



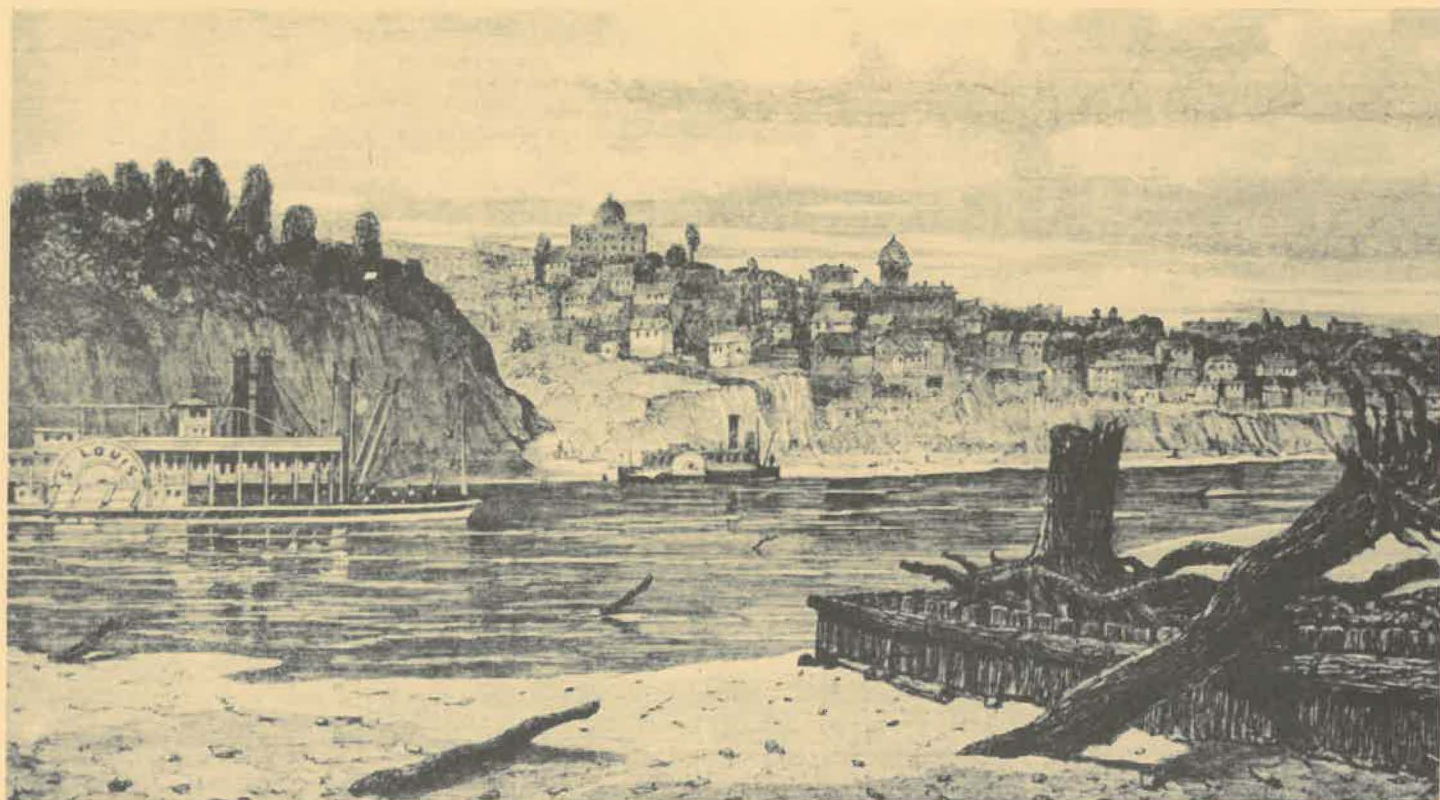
# OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

## 1988 Convention TRAILS GUIDE

Welcome to St. Joseph, Missouri  
August 9 - 14

"On nearing the City it shows a glowing front with high bluffs or baren banks to the rear. These, with the rich valley below are dotted with waggons, tents, horses, mules & other stock to the number of 20,000 with a great portion of other equipage...I visited the heights to the rear of the city where I had a full view of the great encampment. The numerous waggons, tents & so many thousand head of stock on the ground is a sight that is seldom seen by one so old, or during a life time."

"John Clark of Virginia" April 27, 1852



St. Joseph Museum Archives

VIEW OF ST. JOE, MISSOURI FROM THE KANSAS SIDE, "Illustrated London News," 1861



St. Joseph began as a fur trading post established by Joseph Robidoux in 1826. The site was chosen because of its location on the Missouri River and because there were a number of Native Americans in the area. The site was in a "pocket" formed by the bluffs adjacent to the river, but out of the flood plain. The Native Americans provided Robidoux with furs to sell in St. Louis, and they were his customers at the post.

Called Blacksnake Hills, this was the headquarters of the Robidoux family's vast fur trade enterprise. Joseph lived at Blacksnake Hills while his brothers, Louis, Isadore, Michel and Antoine spread out over the west - Michel in the Yellowstone area; Antoine in the Rocky Mountains; and Louis and Isadore in Santa Fe.

Missouri became a state in 1821. However, it was not until 1837 that the state assumed its present dimensions. At that time the six counties that comprise the northwest corner of Missouri were added through the Platte Purchase Treaty. The Native Americans who had lived in this area were moved to Indian Territory, and settlers began to move in and homestead. On July 29, 1843, Blacksnake Hills officially became St. Joseph. It had a population of 500 people.

Wagon trains were leaving St. Joseph as early as 1844. Emigration increased in 1849, 50 and 51, making St. Joseph the leading jumping-off point in number of emigrants. After the early 1850s, Council Bluffs took the lead, but St. Joseph continued to be an important departure point into the 1870s.



Photographer: Don Reynolds

**JOSEPH ROBIDOUX**  
Founder of St. Joseph

On April 3, 1860, St. Joseph continued to gain national attention as a center of westward expansion when it was established as the eastern terminus of the Pony Express. St. Joseph was selected because it was the western-most city reached by both a railroad and telegraph line from the east.

The Civil War years caused a halt to St. Joseph's expansive growth. The city was divided in loyalty between the North and South, guerrilla fighting took place and Federal troops were stationed here to maintain order.

However, after the Civil War, St. Joseph began to recover and became a leading wholesale center supplying the settlers who had passed through in previous years on their way to make new homes in the West. During these "golden years," St. Joseph boasted more millionaires per capita than any other city in the United States. Remnants of those years can be seen today in a few remaining commercial buildings and many examples of fine Victorian mansions which grace the city.



Around the turn of the century St. Joseph also became an important meat packing center. Due to changes in the economy, most of this industry had closed by the 1960s, but it left behind a rich mixture of ethnic heritages in St. Joseph. Immigrants from Mexico, Poland, Germany, the Ukraine and Czechoslovakia came to St. Joseph to work at the packing plants, Their legacies can still be seen in various local neighborhoods.

Today, with an area population of approximately 100,000, St. Joseph is developing new industries and sources of economic development. It is a city rediscovering its historic past. In the 1930s, when Irene Paden stood at the foot of Francis Street in St. Joseph she recorded for her book, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, "St. Joseph was decidedly overmodest and had apparently given no thought to the possibility that some one might find its eventful past interesting. We were most courteously received, but neither the Chamber of Commerce nor the Public Library was equipped to give us any help. We located most of the places of historical interest with the aid of information already in our possession. Where Francis Street ended we left the car, crossed the railroad tracks on foot, and brought up on the river bank under a frowzy and discouraged tree." When you visit this site, you will see a new riverfront park and witness the dedication of a monument commemorating the role the city played in the development of the west.

#### **POTAWATOMIE INDIANS AT THE MOUTH OF BLACKSNAKE CREEK**

by Rudolph F. Kurz  
a Swiss artist living  
in St. Joseph 1848-50

The mouth of Blacksna-  
ke Creek was at the foot of  
Francis Street where  
Irene Paden stood in  
the 1930s



St. Joseph Museum Archives

**The Trails West Field Trip** will take us only a few hours, but in the day of the emigrants, the trip took an average of 10 to thirteen days. Our trip will take us a little over 100 miles west of St. Joseph.

After leaving St. Joseph by ferry, the emigrants first traveled through 5 or 6 miles of Missouri River bottomland. Although farm land now, this area was then one of the heaviest timbered portions of the trail until the emigrants reached California. If the ferries in town were too crowded, emigrants went upriver several miles, passing through the bottomland on the Missouri side to reach a ferry, cross the river and immediately climb the bluffs. Either way, the bluffs had to be climbed. This could be done by going directly up the bluffs on a road with switchbacks or by following Peter's Creek up a more gradual incline. After reaching the top of the bluffs, the emigrants got their first view of the rolling hills of the treeless Kansas prairie.



The emigrants learned to follow ridges where streams had their beginnings and were easier to cross. To unseasoned travelers, the bluffs and hills provided difficult lessons on how to get wagons and stock over these obstacles. Lessons they would use over and over again in even more difficult terrain in the west.

Many emigrants anticipated seeing Indians, and on the St. Joe Road, they very soon had their first encounters with them. Numerous Native Americans were in this area because the Great Nemaha Subagency and Iowa-Sac-Fox Presbyterian Mission were only two or three days travel from St. Joseph. One of the most often mentioned encounters was at the Wolf River where the Indians charged emigrants a toll to cross a crude bridge.

After ferrying the Missouri River, there were three major crossings to be confronted in what is now Kansas - the Wolf River, the South Fork of the Big Nemaha River and the Big Blue River. During dry weather, these rivers were easily forded. In wet weather, the emigrants had to wait for the streams to subside or find other methods to cross.

On the first fifty miles of the St. Joe Road, there were numerous feeder trails coming in from crossings upriver and downriver from St. Joseph. The St. Joe and Independence Roads linked up about seven miles west of where the former crossed the Big Blue. In later years, the Pony Express Trail joined the St. Joe Road at the Big Blue. After the junction of the St. Joe and Independence Roads, it was less than ten miles to the present Kansas-Nebraska border.

## PONY EXPRESS



Photographer: Don Reynolds

**PONY EXPRESS MUSEUM**  
**914 Penn Street**  
**St. Joseph, Missouri**

**The monument marks  
the starting place  
of the Pony Express**

In addition to the reasons already indicated, Russell, Majors and Waddell (owners of the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express, parent company of the Pony Express) chose St. Joseph to be the eastern terminus of the Pony Express because they had gained concessions from the civic leaders of the town. These concessions involved railroad development and routes.

The letter mail from the east was brought to St. Joseph on the Hannibal-St. Joseph Railroad and then combined with the telegraph mail. On April 3, 1860, at the given signal, the rider left the Pony Express stables in St. Joseph, and rode to the post office (located near the riverfront where the Holiday Inn is today). He picked up the mochila and headed for the ferry at the foot of Francis Street. This began an almost 2,000 mile journey for the mochila.



Once across the Missouri River, the rider headed for the town of Wathena where he either took the route into Troy or dropped south to follow the St. Joe-Potawatomie Road. (Please refer to the maps in this booklet for the exact location of the sites mentioned.) If the rider was taking the northern route, the first relay would have been in Troy. If he took the southern way, the first mochila transfer would have been at Cottonwood Springs. Succeeding relay points in Kansas were Syracuse, Kennekuk (where the Fort Leavenworth-Fort Kearny road was picked up), Kickapoo, Log Chain, Seneca (sometimes a home station), Ash Point, Guittard (sometimes a home station), Marysville (sometimes a home station and the point where the St. Joe Road and Pony Express Trail converged) and Hollenberg. About seven miles north of Hollenberg, the Pony Express Trail left the state of Kansas.

#### **SITES TO BE VISITED:**

**Wolf River Crossing:** Approximately two days travel out of St. Joseph, the emigrants often encountered Indians at this crossing site. A primitive bridge was constructed and the Indians charged a fee for crossing. Some emigrants followed the St. Joe - Potawatomie road (shown on your maps) and forded the Wolf River several miles south of the Indians' bridge.

**Iowa-Sac-Fox Presbyterian Mission:** Almost all diarists mention the mission or the nearby Great Nemaha Subagency. The mission was established by the Reverend Samuel Irvin in 1837 when the Indians were moved out of northwest Missouri and into Indian Territory because of the Platte Purchase Treaty. The mission was in operation until 1863. The brick mission building, erected in 1846, houses a museum under the direction of the Kansas State Historical Society.

#### **IOWA-SAC-FOX PRESBYTERIAN MISSION**

**Built in 1846**

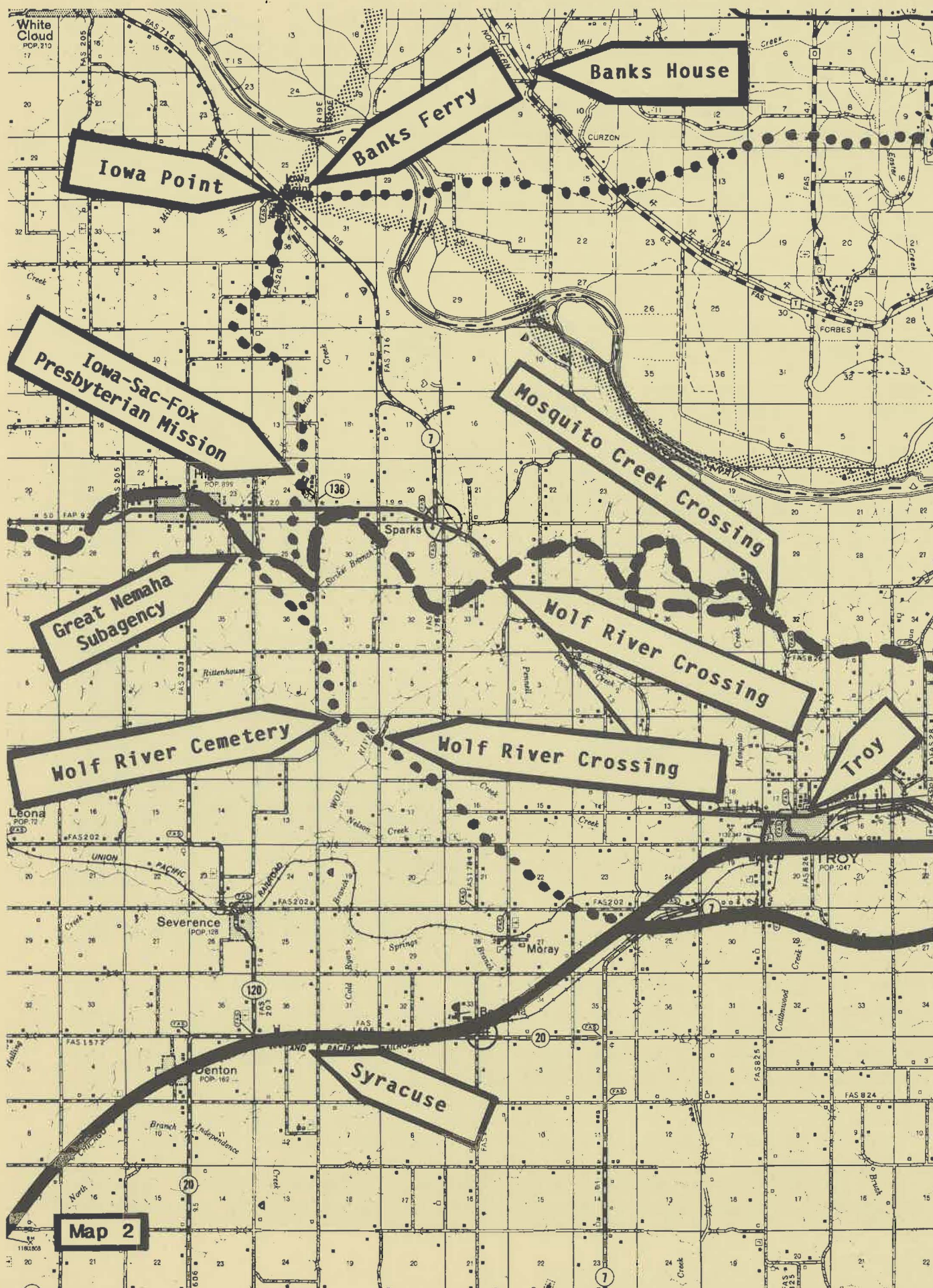


Photographer: Don Reynolds

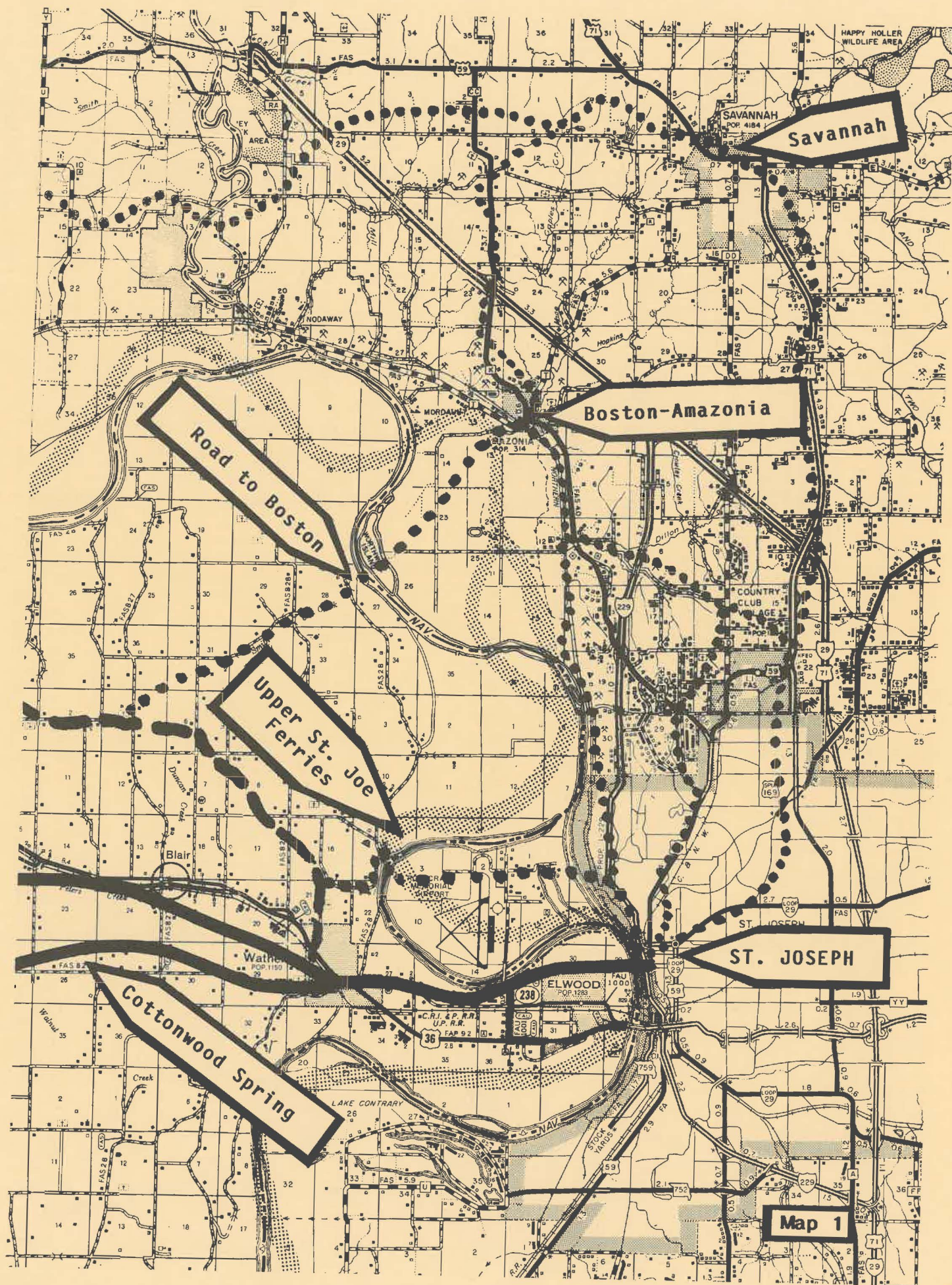
**Pony Express Trail near Seneca:** The Pony Express Trail left St. Joseph and followed a route to the south of the St. Joe Road. At Seneca, the Pony Express trail was following the old military road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Kearny on the Platte. We will see the swale of a portion of that trail. In Seneca, the monument marking the site of the station will be viewed.

**Nemaha River Crossing:** This was one of the major river crossings in present-day Kansas. In good weather, it was an easy ford because of a limestone ledge extending across the bottom of the river at the crossing site. Today this is a quiet, peaceful site on private property, but for a number of years, it was the location of a great deal of activity, many campsites and too many graves. Cholera was claiming many lives on this early part of the trail.

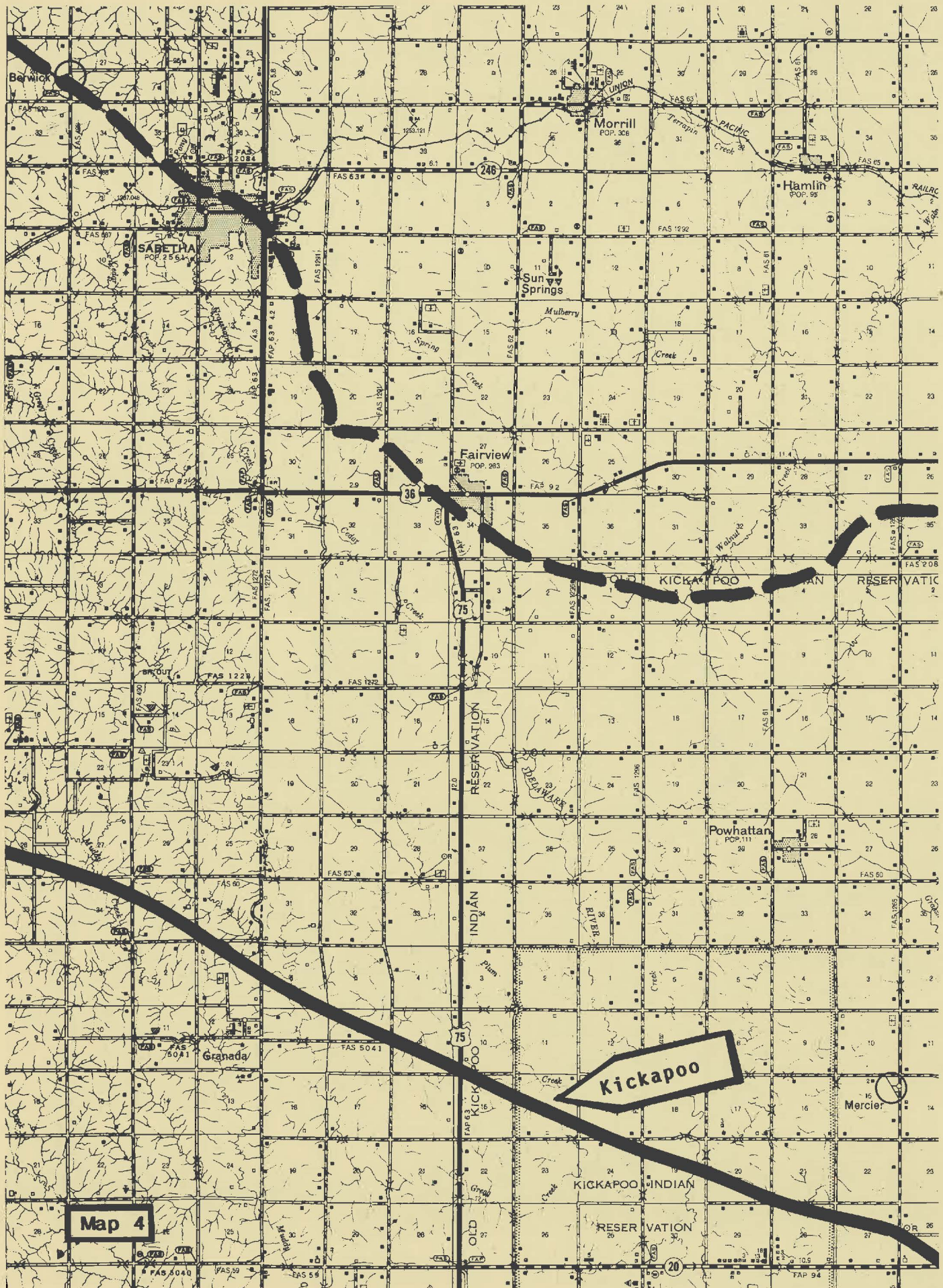




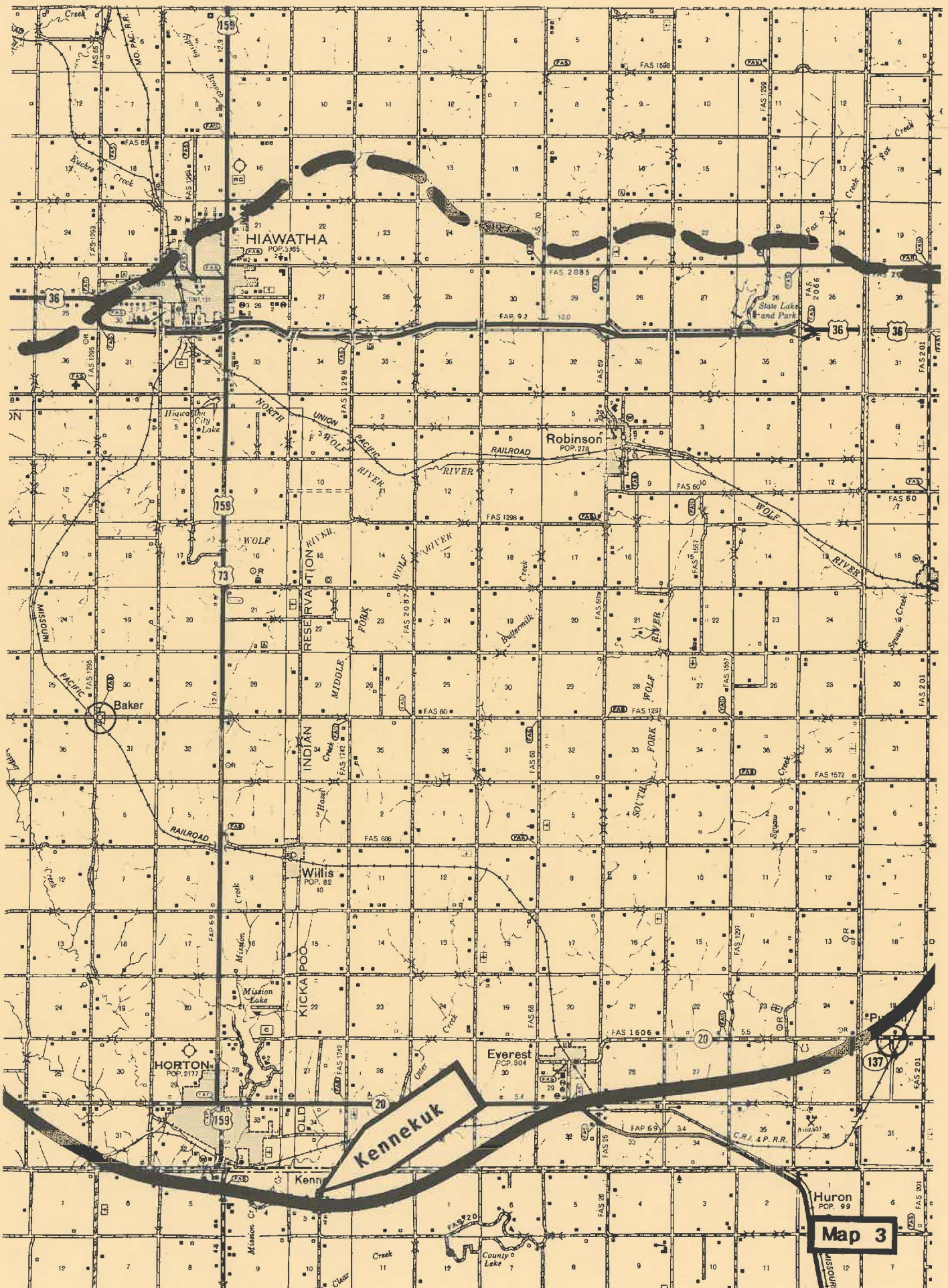




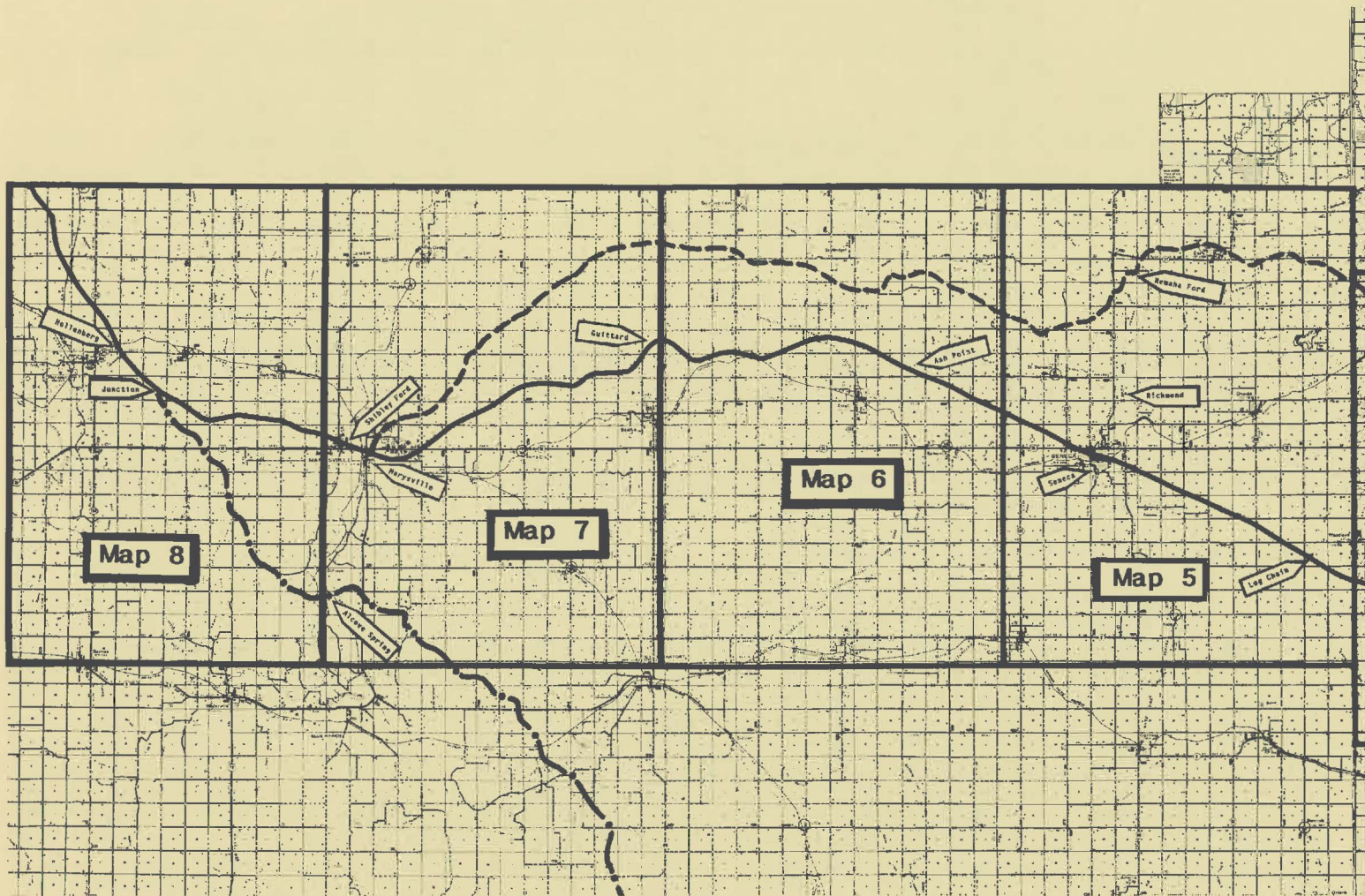












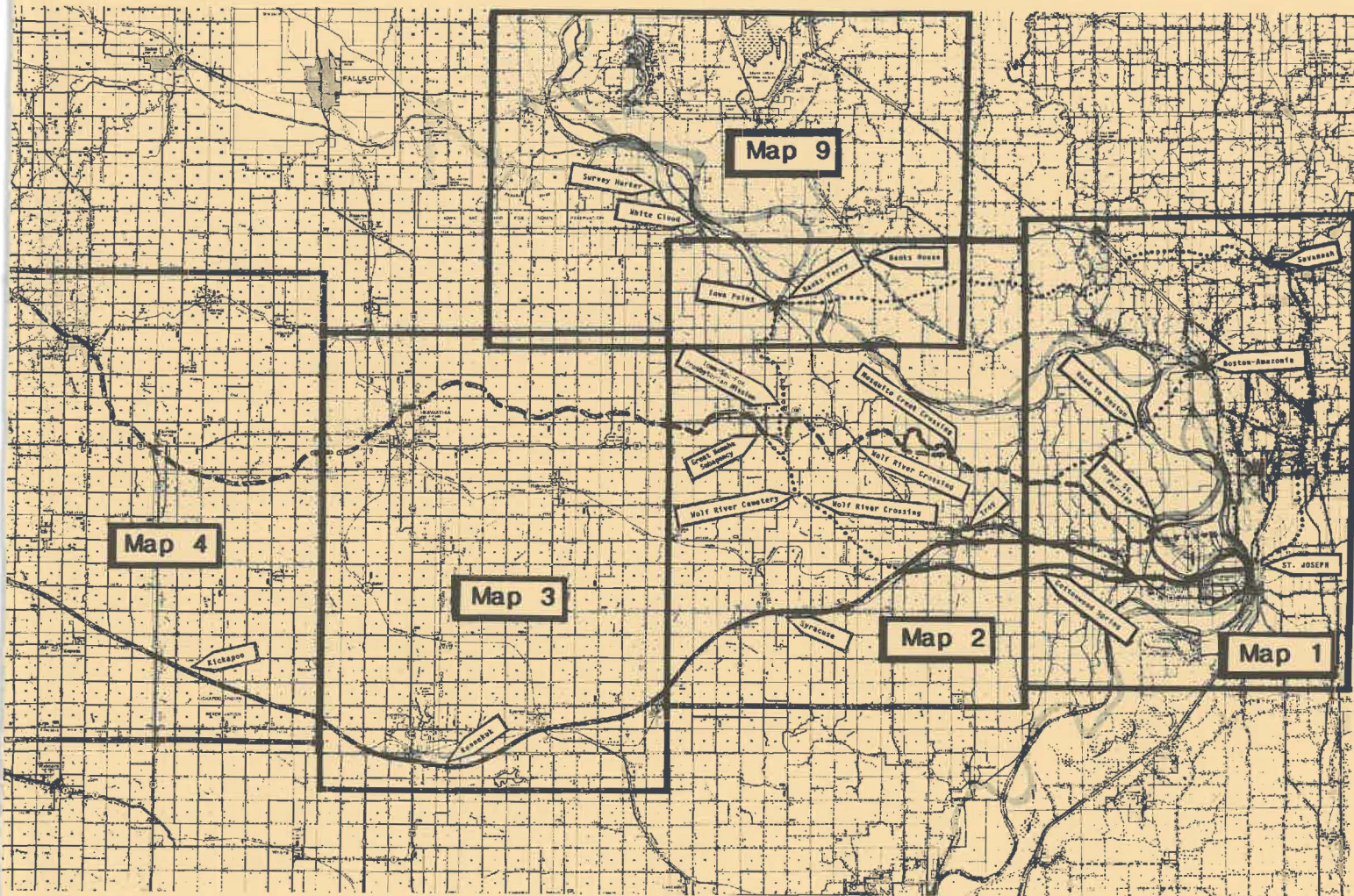
PONY EXPRESS TRAIL

OREGON TRAIL (INDEPENDENCE ROAD)

MISSOURI RIVER - 1952







CALIFORNIA TRAIL (ST. JOE ROAD)



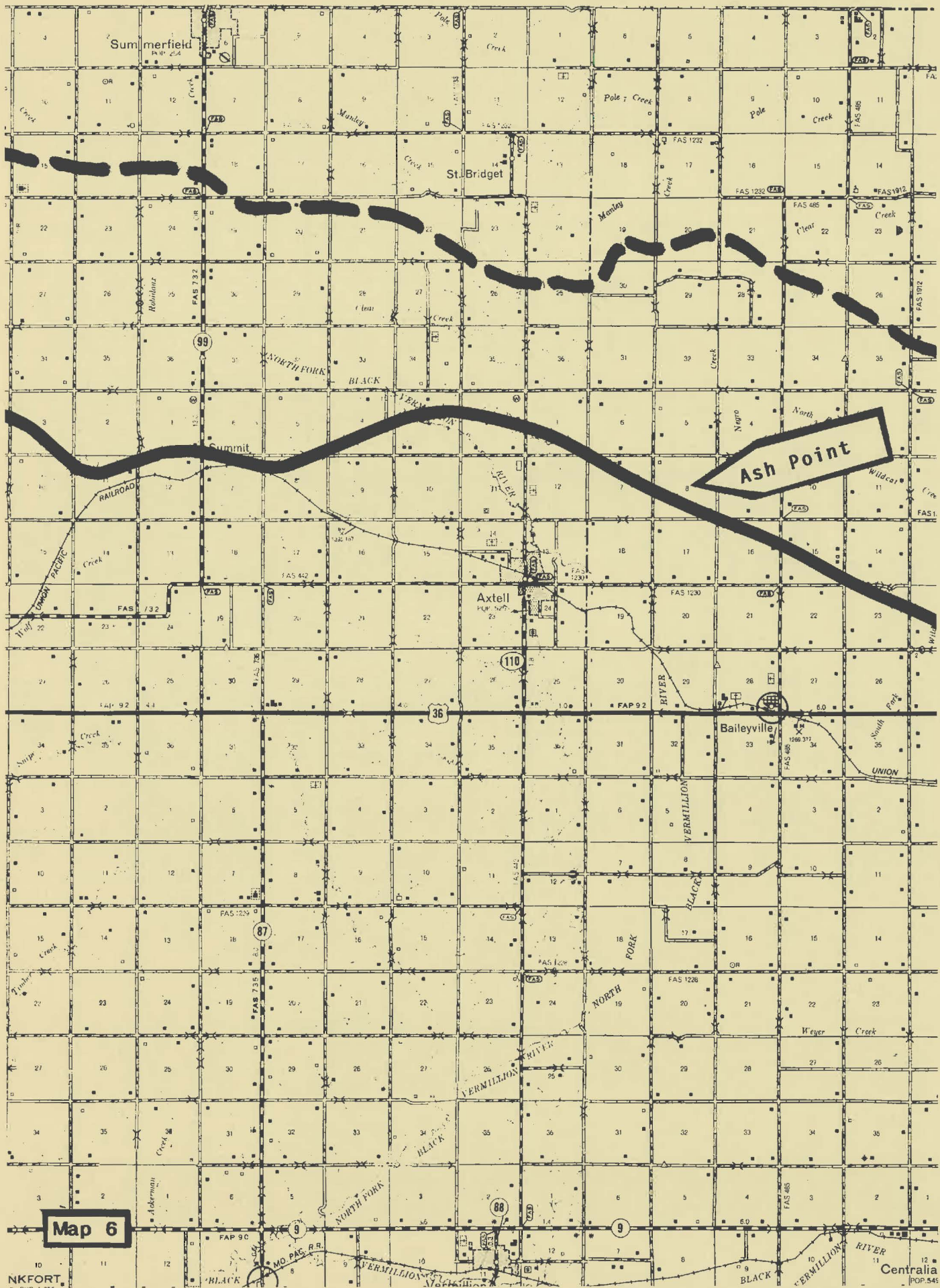
FEEDER TRAILS



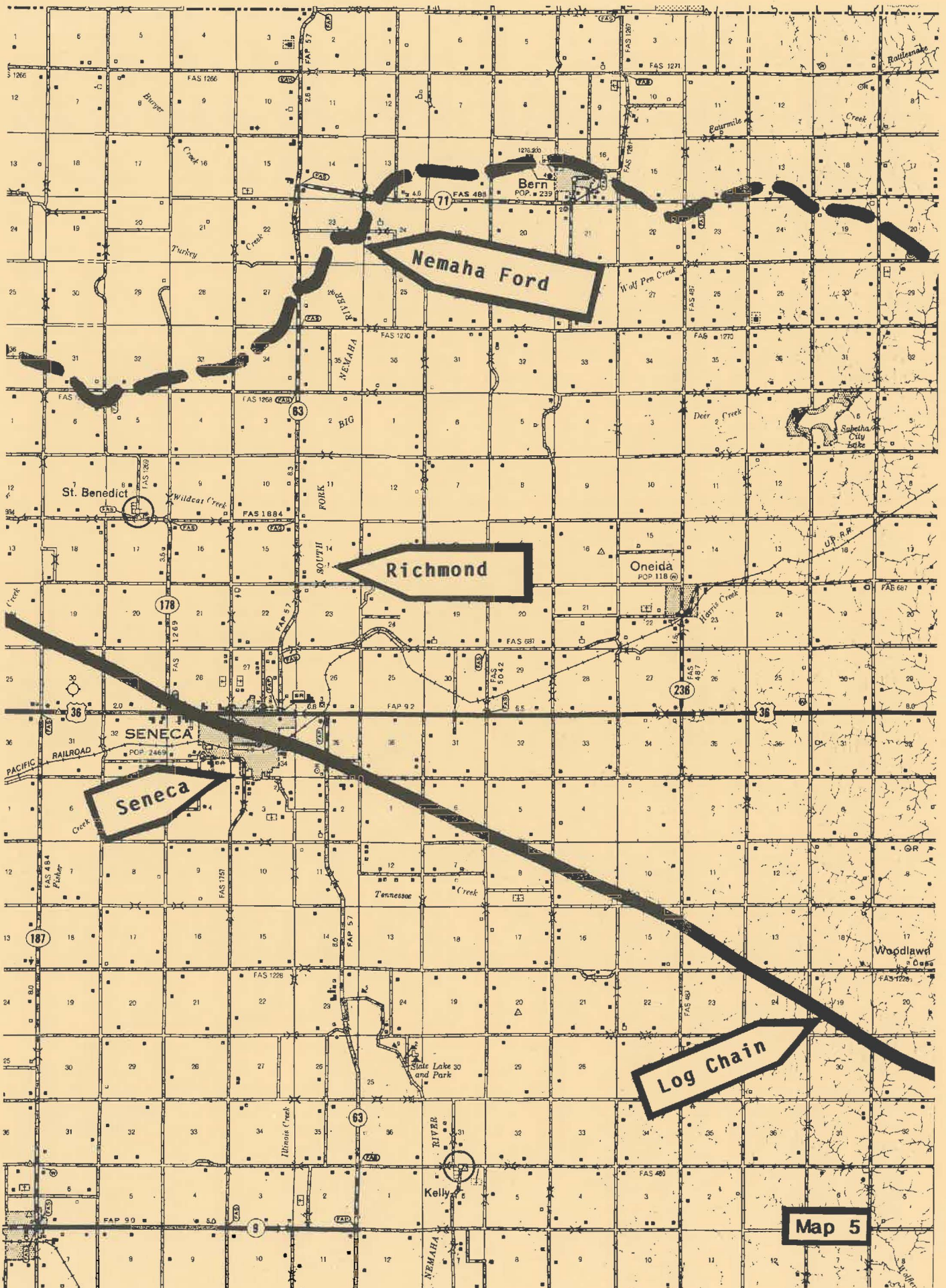
MISSOURI RIVER - 1850



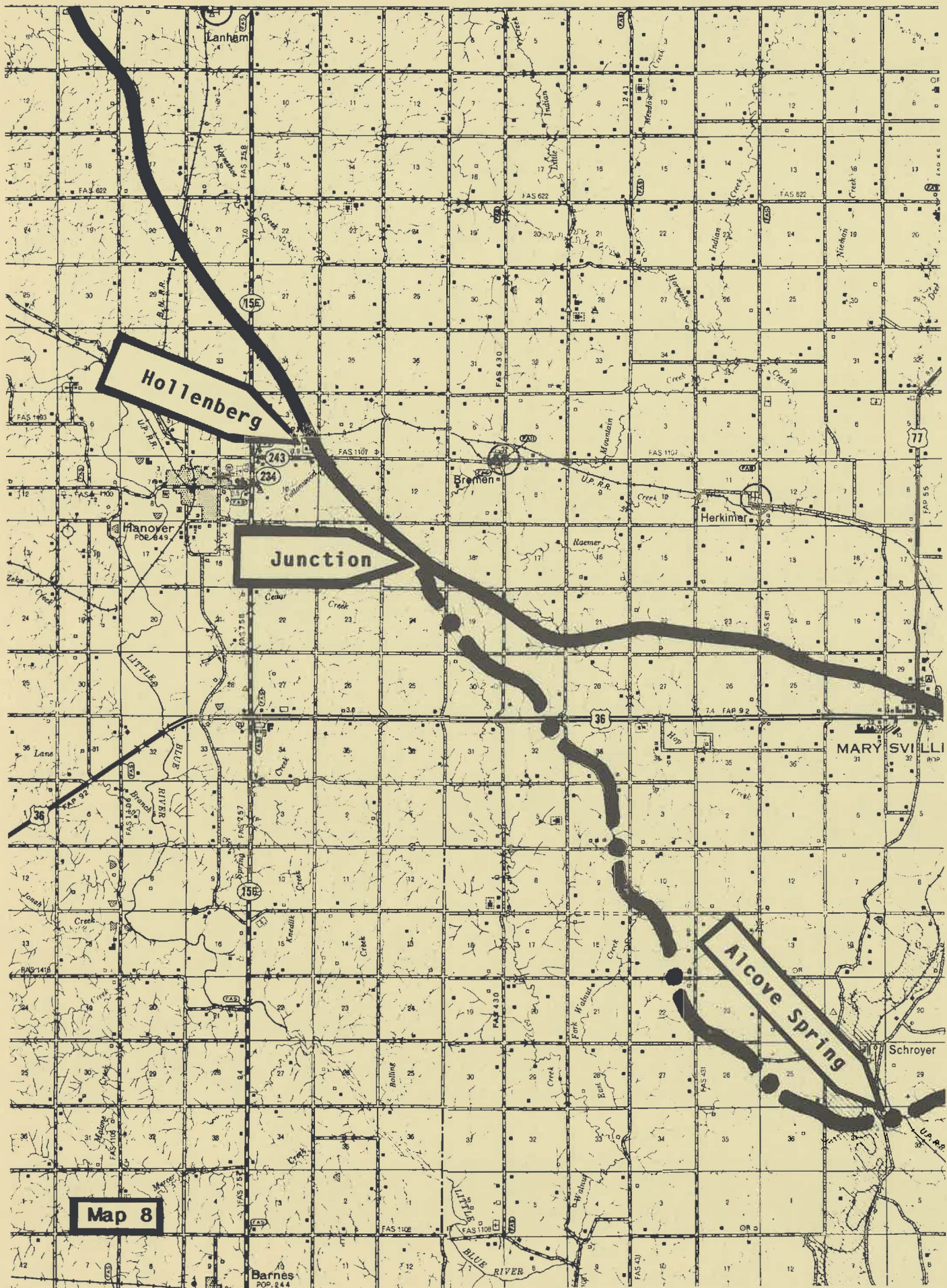




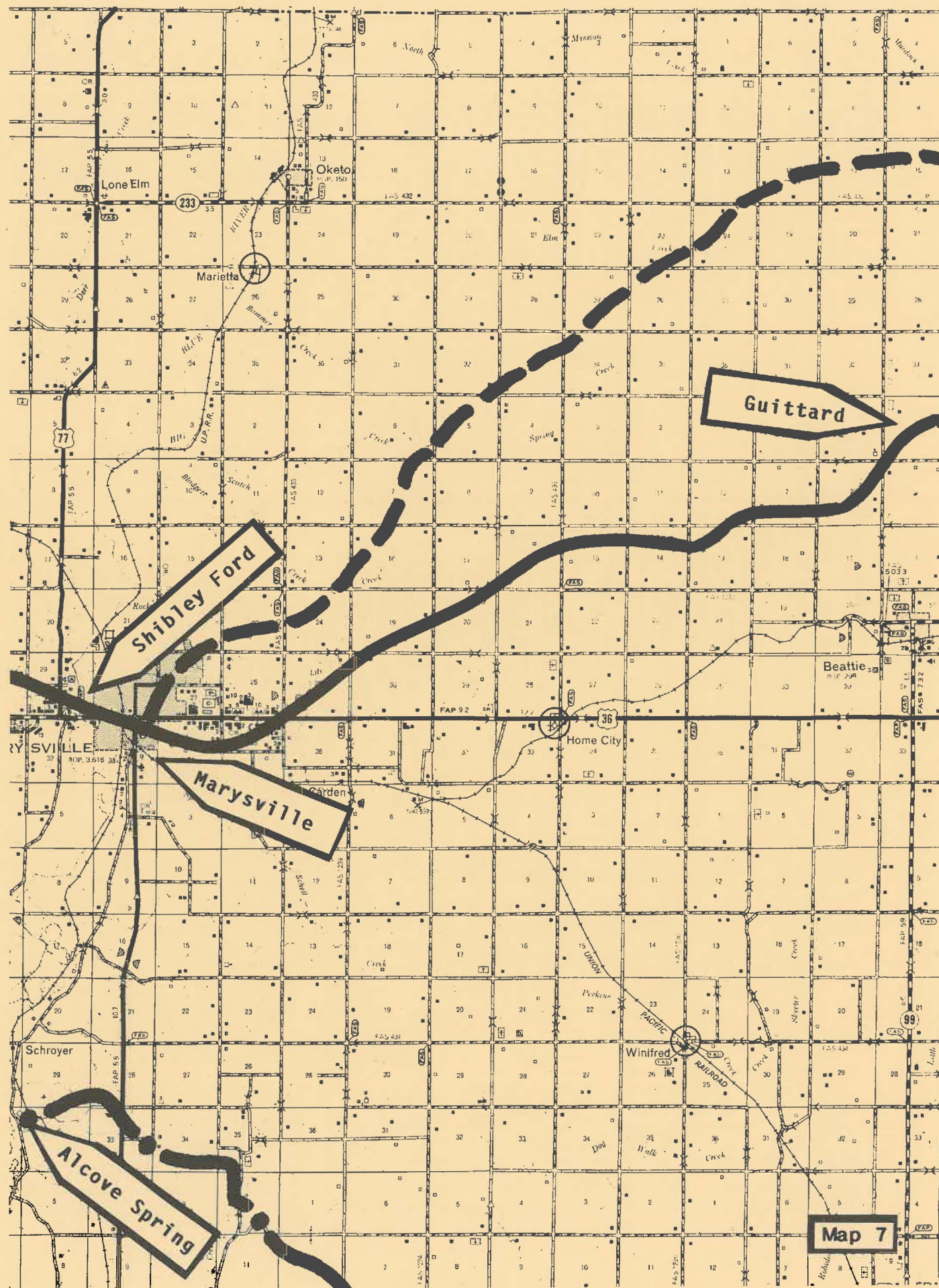














**Guittard Pony Express station site:** George Guittard, a French immigrant, established a ranch in 1857 which would become a well-known stage and Pony Express stop. Today the stream flowing by the former station is called the Robidoux Fork of the Vermillion, but early emigrants referred to it as Vermillion Creek. A monument marks the site of the station.

**Alcove Spring:** Emigrants coming along the Independence Road crossed the Big Blue River approximately seven miles south of present-day Marysville, Kansas. Near the crossing was a delightful spring of cool water and a small waterfall. Members of the Donner-Reed party, camping and exploring in the area in May 1846, came across the site and named it Alcove Spring. They carved that name, along with some of their own, on the limestone ledges. Near the spring is a monument in remembrance of Sarah Keyes, mother-in-law of James F. Reed. Mrs. Keyes died while waiting to cross the Big Blue and was buried near Alcove Spring.



Photographer: Ray Ellenbecker

**ALCOVE SPRING**  
circa 1926



Photographer: Ray Ellenbecker

**Big Blue Crossing in Marysville:** In 1852, Francis Marshall established a ferry at the ford of the Big Blue River. During high water, the ferry was often used and mentioned by emigrant diarists. They also mentioned Marshall's many enterprises and exorbitant (they felt) charges. In 1856, Marshall sold the ferry site to Francis Shibley. Today, a home built by the Shibleys still stands next to a monument commemorating the crossing. The Big Blue, due to channelization, is about a block to the west of its original location.

**INITIALS OF JAMES F. REED**  
carved at Alcove Spring

**Marysville, Kansas:** The town was incorporated in 1855 and is now the county seat of Marshall County. Marysville was a Pony Express station - sometimes used as a relay station and sometimes as a home station. Today, the building in which the stable was located is a museum. Just west of the town is a life-size statue of a Pony Express rider. It was in Marysville that the Pony Express trail joined the St. Joe Road.

**Junction of the St. Joe Road and the Independence Road:** A few miles west of Marysville, the two roads came together. A monument dedicated on August 11, 1941 will be visited. Among those present at this dedication, almost exactly 47 years ago, was Howard Driggs, president of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association and artist/photographer William Henry Jackson. At the time of the emigration, this area was crowded with wagons as far as the eye could see.



## HOLLENBERG PONY EXPRESS STATION

Near Hanover, Kansas

Hollenberg Pony Express Station: Gerat Hollenberg, a German immigrant, established a station at this site in 1857 with the hope of capitalizing on the Oregon-California traffic. Today, it is the only unaltered Pony Express station on the trail and is operated in its restored condition by the Kansas State Historical Society.



Photographer: Don Reynolds

**The River Crossings Field Trip** will cover the ferry sites between St. Joseph, Missouri and White Cloud, Kansas. After the 1837 Platte Purchase, settlers began legally moving into the area around Robidoux's Blacksnake Hills trading post. Since Robidoux had lived in the area for over ten years, he had built up a thriving business. A ferry (in operation as early as 1826) between his post and Indian Territory was just one of his endeavors. The first license to operate a ferry from Blacksnake Hills was issued in 1839 to Robidoux's son, Julius.

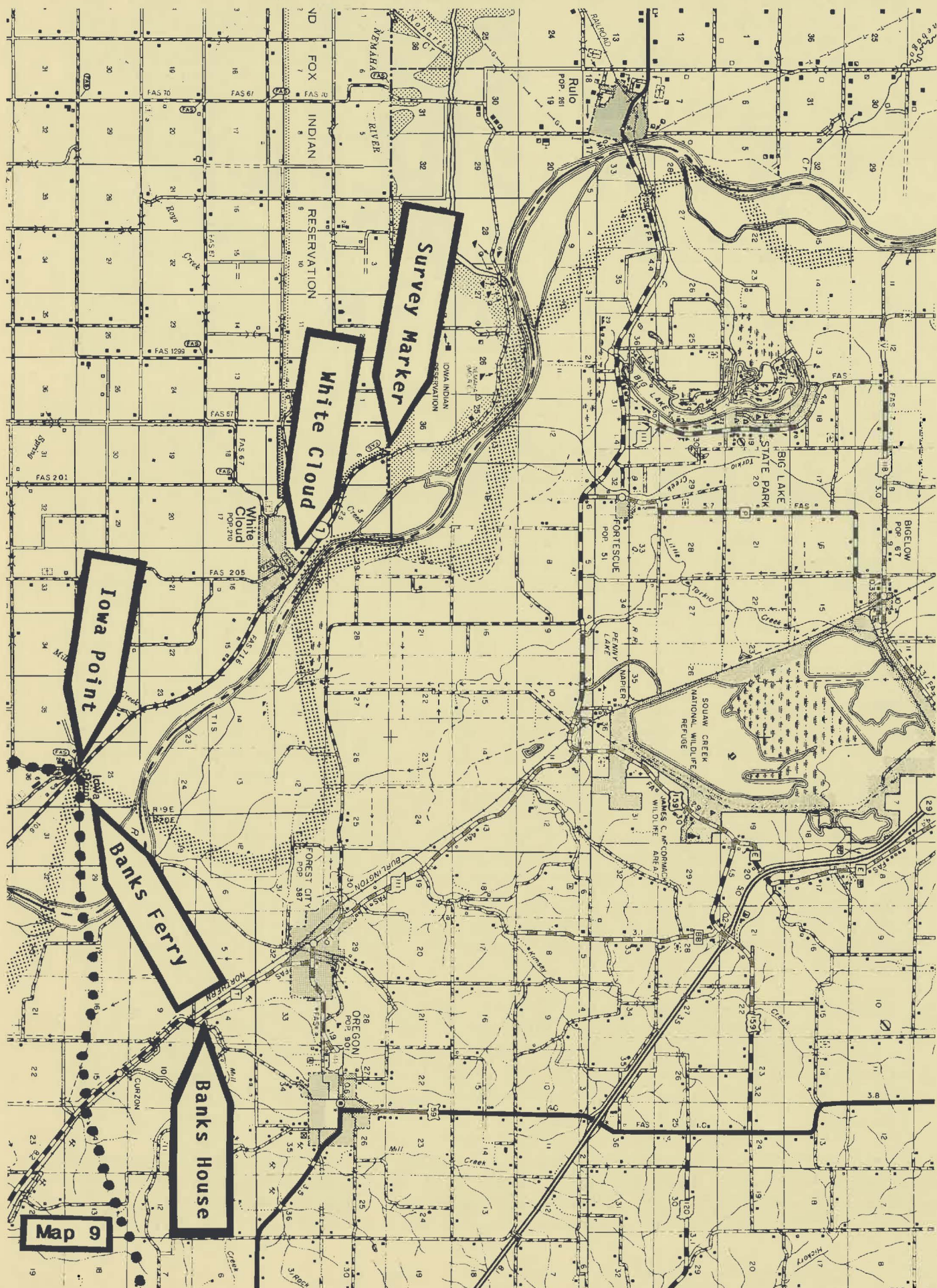
In 1843, when St. Joseph was incorporated, it was beginning to gain importance as a "jumping off" point. As emigration increased, lines began to grow at the crossing at the foot of Francis Street, and entrepreneurs recognized that money was to be made by operating other ferries in the area. A number of ferries sprang up along the Missouri River, both upstream and downstream from St. Joseph. Still, people had to line up at these ferries for hours and sometimes days waiting to cross.

Emigrants came to the vicinity either by traveling upriver, or by coming overland. Once here, they crossed the Missouri River leaving the United States and entering Indian Territory. For many, leaving the United States was an emotional experience added to the heartbreak of leaving families behind. Many diarists wrote eloquently of their feelings on this occasion.

The Missouri River crossing was an experience in itself because of the currents, snags and shifting sandbars. The muddiness of the water was often referred to by emigrants. During the spring floods, the Missouri River could change its channel overnight as the river meandered back and forth over the flood plain between the bluffs. On your maps, you can compare today's channel with that of the mid 19th century. Today, the channel has been stabilized by the Corp of Engineers.

If an emigrant crossed at St. Joseph, he would drive five or six miles through the wooded bottomland to the bluffs. However, if he chose to cross at Duncan's or Parrot's Ferry, four miles upriver from St. Joseph, he would drive through the bottomland on the Missouri side of the river, land at the foot of the bluffs and immediately begin to climb. The next major crossings north of St. Joseph were in the Amazonia, Missouri area and in diaries are referred to as Boston, Nodaway City, Elizabethtown, Amazonia, Caples Landing and Savannah Landing. After crossing at this site, the emigrants would cross the bottomland and ascend the bluffs by following Smith's Creek. Due to marshy areas along the river bank, there were no other major ferries until Iowa Point near present-day Oregon and Forest City, Missouri. White Cloud, Kansas was the site of the next ferry north.





Map 9



Since there were several ferries in the St. Joseph vicinity, it meant that the eastern end of the St. Joe Road was joined by feeder trails for approximately the first 50 miles. By the time the road reached the Iowa-Sac-Fox Presbyterian Mission, the feeder trails had all joined the main St. Joe Road.

#### **SITES TO BE VISITED:**

**Wyeth Hill:** From this overlook on the bluffs in the north part of the city, one can get an overview of the river valley and an idea of how the channel has changed since the mid 19th century. Both the ferry crossing sites at St. Joseph and the Duncan's - Parrot's area can be viewed from this point.

**Amazonia:** At the time of the emigration, this site was adjacent to the Missouri River. However, today the river is about two miles away. Several small towns sprang up in close proximity of each other including Nodaway City (later renamed Boston), Elizabethtown and Amazonia. Since a road came into this area from Savannah, it is also referred to by a few diarists as Savannah Landing. Some of the early wagon trains, including the Gilliam train of 1844, left from Caples Landing at this site.

**Bank's House:** William Banks built this house at the foot of the bluffs in 1848 from native limestone. Banks came to the area in 1841 and began operating a flatboat ferry at Iowa Point. As you can see by your maps, the river did form a point. Here, a layer of limestone extended across the riverbottom so the area had been used for many years as a crossing point for the Indians. Today, the site of the Iowa Point crossing is in the Kansas bottomland.



Photographer: Jackie Lewin

#### **BANKS HOUSE**

**Built in 1848  
by William Banks  
operator of the ferry  
at Iowa Point**

**Survey Marker:** From this initial point, all the land in Kansas and Nebraska and the greater portions of Colorado and Wyoming were surveyed. John Johnson, government surveyor, set this point in 1854, and the six foot cast iron monument was placed here in 1855. It is high on a bluff on the Kansas-Nebraska border. Although you may climb the very steep bluff for a close view, it can be seen from the road.

**White Cloud, Kansas:** This quiet town was once an important river crossing. The first ferry began operation in 1857. There was a ferry at this location as recently as the early 1930s.

**Iowa Point, Kansas:** This is the location of the landing for Banks' Ferry, mentioned earlier. The trail from Iowa Point follows a creek southwest and joins the St. Joe Road near the Iowa-Sac-Fox Presbyterian Mission.



**Mosquito Creek:** One or two days travel from St. Joseph, the emigrants would reach Mosquito Creek (sometimes called Spider Creek). The bluffs surrounding this crossing were steep and, especially to the unseasoned traveler, were difficult and tiresome. The large valley of Mosquito Creek was a pleasant campground for many as hundreds of wagons gathered here for the night. Indian interments in trees along the creek were often mentioned by diarists.

**Wolf River:** This was the first of three major rivers in Kansas to be crossed (the others were the Nemaha River and the Big Blue River). At one location, a primitive bridge was constructed and the Indians charged a fee for crossing. Otherwise, the river had to be forded.

**Wolf River Cemetery:** Some emigrants followed a trail that went south of the main St. Joe Road. One of these was a Mrs. Comstock who died of cholera in 1844 just after crossing the Wolf River. She is the first white woman buried in Doniphan County, Kansas, and hers was the first grave in this cemetery although it is not marked. Several other unmarked graves are here next to where the trail passed.

**Iowa-Sac-Fox Presbyterian Mission:** Almost all diarists mention the mission or the nearby Great Nemaha Subagency. The mission was established by the Reverend Samuel Irvin in 1837 when the Indians were moved out of northwest Missouri and into Indian Territory because of the Platte Purchase Treaty. The mission was in operation until 1863. The brick mission building, erected in 1846, houses a museum under the direction of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Photographer: Don Reynolds



**ST. JOSEPH MUSEUM**  
11th & Charles  
St. Joseph, Missouri

The sixth annual meeting of the Oregon-California Trails Association was coordinated by the St. Joseph Museum's staff. Richard A. Nolf, Director, served as local arrangements chairman. Jackie Lewin, Curator of History, and Marilyn Taylor, Curator of Ethnology, served as coordinators for historical research and historical publications.

John Latschar, formerly historian with the National Park Service and now Superintendent of Steamtown National Historic Site, served as program chairman.

Members of the Gateway and Trails Head Chapters of OCTA assisted in the research, served as trail guides and aided in registration.

Since its founding in 1926, the St. Joseph Museum has served the educational, cultural and recreational interests of the Pony Express city for over sixty years. The extensive ethnological, historical and natural history collections serve as a focal point of community pride and involvement.

In 1959, the St. Joseph Museum acquired the internationally famous "Pike's Peak" or Pony Express stables and operates it as the Pony Express Museum to interpret one the most exciting experiments in American history. The exhibits at the Pony Express Museum depict the creation, operation, management and termination of the Pony Express.