Kansas Governors

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Frederick P. Stanton was appointed secretary of the territory of Kansas by Pres. James Buchanan early in April 1857 and arrived for duty on 15 April. His appointment was part of a deal that brought Robert J. Walker to Kansas as territorial governor. He took over the duties of acting governor from Daniel Woodson and served for forty-one days prior to Governor Walker's arrival. During this period, he expressed the hopes of the new administration when he recited Longfellow's "Great Manitou" speech from *The Song of Hiawatha*, which urged all Indians to live together as brothers. He also issued a proclamation apportioning delegates to the Lecompton constitutional convention on the basis of an incomplete census, which, according to some reports, did not count about half of the potential voters. For instance, only three delegates were allotted to nineteen counties located south of the Kansas River. The delegate election on
15 June merely decided which proslavery candidates would attend the constitutional convention. In the territorial legislative election of 5 October 1857, free staters won a majority of the seats in the legislature.

When Governor Walker was out of the territory on 1 December 1857, Stanton as acting governor issued a proclamation calling the legislature into special session on 7 December to submit a vote on the proposed Lecompton constitution. This action damaged the interests of the proslave party which sought to push the constitution through to congressional approval. Walker was forced out as governor, and Stanton was fired by President Buchanan, which drove him into the Kansas free-state party. Stanton served as acting governor just before and after Walker’s tenure for a total of two months and twenty-six days.

Stanton had an illustrious career before he came to Kansas. Following his graduation from Columbian University (later renamed George Washington University), Stanton taught in a college in North Carolina where he also studied theology with the intention of becoming a Baptist minister. But he changed his mind and studied law; he was admitted to the bar, and in 1834 he set up his practice in Memphis, Tennessee. As a Democrat he was elected to the Twenty-third Congress in 1847. After his victory, his Whig opponent shot him in the neck, wounding him severely, then fled the country. Stanton served four subsequent terms in Congress; near the end of his congressional career, on 20 May 1854, Stanton gave a long speech in the House in support of the Kansas-Nebraska bill.

Shortly after his term as secretary of Kansas territory, Stanton wrote a long defense of his official career, published in the National Intelligencer (Washington) on 21 January 1858. He also spoke at the Chinese Assembly Rooms in New York City on 17 February 1858, where he said that the “effect of these proceedings [in Kansas] on the part of the minority, sustained by the Government of the United States, is to give influence and power to the individuals to whom the President alludes as dangerous and mischievous individuals.” Stanton continued to reside in Kansas where he purchased a large estate two miles east of Lecompton. There he built one of the most spacious and costly residences in the area; for instance, the
third-floor ballroom was 50 feet square, and the whole house was finished in polished black walnut. (This house was later purchased by former Kansas governor Harry H. Woodring in the years just after World War II; he called it Rebel Hill.)

In 1861 Stanton was one of the candidates for the Kansas seats in the United States Senate, coming in fourth after winners James H. Lane and Samuel C. Pomeroy and third-place Marcus J. Parrott. Later that year he was appointed to the Senate by Gov. Charles Robinson on the assumption that Lane’s acceptance of a federal appointment as brigadier general meant that he had resigned. But the Senate recognized no vacancy in the position, since Lane had not tendered an official resignation. At the beginning of the Civil War, Stanton joined the Republican party. Later he moved to Farmwell,
Virginia, and opened a law office in Washington, D.C., in partnership with his old friend Robert J. Walker. Their practice included cases reviewed by the United States Supreme Court.

Stanton was a member of the International Peace League and was its president in 1882. In 1886 he moved to Florida, near Ocala, to a town coincidently named Stanton. He died there eight years later.

In Kansas, a town near Paola and townships in Miami, Linn, and Ottawa counties were all named for Frederick P. Stanton. In 1887, about the time he moved to Florida, Stanton gave the Kansas State Historical Society a marble bust of himself, executed by Horatio Stone, a Washington sculptor.33

REFERENCES: Andreas, 1883; Blackmar, 1912; Connelley, 1900.