

Lecompton Constitution Hall: Civil War Birth Place and Where Slavery Began to Die

In these activities using primary and secondary sources, students will investigate the role of Lecompton and Kansas in the start of the Civil War and how historic events are reflected in maps created at the time of those events. Students will also investigate the criteria for a location being named to the National Register of Historic Places and how those places preserve history.

National History Standards

United States Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction

- Standard 1A The student understands how the North and South differed and how politics and ideologies led to the Civil War
 - Explain how events after the Compromise of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision in 1857 contributed to increasing sectional polarization.
 - Explain the causes of the Civil War and evaluate the importance of slavery as a principal cause of the conflict.

C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

- Civics
 - D2.Civ.1.6-8. Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and the media in a variety of governmental and nongovernmental contexts.
 - D2.Civ.5.6-8. Explain the origins, functions, and structure of government with reference to the U.S. Constitution, state constitutions, and selected other systems of government.
 - D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.
- Geography
 - D2.Geo.3.6-8. Use paper based and electronic mapping and graphing techniques to represent and analyze spatial patterns of different environmental and cultural characteristics.
 - D2.Geo.4.6-8. Explain how cultural patterns and economic decisions influence environments and the daily lives of people in both nearby and distant places.
 - D2.Geo.7.6-8. Explain how changes in transportation and communication technology influence the spatial connections among human settlements and affect the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices.
- History
 - D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
 - D2.His.5.6-8. Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.
 - D2.His.10.3-5. Compare information provided by different historical sources about the past.
 - D2.His.12.6-8. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and additional sources.
 - D2.His.14.6-8. Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.

- D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

Setting the Stage

Information from the Lecompton Constitution Hall website at

<http://www.lecomptonkansas.com/constitution-hall-state-historic-site/>

Constitution Hall, erected by Samuel Jones in 1856, became the place where the Kansas Territorial Government convened. In the fall of 1857 (October 19), the Lecompton Constitutional Convention met and drafted a pro-slavery constitution in the upper story of the building. The downstairs was rented as the federal land office and private law offices.

During 1857 this building was one of the busiest and most important in Kansas Territory. Thousands of settlers and speculators filed claims in the United States land office on the first floor. They sometimes fought hand-to-hand for their share of the rich lands that were opening for settlement. The government was removing the Native Americans from Kansas to make their lands available to whites.

Upstairs the district court periodically met to try to enforce the territorial laws. Most free-state people refused to obey these laws because they had been passed by the pro slavery territorial legislature. This resistance made law enforcement nearly impossible for territorial officials. Time after time the territorial governors called out federal troops from Fort Leavenworth or Fort Riley to maintain order.

In January 1857 the second territorial legislative assembly met on the upper floor. Although still firmly pro slavery, this group removed some of the earlier laws that their antislavery neighbors opposed.

The Lecompton Constitutional Convention met that fall in this same second-floor assembly room. The purpose of the convention was to draft a constitution to gain statehood for Kansas. Newspaper correspondents from across the country gathered to report on the meetings. Many Americans feared a national civil war if the convention could not satisfy both pro slavery and antislavery forces. Regrettably, compromise proved impossible because pro slavery men dominated the convention. They created a document that protected slavery no matter how the people of Kansas Territory voted. This was intolerable for their antislavery opponents, who refused to participate in what they considered to be an illegal government. Eventually the Lecompton Constitution was defeated at the national level. It never went into effect.

Instead, free-state forces rallied their supporters. They gained control of the territorial legislature in the October 1857 election. Two months later this new legislature was called into special session to deal with critical territorial problems. They met in the same Lecompton assembly hall that their political enemies had controlled only a few weeks before. Here they began to reform the laws of Kansas Territory according to their own beliefs. That work continued during later legislative sessions. In 1858 the assembly was moved from the pro slavery capital of Lecompton to the free-state town of Lawrence.

After 1894 Constitution Hall was owned by Odd Fellows Lodge number 413. Over the years they shared their lodge room with the Grand Army of the Republic, the Masons, and the Modern Woodmen of America. Rebekah Lodge number 698 took over responsibility for the building in 1946. This women's group conducted their social and services activities here until Constitution Hall became a state historic site in 1986.

Locating the Site

- *Nebraska and Kansas* map - <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/305825>. Map of the Kansas Territory which stretched into portions of present-day Colorado and the Nebraska Territory which stretched to the Canadian border. This map is provided through a co-operative project between the Lecompton Historical Society and the Kansas Historical Society.
- *Sectional Map of the Territory of Kansas* - <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/305793>. A sectional map of Kansas Territory compiled from field notes in the Surveyor General's Office. County boundaries, cities, rivers, and Indian reservations are identified on the map. This map is provided through a co-operative project between the Lecompton Historical Society and the Kansas Historical Society.

The Library of Congress provides guidelines and a worksheet for analyzing a variety of primary sources, including maps. A PDF of the analysis tool can be found at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf and the teacher guide that provides questions specific to maps to use with this tool can be found at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Maps.pdf The National Archives map analysis worksheet can be found online at http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/map_analysis_worksheet.pdf to analyze the maps.

Essential Question: Why do maps change over time?

Readings – The following readings from the Civil War on the Western Border website provide extensive background information on Lecompton and events leading up to the Civil War.

- Bleeding Kansas: From the Kansas-Nebraska Act to Harpers Ferry, Professor Nicole Etcheson: <http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/essay/bleeding-kansas-kansas-nebraska-act-harpers-ferry>

- Kansas Territory, the Election 1860, and the Coming of the Civil War : A National Perspective, Professor Johnathon Earle: <http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/essay/kansas-territory-election-1860-and-coming-civil-war-national-perspective>
- Lecompton Constitution, Professor Zach Garrison: <http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/lecompton-constitution>

Additional readings on Lecompton and Kansas Constitutions can be found through the Kansas Historical Society and include these articles:

- Kansas Constitutions – this article provides information on the Topeka, Lecompton, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte versions of the Kansas Constitution. <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/kansas-constitutions/16532>
- This article provides additional information on the constitutions plus links to the actual documents. <http://kshs.org/p/online-exhibits-willing-to-die-for-freedom-constitutions/15396>
- Read more here about this artifact that tells the story of election fraud and the Lecompton Constitution. <http://kshs.org/kansapedia/cool-things-calhoun-s-candlebox/101>

Putting it All Together

Excellent lesson plans on Territorial Kansas and the Lecompton Constitutions can be found through the Kansas Historical Society and through Territorial Kansas Online.

Kansas State Historical Society has several lesson plans related to Kansas territory and the border wars in its Read Kansas! series. Check out the following:

- This middle school lesson can be used for Kansas or United States history. It helps the student to understand the concept of popular sovereignty as it relates to the settlement of Kansas Territory. The lesson includes background information on the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The lesson provides students with the opportunity to read a primary source document in the form of a persuasive text. The lesson is designed for two class periods but can be altered to meet the teacher’s needs. <http://kshs.org/p/read-kansas-middle-school-m-10-popular-sovereignty-under-the-kansas-nebraska-act/14899>
- This lesson can apply to Kansas or United States history. It focuses on the dispute over slavery in Kansas Territory. The students will use two pieces of persuasive writing from the period (primary sources) to understand the views of proslavery and antislavery settlers. By comparing and contrasting to gain information, the students will write a persuasive ending to the antislavery document. The lesson is designed to take two class periods but can be adjusted to meet individual class schedules. <http://kshs.org/p/read-kansas-middle-school-m-11-dispute-over-slavery-in-kansas-territory/14900>
- The purpose of this middle school lesson is to familiarize students with some of the people of Kansas Territory. The students will work cooperatively to read 10 biographical cards and summarize main ideas, events, and important details. Each student will further summarize the materials by creating cards to play “Who am I?” This is a game that rewards knowledge about the territorial characters. The lesson as written will take four class periods but can be modified

to meet the teacher's needs. <http://kshs.org/p/read-kansas-middle-school-m-14-territorial-characters/14902>

From the Territorial Kansas online site, check out these lesson plans:

- **Popular Sovereignty and the Lecompton Constitution** (Grades 6-8)
Students examine the debate over the Lecompton Constitution as a way to understand the implementation of popular sovereignty in Kansas Territory.
- **The People of Kansas: Where did they come from and why did they come?** (Middle and High School)
Students seek to understand the origins of emigrants to Kansas and many reasons they settled in the territory.
- **The People of Kansas: Who are they and why are they here?** (Middle and High School)
Students study the settlement experience through first-hand accounts of pioneers to Kansas Territory.
- **Town Development** (Middle and High School)
Students explore town development and how it was affected by the conflict over the extension of slavery into the territory.
- **Sectionalism and the Kansas-Nebraska Act** (Middle and High School)
Students examine the impact of popular sovereignty on the creation of Kansas as a state.
- **Sectionalism, Popular Sovereignty, and Secession** (Middle and High School)
Students investigate the sequence of national events that resulted in the Civil War.

Additional Activity Suggestions

Activity 1: (Note: This activity pairs well with the two "The People of Kansas" lesson plans listed above) Have students analyze the *Nebraska and Kansas* map and the *Sectional Map of the Territory of Kansas* using the Library of Congress or National Archives tools. Then have students compare the maps. Have students list or describe what they see in each map and list three differences between the maps. Have students discuss the following: How do the maps differ? How do you explain the differences between the maps? If it is the same land, why are the maps different? What do the maps tell you about change over time? *Note:* Many of the name changes on the maps for locations change because of a shift from proslavery to anti-slavery or Union sentiments. Have students research the history of the names to determine which reflect a southern and which reflect a Union attachment. Additionally, point out how the relative population of a town is shown on these maps. Have students identify the more populated/important locations on each map. Extend the activity by having students make predictions about what a map for Kansas would look like in the following decades through today.

Activity 2: Lecompton Constitution Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places. A nomination procedure must be followed and certain criteria must be met for a place to be put on the National Register. Read the [National Register Criteria](#) and then read the application for Lecompton Constitution Hall. What criteria did Constitution Hall meet to be placed on the National Register? Have students reflect on historic buildings in their own community. Are they on the National Register? If so, what criteria did they meet? If not, are there any buildings that could be eligible for the National Register? Have students write a proposal for a potential National Register nominee explaining how that building meets the National Register criteria.

Activity 3: The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. Many places on the National Register provide access to the public and other educational opportunities to further preserve the history of those places. View the short video about Lecompton Constitution Hall. The video combines primary sources including photographs, sketches, and artifacts about the historical significance of the building and contemporary photos of Constitution Hall with period music playing in the background. Have students research a historic building in their community and have them create a similar video using primary sources and contemporary photographs to tell the story of their building.

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Criteria for Evaluation

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Criteria Considerations

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties *will qualify* if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a. A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- b. A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- c. A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building associated with his or her productive life; or
- d. A cemetery that derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- e. A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- f. A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or
- g. A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.