“Dr. Charles Robinson came to Fitchburg in 1846, opened an office on Main Street, and practiced his profession here for some three years. During his residence here he interested himself in the peace and anti-slavery discussions of that day, and was, in theory, a non-resistant and abolitionist. His abolition sentiments remained with him through life, but his non-resistant theories were destined to be severely shaken by subsequent events. Early in the spring of 1849, he joined a party of some 40 persons from the vicinity of Boston for the purpose of emigrating to the land of gold.

The party went overland, crossing the Plains and the Rocky mountains by a route then almost unknown, the doctor as physician to the company. They went by rail and canal to Pittsburg, Pa, and from thence by steamboat down the Ohio and up the Missouri River to Kansas City. Some dissentions having arisen, the company divided into tow distinct parties, one of whom procured mules and the other oxen for motive of power, and the 10th of May, 1849, the parties were ready to launch their prairie schooners. Both mules and oxen being unbroken to harness or yoke and the men unused to handling them, their experiences in hitching up, starting and driving the wild teams afforded much amusement as well as many hard knocks, mingled profusely with explosions of the Western vernacular.

The company gradually became separated into parties of two or three and after a wearisome journey of 2000 miles, occupying over three months; the scattered members began to arrive in California. A small detachment, including Dr. Robinson, stopped on Bear Creek in the mining region for the purpose of washing out the precious metal. After a short experience in this work, the doctor visited Sacramento for supplies, and finding a good opportunity for business of a less laboring nature, a co partnership was formed and an eating house was opened.
At this time California had not been admitted to the Union and the only law in force was the old Mexican code. The newly arrived settlers, claiming that the lands of California were public lands, preceded to stake out their claims and to erect their tents or build their shanties or cabins. There settlers were called squatters, as distinguished from certain “land grabbers” and speculators who claimed to have acquired title to large sections under disputed and loosely defined grants from the Mexican government. In many cases the squatters were turned out of their homes and dispossessed of their lands with no pretense of legal process by these land speculators. The settlers resisted and Robinson championed their cause. Steps were taken by them for a permanent organization and the doctor was chosen their president. Public meetings were held, resolutions passed and the excitement was intense. The squatters took up arms in defense of their homes and Robinson, whose non-resistant theories had vanished into thin air, joined their ranks as a private with a six-shooter rifle in hand. The legal authorities, such as they were, were on the side of the speculators. A conflict took place in which the captain of the squatters was killed.

Robinson was shot through the body—a bullet entering two inches below the heart—and one of two others were killed on both sides. Robinson, though supposed to be mortally wounded, was taken by the sheriff and confined on board a prison ship in the river. While yet confined on board in the prison, Robinson was elected to the California legislature, in which body he subsequently took his seat. On his release from prison he had so far recovered from his wound as to be able to take a position as editor of a new paper in Sacramento, called “Miners and Settlers’ Tribune,” in which capacity he was employed until the meeting of the legislature. Here there came the front the question of slavery extension. The legislature was to elect a senator for six years and both of the leading candidates were Southern men and in favor of the division of the state. Robinson, with a few adherents, held the balance of power between the two and defeated an election for that session after upward of 140 ballots.

At the next session, the anti-slavery sentiment was so strong as to elect a Northern man and the question of slavery in California was effectually settled.

In returning to Massachusetts in 1851, Robinson was shipwrecked on the coast of Mexico, but eventually reached Fitchburg in safety. Here he started a weekly paper called the Fitchburg News, which he edited for a year or two, in the meantime continuing the practice of his profession.”
FROM CALIFORNIA. By the latest accounts it seems that Dr. Charles Robinson, of this town, who was reported to be dying, at the last advices, is not dead. He has been arrested, as one of the squatter leaders, and placed in confinement, on the oath of several gentlemen that they saw him deliberately aim at the Mayor. It is not stated whether the report that he was wounded was correct or otherwise. The Pacific News, says:--

A letter was found in Robinson’s tent, after his arrest, in his own hand-writing, from the tone of which it is evident that the final resort to force to maintain possession of their land was deliberately meditated by the squatters. After speaking of the decision of the county judge, the proceedings of the meeting, and other matters connected with the dispute he says:

“What will be the result? Shall I be borne out in my position? On whom can I depend? How many of those who are squatters will come out if there is a prospect of a fight? Will the Sheriff take possession as he has promised, before ten o’clock A.M.? How many speculators will fight? Have I distinctly defined our position in the bill? Will the world, the Universe, and God say it is just?--&c. &c. Will you call be rash if I tell you that I took these steps to this point when I could get but 25 men to pledge themselves, upon paper, to sustain me, and many of them I felt were timid? Such was the case.

This morning I was early on my feet, silently and quietly visiting my friends, collecting arms, &c. Our Manifesto appeared in the paper and in bills early and the town is aroused. Nothing is now thought or talked of but war. About 200 men assembled on the disputed territory, and most of them sympathized with us. A few however, were spies. We chose our commander, and enrolled such as were willing and ready to lay down their lives, if need be, in the cause.

About 50 names could be obtained. I managed, by speeches, business, etc., to keep the spectators and fighters mingled in a mass, all unarmed, so as to let no one know but all were men of valor, and ready to fight. While thus engaged, the Mayor appeared and addressed us in the saddle—not ordering us to disperse, but advising us to do so. I replied most respectfully, that we were assembled to injure no one, and to assail no one who left us alone. We were on our own property, with no hostile intentions while unmolested.

After he left, I, with others, was appointed a committee to wait upon him at his office, and state distinctly our position, &c., so that there could be no possibility of a mistake. He said he should use his influence, as an individual, to keep any one from destroying our property, and told us the sheriff had told him that the executions from the court had just been postponed. We returned, and after reporting, and making some further arrangements for another meeting if necessary, we adjourned. I told the Mayor we should not remain together if no attempt was to be made to execute their warrants, but I told him if in the meantime a sheriff or any person molested a squatter, we should hold him responsible according to our proclamation. From this position we could not be driven, although we knew it was in violation of the regulations of the State. We were prepared to abide the result.

It is said that a writ is made out for my arrest, as a rebel &c. If so, it will not probably be served at present.”
THE TRIAL OF DR. CHARLES ROBINSON, and his associates, for riot and murder, in resisting the authorities of Sacramento, when they were attempting to enforce the laws against the squatters, has been postponed to the first Monday in April next. Dr. Robinson, it will be recollected, is a native of Massachusetts, and as some of the papers say, is under a matrimonial engagement with a daughter of Hon. Myron Lawrence, of Belchertown. He seems to have the sympathy and friendship of a large portion of the community in California, and is, we believe, a member elect of the Legislature of that State. One of the leading counsel(s) for the defense (defense), C. A. Tweed, Esq., is also from Massachusetts, a native of South Reading, formerly residing in Lowell, where he married his wife, (Miss Ruth Greene, of Beverly) and latterly of Florida, where he was a Whig member of the State Senate, when he left for California. By the accounts of the preliminary hearings in these cases, as published in the Sacramento Transcript, Mr. Tweed seems to have taken the lead in arguing the cause of the defendants, sustaining his position with much ability, and carrying his points against the combined influences of the Attorney General and his associates.—Salem Register.

AN ADDITIONAL CONNECTION

TEXT: The American Nation
by Prentice Hall, pages 468 – 470,
“Kansas-Nebraska Act,” “The Crisis Turns Violent”

Fitchburg’s Dr. Charles Robinson returned to Fitchburg and in spring of 1854 headed to Kansas to locate a site for an anti-slavery settlement in the Kansas Territory.

The following excerpts are from The History of Lawrence (Kansas) by Rev. Richard Cordley.
CHAPTER I.

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA BILL. -- THE NORTH AROUSED. -- THE EMIGRANT AID COMPANY. -- ELI THAYER, AMOS A. LAWRENCE AND DR. CHARLES ROBINSON. -- THE FIRST NEW ENGLAND EMIGRANTS REACH MOUNT OREAD, ORGANIZE A TOWN COMPANY AND LAY OUT THE TOWN. -- "WHAT SHALL WE CALL IT ?" -- PITCHING TENTS AND BUILDING CABINS. -- PIONEER BOARDING HOUSE.

When the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed, May 25, 1854, there was a feeling of despondency all over the north. . . .

. . . Congress had thrown the territory open to slavery. Was there any other way of keeping it out? Mr. Eli Thayer, of Worcester, Massachusetts, proposed to meet the question on the terms of the bill itself. The bill provided that the people of the territory should themselves determine whether it should be slave or free. "Let us settle Kansas with people who will make it free by their own voice and vote." William H. Seward had foreshadowed this policy in a speech in the United States Senate. "Come on, then, gentlemen of the slave states. Since there is no escaping your challenge, we accept it in the name of freedom. We will engage in competition for the virgin soil of Kansas, and God give the victory to the side which is stronger in numbers, as it is in right."

. . . The contest, therefore, was transferred to the plains of Kansas. The north had been defeated in congress; she would try again in Kansas. In accordance with this purpose, "The Emigrant Aid Company" was formed in Massachusetts. . .

The most systematic and extensive movement, however, was made in New England. "The New England Emigrant Aid Company," which had been chartered by the legislature of Massachusetts in April, was then called "The Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society." But afterwards a new charter was obtained for "The New England Emigrant Aid Company." The men engaged in it, Eli Thayer, Amos A. Lawrence, and others, began their work at once, arousing public interest and making arrangements to facilitate emigration to Kansas. As early as June, 1854, they sent Dr. Charles Robinson, of Fitchburg, and Mr. Charles H. Branscomb, of Holyoke, to explore the territory and select a site for a colony. Dr. Robinson was just the man for such a mission. Besides being in full sympathy with the ideas of Mr. Thayer, he knew the methods of the frontier. In 1849 he went to California with the gold seekers, and was a prominent actor in the stirring scenes which characterized the early history of that state. In those turbulent times he had been severely wounded, and had been put under arrest and kept in prison for several months. But he and his associates finally won the day, and California was saved from the rule of the thieves. He was just the man needed in the new emergency. He was cool of counsel and brave of heart, and knew the conditions he had to meet. In going to California he had passed over Kansas. He went by what was afterwards known as the "California Road." . .