method the Planters' caught the trade of both sides. When a pro-slavery man came in and sunk his knife down in the top of the bar and shouted, "I can whip any man north of Mason and Dixon's line!" the drink dispenser told him that was the talk and encouraged him. A Northern radical who could whip any man south of the dividing line was encouraged in the same way by the abolitionist. All manner of talk was acceptable, but the line was drawn, Mr. Rice says, when trouble broke. The offender, regardless of politics, was sent down the stone steps at the south entrance to the basement.

Many notable men were entertained at the Planters' House. Stephen A. Douglass made his Kansas Territorial speech from the balcony of the hotel. Abraham Lincoln was a guest there when he came West later, but he spoke in the old Sedgewith Hall.

While in Leavenworth a few months practicing law, William T. Sherman, afterward the famous general, and Thomas Ewing stopped at the Planters'. One of the things, aside from getting little legal business, that disgusted Gen. Sherman with Kansas was the way elections were conducted and political questions discussed around the hotel. Gen. Sherman and Jim Williams, who prides himself on being colonel of the "Fighting Niggers," rescued a fugitive slave from some Missouri border ruffians and he was convinced at once that he was not cut out for political or social leadership in Kansas, and he left soon afterward.

Mr. Rice says that often it seemed as though there was nothing but politics in the Territory, and no discussion was started that did not end at the Planters'. A like condition prevailed in regard to fights. If one was started on Fifth street, it was concluded at the Planters', where a crowd would gather to see it out. If the winter times were lively, trappers, wagon trainmen, and people from the surrounding plains gathered in Leavenworth and elections were held on the slightest pretext, often merely for the attending excitement.

One of the most exciting incidents in the history of the Planters' House was the capture and liberation of Charley Fisher, a slave who ran away from his master in Kentucky. Fisher was employed in the Planters' House barber shop when a pro-slavery man who knew that he was a runaway, notified his master, and the latter came on from Kentucky to take him back. Fisher was arrested under the fugitive slave law, and hot blood arose at once between the abolitionists and Southerners. The abolitionists refused to allow Fisher to be placed in jail pending a hearing before a United States commissioner. After much parleying it was agreed that two abolitionist and two pro-slavery men should guard Fisher in a four-story room in the Planters' House until a hearing could be had. At 1 o'clock in the morning of the first night a dozen abolitionists entered the hotel to take Fisher away. The guard refused to give Fisher up, and barricaded the door. Not to be outdone, the abolitionists battered down the door and the barricade and then Fisher refused to go with them.

There was high feeling the following day, and threats were made that unless Fisher was surrendered the hotel would be burned. A company of abolitionists went to Kickapoo and captured the old brass cannon, Kickapoo, from the Pro-Slavery Rangers of that place, who were taken unawares and did not have time to gather. The cannon was brought close to the Planters' House and unlimbered, and to protect the property Fisher was hurried away secretly under guard. During the recess in Fisher's hearing before the commissioners the next day the United States marshal, James MacDowell, was called to the rear of the courtroom and the prisoner was hustled downstairs and away in a buggy at hand for the purpose. He was not recaptured.

A notable night at the Planters' was the joint debate between Gov. Ranson and Mark Parrott. Great preparation was made for it, and instead of speaking from the balcony of the hotel, a special platform was put up. Mr. Rice did not like the platform idea, feeling that the lumber might be used for another purpose before the night was over. In this he was right. Parrott opened the debate, and there was turbulence during his speech, which was fiery, and in closing he worked his partisanship up to a high pitch. Shortly after Gov. Ranson began speaking a rush was made and the platform was broken down and torn to pieces. The doors and windows of the lower part of the hotel, or barroom side, were smashed and a fighting mob took possession. Capt. Tough, who had a record in those days as a fighter, and who is now a well-known resident of Kansas City, was stopping at the hotel. Mr. Rice had asked the captain to remain near the hotel that night, as he feared the debate might end in a "rough house." When the melee was at its height Capt. Tough, who had been sleeping in his room, slid down the banisters, a pistol in one hand and a long knife in the other, and called out: "Stop instantly or I'll make this a slaughter pen." The captain's words calmed the warriors and they left the place in haste.

During the winter of 1862 a number of officers recruiting for the Second Kansas Regiment were at the hotel. Nearly every night for a week pistols and boots were stolen from their room, which was No. 27. A negro porter was finally caught in the act, and it was decided to give him a bad scare by pretendings to hang him. Placing a rope around the boy's neck they fastened the end to a lamp hanger and stood the boy on a table. One of the soldiers, contrary to the programme, kicked the table from under the boy, who fell nearly to the floor stiff and unconscious. The soldiers thought that he was dead and concluded to dispose of his body under the ice in the river. Mr. Rice met them carrying the negro down stairs wrapped up in a sheet, and asked them what they had. They replied "A dead nigger." In going down the high stone stairway on the west side of the hotel the soldiers slipped and fell and the jar brought the boy back to consciousness thereby saving his life.

It was at the Planters' that Col. D. R. Anthony and C. R. Jennison held their impromptu duel. They exchanged a number of shots, and the only man hurt was a frontiersman named Woods, who started up stairs with half a dozen others to get out of the way of the bullets. When near the top Woods was hit in the neck, fell and seriously hurt, and on being picked up remarked: "It's a damn careless way they have of shooting around here."

Mr. Rice tells of another shooting bee between Col. Anthony and Bob Miller, which ended in neither being hit. And one of the hottest election riots that ever took place at the Planters' was between partisan friends of this same Col. Anthony and Jim MacDowell during one of their contests for mayor. That night all the fixtures in the barroom were destroyed and the dining room was badly damaged.

While the war was in progress the proprietors had much trouble with Cy Gordon's guerrillas. The river was not as wide then as now, and Gordon,s band would gather on the sandbar and shoot at Col. Anthony's building and the Planters', often breaking windows. When the guerrillas were around guests were not put in the east rooms.

Another wild night at the Planters' was when a mob of Leavenworth Germans tried to lynch a man named Gordon who had murdered a German in Denver. The murdered man belonged to a secret society, and members of the same society in Leavenworth decided to take the law into their own hands. Gordon had been arrested by Sheriff Meadows, of Denver, and the officer was aboard an overland coach with his prisoner when the mob cut the traces and tried to take Gordon. Meadows resisted and finally got his prisoner back to the Planters' House, where he was guarded during the night by a committee of fifty citizens.

The last tragedy at the Planters' was the killing of Dan Smith, a brother of Len T. Smith, one of the proprietors of the hotel by Lattin, on March 17, 1879. The men quarrelled over a horse and began to fight. Smith used a hatchet, while Lattin had a pistol. Smith was shot in the breast and Lattin was cut in two places. Lattin was a brother to a former mayor of Lervenworth. After an exciting trial he was acquitted.

But if there was occasional fighting around in the hotel there was also plenty of fun. A couple of stories concerning the early day proprietors was printed in an Eastern paper about fifteen years ago. Here is the first one:

"We landed in Leavenworth in 1866," says Col. Weldy of the Galena Republican, in a reminiscent way, "and secured employment with the Kansas Stage Company whose office was under the Planter's Hotel, at that time an hostelry for your whiskers, and under the management of the big three, Jep Rice, Len Smith, and John Lambert, took second place to none in the West. As we recall that day we smile in contempt at the would-be sports of this day. Here is a sample of the way Jep Rice played them: He owned a pair of steppers that would cash for a thousand and a half any day. He harnessed them to a rig in harmony with the team and took an Eastern friend who was his guest for a drive to the fort. On the way back—remember this was after they had spent a few hours with the officers at the fort—Jep was bragging about the jumping qualities of his team. Said he, 'They can clear that eight rail fence (there were rail fences along the government reserve in those days) as slick as scat.'

"'Impossible,' said his friend.

"'Don't believe it eh' said Jep. 'Well, I'll prove it,' and heading the team for the fence, perhaps a hundred yards distant he plied the lash and they struck that fence at a forty-mile-an-hour gait. The team got over; they leaped into the air and fell over, but the buggy caught at the fourth rail. A more complete wreck was never witnessed and when the men extricated themselves Jep turned to his companion, and, with characteristic coolness, said, "Well by gosh, that's the first time they have failed. Must have had their heavy shoes on.'

"Expense cut no ice when the old Leavenworth gang started in to play a joke."

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