

## Henry Clubb

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As she walked beside the wagon lumbering west into Kansas Territory on May 2, 1856, Miriam Colt looked at the gaggle of women and children walking beside her and declared that they looked “like a band of Mormons bound for Salt Lake City.” Their destination, though, was much closer — Allen County, near present-day Humboldt. These sojourners *did* have something in common with the saints going to Utah, because Miriam Colt, along with her husband, two small children, three in-laws, and dozens of others, had come west to form an intentional community. This one, though, was based not on religious faith but a radical idea about eating.

It was called the Kansas Vegetarian Settlement, and it was one of the most audacious experiments in community ever. It was led by a 28-year-old Englishman named Henry Clubb, whose speaking and organizing skills had put him at the forefront of the brand-new vegetarian movement. Henry Clubb had lived in an experimental community in England that grew their own food, and he believed that such a settlement could entice Americans to stop eating animals. You may know someone who is planning on a vegetarian Thanksgiving. But did you know the original movement, started in 1847, wasn’t about lifestyle or losing weight, but was based in nonviolence? When humans killed animals for food, the meat fueled their aggressions for killing each other. This argument does not stand up to modern scientific inquiry, but it was often stated over the centuries, in sacred Hindu texts and by the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras among others.

Henry Clubb wanted his vegetarian settlement in Kansas because it had cheap land, and because in 1856 the whole country was paying attention to Kansas. That spring an illegally elected proslavery government was attempting to put down a rebellion by antislavery settlers. Of course, this made the territory a dangerous place for anyone, let alone a group of unarmed abolitionist plant eaters. But Henry Clubb was undaunted. “Hurry you Vegetarians. Hurry, lest you be too late,” he urged in his prospectus. “The rich land of Kansas awaits.”

Clubb located the vegetarian colony by a stream near the Neosho River that is today called Vegetarian Creek. He promised settlers a sawmill, a meeting house, and other things — but these never arrived. That summer of 1856 was a time of hard work, deprivation, and disease. The village slowly dwindled down to just a few people. The entire Colt family became desperately ill, and Clubb got sick with malaria and had to abandon his dream. Miriam Colt would write a bitter memoir of her experience in 1862. Titled *Went to Kansas*, the book sold out its print run, and the proceeds allowed her to buy a home, where she lived out her years in upstate New York, far from Kansas.

*This transcript of “Henry Clubb” is part of the Humanities Kansas Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit [humanitieskansas.org](http://humanitieskansas.org) or call 1-888-416-2018.*