

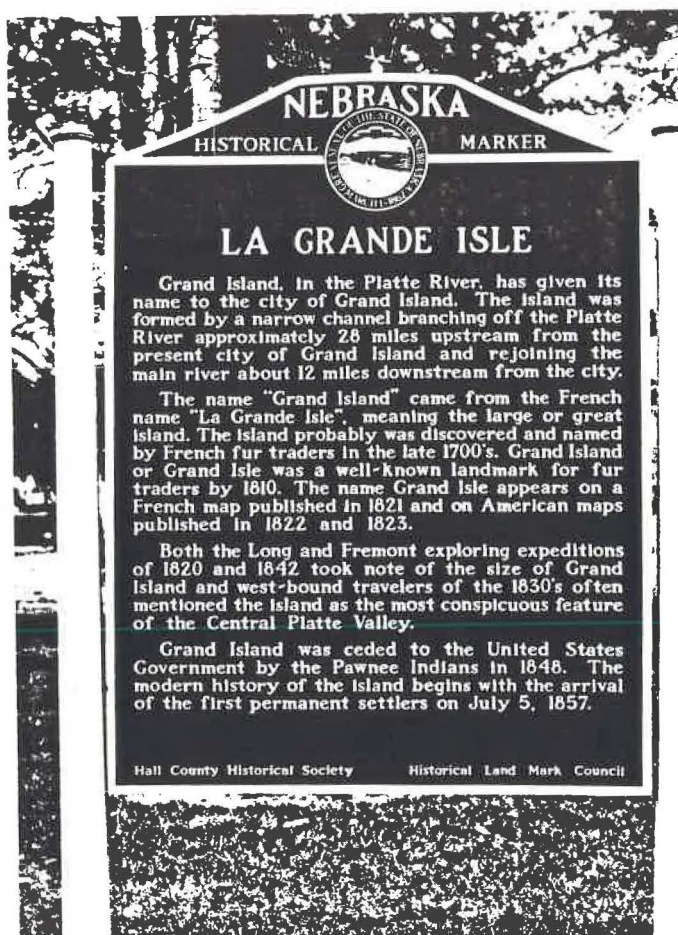
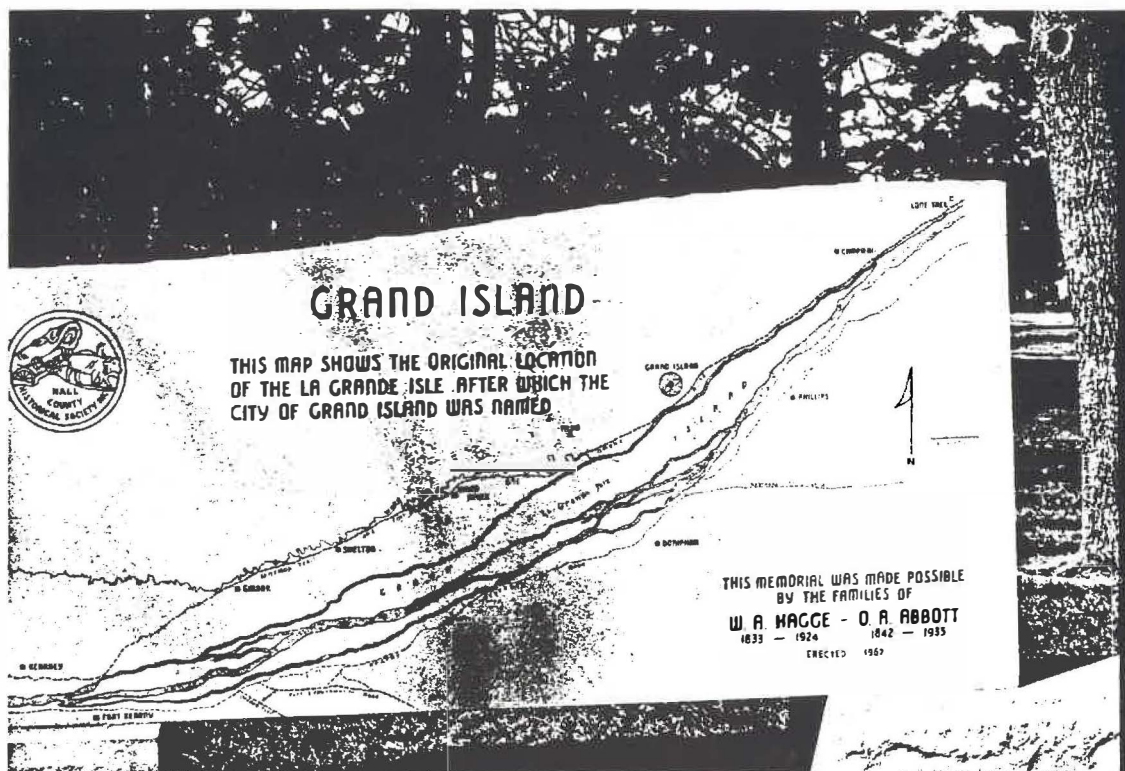
TOUR GUIDE HAND BOOK
ALONG THE PLATTE RIVER VALLEY



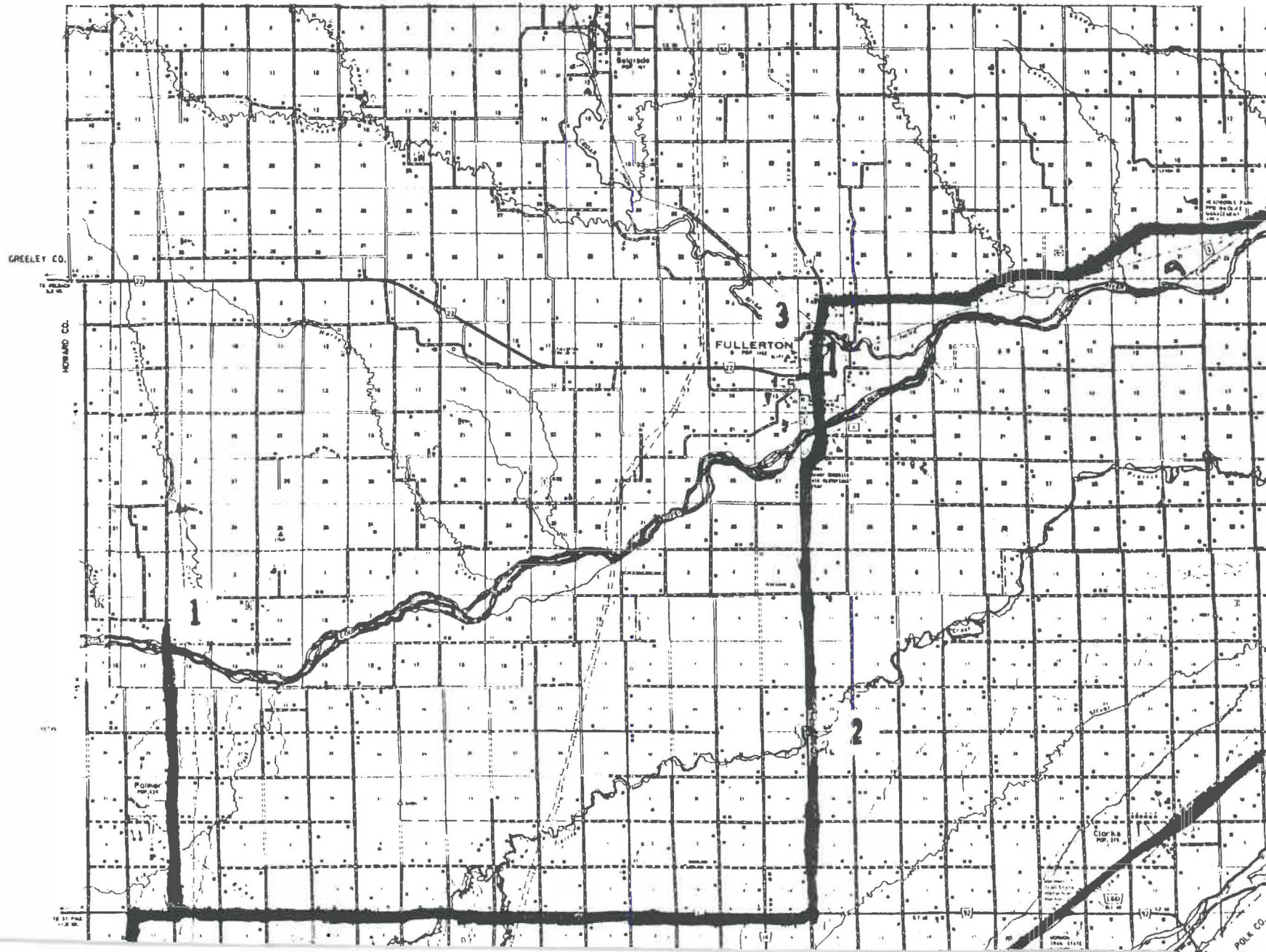
GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA
1995 ANNUAL CONVENTION
OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

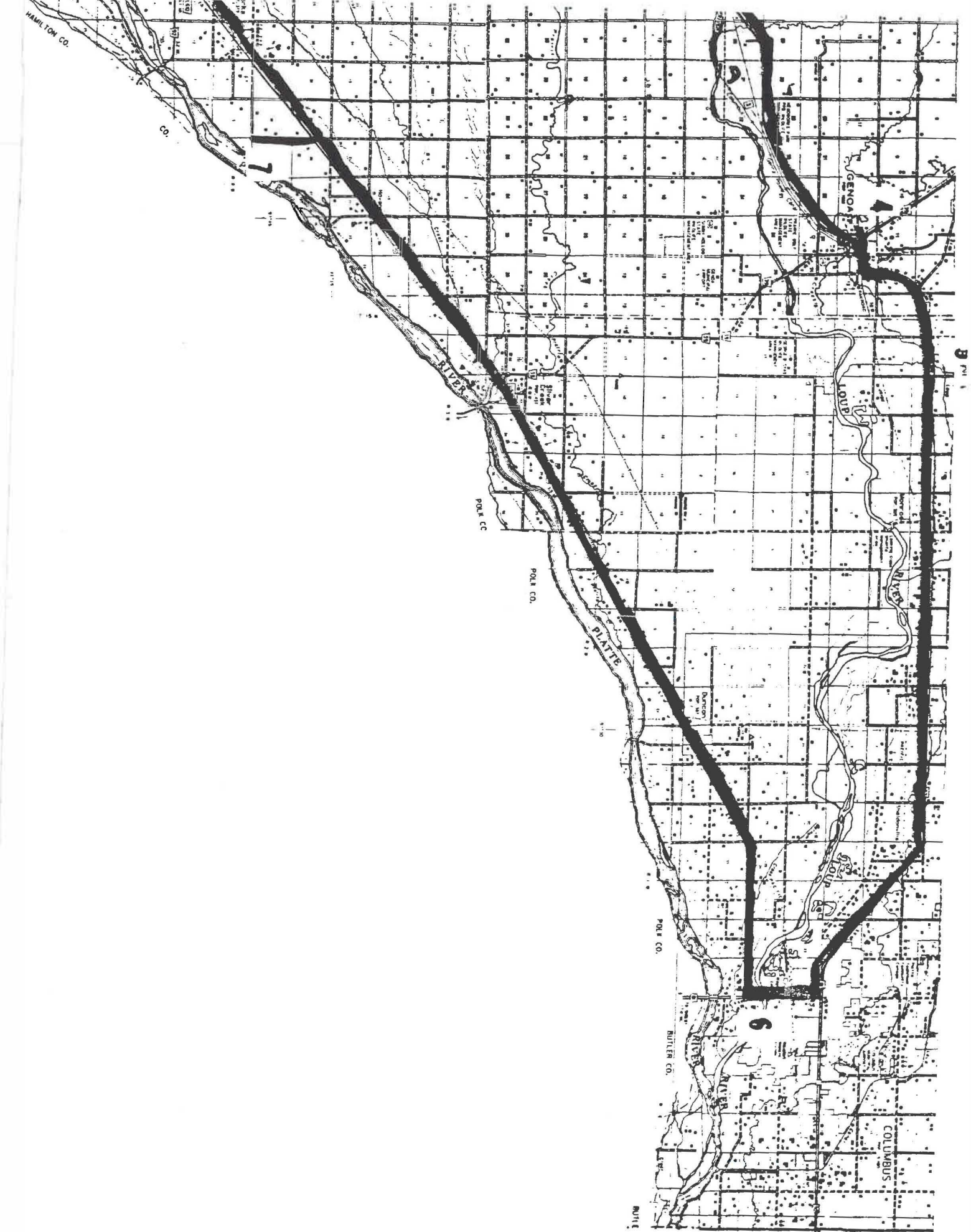
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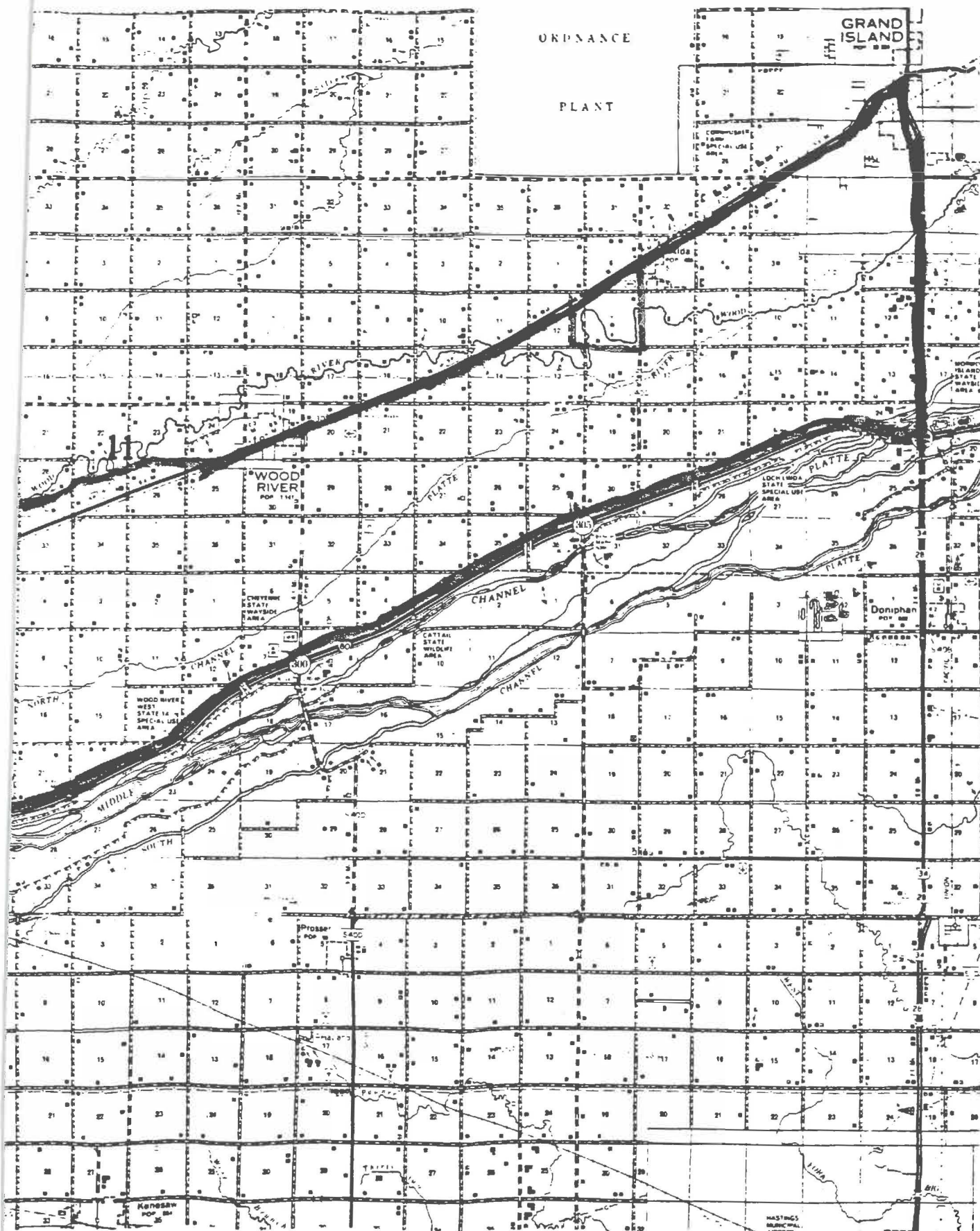
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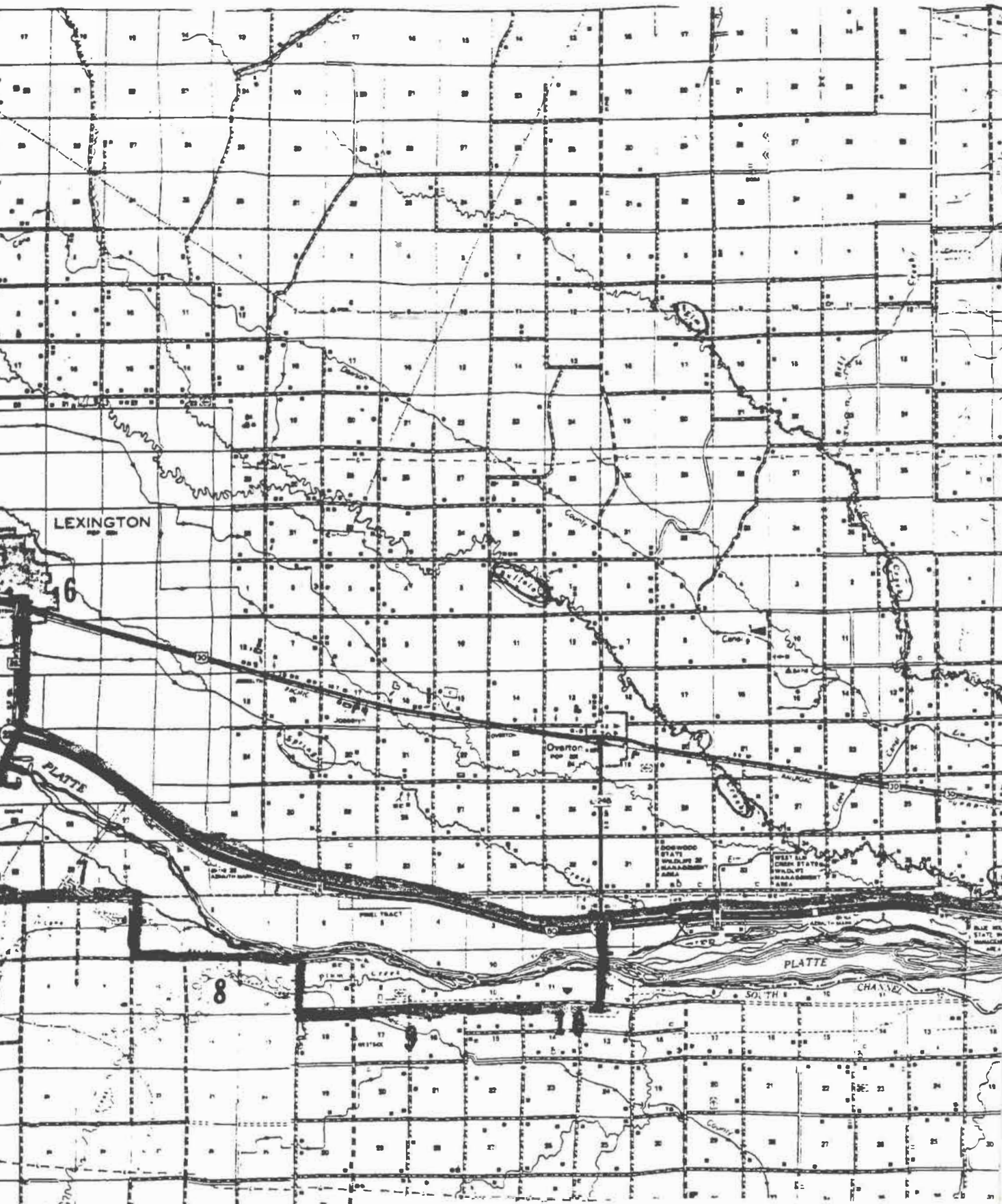




Tour A - South of the Platte River

1 Susan Hail Grave

11 Old Military Road



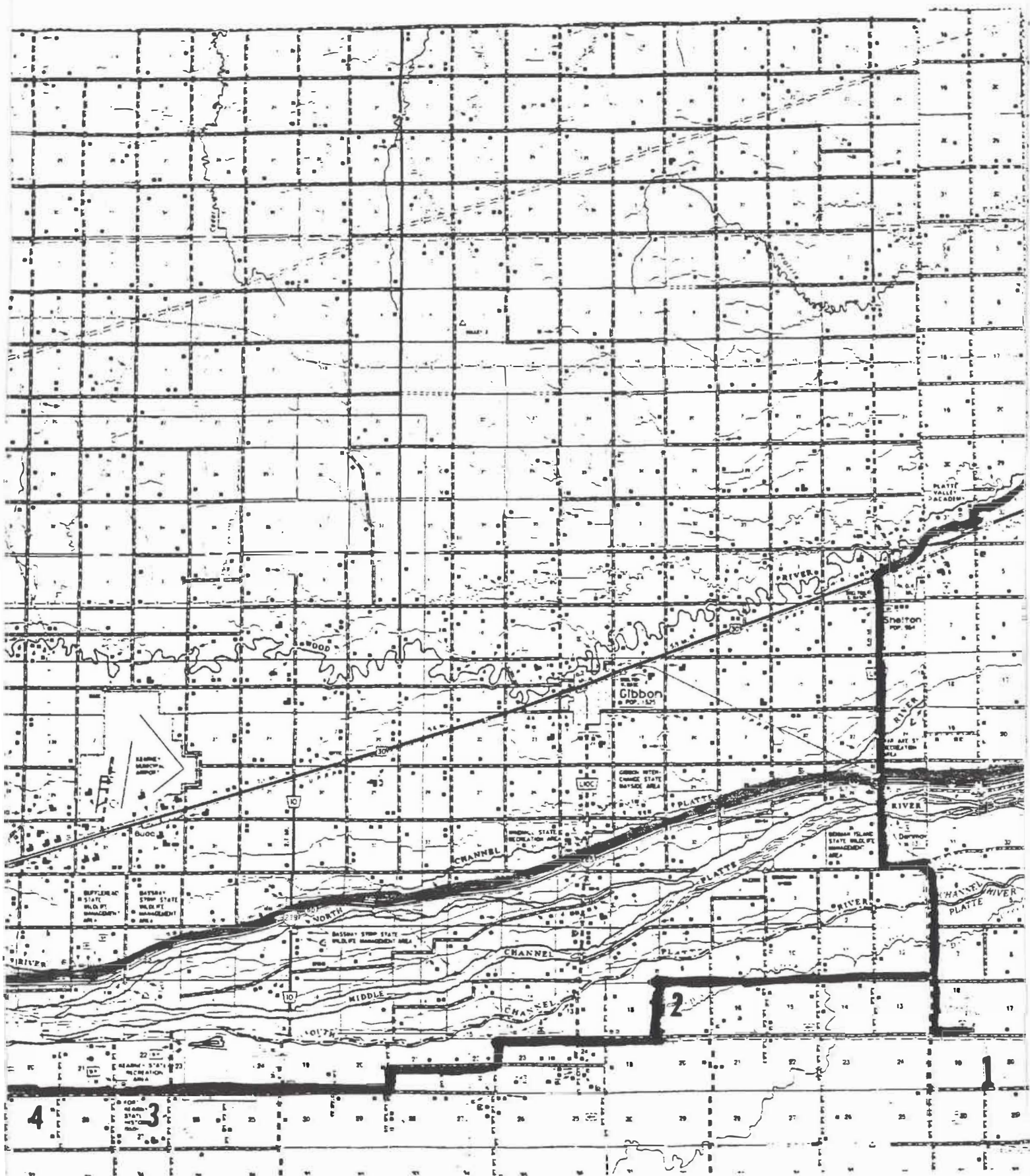
8 Dugout Approaches to Plum Creek Crossing

6 Dawson County Museum

9 Plum Creek Cemetery

7 Freeman Trading Post

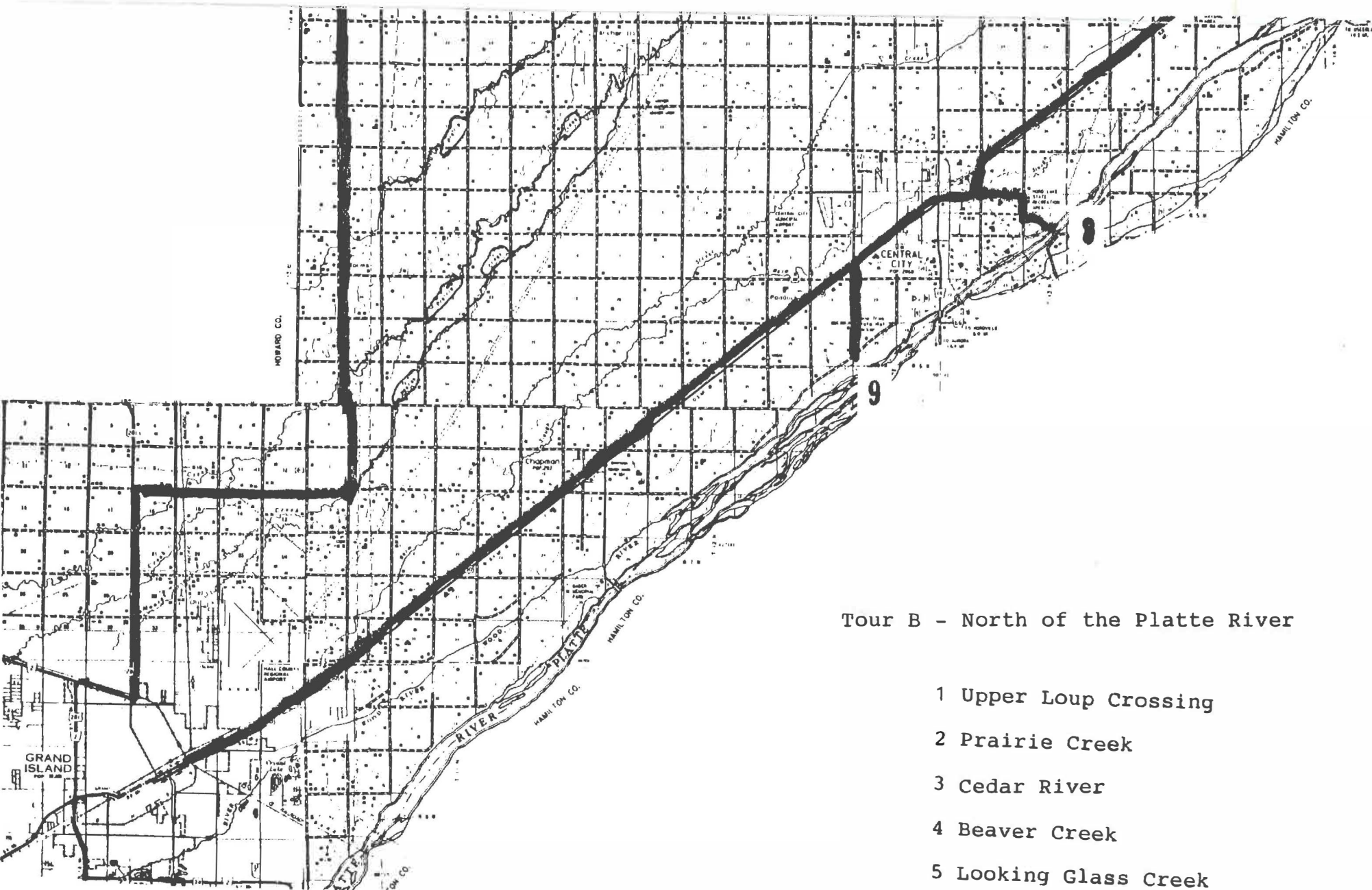
10 Plum Creek Massacre



3 Fort Kearny

4 Dobytown

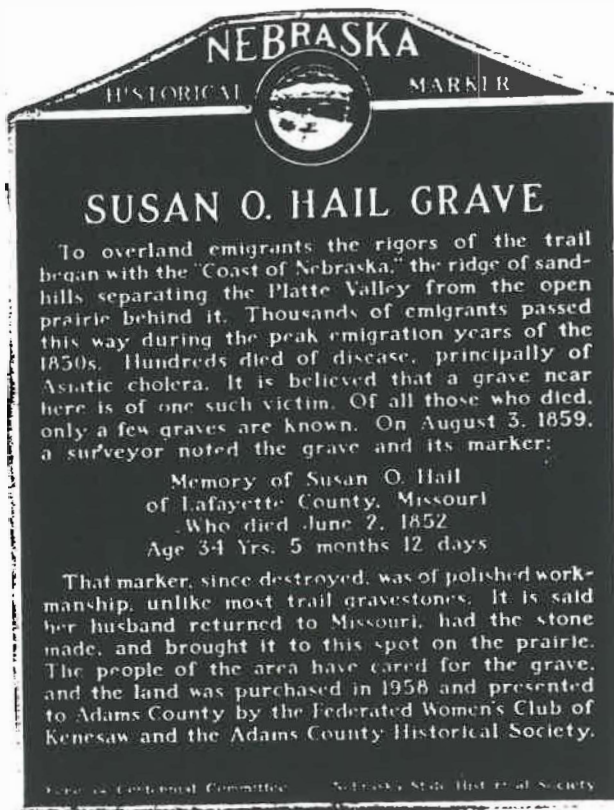
2 Valley Station



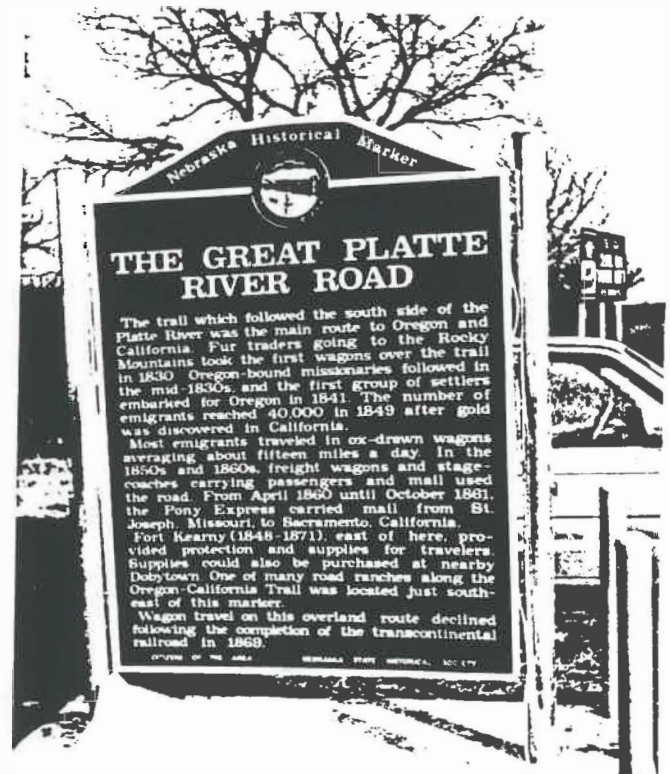
Tour B - North of the Platte River

- 1 Upper Loup Crossing
- 2 Prairie Creek
- 3 Cedar River
- 4 Beaver Creek
- 5 Looking Glass Creek
- 6 Loup River Ferry
- 7 Junction Rancho-Swales
- 8 Hord Lake-Platte River
- 9 Lone Tree Marker

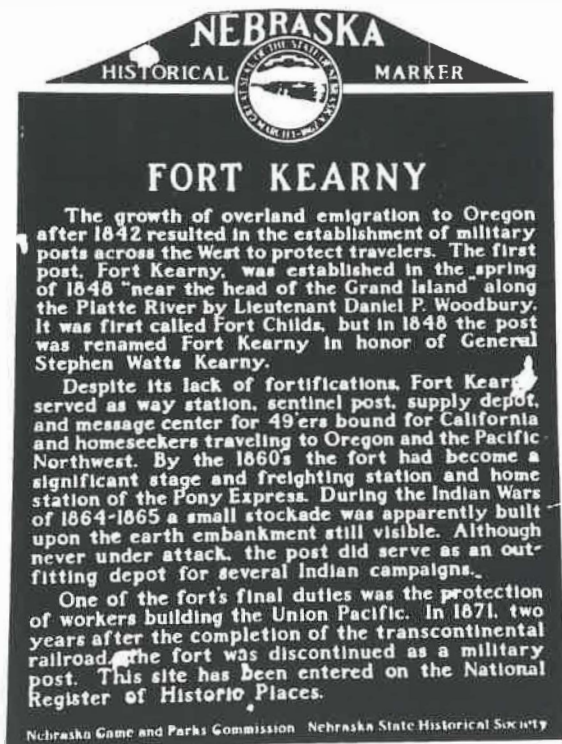
Numbers are keyed to Historic Trails and Markers map



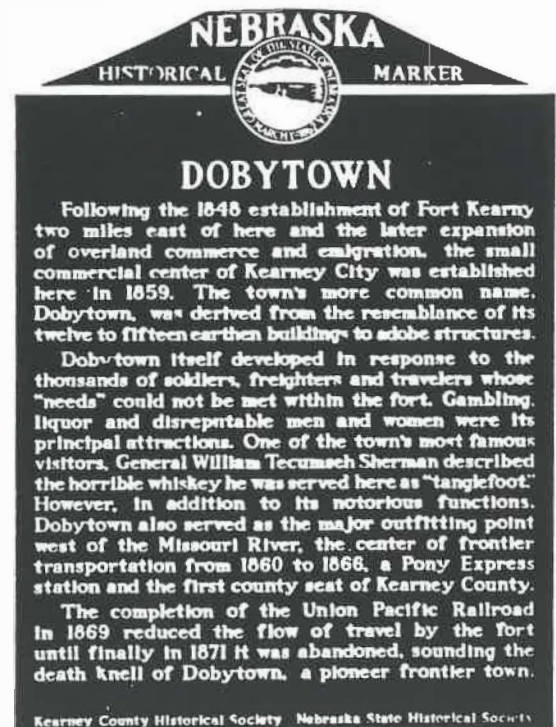
(250) Adams Country



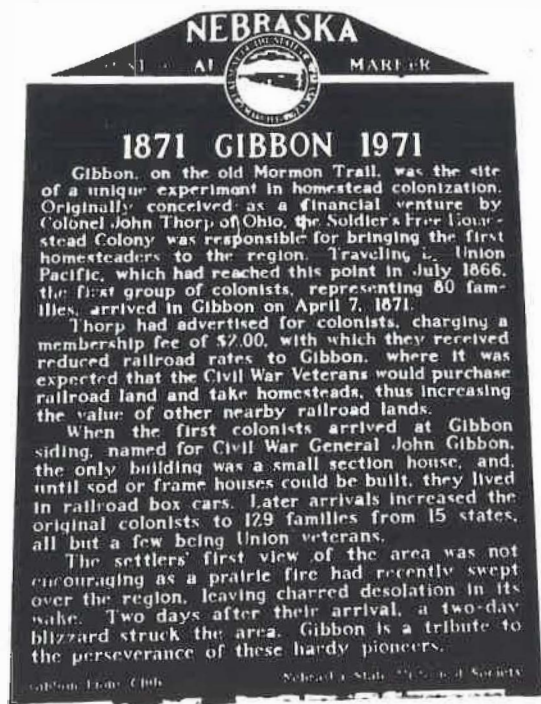
(364) Kearney County



(229) Kearney County



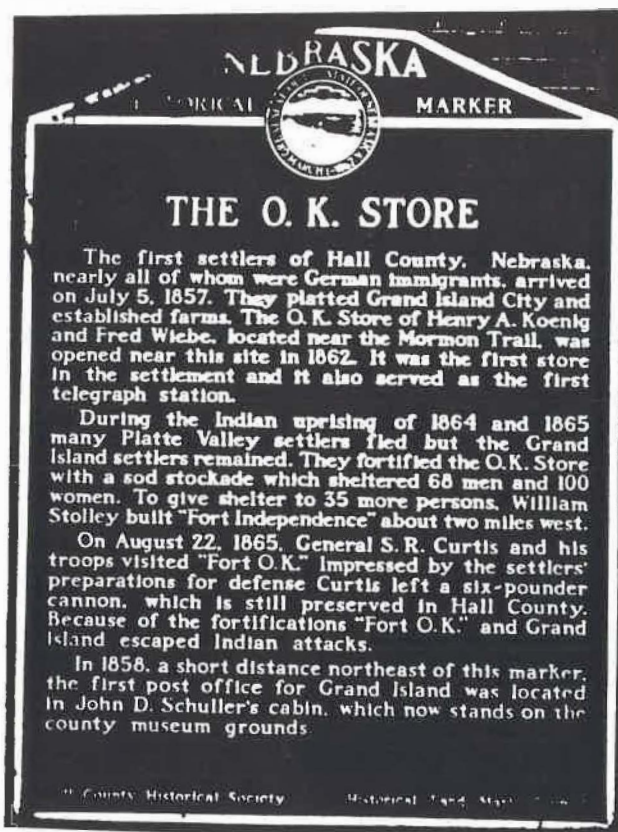
(96) Kearney County



(201) Buffalo County



(359) Buffalo County



(54) Hall County

HISTORICAL MARKERS

Adams County

- 9 The Oregon Trail
- 250 Susan O. Hale Grave
- 324 Kingston Cemetery
- 366 Naval Ammunition Depot

- U.S. 6, west of Hastings
- South of Shelton Interchange
- U.S. 281, 2.5 miles northeast of Ayr
- U.S. 6, 1.5 miles east of Hastings

Buffalo County

- 115 Gibbon, 1871-1971
- 125 Kearney State College
- 148 Kearney Cotton Mill
- 153 Historic Kearney
- 178 Watson Ranch
- 200 Kearney-Fort Kearny
- 201 Gibbon
- 202 The Great Plains
- 319 Elm Creek
- 359 Centre-Boyd Ranch
- 361 Post South Loup Fork

- I-80 Windmill SRA, Gibbon Interchange
- U.S. 30, Kearney
- U.S. 30, west of Kearney
- City Centennial Park, Kearney
- U.S. 30, 4 miles west of Kearney
- I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Kearney
- I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Gibbon
- I-80 Westbound Rest Area, Kearney
- Library on Tyler St., Elm Creek
- U.S. 30, 1.75 miles west of Gibbon
- Hwy 2, 1 mile southeast of Ravenna

Dawson County

- 17 The 100th Meridian
- 73 Central Platte Valley
- 74 Central Platte Valley
- 181 Central Platte Valley
- 182 Central Platte Valley
- 222 The Tobin Indian Raid
- 350 Swedish Crosses Cemetery

- U.S. 30, Cozad
- I-80 Eastbound Rest Area
- I-80 Westbound Rest Area
- I-80 Westbound Rest Area
- I-80 Eastbound Rest Area
- U.S. 30, 1.5 miles east of Overton
- NE 1/4, NE 1/4, T12 N, R 25 W

Gosper County

- 210 George E. Johnson

- Johnson Lake, U.S. 283

Hall County

- 32 Martin Brothers
- 54 The O.K. Store
- 55 LaGrand Isle
- 141 Pioneer Park
- 171 Grand Island
- 172 Grand Island
- 255 The Lincoln Memorial Highway
- 259 Conflict of 1867
- 336 Wood River Original Townsite

- I-80 Westbound Rest Area, Alda
- Fonner Park, Grand Island
- Stolley Park, Grand Island
- Pioneer Park, Grand Island
- I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Phillips Interchange
- I-80 Westbound Rest Area, Phillips Interchange
- Pioneer Park, Grand Island
- U.S. 81, west of Doniphan
- U.S. 30, 3 miles west of Wood River

Hamilton County

- 46 Deep Well Irrigation
- 325 Farmers' Valley Cemetery

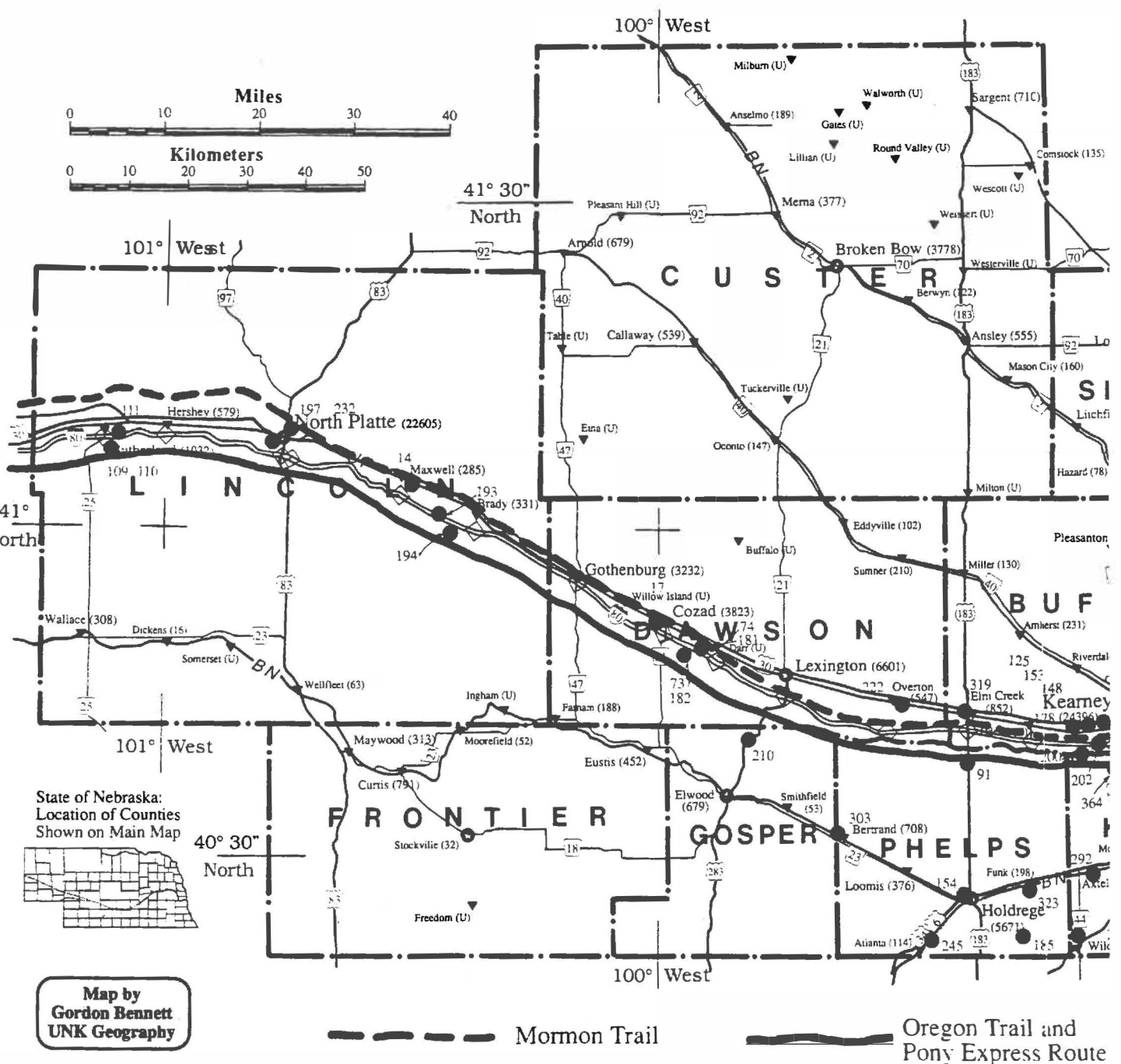
- U.S. 34, Aurora City Park
- 5 miles east and .5 miles north of Stockham

Kearney County

- 96 Dobytown
- 142 Lowell 1872-1972
- 212 Walker's Ranch
- 229 Fort Kearny
- 239 The Burlington & Missouri River
Railroad
- 241 Lowell 1872-1972
- 292 Axtell
- 364 The Great Platte River Road

- Highway 10, west of Fort Kearny
- In Lowell
- Highway 44, north of Wilcox
- Fort Kearny State Historical Park
- Highway 10, Fort Kearny Junction
- South of I-80, Minden Interchange
- Axtell City Park
- Highway 44, 1 mile south of Kearney

NEBRASKA - PLATTE RIVER



ER BIG BEND REGION

Historic Trails and Markers

(35)



..... Oxbow Trail

— Nebraska City Cutoff

Lincoln County

14	Fort McPherson	U.S. 30, west of Maxwell
89	Sioux Lookout (destroyed)	Southeast of North Platte
109	Crossing the Overland Trail	I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Sutherland
110	The Great Platte River Road	I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Sutherland
111	The Great Platte River Road	I-80 Westbound Rest Area, Sutherland
193	Fort McPherson and North Platte	I-80 Westbound Rest Area, Brady
194	Road Ranches along the Platte	I-80 Eastbound Rest Area, Brady
197	Fort McPherson	Lincoln County Historical Society Museum, North Platte
232	Scout's Rest	Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park

Merrick County

6	The Mormon Trail	Junction of U.S. 30 and NE Highway 92
92	Lone Tree	U.S. 30, Central City
158	The Mormon Trail	Mormon Trail SRA, northeast of Central City

Phelps County

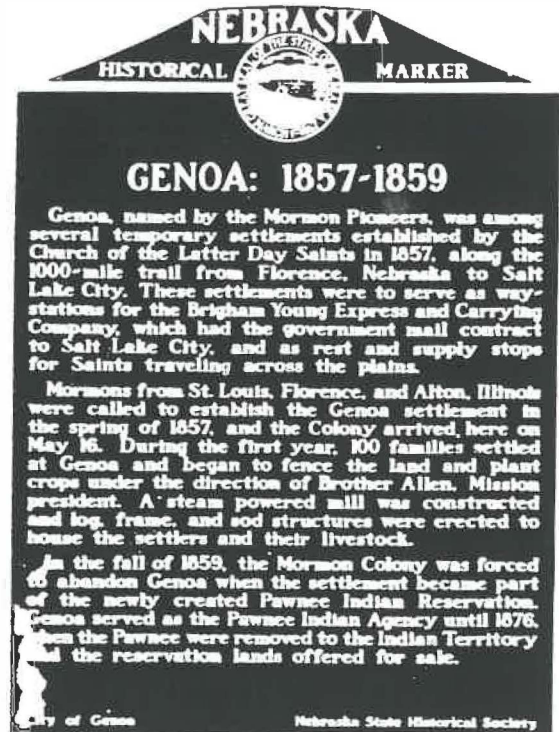
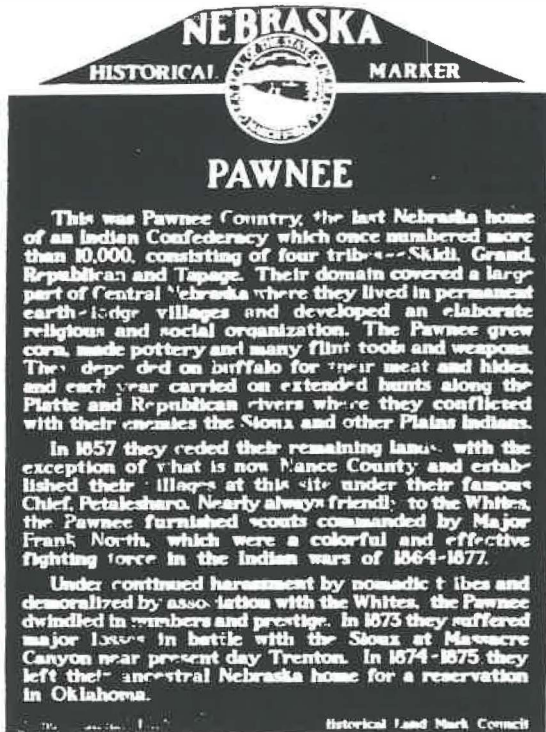
91	Historic Platte Valley	U.S. 183, south of Elm Creek
154	Phelps County	County Court House, Holdrege
185	Site of Old Sacramento	2 miles south of Sacramento
245	Atlanta Prisoner-of-War Camp	U.S. 6, 1 mile northeast of Atlanta
303	Bertrand 1885-1985	Bertrand City Park
323	Funk	Funk City Park

Platte County

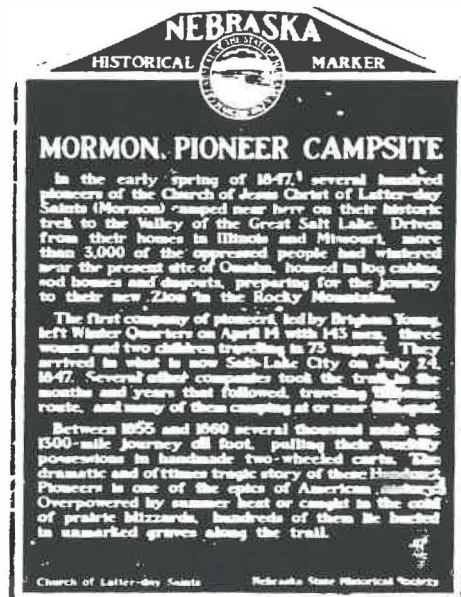
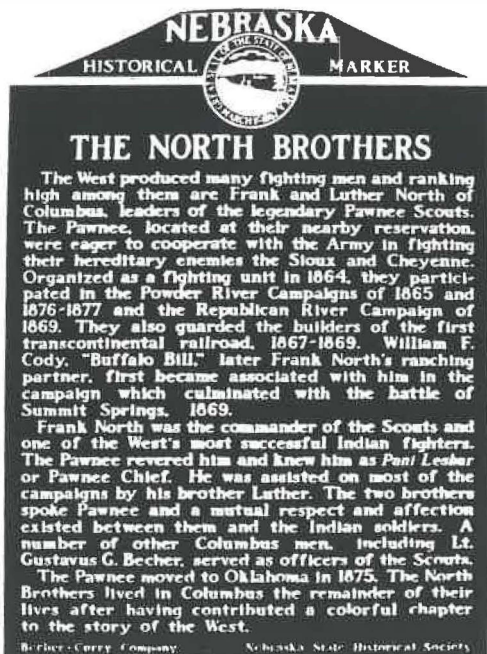
100	The North Brothers	U.S. 81, Columbus
127	Duncan 1871-1971	U.S. 30, Duncan
139	Agricultural Park	County Court House, Columbus
305	The Villasur Expedition, 1720	Junction of U.S. 30 and 81, south of Columbus
318	West Hill Cemetery	5.5 miles north and 6 miles west of Monroe

Polk County

57	Osceola and the Early Pioneer	Highway 92, Osceola
328	Stromsburg – The Swede Capital	Stromsburg Buckley Park

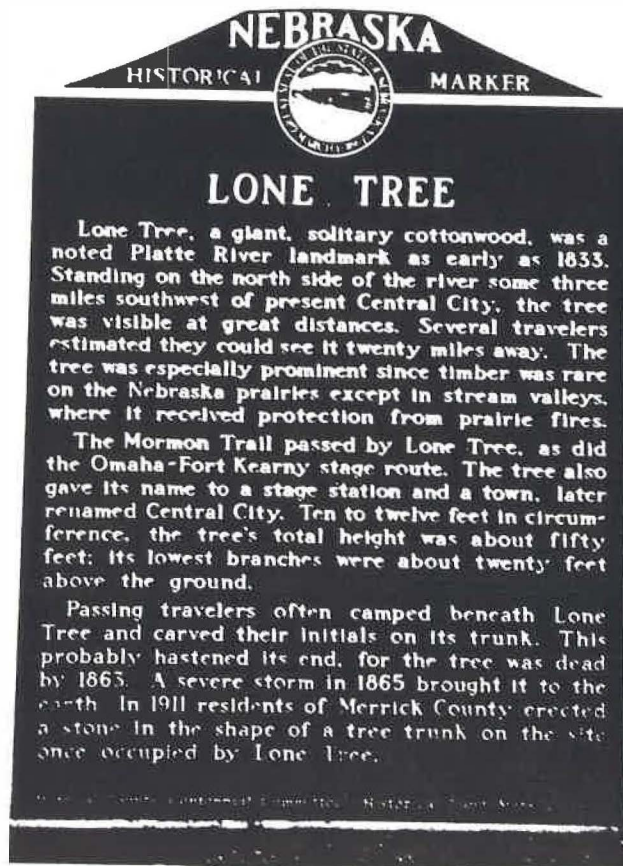


Genoa (not listed on the map)



(100) Platte County

Fullerton
(not listed on the map)



(92) Merrick County

THE MORMON TRAIL

Text from the state historical marker at the junction of 92 & 30

For thousands of Mormons, the great pioneer trail along the north bank of the Platte which paralleled the river about a mile south of here was an avenue or escape from persecution and a roadway to a new life.

Brigham Young led the first major migration over the Mormon Trail to the Great Salt Lake in 1847. The north bank of the river was chosen to avoid contact with the travelers on the heavily-used Oregon Trail that followed the south bank of the river from near Kearney westward. Among the expeditions which followed were several so poor that pioneers walked and pulled handcarts.

The trail became one of the great roadways to the west, used by Mormons, military expeditions, gold seekers and settlers.

The completion of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869 ended extensive use of the trail as the railroad track followed essentially the same route. Today, the Lincoln Highway (Highway 30) follows this great roadway to the west.

(6) Merrick County

TOUR A SOUTH OF THE PLATTE RIVER

GRAND ISLAND - LEXINGTON TOUR

As we leave the motel, the bridge we are crossing spans the north channel of the Platte River. Throughout the years, the channels of the Platte have changed their course many times due to nature's floods and man-made barriers. During the emigration years, the north channel left the main channel near Fort Kearny. It rejoined the main Platte River channel near what is now Chapman, Nebraska, thirteen miles northeast of the present city of Grand Island, thus forming La Grand Ile, purported to be the longest river island in the world. John Fremont estimated the length to be 52 miles. According to modern day estimates, it was probably 45 miles long and no more than 3 miles wide. The land on which Riverside Inn now stands was part of the famous Grand Ile, mentioned so often in emigrant diaries. It was noted for its timber in an otherwise treeless plain.

Camped beside the island, J. Quinn Thornton reported in 1846, "It is well wooded, and has a fertile soil; and the annual rise of the stream does not overflow it. There are many circumstances which unite to make this a suitable point for the establishment of a military post."¹ Two years later, Fort Kearney was established on the south side of the main Platte channel. The availability of timber for building was a factor in the choice of the location.

We will also cross Wood River, a tributary of the Platte. It, too, was noted for its timber. At the crossing at what is now Alda, west of the city of Grand Island, William Clayton wrote in The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide, "Wood river, 12 feet wide, one foot deep. Plenty of timber, and a good place to camp. Banks descending steep, and some soft - but good going out."² At the Interstate we will go by the Mormon Island State Wayside Area that is a reminder of the Mormon trek through this area. The name commemorates the fact that some Mormons wintered on an island near.

As we approach the Interstate that follows the north side of the Platte River, we will read from trail diaries, describing the river and the Platte valley. Listen, and use your imagination to see the land as it looked at the time of the emigration.

On June 4th, 1849, Major Osborne Cross wrote, "Although it (the Platte River) is large, it is but a drain for the melting snows from the mountains, and can only be remarkable for possessing more sandbars, less depth of water and more islands half covered with useless timber than any other stream of its size in the country. It is not navigable, nor can it be made so, and (from) a commercial point of view has very little to recommend it."³

George Gibbs, who was with Major Osborne Cross, reported, "The Platte is, I imagine, alone among rivers. Straight and swift, shallow and muddy, it is unfit for navigation, bad to ford, destitute of fish, too dirty to bathe in, and too thick to drink, at least until custom habituates one to it."⁴

Coming down into the Platte River Valley, Francis Parkman

wrote in 1846, "It was right welcome, strange too, and striking to the imagination, and yet it had not one picturesque or beautiful feature, nor had it any of the features of grandure, other than its vast extent, its solitude and its wilderness. For league after league, a plain as level as a lake was outspread beneath us. Here and there the Platte divided into a dozen thread-like sluices, and an occasional clump of wood, rising in the midst like a shadowy island, relieving the monotony of the waste. No living thing was moving throughout the vast landscape, except the lizards that darted over the sand and through the rank grass and prickly pears at our feet. . .before and behind us, the level monotony of the plain was unbroken as far as the eye could reach. Sometimes it glared in the sun, an expanse of hot, bare sand; sometimes it was veiled by long course grass."⁵

In 1850, Calvin Taylor wrote, "Resuming our journey this morning after travelling a few miles, we crossed the low sand hills seen yesterday and entered the valley of the Platte, which is three or four miles wide at this point. There are two roads, one along the bank of the river; the other along the base of the sand hills. Both roads being on the south side of the river. Saw a large number of emigrants today, the road being lined as far as the eye could reach with wagons, horses, mules and oxen. There is no timber here except on the islands in the river where it grows large and plentiful, there being none on either bank or neighboring hills, which is owing perhaps to the annual burning of the prairie grass which consumes everything to the waters edge. On the north side of the river there is a similar chain of sand hills to those on the south, and running parallel with an extensive bottom between 3 and 4 miles wide."⁶

Echoing the sentiments of Francis Parkman, Mr. Taylor commented on the monotony of the terrain. "Nothing of interest transpired today. Our march is still along the Valley of the Platte which is becoming rather monotonous, from the uniformity of the surface being a broad level valley from 6 to 8 miles wide with a low range of hills on either side. Saw a few more returning emigrants today in consequence of sickness and death on the way."⁷

Richard M. May had the same opinion. He wrote in 1848, "The dull Monotony of a Prairie Journey is quite Tiresome. it being So very uniform that the variety which We Seek is no where to be found. The Crack of the whip the clanking of Chains and the Still more disagreeable Schreek of Wagons is all that the Sense of hearing Conveys to the mind. Now and then the Lark and linnett will give you one of the best, and Sweetest notes To emulate you while Journeying in these endless prairies."⁸

Two short diary entries by George McKinstry in 1846 told it all. "Wednesday June 11th, started at 8 Oclock traveled up the Platte 20 miles, the soil and scenery the same as yesterday." And a few days later, "Sunday June 15th, traveled 20 miles, today along the Platte, soil and scenery the same as before."⁹

Virgle Pringle, another traveler in 1846, had a different

view and appreciated the ease of travel. "Started in fine season and came in sight of the sand hills of (the) Platte in about 3 miles and arrived on the borders of the bottom about ten o'clock. This is the most romantic view I have ever seen." The next day he wrote, "Camped this night on the bank of the river which looks very majestic, but in fact is nothing but a broad vale of sand with banks about 3 feet high, which are full at high water and the sand dry in a dry time. There is now just water enough to barely cover the bars, leaving them sometimes in sight." The next day, "The morning cool but the day pleasant for traveling and the roads of the best order, being level bottom and firm." And two days later, "A fine day for travel. The scenery of the country very similar since we came on the river, although there is enough of change to render it agreeable. The breadth of the river, the numerous islands and the variety of shape in the sand hills all keep the mind relieved from sameness."¹⁰

Our first stop will be at the Susan Hail grave. While there, look northwest and just to the left. In this field of native prairie grass was located some sort of an establishment. In 1991, the Nebraska State Historical Society considered it to be the site of the Sandhill Pony Express Station, which had formerly been believed to be located a few miles south of here. Others believe it was some other site. In any case, the area is a treasure chest of artifacts including lead bullets, a tea kettle, U.S. Cavalry uniform buttons, shell casings, hair pins, and square nails.

Thousands of emigrants passed this way during the peak emigration years of the 1850s. Hundreds died of disease and of all that number, only a few graves of them are known. Here is one that is known! In 1859, Mr. Justis Cozad of the United States surveying party who first surveyed this area, reported that he found, on this raised spot, a marble tombstone on which was engraved the following inscription: In Memory of Mrs. Susan O. Hail of Lafayette, Mo. who died June 2, 1850, Aged 34 years, 5 months 12 days.

The local story tells that she drank from a spring poisoned by Indians and she died with shocking suddenness. More likely, she died from drinking contaminated water from a pond that had been polluted by buffalo. The grief stricken husband left the train, returned to St. Joseph, Missouri, had a marble tombstone engraved and moved it back to this point, put the stone on her grave, and then he disappeared into the mists of time. This is at least the third stone that has been placed on this tomb. The others have been chipped away by curiosity seekers over the past years.

William Woodhams traveled past this place in 1859. On May 10th, he wrote, "Left Little Blue this morning for the Platte River Valley. Traveled all day over a high rolling prairie, no wood or water fit to use. Saw plenty of wolves, and passed many graves. One had a nice marble headstone with a woman's name on it. It stood on the top of a sandhill, and strange enough was that sad evidence of civilization here in the wilderness, the more so as it bore a woman's name." He continued

writing, "We are encamped by the Platte, a wide shallow, dirty stream, so muddy that a pailful of water standing overnight will deposit an inch of mud by morning. Grass is pretty good, but wood there is none, and for the first time we use "bois de Vache" or 'buffalo chips'."¹¹

Merrill Mattes, in The Great Platte River Road, wrote about the problem of obtaining drinking water from the Platte River. "Platte River water was obtained in two ways: by scooping it up out of the main stream or its backwaters, or by digging a hole two to four feet deep in sandy soil near river level. The latter method was used by many, and while there was more exertion, according to Addison Crane, by this method, 'most excellent cold pure water can be obtained anywhere. It leaches through the sand from the river and is perfectly filtered.' Most emigrants disagreed, however: well water was more apt to be warm, dirty, and often alive with tiny creatures. After trial and error, several affirmed that 'river water is safer.' . . . If river water was deemed safer than well water, it still held few charms for the fastidious. John Wyeth warned that a Platte River cocktail 'is warm and muddy, causing diarrhoea.' . . . Getting his out of a slue or backwater, John Dalton called it 'nasty, filthy stuff.' D. A. Shaw proclaimed it 'useable only if filtered and strained' with a cloth, since this is not a river at all, but 'simply moving sand.' Randall Hewitt came up with another formula for dealing with 'the mud of a river intent on wearing away half a continent.' He recommended putting a handful of meal in the bucket, and 'a few moments time is sufficient to precipitate the silt and render the water very palatable.' Some of the women recommended boiling, not to kill bacteria, which they had never heard of, but to immobilize the wiggle-tails. Timpkins was ahead of his day in believing the 'secret of boiling water (was) to evaporate its deleterious properties.' Drinking untreated shallow well water and Platte River water was doubtless a factor in the high mortality rate."¹²

The use of buffalo chips for fuel was unique to the Platte River journey. Elizabeth Dixon Smith wrote in 1847, "we see thousands of buffalow and have to use their dung for fuel a man will gather a bushel in a minute 3 bushels makes a good fire."¹³

Heber C. Kimball in 1847 invented a new way of building a fire, adapted to the use of buffalo chips as fuel. "He dug a hole in the ground about eight inches deep, fifteen inches long and eight inches wide. At each end of the hole, he dug another about the same dimensions as the first, leaving about three inches of earth standing between the middle and two end holes. Through these partitions he made a hole about three inches in diameter to serve as a draft. In the bottom of the middle hole the fire and fuel were placed and across the top were set two wagon hammers, upon which pots and pans were placed so that the fire could have free circulation underneath. By this method much cooking was done with very little fuel. Luke S. Johnson, in building his fire, transformed a buffalo skull into a chimney in such a way that the smoke passed through two holes between the horns."¹⁴

The importance of this fuel was noted by Welborn Beeson in 1853 as he traveled along the Platte. May 22, "Good grass, lake water, no wood, plenty of buffalo chips." May 23, "Plenty grass, water and buffalo chips." May 24, "Plenty of grass and buffalo chips."¹⁵

If the chips were thoroughly dry, they burned odorless and made a quick, hot fire. Mrs. George Donner wrote in 1846, "Wood is now very scarce, but 'Buffalo chips' are excellent - they kindle quick and retain heat surprisingly. We had this evening Buffalo steaks broiled upon them, that had the same flavor they would have had upon hickory coals."¹⁶

And in the same year, Nathan Putnam wrote, "For two days past we have been cooking with Buffalo Chips. I think . . . it is rather a hard matter that the Buffalo should furnish the meat and then, the Fuel to Cook it with but nature seems to have so ordered."¹⁷

In the days of trail travel, buffalo herds thrived. As he traveled along the Platte River, Medorem Crawford wrote in 1842, "Our animals alarmed last night by the Buffalo approaching the camp. Saw thousands of buffalo. Little feed for horses."¹⁸

The Mormons, traveling on the north side of the river in 1847, had the same problem in that the huge herds of buffalo had eaten the grass, leaving no feed for their animals. On May 8, "The prairie on both sides of the river was literally black with buffalo. It would have been impossible, Elder Clayton wrote, to have tried to state the number. On the south side of the river there was one dense mass of these animals covering the plain several miles in length and marching toward the hills. Many of the brethren expressed their thankfulness that they were on the north side of the river, away from such immense droves, but as the company, in a short time, turned a point of the hill, they saw thousands and thousands of them marching directly in the path of the pioneers and going in the same direction as the wagons. They were such a mass of living blackness that the vanguard could not see the prairie beyond them."¹⁹

Also on the north side of the Platte River, John Pulsipher described the phenomenon in 1848, "Buffalo abound along the Platte River in such vast numbers that it is impossible for mortal man to number them. . . Thousands of them sometimes would run toward the river, plunge down the bank into the water, tumble over each pile up, but all would come out right on the other side of the River & continue the race. Sometimes we would see the Plain black with them for ten miles in width."²⁰

A buffalo stampede was always to be feared. Samuel Hancock, 1845, "The whole country. . . presented a mass of buffaloes on a stampede coming toward us. . . we immediately went to work preparing ourselves as best we could, by driving the wagons around in a circle, to make a fortification. . . against the approach of these formidable travelers of the Plains. Several of our company more daring than the others took a position on an eminence and keeping an incessant firing of guns and pistols, succeeded in a diversion of their route, to within two hundred yards of us. . . It was estimated that this army of buffaloes was at least two hours in passing. . . immediately following

them were immense gangs of wolves, making the most hideous noise."²¹

W. McBride, 1850, "Our company was much alarmed last night by a herd of buffalo rushing by our encampment. . .As the vast herd was coming up they sounded like distant rumbling thunder and grew louder and louder til they passed. . .This morning whilst engaged in harnessing the horses a herd of buffalo were seen coming under full speed. All save the teamsters rushed for their arms. . .as they drew closer they espied us and sheared very slightly to one side. . .As these huge creatures came booming along, their beards, being pendant from their jaws and almost sweeping the ground, their great brawny necks and shoulders covered with long flowing hair and mane. . .with their eyes rolling and fiery, they looked like a most noble and formidable enemy."²²

Mrs. Ferris, 1852, "We suddenly came upon an immense herd of these monsters of the Plains. They started to run in three mighty streams, two of which went directly through the gaps of our trains. As they thundered past in blind fear, shaking the very ground beneath their feet, it seemed to me as though everything must be dashed to pieces. I thought I could then realize something of the terrific. . .charge of cavalry."²³

Ezra Meeker, 1852, "Suddenly there was a sound like an approaching storm. Almost instantly every animal in the corral was on its feet. The alarm was given and all hands turned out. . .The roar we heard was like that of a heavy railroad train passing at no great distance."²⁴

Elisha Brooks, 1852, "One morning a large herd was seen on the other (south) side of the Platte River in full sweep toward our camp. . .Into the river they plunged, forced on by the mass in the rear, churning the water into foam and heading straight for us as the only landing place in the vicinity. We all turned out and by shouting, gesticulating and firing into the herd we succeeded in sheering them off a little to one side and escaped with only the destruction of a tent or two and some shattered nerves."²⁵

Although the buffalo stampedes were frightening, the buffalo trails caused considerable consternation for the emigrants. It was the habit of the creature to walk in single file from the sandhills to the river for water, thus creating deep ruts that made a washboard of the trail. Sarah Cummins complained that they "were as regular as any set of ploughed furrows, so we rode on a constant rocking motion" and according to Washington Bailey, "We see buffalo trails every day where they go to the river to drink. It makes the road rough."²⁶ In our modern day, we would call them speed bumps in reverse.

Buffalo hunting was considered to be a great sport. George Belshaw wrote in 1850, "Killed a buffalo today. . .we saw 12 . . .our company took after them. . .we broke his leg the first shot with a revolver then shot him through the eyes. . .I jump off my horse and gave him a death shot in the brain. . .fine sport was this for all the boys. . .we had a fine mess of beef."²⁷

William Pleasants, 1849. "We rode up quite close to where

a few were rolling in the dirt. . . (shooting one). . . at every shot he would wheel and charge us, and more than once he came near ripping the side of a horse with his sharp, curving black horns. . . The pursued animal finally stopped running and stood at bay, madly pawing the ground. . . his bloodshot eyes full of rage and defiance. . . taking running shots at his side . . . he was finally dispatched."²⁸

C. W. Smith, 1850, commented on their speed. "Buffalo have a clumsy sort of canter, yet they are not slow as it takes a good horse to overtake them."²⁹

On May 1, 1847, the Mormon pioneers, camped near Grand Island, spent three hours hunting buffalo. Andrew Jenson, Assistant L. D. S. church historian recorded, "At the appearance of a large herd, President Young named 11 men to mount and give chase. The wagon train moved slowly along, all the men left in the party being deeply interested in the hunt, and the excitement ran high. The hunters were soon enveloped by a cloud of dust, caused by the avalanche of moving buffaloes. One of the dogs had scared up an antelope which ran directly toward the herd of frightened and fast retreating animals. They scattered in every direction and the hunters were in hot pursuit. Heber Kimball enthusiastically joined in the hunt and a large cow was killed by him after a most exhilarating chase. Mr. Kimball had fired over his horses shoulder and the horse, becoming frightened, ran away and nearly threw the rider, but was checked in his mad career before any damage was done. At this point, those in the camp who were watching the hunt with spy glasses noticed that some of the buffaloes had separated and were wildly galloping directly toward the wagon train. President Young ordered a halt and had the wagons drawn together, lest the beasts in their fury should dash into the long column. Some of the foot hunters started from camp of their own accord and joined in the chase, now grown into a most exciting hunt. Porter Rockwell, hearing that a buffalo's forehead would resist a ball, got a good chance and fired at one, hitting the animal fairly in the front of his head, but it had no effect other than to raise some smoke and dust and caused a fine-looking bull to shake his head in a perfect frenzy of anger. The chase lasted from nearly 1 to 4 p.m. and when the wagons brought in the dead animals, it was found that in all 10 had been killed. The fresh meat was distributed equally and heartily relished by all."³⁰

When we stop at the Susan Hail grave, look below and beyond to the northwest to see traces of the trail. The land in native prairie looks very similar to what the emigrants saw. This is an appropriate first stop since it was here that the overlanders caught their first glimpse of the Platte valley. The trees you will see in the distance border the Platte River. At this stop, Kim Naden of Franklin, Nebraska will point out the trail traces and will inform us about the trail here. In the summer of 1980 and 81, Kim walked this trail of approximately 430 miles across the state. His reports and maps on are file at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As we leave the Susan Hail grave, we will be approaching the land that was the eastern boundary of Fort Kearny, in about five miles. This area was the site of a stage station known as Valley Station, built in 1859, consisting of a stable, dwelling and store. It served as a "home station" for the Pony Express and as a stage station. Richard Burton complained in 1860 that he was served "vile bread and viler coffee for 75 cents."³¹ It was also known as Junction Station since the road from St. Joseph, Leavenworth and Independence, the road from Nebraska City, and one of the branches of the road from Kanesville (Council Bluffs) all joined together near here and passed this place.

Sarah Herndon wrote in 1865, "We came through a little town-Valley City. There is a very pretty attractive looking house near the road. . .Our inclination to enter that pretty home was irresistible, so we dismounted, took off our habits, hitched our ponies, and knocked at the door. A very pleasant lady opened the door and gave us a hearty welcome. . .The gentleman of the house is postmaster, and has his office in the room across the hall from the parlor. While we were there the coach arrived, and the mail was brought in. . .a mass of pulp. . .because they send such old leaky mail-bags on this route." Miss Herndon reported that she helped Mr. Hook and his wife dry out the mail in the hopes of salvaging some of it.³²

The site was also known as Dogtown because there was a large prairie dog town in the vicinity according to Frank Young, who traveled through this area in 1865.³³

Prairie dog towns were a common occurrence on the trail in Nebraska. Andrew Jenson described the creatures as the Mormon pioneers of 1847 saw them. "The pioneers came to a long range of dog towns and saw many little prairie dogs playing around their holes. The extent of this string of dog towns seemed to be about five miles and in some places nearly two miles broad; and it was judged that there were thousands of these little creatures. They appeared to be about as long as a common gray squirrel, but with a larger body and chubbed head. The tail was short, resembling that of a dog, and the color light brown."³⁴

The prairie dog holes were a menace to horses and riders going at top speed because a slip into a hole could break a horse's leg. The emigrants believed that the prairie dogs shared their holes with rattlesnakes and burrowing owls. Capt. Stansbury reported, "When shot, they fell back into their holes, where they are generally guarded by a rattlesnake. . .Several were shot by us. . .but when the hand was about to be thrust into the hole to draw them out, the ominous rattle of this dreaded reptile would be instantly heard. . .A white burrowing owl also is frequently found taking up his abode in the same domicile. . . .I have never personally seen the owl thus housed, but have been assured."³⁵

Another feature of trail travel in this area in the spring were the beautiful wild flowers. Mary Ellen Todd wrote in 1852 in her diary. "Occasionally we passed by where fields of lovely flowers-wild blue bells, buttercups, lupine-purple and white-

wild blue flax and many other kinds" could be seen. "How I loved to jump out and gather arm loads of them. Then Lauvina and I liked to braid them in wreaths, crowning little Cynthia as Queen of May. Father and Mother always encouraged us in our love for the beautiful; hence our wagon was often decorated with bouquets and garlands."³⁶

Parthenia Blank, on the north side of the Platte, wrote in 1852, "Here we find lockspur and also a very pretty dark³⁷ red flower, strangers to us. They resemble the moss rose."

Along with the beauty on the trail came the trash as emigrants were forced to lighten their loads. Elijah Bryan Farnham wrote in his diary in 1849, "This morning as we wended our way up the river we saw a great many teams that had stopped and the companies were lightening their wagons by throwing out some of their load. We saw large piles of bacon that had been thrown out from the overloaded teams. Some of the companies when they are out of wood make use of this bacon for fuel. We stopped and camped at noon. No sooner had we camped than some were making ready for lighting up. We had some of the bread taken out of the boxes and put in sacks and thus got rid of a good deal of weight. It was impossible to keep the bread whole or clean this way. Yet we were forced to submit to this inconvenience and economize in this way and relieve our cattle of every pound we could, for the roads that had heretofore been good when on the level were here sandy and the wagons pulled hard over them and from the information that we could get from guides, they were for some ways ahead. We also threw some beans out. Some of the company that had some rough boxes tried to get up an excitement to have all the trunks thrown away, but as it was allowed by the constitution for every one to have a light trunk and as the majority had articles that they wished to keep secure, those considerate schemers could not succeed."³⁸

The Fort Kearny we are approaching is actually the second Fort Kearny. The first Fort Kearney, a blockhouse on the Missouri River at what is now Nebraska City, was built in 1846-47. Soon after this first post was occupied it was determined to move it to a point that would give more protection to emigrants on the Oregon Trail. In June 1846, Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury, who chose the site, came here with 175 men and began construction of fortifications, making and sun-drying adobe brick and building sod stables.

During the Civil War regular troops were withdrawn, and the fort was manned by volunteers, including a number of former Confederate soldiers, who were called "Galvanized Yankees." In 1865 a troop of Pawnee Indians were enlisted to help hold the Sioux Indians in check, and these men continued to serve here during the building of the Union Pacific Railroad. When the railroad displaced the wagon train, the usefulness of the fort was over. It was abandoned in 1871, and a few years later the military reservation was thrown open for settlement.

Many emigrants mention the fort. James A Pritchard wrote on May 10, 1849, "At noon we reached Fort Kearny. Passed through the place 1 mile and stopped to graze and rest a couple of hours. Here we found a military post established and some 60 or 90

Dragoons posted here - also a kind of post office establishment, which gave us a opportunity of sending back letters. The Fort is about 12 miles above the head of Grand Island, and the houses are built of adobes or sun dried brick."³⁹

On June 17, 1849 J. Goldsborough Bruff wrote, "I visited the fort. . . This place is as yet merely the site of an intended fort; it has some adobe embankments, quarters - etc. of adobe and frame and a number of tents & sheds. Is on the bank of the Platte."⁴⁰

William H. Woodhams wrote on May 11, 1854. "We passed Fort Kearny and left letters for home. The fort is merely a collection of wooden buildings, with a force of 80 men to guard 400 miles of the worst road on the route as far as Indians are concerned, but government has more important ends in view than protecting a few thousand emigrants."⁴¹

The great volume of traffic past the fort did cause some problems. In 1852, Origen Thompson wrote, "We arrived there at 5 in the evening. Wood being scarce on the road, some persons seeing plenty of it lying about here, and thinking that, as it belonged to Uncle Sam, of course any person might use it, began to help themselves and stow away enough to last a few days, perceiving which, the quartermaster ordered them to bring it all back under penalty of the guard house."⁴²

Richard Owen Hickman, the same year, wrote that his company camped within a half mile of the fort and started to graze their animals. He reported that the Captain sent them a message to leave within 30 minutes or be canonaded.⁴³ Apparently grass for the fort's horses was a problem.

Calvin Taylor wrote on June 10th, 1850, "Reached Fort Kearny about six o'clock in the evening and encamped one mile from the Fort as all grass within that distance is required for government use. Procured some good water from a well at the Fort which is quite a luxury in this country. There are three or four good frame houses for the accommodation of the officers and soldiers, besides extensive ranges of stables, the walls of which are built of sod about two feet thick and the roof covered in with straw making a most comfortable building, warm in winter. Some of the dwellings are built of the same material, the cheapest and most comfortable which can be built here owing to the scarcity of timber. What is made use of here for building purposes is procured from the islands."⁴⁴

Travelers on the north side of the Platte who did not venture the river crossing to reach the Fort were sometimes frustrated as was the Eaken family who passed by the fort on May 23rd, 1866. "This Fort is 5 miles from the road on which we passed, the River being 3 miles wide. Of course it was impossible for us to receive mail as there was no ferry on the river."⁴⁵

Jane Gould wrote in 1862, "Sunday, June 3. This camp is a little above opposite to Fort Kearny. We heard the night and morning gun. We were in sight of the flag yesterday. The river is so high that we were unable to get across although we were very anxious to, to get letters."⁴⁶

The young agricultural community of Grand Island, founded in 1857, benefited from its proximity to the fort. One of the settlers, William Stolley, recalled, "In the fall of 1859 I succeeded on behalf of our settlement in making a contract with Colonel May, commander at Fort Kearny, for the delivery of 2000 bushels of corn at \$2 a bushel. Colonel May was a very honest man, and proved to be a real friend to the settlers. Up to this time the necessary corn for Fort Kearny had been secured from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, at a cost of \$3.50 to \$4 to a bushel, and Colonel May had many obstacles to overcome before he could finally persuade the War Department at Washington to give this delivery contract to us, in spite of the fact that we offered to deliver corn at about half the price offered by previous contractors. Corrupt groups existed even at that time, who enriched themselves through dishonest practices, often to the detriment of our settlers.

It is true we received good prices for all our products at Fort Kearny as long as Colonel May was in command there, but the long trip often involved lots of trouble and work, and even danger. We had to cross the Platte River with our corn and it was not unusual to unload and reload our corn two or three times when the quicksand was too bad. Sometimes, on account of the quicksand it was so dangerous that we could not risk the attempt until the commander had ordered out a squadron of cavalry, four horses abreast, to cross the river several times. This settled the quicksand and a wagon crossing was possible.

Many of our inhabitants found very remunerative employment at Fort Kearny at such times as work at home permitted. Besides this, the trade with the emigrants, traveling to the then newly discovered gold mines in Colorado, as well as those bound for California, New Mexico, Montana, and Oregon, was very profitable for us. For many years we had an excellent market for all our products, at home as well as Fort Kearny. A good head of cabbage, for example, sold for fifty cents, a nice watermelon brought one dollar. There were no bank notes at the time, only gold and silver money being used.

Almost daily, long wagon trains passed our homes going either up or down the Platte River and settlers could often buy at a very low price lame cattle and young calves, which, with rest and feed were in tip-top shape again in a very short time. Under these conditions our settlement developed very rapidly and, in time, became one of the best in the State of Nebraska."

Mr. Stolley's next comment reflected the sturdy and conservative nature of the inhabitants of Grand Island. "While the circumstances and prospects of those who came here to establish their homes and who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the tilling of the soil improved steadily, the opposite was true for those who had participated in the settlement purely as a speculation."⁴⁷

We will stop at Fort Kearny for coffee and a tour of the park under the direction of park superintendent, Gene Hunt, and park historian, Paul Hendrickson, assisted by Kim Naden and Jay Mennenga.

As we leave Fort Kearny, we will drive by a state historical marker denoting the site of Dobytown. Since we do not have time to stop at all the historical markers along the trail, pictures of them are included in the tour guide hand book.

Dobytown was a small settlement one mile west of the Fort Kearny military reservation. According to Andreas' History of Nebraska the place was initially called Central City, being founded by an adventurous company from St. Joseph. It had become Kearny City by 1859. Travelers from the east were not allowed to camp on the Fort Kearny military reservation grounds, so if arriving late in the day, they would travel west to this community. The business buildings were all made out of adobe and the town came to be known as "Dobytown" to the freighters and traders along the trail. As time went on it grew and became known as Kearny City. Later when the Union Pacific railroad was built on the other side of the Platte River, the businesses at Kearny City moved across the river and started the city of Kearney along the railroad track. (Why the spelling of the name changed is uncertain.) Just to the north of here was an establishment known as "Dirty Woman Ranch", a place visited by freighters and soldiers. It was a place with a bad reputation.

Apparently, according to Ben Arnold of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry, 1863, Dobytown was not much better. "The townpeople were mostly frontiersmen who settled there for the sole purpose of . . .preying upon those who traveled the Oregon Trail. The population consisted chiefly of men; about two dozen inhabitants, mostly gamblers and saloon-keepers, some loafers. . . .and a few women of well-known reputation. When immigrants put their herd out to graze these fellows would sneak away at night and run them off a few miles around a bend of the river, reporting that the Indians had taken them. . .In a conveniently short time a suitable reward was offered, the vagrant would go out and bring in the stock, deliver it to the owner, and get from the later a liberal reward in cash and gratitude. The saloon . . .in which I spent most of the evening consisted of a long narrow room with a bar made of rough boards extending the entire length of one side. . .some square pine tables covered with woolen blankets used for card tables. Some gambling was going on night and day, but at night. . .the tables were always full . . .languages used were Mexican, French, English and profanity. Occasionally some exultant winner would express his delight by firing his pistol through the roof or into the sod walls . . .and a little loose dirt would trickle down. The air was heavy with the blue smoke from the guns and the lighter tobacco smoke; and the fumes of both, mixed with the stench of the liquors slopped over the bar by unsteady drinkers, made a combination of foul smells unknown outside a whiskey dive."⁴⁸

On our drive to Lexington on the Interstate, we will talk about the trail south of the Platte River using emigrant descriptions and experiences.

Elijah Bryan Farnham wrote on May 29, 1849, "There are three trails here and these are filled with wagons for as far as the eye can see. We here learnt that 2,822 wagons were ahead

of us. On the 27th saw three men start back to the States with their knapsacks on their backs. The men generally bid them good speed as they went past. There were also two wagons going back to the States belonging to an old man and his two sons. The old man had broken one of his legs. This accident compelled them to turn back much against their will. One of the boys was so disappointed that he could not surpress his tears even when he went past us. Their ambition had received a severe check. This night camped on the river bank among a huddle of other camps. Here the plain is everywhere spotted with tents and numerous herds of cattle and horses are grazing on its luxurious pasture. It is a fine site to see so many beings enlivening these dull monotonous plains. We failed of getting wood and had to burn buffalo chips to do our cooking. They did not make a bad fire either. The river banks are so low that to look at the river when aways from it looks the highest."⁴⁹

There were several overland stage stations south of the Platte, but there is some confusion as to name and place. They were known as 17 Mile Station, Platte Valley Station, Garden Station, and Craig or Shakespear Station. John Townley in his new book, The Overland Stage, lists 17 Mile, Platte and Garden all as one station. Sir Richard Burton, on a stagecoach in 1860, wrote, "We made 17 Mile Station and halted there to change mules."⁵⁰ Merrill Mattes and Paul Henderson in their book, The Pony Express. Across Nebraska from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie, list Platte and Seventeen Mile Stations as probably the same station. They also list Garden Station as probably the same station as Craig and Shakespear Station. Gregory Franzwa stated "Lots of people have studied these problems with mixed results."⁵¹ We only know of the approximate site of Seventeen Mile-Platte Station. It is supposed to have been about two and a half miles east of present day U.S. highway 183 and just north of the section road. That would place it southeast of the town of Elm Creek.

Anyway, along this area on June 1, 1849, Vincent Geiger and Wakeman Bryarly were traveling west. They wrote in their diary, "About sundown a small party went to the river on a fishing excursion and, in the course of an hour or two, one of them returned stating that a party of Indians were crossing the river. Immediately all hands were preparing their guns, pistols etc. to give the red-men a warm reception. Capt. Smith, with a small party, went to the river expecting to encounter the enemy. Sure enough, some objects could be descerned in the river making for the shore. Every man was excited. They fell flat to the ground in order to conceal themselves, the better to give a fire. Every gun was charged and every eye gazed eagerly at the Indians, who in a few moments advanced nearer, when, lo and behold, the Indians proved to be six large elk crossing the river. The men imprudently left their hiding places and drove the elk back - thus losing the chance of a good roast."⁵²

Since we are in the county named Buffalo County, it is appropriate to read one more diary excerpt about the buffalo.

On May 12, 1849, Joseph Berrien wrote, "This morning the camp was aroused by the guard calling out that the buffalo were crossing the river. On getting up we found that such was the case and our hunters were immediately on the qui vive. . . Col. Jarrot immediately set out in pursuit of them leaving the camp without any guard. Unfortunately the mules and horses attracted by the unusual sight of the buffalo in the river ran to see what they were and a partial 'Stampede' took place in which 10 mules and 3 or 4 horses were lost including one of mine. The mules were recovered however in about an hour and the horses also were found late in the day keeping company with the buffalo. This day we had the first grand site of the buffalo. I had always discredited the stories I had heard of there great numbers but I do so no longer as I am certain I saw during the day at least 20,000. They covered the vast plain for miles, the surface of the earth being literally black with them."⁵³

In the rush to get to California in 1849, some gold seekers did not bother with animals. William G. Johnston reported on May 17, "Two men approached who were pursuing their journey to California alone and on foot. Their tent was an umbrella; and in packs borne on their backs, they carried provisions to last them about thirty days, expecting to get fresh supplies at forts on their way. They started from some point on the Missouri River, and thus far have passed all trains they came in sight of. We permitted them to fry bacon at our fire, and furnished them with coffee to drink, for which they were very thankful."⁵⁴

This was an area of the Platte River Valley where many emigrants reported terrible wind, thunder, and lightning storms. William Woodhams wrote in his diary, "This valley must be the birthplace of storms. About 10 o'clock I was awakened by the wind blowing a hurricane. I jumped from the wagon and looked at a scene that for wild grandeur I never saw equalled. All the prairie east of us was on fire, the fierce wind fanning the flame into a wall of fire that cast a lurid red light on the heavy black clouds rolling up from the west, and every instant the heavens from the center to the horizon was split by vivid lightning, and the heavy thunder rolled above the roaring of the fire and wind. Presently the deluge fell and we had to grope in the black pall of darkness that fell with it, for our frightened horses, and holding as many as we could, turn our backs to the pelting storm, 'donkey fashion' and take it."⁵⁵

The climate in Nebraska could be unpredictable. Joseph Hackney, on May 25, 1849 wrote, "Whew if this aint (something). Here it is the 25th of May and it is as cold as almost any winter day. The wind blows a perfect gale, and made all the clothing one could pile on necessary for one's comfort. It rained all night long in perfect torrents, we did not start till late this morning. The boys all appeared froze up. Made our breakfast on hard bread. No great inducement to stay here."⁵⁶

The emigrants had many complaints to make while traveling along the Platte River valley. Ezra Meeker wrote in 1852, "The dust was intolerable. In calm weather it would rise so thick

at times that the lead team of oxen could not be seen from the wagon. Like a London fog, it seemed thick enough to cut. Then again, the steady flow of wind. . . would hurl the dust and sand like fine hail, sometimes with force enough to sting the face and hands."⁵⁷

Mosquitoes were also a problem along the Platte River. In 1849, Kimball Webster found "mosquitoes more plentiful here than I have ever seen before. I would judge there are more than 40 bushels of these pests to the acre."⁵⁸ At Chimney Rock Nathaniel Wyeth complained, "My face like a plum pudding. The skin is entirely off one of my ears." Seeking to avoid the mosquitoes by the river, he found "ghnats" on the bluffs equally troublesome. This later species were the "buffalo gnats" which at times swarmed in great clouds.⁵⁹

Camped by the north side of the Platte on May 28, Martha Read complained, "The mosquitos were so thick they had like to have devoured us and our teams." Two days later she wrote, "Campt near the Loop Fork River. The mosquitos had like to have eaten us up."⁶⁰

Also traveling on the north side of the Platte, A.J. Leach added green head flies to his complaints in 1852. ". . . there were better places -far better, than the flat, treeless, uninviting valley of the Platte, with its shallow, muddy river, its swarms of mosquitoes and green head flies, its stretches of wet, swampy ground, its prairie dog towns and its rattle snakes."⁶¹

At the summit of California Hill in 1849, Joseph Berrien expressed his good fortune at being spared from a tornado he watched. He wrote, "A tornado was whirling across the prairie and though there was but little on which to exert its fury still the commotion of the clouds and the immense masses of vapour whirling around with inconceivable rapidity. . . while the roaring of the wind could be distinctly heard at 2 miles distance, furnishing a sight seldom witnessed. . . After the tornado had passed clouds of Grasshoppers fell from the sky. . . The Cloud presented the appearance of a long funnel the small end downwards as black as ink. . . fortunate for us was it that it did not pass near or over the waggons which had it occur'd would have been scattered to the four winds of Heaven."⁶²

Our lunch stop will be at Lexington, Nebraska. Lexington is the offspring of a Pony Express station and trading post called Plum Creek. After the arrival of the railroad at this point, the settlers moved across the river and named their new town in memory of the Battle of Lexington. For some time the little settlement was a rendezvous for gamblers, thieves, and hold-up men, who preyed on miners returning east with gold or silver. For a time the settlement had no organized government or sheriff, but even after a government had been established, the officers were ineffective against the hoodlums. The citizens finally formed a vigilance committee and drove out most of the outlaws. In 1867, aroused by the building of the railroad through their hunting grounds and the patrolling activities of Major Frank North and his Pawnee Scouts, the Cheyenne, led by their chief, Turkey Leg, tore up a culvert 4 miles west of

town and wrecked a train, a west bound freight. They scalped the crew, broke open the boxcars, and stole the contents. Some of the braves, finding bolts of bright-colored calico, tied the ends to their ponies and galloped off with their brave display. (Nebraska, Federal Writers Project)

We will stop for lunch at the Dawson County Museum. This museum with Bob Wallace as director is the visible arm of the Dawson County Historical Society which was founded in the late 1950s. A dedicated group of volunteers with a deep commitment to preserving their heritage joined to begin collecting and interpreting the artifacts and documents of their past. With their central location and proximity to the Oregon Trail, the people of Dawson County have been on the cutting edge of the western expansion since its earliest days.

Some of the following comments are taken from the "Circle Tour of the Oregon Trail & Plum Creek Massacre Site" published by the Dawson County Museum. As we leave Lexington, we will cross the bridge to reach the south side of the Platte river. The original bridge, built in 1873, came about through an ingenious property tax maneuver in which the largest property owner in the county, the railroad, was levied nearly all the tax, \$50,000, needed to build the wooden bridge. When the railroad refused to pay the taxes, the county clerk chained a locomotive to the tracks and, with shotgun in hand, he ordered the engineers to wire their president for the money. Within 24 hours the money was sent and the railroad was once again open for business. Since Plum Creek's bridge was the first to be built across the often unruly Platte River, it helped the town become a trade center.

Daniel Freeman's first trading post, circa 1861, was located near the irrigation pump building approximately 1/4 mile north of the road. In 1862, Mrs. Freeman brought her three little children up from Kansas to join her husband. She reported that they put up a big sign with the word "Bakery" on it. "I baked a hundreds pounds of flour every day. . .I sold my bread for fifty cents a loaf and made as much as thirty dollars a day. . . .I got up fine meals and charged two dollars a meal. The people were glad to pay it."⁶³

The Plum Creek telegraph station, built in the early 1860's, was located just west of the main power plant building. It was from here that Lt. J. Bone wired the Fort Kearny telegraph station on the morning of August 8, 1864. "Send company of men here as quick as God can send them. one hundred 100 Indians in sight firing on ox train."⁶⁴

More about that later, after our stop at the Joe Jeffrey ranch. Crossing some of the creeks could be difficult because of the steep ravines. Here you will see the evidence of two dug outs made by the emigrants to smooth the approach to the Plum Creek crossing. Enjoy this stop on the prairie and look in the distance to see the Sandhills.

Plum Creek Pioneer cemetery was mistakenly dedicated as the Plum Creek Massacre site in 1930. We will pass the actual

site of the burial ground of the victims a short mile from here. Clyde Wallace, a local historian, was instrumental in correcting the mis-information. Plum Creek cemetery does contain two emigrant graves. Sarepta Fly was one of these. She died while heading west in 1865. There is also a grave here for an unknown child. The marker states, "In memory of an unknown child, from the information available, became seriously ill and died while traveling with a wagon train in 1865 or 1866. Was buried on the Rev. Pierce farm west of Holdrege. The grave was exposed by erosion in August 1963 and was moved here."

The sign on the right marks the site of the Plum Creek Indian attack and mass burial of the victims. After camping just two miles south and east of here on August 7, 1864, the Morton party set out at 6 o'clock in the morning. They had joined with nine other wagons the night before to make a train of 12. Nancy Morton's husband, Thomas, her brother William Fletcher, and cousin John Fletcher, were also on the trip, hauling freight to Denver City. This was Nancy's third trip with her husband. Thomas was asleep as they started out, after having stood the last half of the night watch over the camp. As Mrs. Morton drove the wagon she saw something approaching, but could not make it out in the distance. Soon she realized it was an Indian attack. All eleven men were killed. Nineteen year old Nancy Morton was taken captive along with Daniel Marble, nine years old, the son of one of the other men on the trip. Nancy was wounded by two arrows which she later removed by herself. Daniel Marble and three other white captives taken elsewhere were turned over to Major Edward Wynkoop, commander at Fort Lyon, in Colorado Territory, on September 11, 1864. After six months and several attempts, Nancy Morton was ransomed from the Indians for a prized horse and some trade goods in January, 1865 near Fort Laramie. After recuperating, she returned to her hometown of Sidney, Iowa and within a year she remarried. Later in her life she set down the events of those fright-filled six months, and they form the basis for the book now available from the Dawson County Museum.

These are her words. "We traveled on until we arrived at Plum Creek Station. Having no thought of danger nor timid misgivings on the subject of the Indians as telegrams were sent as to the quiet and peaceful state of the country thru which we must pass. Being thus persuaded that fears were useless, we entertained none.

The beauty of the sunset and the scenery around filled us with admiration as we viewed the beautiful landscape before us, tinged in purple and gold. Without a thought of the danger that was lying like a tiger in ambush by our path.

About six o'clock in the morning we again started on our western course. My husband being quite fatigued (from standing guard the later half of the night) requested that I should drive which I gladly consented. While I was driving and my husband fast asleep, all of my time was spent in viewing the beautiful landscape. Which I supposed we would soon reach. But alas! That was only a momentary thought for far in the distance I could see objects which seemed to be approaching but on account

of the great distance they were indistinguishable. What could it be? I called to my husband and he at once came to my side when I told him to look in the distance and tell me what that large group of objects could be. He thought it was only a herd of buffalo so soon reclined on the couch and was soon fast asleep. But it wasn't long, only a few minutes, until I observed they were Indians and I again called my husband. . . Soon we observed they were warriors and were painted and equipped for battle. Soon they uttered a wild cry and fired a volley from their guns, which made us realize our helpless condition."⁶⁵

This attack was one of many on August 7th and 8th in a coordinated attempt by a confederacy of tribes to paralyze the use of the trail from the Little Blue River to Julesburg, Colorado. Broken treaties, mistreatment, increasing white settlement, and diminishing buffalo herds forced the Indians to take a stand against the white intruders. They met with temporary success as their attacks brought trail travel to a standstill for a while as the military was spread too thin to provide escort duty.

An editorial in the Nemaha Nebraska Advertiser noted the economic and political impact of the attacks. "The outbreak of the Cheyennes and allied tribes at the present time is a most unfortunate affair in more ways than one. It interferes with travel to and from the mountains. It creates wide-spread alarm even at points where there is no danger, and will doubtless very much check emigration to Nebraska as well as to other Territories. But worst of all, it will require so many soldiers to quell it that are needed to put down the rebels. This Indian war is a God-send to the rebels."⁶⁶

In earlier times, the Indians befriended Nancy Morton and her husband on their first trip to Denver when they camped near O'Fallons Bluff. Nancy wrote, "We decided to camp for the night. While we were preparing our supper, three Indians came to our camp. One of the Indians was a chief called Spotted Tail. They told us a dreadful storm was coming and they soon departed. We immediately set to work and tied our wagons down, which was none too soon, for suddenly the sky began to darken, and a gleam of lightning. . . shot from the black cloud that was rapidly spreading over the heavens."⁶⁷

As we follow the Interstate on our return trip, we will talk about the trail on the north side of the Platte River. The amount of travel on the north side of the Platte River in later years was high. Here is a transcript from the diaries of the Eakin family in 1866. "On the march a little before 6. Here we traveled till $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 o'clock without seeing water then we camped on the first stream we came to and was the Platte. The captain of the train in which we were traveling, Cap. Murry, and myself went ahead of the train and we came across an Oregon Train of 20 wagons. We all camped here with them. We met in the evening and organized an Oregon Train. . . We were the third train camped here and shortly after us came another large ox train, making 4 trains in camp here. Over 75 wagons and no end to stock. Mules, horses, oxen & cows as far as you could see in every direction. The camp this eve was more like a little

city than a camp on the Platte River. It was really amusing to see every body going this way and that way, and going nowhere just to view the camp. Truly it was a sight."⁶⁸

And now, two final comments about the buffalo, one accident related, the other conservative minded.

On June 11, 1845, Jacob Snyder wrote in his diary, "An accident occurred to Mr. Scott of Brown's Company a few days since. He wounded a buffalo which charged on his horse. The horse, making a sudden spring, threw Scott, & the bull plunged one horn through the pocket of Scott's blanket coat & passed on without doing further injury & fell dead."⁶⁹

William G. Johnston reported on June 1, 1849, "Buffalo in astonishing vast numbers yet inhabit this region, but the destruction in constant practice by hunters who kill them almost exclusively for their skins, must before many years make them very scarce. Each day we see evidences of this shameful waste in the great quantities of bleaching bones which mark this valley."⁷⁰

Traveling on the north side of the Platte river entailed crossing several creeks. Buffalo Creek was two miles east of Overton. In The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide, William Clayton described it as "A wide creek, with deep banks, but no timber except a few willow bushes."⁷¹ On Tuesday, May 4, 1847, the Mormon pioneers crossed Buffalo Creek. "At 9 A.M. the wagons began moving and passed over the creek near its junction with the river, at which place the creek was about 10 or 12 feet wide. After crossing the creek, a halt was made. . . While stopping, three wagons were discovered on the opposite side of the river, which at this point was about two miles wide, and as none of the pioneers was acquainted with the river, no one attempted to cross it. . . After traveling about three miles, the brethren saw one of the traders, namely, Charles Beaumont, a Frenchman, wading over the river toward them, so they halted to see him. His object in crossing the river was to ascertain who the pioneers were. . . Mr. Beaumont cheerfully agreed to carry letters to Winter Quarters for the pioneers. . . A mail of 54 letters was quickly made up and sent by Mr. Beaumont, who was going to Sarpy's Point, near Council Bluffs. In appreciaion of his kindness, he was given bread, meat, sugar and coffee, for which he was very thankful. It was with regret and a spirit of homesickness that the pioneers saw Beaumont depart."⁷²

Later in the day, some of the pioneers crossed the river to visit the trader's camp. They returned to report "that it would b advantageous for the pioneers to cross the river, as the Indains were burning up all the grass on the side they were traveling, but when they considered the siuation of the next companies of Saints and the thousands of men, women and children who would follow the pioneers; that the pioneers were making a new road over which these Saints would follow, and as the later companies would be unable to cross the river when the melting snow in the mountains would swell the rivers, it was thought best to keep on the north side of the river and brave burning prairies and other difficulties, President Young,

therefore, made a motion that the pioneers would keep on the north side of the Platte as far as Fort Laramie at least. The motion carried unanimously."⁷³

Prairie fires caused a considerable problem for the 1847 Mormon pioneers. "Prairie fires, which seemed to sweep the whole country and which had reached within a mile of the pioneer encampment, had so far destroyed the feed that the teams of the company could not be sustained. A company of men went about ten miles and found only here and there a patch of grass not burned, and fire still raging in different directions, and as far as they⁷⁴ could see up the river, fresh fires and smoke were rising." The Mormons had to retreat to a river island to escape the fire.

William Stolley described a prairie fire near Grand Island in 1859. "One who has not seen a gale-whipped prairie fire can hardly imagine the awful terror of it; the fire monster rages across the wide grass-covered plain in the form of a wedge, hiding everything in black clouds of smoke, and developing such intense heat that the dry grass is ignited more than 200 feet in advance of the actual fire line. As swiftly as it comes—just as suddenly it is over for those who know how to protect themselves against it. On the great plains such a fire cuts a wide swath through the dry grass in a few hours and then the land lies black, as far as the eye can see. . . This fire burned as far as the Platte River and 400 tons of hay belonging to the government was destroyed by flames."⁷⁵

Another creek to cross was Elm Creek at the town of the same name. In the history of the 1847 Mormon migration, Andrew Jensen reported, "A camp was formed at the mouth of a small creek (Elm Creek), at the place where it empties into the Platte river. Here the pioneers found plenty of good water and feed for the cattle. This place was so favorable that it was decided to lay over on Monday and some needed repairs were made to the wagons and equipment by the blacksmiths."⁷⁶

Lucia Williams wrote of the consequences of a bad storm in crossing Elm Creek. May 21, 1851, "We had one of the worst storms that I ever read of. It beggars all description - thunder, lightening, hail, rain, and wind. Hailstones so large that they knocked a horse onto his knees. The driver got out and held the oxen by the heads for they showed a disposition to run. Most of our things were completely soaked, so the next day we stopped and dried up. It was the last hard storm we had.

On the 23rd we came to a creek that overflowed its banks, Elm Creek. The water was some 20 feet deep but not very wide. They fell a tree over the creek and packed the loading, put our wagons into the water with the rope attached to the tongue, and swam them across."⁷⁷

Parthenia Blank remembered the place differently. June 19, 1852. "Encamped on Elm Creek, a very beautiful spot. It seems too bad to see such pretty places uninhabited."⁷⁸

Jane Gould's diary of 1862 indicated the growing settlement in the Wood River area. "June 5. Have passed quite a number of good farms. We hear this is a Mormon settlement. If there was plenty of timber this would be beautiful farming country as the farmers have a home market for all they can raise and get a good price for it too. . . Have passed two or three beer shops and toward night came to a sawmill and corn mill, the latter is a government mill to grind corn for the Indians. We also saw quite a sight for this part of the world, a large two story frame house not quite done yet. Camped on the banks of Wood River, a nice little stream. Went to a dance in the evening. Walked home. Arrived at home at twelve o'clock. The next morning, she wrote, "Twas a very hard task to arouse ourselves sufficiently to (get up) this morning at 4, but we did so." On June 7 she wrote, "Nooned on the banks of Wood River again near a house."

We will make a rest stop at the Windmill State Wayside Area at the Gibbon Interchange. Gibbon's first settlers were Civil War veterans. Colonel John Thorp's Soldiers Free Homestead Colony, made up of 80 families, came here on the Union Pacific on April 7, 1871. They lived in the railroad box cars until permanent shelters were built.

We will leave the Interstate at the the Shelton exit. Shelton was originally named Wood River Center, not to be confused with the town of Wood River, founded later in 1882. Joseph Johnson was sent here by Brigham Young to establish a Mormon way station in 1858. It was here that he published the Huntsman Echo, circulated to emigrants and freighters on the trail. Founded in 1860, it was one of the oldest newspaper west of Omaha.

The advertisements in the paper indicated the increasing settlement in the area. In the June 7th edition, 1860, we read "Hill's Station and Ranch, Two miles above Charlie Edgerton's (Lone Tree) [present-day Central City] Keeps always on hand Hay and Oats, Good Stabling and Ready Hostlers, Also hotel accomodations, and every luxury and comfort that care and attention can produce, provided for the Guests. If you appreciate Home and Ease, stop at Hill's"

In the same edition, Johnson listed a table of distances from Omaha to Denver City. Past Hill's Ranche was Jesse Shoemakers Ranche; then followed Grand Island City, Lambs, Moores, Wood River Centre, Peck's and Henry's before crossing the river to Fort Kearny. The following advertisement appeared for travelers continuing on the north side. "Butler & Davis, dealer in groceries, provisions, liquors, hay, corn and oats, Two miles west of Fort Kearney on the Pike's Peak, Utah & California Road. Emigrants will find the Best Accommodations. Wood and water Free."

In the following year in May of 1861, the paper printed a "Guide to the Gold Mines", listing an increasing number of road ranches, in some cases only a mile apart. Near present-day Gibbon, the Boyd Brothers maintained a ranche with a Nebraska Center Post Office, brewery and blacksmith shop. There was

also a post office at the Johnson establishment along with a grist mill and blacksmith shop. Emigrants were encouraged to stop and register their names for publication. On July 26, 1860, Johnson wrote of a Mormon handcart company passing through that included 21 carts, nine supply wagons, 60 head of stock and 144 Mormons--71 Scandinavians, 53 English and 20 Swiss.

Southwest of Alda, near the Wood River Crossing, Squire Lamb, a driver for the Western Stage Company, established a stage station and ranche in the fall of 1858. A local descendant of the Lambs, Marilyn Wilson of Clarks, Nebraska, has in her possession copies of over 50 letters written by Squire Lamb and his son, Hank, to his brother Hiram Lamb, Hank's uncle, in New York State. Marilyn has kindly given us permission to quote from these unpublished letters.

In December 1860, Squire wrote of the increasing settlement of the area. "We have a telegraph into here and got a post office at our place. One year (ago) last April I had 1 settler in 60 miles, now most all the claims is taken however." And in October, 1864, he wrote, "It does not take long for letters to come and go when mail runs regular. The Overland Stage Co. is running now from Denver to Atchinson, Kansas."

Squire's letters include comments about the emigration and the profits thereof. June, 1861, "Emigration has been heavy for California and Oregon. The Mormon travel has just commenced." August, 1862, "The emigration has passed for this season. The last train the 26th (of) Aug. The largest emigration for one season yet. The Buffalo have come again, the perraries is lined with them by (the) thousands. The folks are going west as fast as they can to get out of the wars. But I don't think the wars will be closed for a long time." November, 1862, "Speaking of travel, I must say that you would be suprised to see the ways of travel. Large trains of carts with one ox on a cart, some waggons with 8 youke, horse teams, mule teams, sail waggons goes by wind and steam waggons and hand carts and whele barros. May, 1863, "There is no end to this spring migration. Times is good here, everything brings cash. There has about three thousand passed already, some with carts and wheelbarows and some afoot packing their provisions and blankets. The other day there was a drove of turkeys, geese and hens passed that was egel the loads of colts tote in to the mountains, and loads of little pigs." January, 1864, "There will be a big emigration this spring, some have started now. Verry bad traveling, frost coming out of the ground. Everything is high, corn at house 1.25 to 1.50 an ear, hay 20.00 (dollars) per ton. The emigration will want a thousand bushell and about 20 tons of hay. May, 1864, "You wouldn't believe the amount of teams traveling without seeing it from morning till night--one constant train from March first and from all parts of the world; ox trains commences now on grass. This country is settling fast." June, 1864, "The travel does not slack up yet, one cloud of dust from morning till knight." October, 1865, "The road is lined all day with returning Pilgrims. The war is over and they think they can live in the States.

In 1864, Squire wrote of the results of the Indian Wars. "Our country has ben thrown in confusion by the Indians. Most of the settlers left there homes, some for good. . .Hundreds of families had to leave all but there stock and leave for the Missouri. . .Some of the crowd are still going to Iowa, Ills. and God knows where. Them that left ther things the soldiers stole. They stole bedding, clothes in fact everything. So I think the thng is rather dark for this winter, the country is desolate."⁸²

During the 1864 Indian Wars, the townsmen of Grand Island protected themselves by constructing two forts, Fort Independence on the Stolley farm and Fort OK, consisting of several building protected by earthen walls with projecting towers at each corner. Early in August of 1864, George Martin and his two sons, Nathaniel and Robert, were working in the hay field on their farm south of the town when they were attacked by the Indians. George was wounded by an arrow that pierced his jugular vein and lodged in his collar bone. Mrs. Martin quickly dragged her husband into the house and sewed up the gash in his jugular vein with a pin. She ran to the barn after a horse hair which she twisted around and around the pin, thus closing the gaping wound, stopping the bleeding, and saving her husband's life.⁸³ The two young boys, riding on one horse to flee the Indians, were shot with an arrow that pinned them together. They slid from their horse and the Indians passed them by, thinking they were dead. They survived and lived to become a part of Grand Island history.

The year 1857 was important to the history of the trail on the north side of Platte because it was then that the trail became the Omaha-Fort Kearny military road. The federal government appropriated funds to improve the road from the military supply depot at Omaha to Fort Kearny, making this road one of the first federally funded road projects in the west. With the improvements came increased traffic and the road ranches that served the emigrants.

We hope you enjoyed the tour today and gained some insight into emigrant travel along the Platte River valley from the early years before the establishment of Fort Kearny to the later years of settlement.

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TOUR B NORTH OF THE PLATTE RIVER

GRAND ISLAND - COLUMBUS TOUR

The prairie and the Platte Valley will be the theme of the 1995 OCTA convention. After leaving the heavily timbered hills along the Missouri River, the emigrants needed to adapt and adjust to the vast and level prairie. This was to prove a real challenge since they had not experienced this topography before. "Flat as a floor," "endless space," "no trees or landmarks" are only a few of the descriptive phrases used in their diaries. Many of you attending the convention in Grand Island will think "Oh, there are lots of trees here." Today this is true - especially in the Platte Valley but during the migration years, this was a treeless area - no shade, no wood for fires. The Platte Valley today is a heavily irrigated agricultural area as compared to the "Great American Desert" of earlier times. The vast fields of corn and soybeans may be interesting to you from the urban and arid areas.

The fact that trails are located on both sides of the Platte make this a unique area for "rut nuts" even though there are very few trail remnants to be seen. Beyond Ft. Laramie the trail is mainly on the south side of the Platte - at least until later years. The trail is on both sides of the Platte here in eastern Nebraska along with wild flowers, many species of birds and wild animals, wind, violent storms, beautiful open skies, oppressive heat and humidity, mosquitoes and ticks.

This stretch of vast prairie is interesting to trail historians since it is the transitional area from the Missouri River timberlands and bluffs before entering the arid desert. The only true prairie on the trail lies along the eastern Nebraska Platte River. Even though the emigrants were just beginning their trek, they speak frequently of the monotony and tedium. This to me is the shake down part of the migration - developing routines, learning to cook over camp fires and always searching for firewood and forage for livestock. Lasting friendships and bitter enmity are all here along with longing for family and friends left behind in "civilization". Violent storms here would be another new experience since most had not experienced a prairie storm with no protection from the elements.

In 1991 Dorothy Dustin prepared an introduction for a Nebraska chapter trail trek. The group met in Columbus early on a September morning and began our trek along the north side of the Loup River. Today we will be traveling the same route in reverse since we will leave from Grand Island. In memory of "our" Dotty, I would like to begin this narrative with her introduction. Charles Martin prepared the diary excerpts and Bob Berry and Kim Naden prepared the maps. Here is Dotty's introduction.

"Because in 1847 the Latter Day Saints began using this north-of-the-Platte route to the West, it has for some time been referred to as the Mormon Trail. A more accurate name is the Council Bluffs route because the point of departure of its users, Mormon or gentile, was almost always somewhere between Bellevue on the south and Fort Atkinson on the north, the area that was known as the Council Bluffs ever since Lewis and Clark's

visit to the west side of the Missouri in 1804. Whatever you call it, as we travel today we will be accompanied by some sprightly, interesting ghosts.

White men used the route as early as 1820, when the Stephen Long expedition left newly-established Fort Atkinson to make its historic cross-country trek. In 1827 the famous mountain man, Joshua Pilcher, came this way with a trading party consisting of 45 men. In 1830 Warren Ferris led the first American Fur Company caravan to go overland instead of up the Missouri in keelboats, and this northern route was henceforward used by most fur company caravans. It was in 1837 that the celebrated "Scotsman in Buckskins", Sir William Drummond Stewart, accompanied a fur company brigade and, luckily for us, took with him an artist named Alfred Jacob Miller. The year before that, in 1836, another fur company caravan had an unusual caboose; the Spalding/Whitman missionary party which included their wives. Eliza Spalding and Narcissa Whitman became the first white women to traverse the trail on either side of the Platte.

As nearly as can be determined, the fur company caravans crossed the Loup close to its mouth. Possibly they constructed rafts or other kinds of ferries in wet years, but evidently in dry years their horses, mules, and freight wagons made it on their own. Marcus Whitman complained that the Loup had so many holes and quicksand that it was difficult to cross, but Narcissa said they were able to cross in a few hours "without unloading our wagons much."

Now, we will travel the north side of the Loup, as did most Mormons, including the hand-cart brigades of 1856. As we speed along in our comparatively comfortable vehicles, you can think of all those hardy souls. Perhaps, across the River, you will catch a glimpse of the ghost of Narcissa Whitman, side saddle on a horse, racing until 1 a.m. to catch up with the Fur Company caravan. If you happen to see the ghost of Marcus Whitman, he may be standing in amazement at the productivity of the land, for he said "the soil is not universally good--much of the rolling prairie is barren sand or hard clay." This ends Dotty's introduction.

Now, we will go to Merrill Mattes and his The Great Platte River Road for more commentary on the Council Bluffs Road.

"From Liberty Pole-Fremont to Fort Laramie the Council Bluffs Road followed the north bank of the main Platte, and its monotonous scenic and vegetative characteristics were pretty much identical with the situation on the south bank, the side of the Nebraska City Road and the main Oregon-California Trail. The principal exceptions to this were a few short sandhill detours in central and western Nebraska, and the fording of the Loup River. In 1858, upon military recommendation, a dependable ferry was installed at the mouth of the Loup, right at present Columbus, so that the journey along the main Platte was uninterrupted. Prior to that year, however, the emigrants deemed it necessary to continue up the Loup many miles before crossing.

Passing an 1846 Pawnee village southwest of Columbus, the original route as pioneered by Brigham Young in 1847 continued up the north bank of the Loup to Beaver Creek. Here in 1857, the town of Genoa was founded, a ferry established, and a new road pioneered south to reach the Platte near Clarks. However, in the earlier climax years the emigrants followed the Mormon lead south-westward along the Loup past the mouth of Cedar Creek, where the pre-1846 Pawnee town was destroyed by the Sioux. The place selected by the Mormon Pioneers and most others to ford the Loup was just above the Cedar Creek and about three miles downstream from Fullerton.

Because of the softness of the banks, and the quicksand in the river, the Loup always posed a problem. Once across, the emigrants kept along the south bank of the Loup for several miles, and then turned due south over the dry divide to Wood River, striking the Platte about ten miles upstream from Central City.

There was another crossing of the Loup farther upriver, about four miles north of Palmer in Merrick County. It passed the Skidi Pawnee village, then traversed Howard and Hall counties south and southwesterly to strike the Platte near Alda, about ten miles west of the modern city of Grand Island.

Having gotten over the Loup, travelers via the Council Bluffs Road "had it made" as far as stream crossing were concerned; there were none of consequence until they finally crossed the North Platte itself. They did have some unpleasant swamp and sandhill crossings, but these were too routine to deserve detailing. Their experiences with storms, buffalo, Indians, and French traders paralleled those of their south-side contemporaries. They suffered less from cholera, but had to content themselves with viewing from a distance the famous south-side landmarks of Ash Hollow, the Court House, the Chimney, and Scott's Bluffs."¹

Our tour today will be in reverse of the emigration until we reach Columbus. To accomodate our buses on this tour today, we will need to remain on paved roads. We leave Grand Island to travel north for 10 miles, then east for a short distance. As we turn north again toward our first stop, the trail is to our right (east). Along this route is Prairie Creek, (not accessable to our buses).

A number of diaries mention the wide plain with no trees, and then the crossing of some sand ridges. John Clapp in 1859 reported that from a hill overlooking the surrounding plains, he could not see a single shrub or tree. He said, "It seemed like looking off upon the mighty ocean, unruffled by the passing breeze."²

The same year, John Steele reported his company crossed some sand ridges, where the wagons moved slowly on the soft road.³ William Edmundson wrote about crossing a ridge very sandy and broken with numerous ponds and basins, then traveling for 18 miles over flat and rather marshy country.⁴

In 1852 other diarists also told of these sandy hills.

1853 was a year of many spring rainstorms. On May 18th Catherine Amanda Stansbury reported that Prairie Creek was

running full. She writes, "We had to ferry the creek in the wagon bed. Commenced at two o'clock and got everything over and the cattle before sundown. We drew the wagons across with ropes. Camped on the creek."⁵

Welborn Beeson was there the same day. He writes, "We traveled for 4 miles to Prairie Creek. It is swollen to be a large stream. We joined another small company to cross in their wagon beds. We got across by 3 o'clock so got reloaded ready to start again."⁶

On June 3rd William Richard Brown came to Prairie Creek. He reported, "There were a number of emigrants preparing to ferry it in their wagon beds. We kept traveling up a trail on the north side of it to find a crossing place or head the creek." They camped for the night and the next day continued going up the creek. No other wagons, just their own company. He said they crossed some of its branches and finally forded the main creek.

On June 8th Mrs. Velina Williams arrived. She wrote, "The banks were high and steep. Before we started this journey we would have thought this stream impassible without a bridge, but no accident occurred."⁸

Our first stop will be at the upper Loup River ford near Palmer, Nebraska.

In 1850 Jerome Dutton and his company forded the Loup River here. He reported, "We had to raise our wagon boxes eight inches to clear the water and had to drive very crooked and keep moving to prevent our wagons from sinking in the quick sand. Several wagons belonging to other companies were stalled and nearly upset in consequence of the sand washing out from under one side faster than the other. But the wagons were quickly got out, otherwise they would have soon been under water. Their drivers did not follow the road that Captain Clapp had staked out. (Captain Clapp was the leader of Jerome Dutton's wagon train.) They thought their road the best, but they found out their mistake. We have a first rate captain!"⁹

The same year, William Edmundson crossed the river here. He wrote, "Went six miles to the Loup Fork which we forded by having poles across the tops of our wagon beds and piling the loads on the top, then taking the wagons across by hand. The river here is about 300 yards wide, about three feet deep, very rapid and full of quick sand. We commenced at 11 o'clock A.M. and finished crossing about sundown, camping on the western bank of the river."¹⁰

Rain created problems in 1853. The diary of Samuel Handsacket reports that his wagon train arrived at the ford on May 16th at 4 P.M., but it could not cross because of a storm. During the night they had a heavy rain storm with much thunder and lightning. The river was rising fast so the next day it was not safe to cross. Handsacker writes, "Mr. Job went over on horseback and came near being drowned before he could get out. The current is so strong that a horse cannot keep on its feet. The river is half a mile wide." The next day the river was still too high to cross. On the 19th he wrote, "At noon we commenced to make a ferry. This was done by taking a wagon

box and making it water-tight, then lashing three water kegs to each side. There is a sandbar two-thirds of the way across. We drove our wagons to this and unloaded the heaviest of our provisions, and ferried it over the current. We had then to drive one mile down the stream before we could get our wagons to shore. The current is about 50 yards wide, and, four feet deep, with a very bad bottom, so much quick sand." The next day he reported that they finished crossing without any accident.

About two weeks later Mrs. Valina Williams told of her problems. The men in her company decided it would be too perilous to ford so they decided to hitch two of their wagon boxes and lash them together to form, so she said, a kind of boat and ferry. They were soon able to ford part of the river to an island. Here they decided to set up a cable from the island to the other bank. But the boat tied to the cable could not be controlled and finally landed on a sandbar about three-quarters of a mile downstream. The river kept rising and those on the island decided to retrace their way back to the shore that they had started from. But the river had risen so much they found they could not! They remained on the island all night fearing that the island would be flooded by the rising waters. They spent the next day and night on the island also. At last on June 3rd, the water had fallen enough that they were able to get across the river.

After the emigration years, the first white settlers arrived in Palmer in 1872. With dreams of being the division point for the Lincoln and Black Hills Railroad, plans were made for a fine depot, switching tracks and round house. The dream never materialized.

We travel east again and then north being away from the trail which lies to the west and north, following the Loup River. In Fullerton, we will have a coffee break to be off the buses for a short time.

The town of Fullerton was originally the headquarters of the Randall Fuller ranch. In 1874 and 1875, the Pawnee Indians were moved from Nebraska to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Fuller, hearing that the Pawnee were being moved, immediately drove his cattle to the area, appropriated some of the land and immediately started his ranch. In 1878, when the area was officially opened for settlement, he bid for and received several quarter sections of land. The next year the county was organized. The town of Genoa was actually the only town in the area and was expected to be named the county seat. Fuller immediately got all his ranch hands together, went to Genoa and took all of the areas records and brought them to his ranch. He then went to the state capitol in Lincoln and told Governor Nance that "Fullerton was in about the middle of the proposed county and should be named the county seat." Besides, he reported, his group had planned to call the new county, Nance, after the name of the governor. Governor Nance was impressed and declared Fullerton to be the county seat. Randall Fuller's 1849 overland trip to California was reproduced in Volume 6, Number 4, 1968 Overland Journal.

He writes of his journey along the Loup River in May.
"We went to day to lookingglass crick we found wood and good water. On the 16th we went from lookingglass creek to the old pawnes village and thair camped beside of the river this villag was destroid by the sews (Sioux) here we found wood this river is seder river

the river is seven rodes wid one foot deep. The old pawne village is (situated) on the north side of the plat river and it has ben a large vilag in its day we saw to day two misionary houses partly don (down) and no one liven in them

the distance that we preformed to day is 22 miles and on the 17th we went to the loup fork and camped we found wood here.

and in the mornin on 18th we crosed it we drove into it a bove the old ford and went up streame and cept (kept) on the sand bars we raised up the boxes of our wagons a bout fore inches and the water did not com into the boxes. a wagon dros (draws) very hard on the quick sand the sand runs out from the wheels and the wheels settles down the river here is a bout three quarters of a mile wide. before crosing this river go in and find whare the sand (bars) run they chang evey yeare and we laid over here the rest of this day

in the morning on the 19th we left the loup fork and went two miles of wood river the distance 34 miles and thair camped for the night we found no wood and found no water but slew water. on this day our company devided

they got to quarling som wanted to drive faster than others and it made contention a mong them they drove out hilter to skilter and the fastez teem was a head in a short time

and we folowed the head company and cept (kept) up with them and on the 20th we went to the plat river"

Two and one half miles south of Fullerton and south of the Loup River is a Mormon marker, designating a Mormon campsite.

In the early spring of 1847, over one hundred pioneers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-Day Saints camped near here on their historic trek to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Driven from their homes in Illinois and Missouri, more than 3,000 of the oppressed people had wintered near the present site of Omaha, housed in log cabins, sod houses and dugouts, preparing for the journey to their new Zion in the Rocky Mountains.

The first company of Pioneers, led by Brigham Young, left Winter Quarters on April 14 with 143 men, three women and two children, traveling in 73 wagons. They arrived in what is now Salt Lake City on July 24, 1847. Several other companies took the trail in the months and years that followed, traveling the same route, and many of them camping at or near this spot.

Between 1855 and 1860 several thousands made the journey on foot, pulling their wordly provisions in handmade two-wheeled carts. The dramatic and ofttimes tragic story of these Handcart Pioneers is one of the epics of American history. Overpowered by summer heat or caught in the cold of winter blizzards, hundreds of them lie buried in unmarked graves along the trail.

One such grave lies west of the Loup Fork at Columbus. Archer Walters, a member of the first handcart company, wrote on July 26, 1856, "Passed over the ferry (Loup Fork). Traveled about 6 miles. As soon as we crossed it looked very dark and black. We had not got far and it began to lighting and soon the thunder roared and about the middle of the train of handcarts the lightning struck a brother and he fell to rise no more in that body. By the name of Henry Walker, from Carlisle Conference, aged 58 years. Left a wife and children. One boy burned a little named James Stoddard; we thought he would die but he recovered and was able to walk, and Brother Wm. Stoddard, father of the boy was knocked to the ground and a sister, Betsy Taylor, was terribly shook but recovered. We then went 2 miles to camp. All wet through. . .I put the body with the help of others, on the handcart and pulled him to camp and buried him without a coffin for there were no boards to be had."¹⁴

Just outside of Fullerton, the emigrants crossed Cedar River, also called Willow Creek.

Cephas Arms, who crossed the Cedar River on June 1, 1849, reported his crossing of the river this way. "Crossed Cedar River, eight rods wide, bad ford, having a quick-sand bottom (but) got safely over."¹⁵

William Edmundson was here June 8, 1850. He reported that after leaving the old Pawnee village, "we traveled four miles to Cedar creek, a stream 8 rods wide. The water being deep, we propped our wagon beds up on a block so as to raise them a foot higher and forded the stream without damage."¹⁶

Southeast of Fullerton was the site of the Pawnee Mission and a large Pawnee village, destroyed by the Sioux in 1846. The site was located at Plum Creek. There were two Plum Creeks in Nebraska; this one on the north side of the Loup River, and the other one on the south side of the Platte River near what is now Lexington, Nebraska.

In 1849 Edwin Hillyer passed the old mission on Plum Creek. He reported that "two of the buildings still stand, apparently never completed. All the rest have been destroyed by fire. Traces of the old corn fields can still be seen, and we are camped on an old battleground on a beautiful prairie, at the west side of the Loup River, and the skulls and human bones lie scattered all over the ground. This battle was between the Pawnee and the Sioux."¹⁷

In late May of 1837, the Spaulding-Whitman missionary party was opposite the last of the then-extant Pawnee villages. Both Eliza Spaulding and Narcissa Whitman wrote of "the multitude of natives who crossed the river at noon and at night because we ladies were such a curiosity to them. They would come and stand around our tent, peep in, and grin in their astonishment to see such looking objects."^{18,19}

Fellow-traveling missionary William H. Gray likened the affair to a traveling side show, saying they received all this attention even though they had not "posted any handbills, or charged any fee for exhibiting."

Several emigrant diaries report on this Indian village. Cephas Arms in his 1849 diary wrote, "It covered several acres

and was surrounded by a sod wall on all sides, except toward the river, near which it stands. Many of the houses are still standing and display a good deal of skill in building them, they are circular in form, with a down shaped roof. The walls of the wigwams are of dirt, three or four feet high, with a covered entrance, extending several feet towards the river; the roofs are supported by forks and covered with grass and dirt; forty or fifty are yet standing."²¹

Near the village was a pioneer ford of the Loup River. Clayton's Mormon Guide reports, "This is the pioneer's ford, but it is considered not so good as the Upper Ford."²² Most of the overlanders followed William Clayton's advice and went to the Upper Ferry.

Earlier than the Mormon pioneers of 1847, Joseph Hammer and his emigrating company crossed here in 1844. He wrote on June 15, 1844, "A fine day. Traveled eight miles and crossed the Loup fork. We could not cross any sooner on account of the quicksand which is in the river. . . We crossed near the Loup village (that) is a tribe of the Pawnees." He described the area as "Poor land, very sandy and gravelly. Plums on bushes about knee high. Wild cherries on bushes that grow from six to twelve inches in height."²³

In 1853 Welborn Beeson and his party crossed at this lower ferry. He recorded in his diary as follows, "May 15. Started early. Came to the old Mormon Ford of the Loup Fork of the Platte River. Here the stream is full of quicksand so that if you stand in one place for long you sink down. Henry Church, William Loughlin and myself waded for two or three hours to find the best ford. We got our two teams across this evening. May 16. The company all got across by noon."²⁴

As we leave Fullerton for Genoa, we will point out the sites of Cedar River and Plum Creek. At Genoa, we will come to yet another creek, named Beaver Creek, forded by the emigrants. Milo Harmon with the advance Mormon train heading west in 1847, said Beaver Creek was about 30 feet wide and 2 feet deep when his wagon train forded it."²⁵

In 1849 Edward Hillyer reported that when he arrived at the stream, his group found a paper pinned to a tree saying that there were ninety teams ahead of them. The paper was dated several days before. He said he added his "mite" to the paper adding their number to it."²⁶

In 1850, rainstorms caused trouble crossing the stream. Jerome Dutton arrived here on May 24th. He wrote, "Here we were again water-bound, and built, not a wire, but a brush suspension bridge. There was some flood trash collected in the middle of the stream and using this for a pier, we felled some willows on to it from each shore. We then cut some brush and laid across the willows thick enough so that we could haul our wagons over by hand. There were six other companies corralled there, also, and in all these were 304 men, 24 women, 21 children, 920 head of cattle, 73 horses and 154 wagons."²⁷

Two weeks later, on June 7th, this bridge was apparently still being used. William Edmundson wrote in his journal,

"Traveled 9 miles to Beaver River, a stream about 30 feet wide and very deep. We had to unload our wagons and carry the contents across on a temporary bridge formed of a log and some brush. We then drew the empty wagons across by ropes and swam the horses and oxen."²⁸

Apparently in 1853 Beaver Creek was high again. On May 18th Catherine Amanda Stansbury Washburn arrived here. She wrote, "We had to ferry the creek in the wagon bed. Commenced at two o'clock and got everything over and the cattle before sundown." We drew the wagons over with ropes. Camped on the creek."²⁹

Ten days later the stream was still high as Mrs. Velina Williams reported that her group had to raise their wagon beds with blocks. She reported that the stream was rapid and from two to three and a half feet deep."³⁰

The town of Genoa was named by the Mormons and was one of the temporary settlements established in 1857 along the 1,000 mile trail from Florence, Nebraska to Salt Lake City, Utah. It was set up to serve as a way-station for the Brigham Young Express and Carrying Company, which had the government mail contract to Salt Lake City, and as a rest and supply stop for Mormons traveling to Salt Lake City. During the first year, 1857, 100 families settled at Genoa and began to fence the land and plant crops.

On July 1, 1857, Henry Hudson wrote the following letter from Genoa City to the Editor of The Mormon.

"Dear Sir: According to the instructions of J. Taylor and E. Snow, I take up my pen (as Historian of the Nebraska Mission) to inform you of our progress and prospects. As already published in The Mormon, we left Florence for this place on the 11th of May and reached our destination after a tedious travel of 5 days. In consequence of the lateness of the season, the feed was poor and nevertheless, all arrived in safety and commenced putting in the plow. We have very little wheat; but intend to sow liberally in the fall. Our farm lies south and east of the city. It contains about 750 acres bounded on the south by the Beaver, southeast by the Loup Fork, north and west by a sod fence. This farm is occupied chiefly by the Florence and St. Louis companies; the Alton Company is not included in the above, but is located one and one fourth miles north in a bend of the Beaver River, containing 100 acres. Our crops are of the most flattering character; corn, potatoes, buckwheat and garden stuffs are looking finely, and if our corn escapes the early frosts that are peculiar to this latitude, it is the opinion of some of our best judges that the yield of corn will be from 60 to 70 bushels to the acre. We have our saw mill in operation and expect enough lumber will be got out this season to help put up houses sufficient for our present population. We have a brick yard in full blast, and expect soon to be able, from such auxiliaries as saw mills, brick yards and willing hands, to build a city not a whit behind any other in Nebraska. The City of Genoa is about 102 miles from Florence, contains about 400 acres, 10 acres to a block, 8 lots in a block, 18 rods long, 9 rods wide; the streets cross at right angles 4

rods wide. It is laid off on a beautiful eminence near the bluffs on the north, gradually descending to the east, south and west. As the ground is a little the highest in the centre, standing on the public square, you have a fine view to the east, some 20 miles. Looking at the south, the Loup Fork presents itself with its ever shifting sandbars, and zig-zag course, spotted with islands of cottonwood, box elder, willow and some cedar; still farther in the distance, you see the bluffs rising, the dividing ridge between the Loup Fork and Great Platte River. Strain your vision a little more, a dark blue line presents itself, that is the Bluffs. Beyond the Platte, some 30 miles off, southwest, are groves of timber, the Loup, Bluffs, and a sea of grass meets your eye. At every turn west, bluffs in majestic grandeur, covered with ancient ruins, telling us plainly, without any translations, that their occupants understood the arts and sciences; for we have found specimens of both copper and earthenware, being another link in the great chain of testimony of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I will give a statistical item, and then leave the subject to be resumed upon our further progress. We number 97 men, 25 women, 40 children, 42 yoke of oxen, 20 cows, 6 horses, and some two dozen chickens,³¹ 20 hogs and 2 cats, and dogs plenty. Yours truly, Henry Hudson"

In the fall of 1859, the Mormon colony was forced to abandon Genoa when the settlement became part of the newly created Pawnee Indian Reservation. Genoa served the Pawnee Indian Agency until 1876, when the Pawnee were removed to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

We will enjoy a brief stop in the park here to read historical signs and be greeted by local citizens. The park borders on Beaver Creek.

Again heading east, we reach and cross Looking Glass Creek. Aaron Word Harlan, while near this area on May 26, 1850, wrote this little bit of poetry.

"On our left rolled down the mighty Platt (Loup R. branch)

A broad sheet of turbid waters
And still beyond were hills and vales
The home of the Pawnee daughters.

On our right stretched forth an extensive plain
As level as the ocean
The bluffs beyond, the mirage between
The hills all seemed in motion.

And in the front was an open space
With full scope to the vision
Here in the center still rolling ahead
Was our split log division."³²

The Pawnee Indians called Looking Glass Creek, Quitoquataleri, or Water that Reflects Your Shadow. The creek has changed its course some since 1847 and no longer runs clear.

In 1849 Edwin Hillyer stood guard in a rainstorm while camped at Looking Glass Creek. He reported, "It rained very

hard last night and the lightning was very vivid. It seemed as though one flash after another ran completely around our corral on the chains connecting one wheel with another. . . I stood guard from 11 to 12, and nearly all the time the heavens were one continuous blaze, and peal succeeded peal without cessation. At one moment all would be a blaze of light, then more than mid night darkness would succeed. I was completely blinded, and would think that the light would never, never come. It was a terrible night."³³

That same year, on May 31st, Cephas Arms crossed this creek by fording it. He called it a small and rapid stream,³⁴

Jerome Dutton arrived here in 1850 and wrote, "We followed up the Platte (Loup Fork) without any trouble until we came to Looking Glass Creek, a stream that enters into the Loup Fork. But on the night of the 19th and again the evening of the 22nd we had very heavy thundershowers and, consequently, when we arrived at the creek on the 22nd, we found it very much swollen and the bridge gone. We therefore had to build a bridge 52 feet long. We had it ready to cross on the next morning, having plenty of help from other companies in the same fix."³⁵

In 1853 William Richard Brown also had trouble with a rainstorm while in the area of Looking Glass Creek. On June 1st he wrote, "It rained and thundered and stormed all night. We awoke up and found the water pouring through the tent which completely drenched us, wetting the bed clothes so much that we could wring the water out. We rolled out early, traveled over a sandy bottomed land. . . Mud was very deep and up to the wagon bed in the slues. We had to double team to haul them out."³⁶

Another big storm occurred in this same area on May 22, 1853. The Eakins family reported, "No small change in the weather. During the early part of the night the clouds commenced to gather, black and heavy they were too. The wind whistled. Yes, it blew the hardest kind. The thunder roared and the lightening flashed. The rains descended and the floods came, and great was the storm of that night. It was the hardest storm I ever saw or heard of. We camped last night with no extra preparation for a storm. Rob and I were in one wagon, we had lain but a short time on our hard bed when we heard the wind rising. We did not lay many minutes until we made preparations to face the storm, watching the mules and seeing how the rest of the folks get along. Our wagon was not one rod from the tent and they had called to their utmost for help but we did not hear for the storm. When we went out I found father sitting on the corner of the tent keeping it from falling on the folks inside. It was raining at this time "or not raining 'but pouring down'"³⁷

We will stop for lunch at Columbus at a park adjacent to the Loup River. A marker commemorates the Loup River Ferry. Conditions of the river determined the route and many emigrants chose to remain on the north side of the Loup and crossed later at Genoa or Fullerton. Grazing availability and the number of people waiting to ford or ferry made the decision for the emigrants. If they crossed here, they remained on the north

side of the Platte.

According to Robert Manley, "Few emigrants in 1852 took this route because the flat land adjacent to the river was swampy and because Prairie Creek was very fast-flowing, wide and with banks ten to twelve feet high, was very difficult to cross. The third alternative was to use the ferry and then follow the south bank of the Loup River for two or three days before swinging southwest back to the Platte valley. Following the Loup River enabled the emigrants to by-pass the wet lowlands near the Platte; and they were also able to ford Prairie Creek upstream where it was narrow and shallow."³⁸

The February 1850 newspaper, Kanesville Guardian showed an advertisement by the firm of Sarpy, Martin & Gingrey. It reported, "The difficulties of crossing the Horn and Loup Fork of the Platte have been entirely removed by the subscribers placing upon each of these streams large and substantial flat boats. At the ferry on the Loup Fork of the Platte we will have one excellent boat, which with the men we will have in charge will insure to all a safe and speedy crossing. . . Our boats with competent hands will be at their places on the 2st of April, and all may rest assured that what we have said may be relied on with the utmost confidence." They also state, "Heretofore emigrants have had to lose several days in constructing rafts which at least made a rather hazardous undertaking." Actually, before 1850, many emigrants went up the north side of the Loup River and crossed it farther to the west.

On May 4th, 1850 the Kilgore wagon train arrived at the ford. Kilgore reported, "Came to the Loup Fork, a ferry here and 100 wagons waiting to get across, and we have 30 in our company."³⁹ They waited until the next day, finally getting across on the second day.

John Clapp arrived six days later on May 10th. Due to the great number of wagons lined up to cross, he also had to wait two days.⁴⁰ John Steele, here on May 22nd, also had to wait two days. He reported the raft was made of cottonwood logs, flattened, and put together with crossbars fastened with large wooden pins.⁴¹

On May 28th the rush seemed to be over, as A. W. Harlan reported no delay by his company in crossing.⁴² But on June 6th when William Edmundson arrived, he reported, "The ferryman gone and the boat sunk. We attempted to raise it but found it so much damaged as to be unfit for use. We then took the road up the Loup Fork to the ford which is 48 miles."⁴³

The next year in 1851, Amelia Hadley reported on May 14, "Try to ferry this morning. The boat is an awful constructed thing and is not fit to ferry with. It sank yesterday with 12, or 15 men on it, no lives lost, some of our company has crossed, and we still remain here, an awful thunderstorm accompanied with hail, and heavy wind, is on hand. The waves run high, have to camp with nothing to eat or sleep upon our wagons being on the other side." The next day she wrote, "Crossed this morning looking rather rough, but came across safe."⁴⁴

In 1853 Amelia Knight reported that there were two ferryboats running.⁴⁵ In 1866, the Eakin family reported that they crossed the Loup River on a pontoon bridge and stated that the country along the roadside was as well settled as it was in western Iowa.⁴⁶

Jane Gould wrote on Monday, June 2, 1862, "Came through a small town by the name of Columbus three miles from where we camped. Put some letters in the post office there. Bought a thimble."⁴⁷

In early 1856, a "town company" from Columbus, Ohio located a town here as a bold business venture. The Loup and Platte merge about 5 miles east of the park where we will enjoy lunch. This "town company" of German, Swiss and Irish descent arrived on May 29, 1856. Busy and industrious settlers soon had built houses and planted trees and crops. They established a sawmill, a gristmill and a ferry. Heinrich Egge, one of the founding fathers of Grand Island, established a year later in 1857,⁴⁸ wrote that in 1857, Columbus was a town of eighteen log houses. After 1869, the Union Pacific Railroad made this a center for commerce and travel. Columbus is the home of Luther and Frank North - noted Pawnee Scout leaders, at one time stationed at Fort Kearny. Buffalo Bill Cody's first performance of his Wild West Show was staged here as a rehearsal before opening in Omaha.

As we begin our return trip to Grand Island, we will travel south and west on Highway 30 - along the original Lincoln Highway route. In later migration years, road ranches were established about every ten or eleven miles. The Platte River is to our left (south) and just across the Platte is the Oxbow trail, another migration route going from Nebraska City northwest to join the Platte. The Union Pacific Railroad later platted towns along their line.

The next town we pass, Duncan, was named for a favorite conductor on the Union Pacific. The town was platted in 1871 and incorporated in 1913.

Prairie Creek, the one that caused difficulties for many emigrants, emptied into the Platte River a few miles west of Duncan.

The following town, Silver Creek is located on the eastern edge of Merrick County. Its name comes from a pretty creek that flows nearby. The town was platted by the Union Pacific in 1866. Homesteaders arrived by 1870.

Between Silver Creek and Clarks, time permitting, we will stop at a Mormon Trail rest area to read an historical marker.

Weather permitting, we will drive along a country road here to see trail markers and swales from the Old Military Road and we will be near the site of Junction Ranch. In 1865, Calvin Blanchard Hartwell arrived at what would be Junction Ranch along the Platte River to establish and operate a stagecoach stop-over and trading post. Three miles west of the ranch, the Union Pacific platted the town of Clarks in 1866. The town is named for Silas Clark, a railroad superintendent. Joe and Lois Fairfield have provided interesting guidance and information about this area. Lois' family reside in Clarks.

In 1933, the newspaper, Clarks Enterprise, published the following recollections of Amos Hartwell, the son of the owner of Junction Ranch.

"Toward the end of the war 1,000 soldiers of the Kansas Seventh Regiment traveled along the Military Road on their way to Fort Kearny to be mustered-out of the service. They came to Junction Ranch and camped about 300 yards from the house. A few soldiers approached Calvin Blanchard and asked for some watermelons where-upon he told them he had a melon patch but that the melons were not yet ripe. The high-spirited soldiers rode into the patch and picked all of the larger melons and dug three-fourths of an acre of potatoes taking the nice, large ones. In the morning they filled their wagons with green corn and took it with them for their dinner. A few hours later the wagon supply train arrived and father (Calvin Blanchard Hartwell) explained to the officers the situation. They took the time and trouble to appraise the damage. A letter was written and sent by stage which reached Fort Kearney before the looters did. From each soldier's pay was deducted his share of the damage to father's crops. We heard afterwards those soldiers cursed that old ranchman and wished they could kill him. Mother (Mrs. Elizabeth Hartwell) always said she would rather see the Indians come than the soldiers.

Mr. Hartwell hauled wheat to the mill at Schuyler. He would start very early in the morning with a team of mules hitched to his wagon. All day long the mules plodded on along the highway to the northeast. One of the chief difficulties of the trip was the crossing of the Loup River this side of Columbus. There was a bridge across the main channel but the shallow part had to be forded. To do this with a heavily loaded wagon was no easy task. Sometimes he had to back-up the mules across the bridge, unload half of the wheat, then take the remainder across, unload it to the ground, return for the first half and cross with that. They usually planned to spend the first night at Columbus. Jim North kept a livery stable at Columbus where young Hartwell put up his mules for the night. Then, with North's consent, he would climb to the hayloft and sleep. The next day he would continue his journey to the Wells and Nieman Mill where sometimes he would have to wait two or three days for a grist.

At the time the Hartwell family came to this part of Nebraska, the Pawnee Indians were not hostile but they annoyed the settlers by begging and stealing. There were no trees in the Platte Valley so the settlers drove to the Loup River starting very early in the morning as soon as it was light. They would cut wood all day, pile the trimmed logs on their wagons and start for home. Sometimes, the Pawnees would appear and make them unload the wagon and go home without it. It was possible to hire the Indian squaws to work. They would husk corn, dig potatoes and cut wood for 25¢ a day. During the three years (1865-68) that Junction Ranch was a trading post, there would sometimes be 200 or 300 buffalo robes on hand at one time. The nearest buffalo were found in Wood River. At times the old ranch was something like a town with 300 to 400 people with

their horses and cattle camping about. The Mormons stopped there on their way west. The Pawnees came to the ranch to acquire their needs. When the Hartwell family saw the Indians coming, the three youngest children would hurry to the store to help guard the goods.

Twice each year in the late fall and in February the Indians would leave the Platte Valley for a time and travel south to the Republican River to hunt. They took their tents, ponies, squaws and papooses with them. It was on one of these hunts that 700 Sioux warriors came upon 400 Pawnees and massacred nearly all of them including women and children. The Sioux achieved victory by their superior numbers even though the Pawnees were larger framed and stronger people. Major Frank North considered one Pawnee equal to three Sioux in warfare as the Pawnees understood military tactics as well as the Indian way."⁴⁹

Our next stop will be at Central City, Nebraska at the Lone Tree Marker. A giant lone Cottonwood tree stood here and served as a landmark for travelers. Being the only big tree in this treeless level prairie, it could be seen for many miles in every direction. In 1858, the Lone Tree Road Ranche was established nearby, and in time it became one of the 20 mile stopping places for the Overland Stagecoach on its weekly trips. When the Union Pacific Railroad was built, a station was established near here and it was named Lone Tree. In a short time a town was started. When the town site was platted, the name Lone Tree was changed to Central City. The tree finally died as hundreds of passing travelers stopped to carve their initials or names on its massive trunk. It was finally destroyed in a storm in 1865.

As we approach Chapman, you will note that we are following the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The town was first settled in 1866. Among the early arrivals was John Donovan, local railroad section foreman. Chapman was platted in 1869 after the Union Pacific Railroad staked its right of way. At Donovan's request, the town was named for the railroad roadmaster at that time.

One of the trails coming down from Loup River crosses highway 30 about one mile southwest of Chapman and is off to the north (right). Also to the north is Prairie Creek mentioned in diary excerpts this morning. To the south of the highway is Wood River, the river not the town. Some emigrants chose to cross the river here. Others followed the north side of the river to cross at Alda, west of Grand Island.

Cephas Arms arrived at Wood River on June 5th, 1849. He wrote, "We stopped at noon on Wood Creek, where we found. . a warning against the Indians from the Iowa Rangers (Company) who had three of their men driven into camp by them last night." He continued by saying, "We found several new and pretty flowers on the prairie today, and saw the cactus for the first time."⁵⁰

In 1850 William Edmundson arrived on Wood River on July 11th. He reported they unloaded their wagons and carried the

loads over on the horses, then brought the wagons over empty.⁵¹

In 1853 rain caused problems. Amelia Knight described a storm on May 17th that caused the river to rise. "I never saw such a storm, the wind so high, I thought it would tear the wagons to pieces, nothing but the stoutest covers could stand it, the rain beat into the wagons so that everything was wet, and in less than two hours, the water was a foot deep all over our camping ground, as we could have no tent pitched, all hands had to crowd into the wagons and sleep in wet beds, with their wet clothes on, without supper, the wind blew hard all night, and this morning presents a dreary prospect, surrounded by water." When they arrived at Wood River, she wrote, "Come to Wood Creek, and we are up a stump again, it is so very high, and we will have to cross it as we did the Elkhorn, in a wagon bed, and swim the stock. Just got things packed away nice this morning, now they must all be tumbled out again. Well, there is plenty of wood, and I will spend the afternoon cooking."⁵²

On the same day, Catherine Amanda Stansbury writes, "Came to Wood River. It is very high and still rising owing to the recent rain. The river is lined with teams. Some are ferrying in their wagons beds. There is three men here that started to Oregon, four in the company with one wagon and six mules. They disagreed and one of them took two mules and packed on. The other three sawed their wagon in two and tried it as a cart, but it was too heavy for four mules and they sold out and started back. We bought some coffee and a camp kettle of them."⁵³

We will turn south off highway 30 onto Gun Barrel Road and travel south for three miles, then turn right (west) on to Seedling Mile Road which is a segment of the original Lincoln Highway route. At the junction of Gun Barrel Road and Seedling Mile is an Overland Trail marker.

This has been an interesting day tour for our planning committee. We hope that you have enjoyed the trip and the narration.

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ADDENDUM

Robert Manley wrote, "As the weeks passed the people in the wagon train worked out daily routines. Adjustment to trail life came easy for men and boys, since their responsibilities were few and well defined. They cared for the stock, stood night guard and handled the wagons. Women found adjustments much more difficult. They had a multitude of tasks to handle; their work often seemed without end. During evening camps, when the men and boys were free to sit and talk, the women had chores to attend to. And always there was dirt and unsanitary living conditions to contend with. Water for bathing and washing was always in short supply, and camp sites were usually strewn with heaps of refuse. One distraught woman wrote:

. . .Our tents stand in what we should style a barn-yard at home and I am sure if I were there I should as soon think of setting a table there as in such a place. The stench is sometimes almost unendurable, it arises from a ravine that is resorted to for special purposes by all the Emigration but such things we must put up with.

For women on the trail the unexpected became commonplace, and they learned to respond quickly to calamities. Rebecca Ketcham discovered the need for ingenuity and patience in responding to problems. The captain of Rebecca's wagon train had ordered an early start. The wagons were loaded and rolling before sunrise. They were only a few miles down the trail, however, when a woman's scream pierced the early morning gloom. Mrs. Dix, an elderly lady in the party, 'discovered that her teeth were not in her mouth.' Her dentures, she cried, must have fallen to the ground back at the camp site. The men refused to go in search of the missing teeth, but Rebecca prevailed on them to pause long enough so that Mrs. Dix's wagon could be thoroughly searched. Sure enough, the elusive set of teeth was found tucked away in the folds of her hastily rolled up blankets. Thanks to Rebecca's coolness under pressure, the crisis was resolved and the wagons rolled on."

Dorothy Creigh wrote, "Neither birth nor death could stop the westward rush, a frantic almost compulsive movement. Babies were born along the way--journals indicate that 1864 must have been a fruitful year--and if the mothers died in childbirth, there was usually a nursing mother in another train to feed the child. 'This is a great country for babies,' one traveler, (William Larkin) wrote in a letter, 'Almost every train has had one and almost every one you meet expects to have one. It beats all!'"²

From Robert Manley, "Despite the hardships which they encountered on the trail, many emigrants were impressed with the Platte valley in eastern Nebraska. . .The soil was excellent; only the absence of trees prevented it from becoming good farming country. Why this judgement? Just think a moment about Eastern farmers. Logs provided buildings materials, fuel and fencing. How could one farm without buildings, fuel or fences? Eastern farmers of this generation were likely to answer, without trees, there could be no farming."³

Dorothy Creigh wrote that pioneer Nebraska farmers had the ability to "make do". "Almost overnight they evolved a unique way of living, creating a sod-house-windmill-barbed-wire culture. Since there was no wood or stone for building, they made their houses of dirt and grass-and called the sod Nebraska marble; since there was no wood for fuel, they burned dried cow manure and called it Nebraska coal. The sod houses are gone now, but the inventive spirit and broad sense of humor remain.

Nebraskans today reflect the qualities of their pioneer fathers-the stubbornness that would not let them be defeated, the friendliness and generosity that makes no man a stranger on the prairie, the stoicism of the farmer watching his crop shrivel and die in front of his eyes, the daring of the cattlemen betting his all on the turn of the market. The raucous violence of the frontier is not long past nor are the days of bleakness; all the elements of Nebraska's past have combined to create a breed of forceful, energetic, free-ranging souls. Nebraskans possess audacity tempered with caution, honesty and trust, creativity,⁴ ambition, and most of all, force, determination and drive."

The theme, Nebraska, the good life, is reflected in this description of Nebraskans by Dorothy Creigh. "Nebraskans are so closely attached to the land that the changing of the seasons, the cycles of the year, are important to them. Their lives are tuned to the greening of the spring, the heat of the summer, the glories of autumn, and the exhilaration of winter blizzards; they find beauty, pleasure, and rejuvenation in watching the cottonwoods change from delicate green to full shimmering green to pure gold to leaflessness, for these symbolize all growing things. The heart of Nebraska is in her soil and its productivity."⁵

NOTES

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CHRONOLOGIAL TIME LOG ALONG THE PLATTE
Compiled by Betty Scheinost

1720 Villasur under the orders of Gov. Val Verde (New Mexico)
1739 Mallet brothers, Great Lakes, Mississippi, Missouri,
Platte (French Canadian)
1804 Lewis and Clark (mouth of the Platte)
1805 Pike expedition
1812 Robert Stuart - South Pass to Pawnee Village
1820 Long expedition - June 11th, Loup Village of the Pawnee
1824 Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, William Ashley, fur traders
and trappers up the Platte since the Missouri was closed
by the Arikara
1825-26 Jedediah Smith
1828 Hiram Scott - wheels up the Platte
1830 Ten wagons to rendezvous - Sublette, Jedediah Smith,
David Jackson
1832 Bonneville
1833 Larapenteur
1834 Townsend, Nuttall, Nathaniel Wyeth
Jason Lee, missionary
Dunbar and Alles - mission for the Pawnee at the Platte
1835 Samuel Parker, Marcus Whitman
1836 Whitman & Spaulding and their wives
1837 William Drummond Stewart and the artist Jacob Miller
1840 Father DeSmet, Sutter, Andrew Drips
1841 Bidwell Bartelson party led by Fitzpatrick
1842 Fremont
1843 Great Migration
1845 5,000 emigrants - Col. Stephen Watts Kearny, Fitzpatrick
1846 Francis Parkman - Donner Party
1847 Mormon Migration
1849 30,000 emigrants
1850 50,000 gold seekers
1851 Horse Creek Treaty
1854 Grattan Massacre - Kansas-Nebraska Act
1855 Harney Retaliation

IN THE CRADLE OF THE PLATTE
Author Unknown

A little stream in the canon ran,
In the canon deep and long,
When a stout old oak at its side began
To sing to it this song.

"Oh, why do you laugh and weep and sing,
And why do you hurry by,
For you're only a noisy little thing,
While a great strong oak am I.
A hundred years I shall stand alone,
And the world will look at me;
While you will bubble and babble on
And die at last in the sea."

"So proud and lofty," the stream replied,
"You're a king of the forest true;
But your roots were dead and your leaves all dried
Had I not watered you."

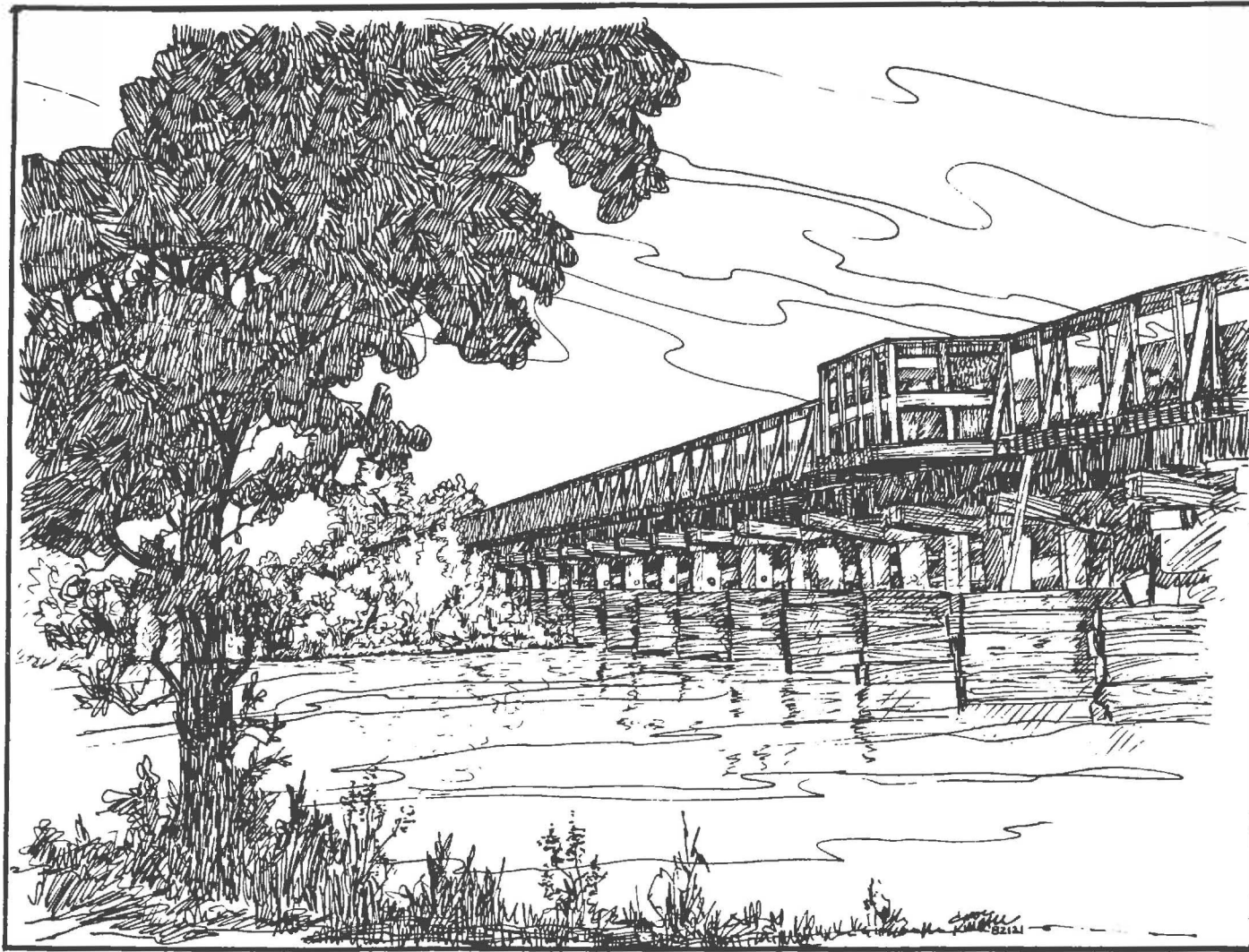
The oak tree rustled its leaves of green
To the little stream below;
"'Tis only a snowbank's tears, I ween,
Could talk to a monarch so.
But where are you going so fast, so fast,
And what do you think to do?
Is there anything in the world at last
For a babbling brook like you?"

"So fast, so fast,--why should I wait,"
The hurrying water said,
"When yonder by the canon gate
The farmer waits for bread?
Out on the rainless desert land
My hurrying footsteps go;
I kiss the earth, I kiss the sand,
I make the harvest grow.

"And many a farmer, when the sky
has turned to heated brass,
And all the plain is hot and dry,
Gives thanks to see me pass.
By many a sluice and ditch and lane
They lead me left and right,
For it is I who turns the plain
To gardens of delight."

The hurrying on, the dashing stream
Into a river grew,
And rock and mountain made a seam
To let its torrent through;
And where the burning desert lay,
A happy river ran;
A thousand miles it coursed its way,
And blessed the homes of man.

Vain was the oak tree's proud conceit,
Dethroned the monarch lay;
The brook that babbled at its feet
Had washed its roots away.
Still in the canon's heart there springs
The desert's diadem
The shepherds bless the day that brings
The snow-bank's tears to them.



THE FORT KEARNY HIKE-BIKE TRAIL



NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION
Eugene T. Mahoney Director

THE FORT KEARNY HIKE BIKE TRAIL

Compiled by
Beverly Kimball
Kearney, Nebraska

NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION
Eugene T. Mahoney, Director

INTRODUCTION

The Platte Valley of Central Nebraska and specifically the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail offer a rich heritage of the past and an abundant array of wildlife for the present. This booklet serves to introduce the reader to some of the geology, early inhabitants, fort and railroad history, and the plant and animal life of the area. It is hoped that many people will continue to enjoy this unique locale in the future.

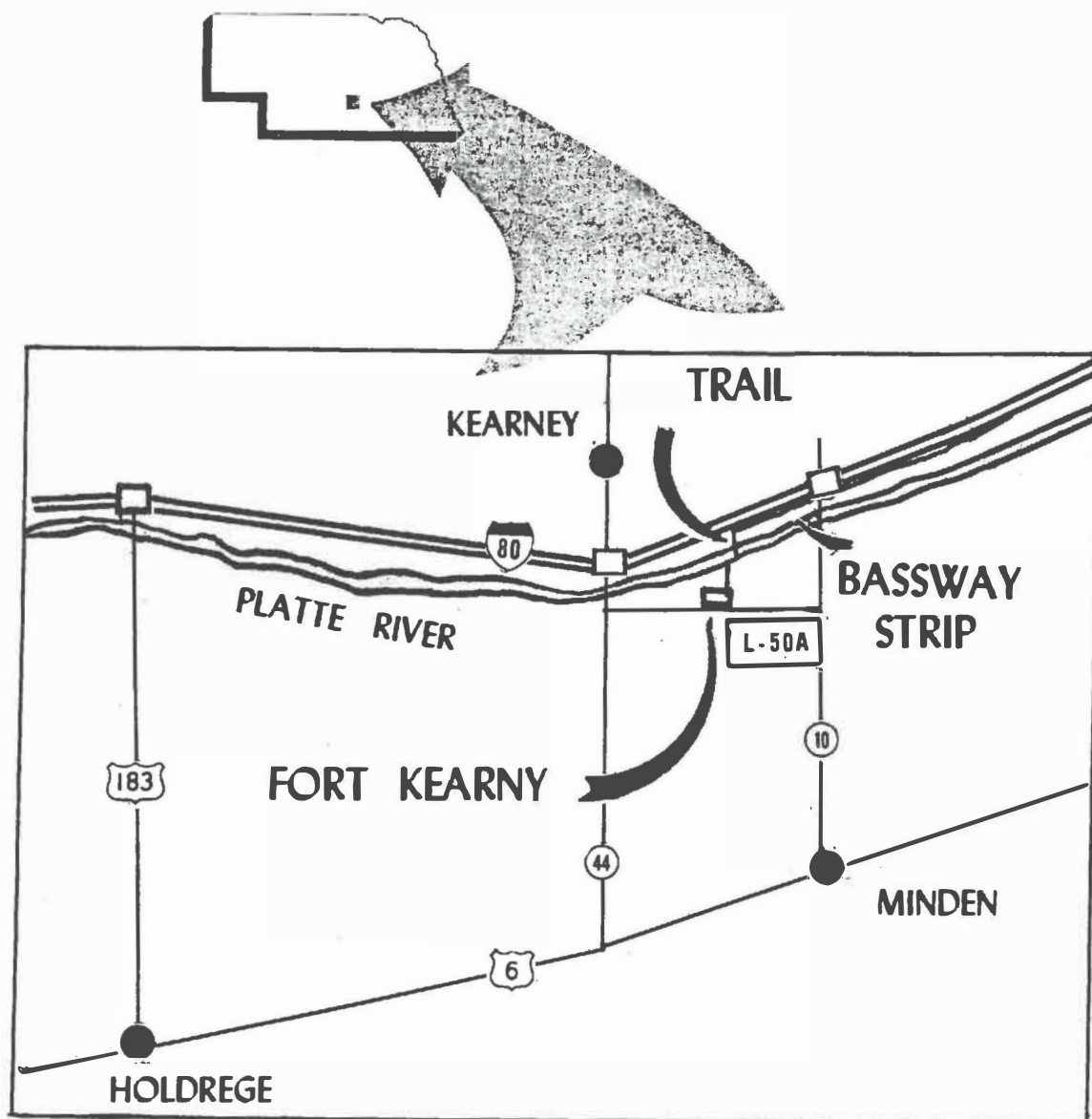
Dedicated to
Bob and Evelyn
Jim and Audrey, Val, Matt and Brett
Bob and Linda, Bobby, Teri and Forest

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The Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail lies in an area rich in the history of the westward movement of our nation. Its 1.8 mile length is entirely within the original boundaries of the Fort Kearny Military Reservation, established in 1848.

Beginning the trail at the south end finds one on the route of the Oregon Trail, the Pony Express and the line of the first telegraph, all running along the south side of the Platte. Taking the trail across the two bridges to the north side of the river, one enters the path of the pioneer Mormon Trail and the California and Overland trails. All of this area has a rich heritage and contains many reminders of the Old West.

In Nebraska history, the importance of the trail grows out of the fact that for 104 years it was a segment of the first Burlington line in Nebraska, then known as the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad. Its junction with the Union Pacific created the city of Kearney and opened up development of the state south of the Platte River.

The Burlington & Missouri River Railroad was given authority under an act of Congress, approved July 3, 1864, to extend its road through the Territory of Nebraska from the Missouri River, south of the Platte River, to a point not farther west than the 100th meridian. By further act of Congress, approved May 6, 1870, this railroad line was authorized to connect with the Union Pacific Railroad at or near the Fort Kearny Military Reservation.

T. E. Calvert, a former general superintendent of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad, in a letter dated May 22, 1898, recalled that "the fact that Fort Kearny was the only point west of the Big Blue River having a name and being shown on the maps in that vicinity probably had much to do with its selection," although it was some 65 miles east of the 100th meridian.

Construction started from Plattsmouth early in 1870. Although there was no bridge across the Missouri River at Plattsmouth and construction materials had to be ferried across from the east bank of the river, the work moved ahead rapidly. On July 4, the rails were within a mile of Lincoln, the newly designated state capital. By the end of 1870, 65 miles of track had been laid.

In 1871, construction was completed to Hastings, and on September 18, 1872 the 194 miles of railroad were completed to the Union Pacific rails at Kearney Junction.

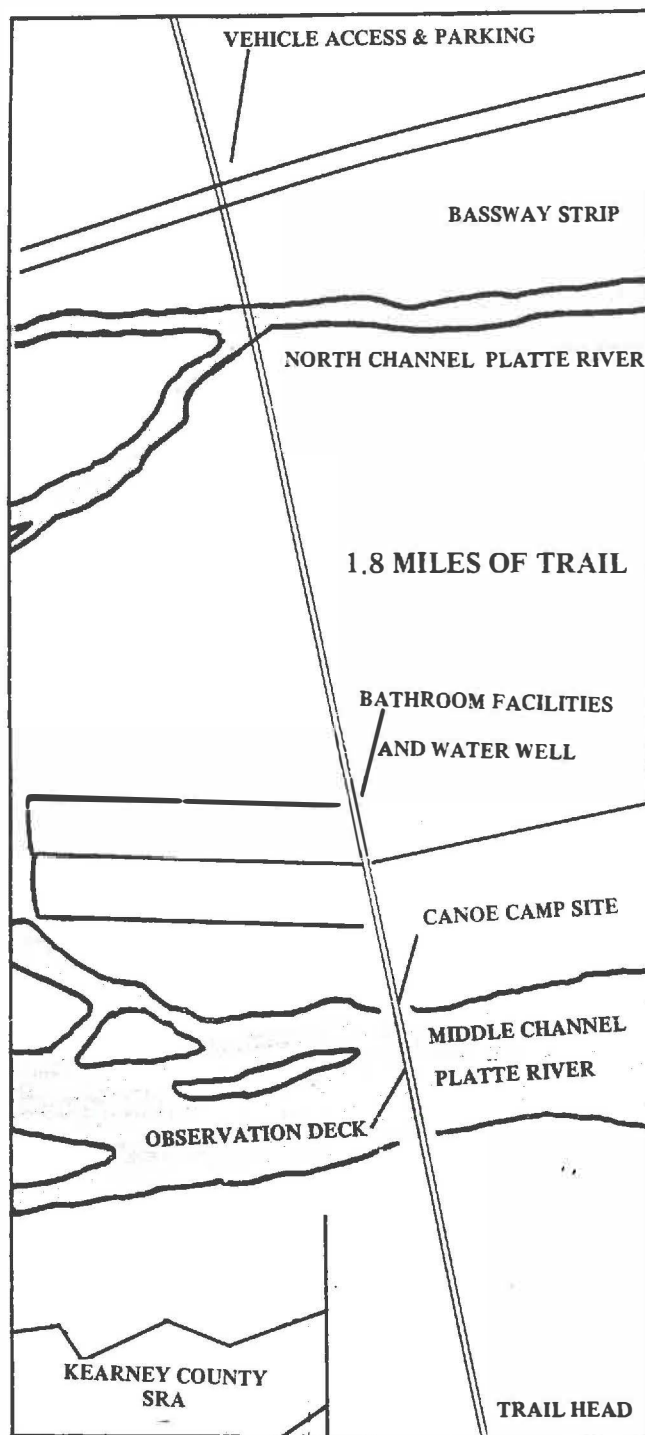
The right-of-way which makes up the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail includes two railroad bridges across the Platte. These bridges are of historic importance because they were the first to link southern Nebraska traffic with the transcontinental Union Pacific.

With the exception of one short-lived bridge connecting Omaha to the Burlington & Missouri River line at the extreme east edge of the state, these two bridges were the first to cross the Platte River.

Reconstruction of the bridges has been necessary during their century of existence for maintenance and to conform to the changing channels of the Platte. The original length of the south bridge was 560 feet. Built in 1928, the present bridge, however, is 962 feet long. In contrast, the north bridge was originally 1,820 feet long. The present bridge, built in 1915, was 340 feet but a year later 42 feet were filled in leaving the present length at 298 feet.

To anyone interested in the history of the Old West, the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail offers the opportunity of setting foot on the routes of the early pioneer trails, the Pony Express, the first telegraph line and the first railroad crossing the Platte.

THE FORT KEARNY HIKE-BIKE TRAIL



ACQUISITION OF RIGHT-OF-WAY

In 1872, 24 miles of track were completed between Kenesaw and Kearney by the Burlington Line. This section was used for over 100 years with the last train making its run on November 3, 1976. Several months later, on March 25, 1977, the abandoned Burlington-Northern Railroad between Kenesaw and Kearney was put up for sale to adjacent land-owners of the right-of-way.

However, the 1.8 mile segment between Bassway Strip State Wildlife Area and Kearney County Recreation Area was sought by the Fort Kearny Preservation, Restoration and Development Board as a future hike-bike trail.

With only two weeks allowed for bids and purchase, concerned citizens and organizations of the State of Nebraska requested that the Interstate Commerce Commission reconsider the environmental impact of this river bottom segment.

The Commission did take action and ordered that "the Burlington Northern, Inc. shall cease and desist from any salvage activities or dismantling of the right-of-way and bridges."

Immediately the PR & D Board, members of the Buffalo and Kearney County Historical Societies and interested citizens met to devise a financial plan to "save the bridges." A fund raising committee was formed. A goal of \$10,000 was urgently needed to buy the 1.8 miles including the two bridges.

Since state agencies are prevented by law from acquiring property without specific permission of the Legislature, LB527 was introduced on April 1, 1977, by Senator Martin Kahle and supported by Senator Ron Cope "for an act...to authorize the Game and Parks Commission to purchase or obtain title to 1.8 miles of abandoned Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad right-of-way as described, and to declare an emergency." Within two weeks, the Constitutional Revision and Recreation Committee heard and advanced the bill and LB527 passed 29-1 on April 15.

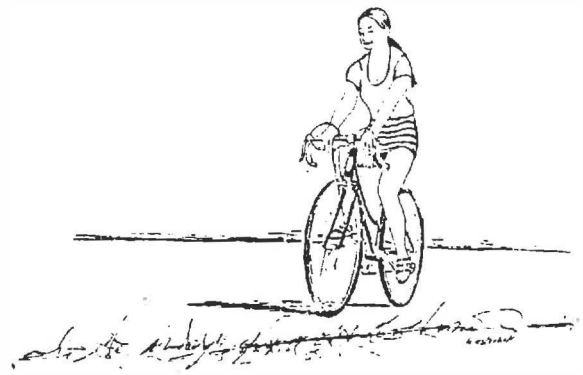
Meanwhile, in Kearney, a benefactor had been found who was willing to underwrite the entire sum. On April 11, 1977, the R.E. "Bob" Caldwell family presented a \$10,000 check to the PR & D Board. Mr. Caldwell commented, "I've thought a lot about doing something that the public could enjoy. This particular idea (the Fort Kearny trail) just seems to be what I'd like to do. I'd like to do this for my grandchildren and for the general public."

On April 16, the Burlington-Northern acknowledged "receipt of the \$10,000 and was submitting the purchase agreement to management." The PR & D Board was notified a month later that the deed to the 1.8 mile segment would be forthcoming with the railroad retaining salvage rights regarding the ties and the rails.

William Meier, Secretary of the PR & D Board, on April 24, 1978, at Fort Kearny State Historical Park, presented the deed to the railroad property to Gene Mahoney, director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Mr. Mahoney also was given the balance of the monies raised above the purchase price to be used toward the development of the trail.

After considerable delay by the railroad in the salvage work, a Fort Kearny crew was able to complete the grading of the roadbed that fall. Two carloads of lumber, pressure treated with copper sulfate and a salt base mixture which serves as a preservative and ordered in early summer, finally arrived November 9, 1979, too late for installation that year.

In December, a Nebraska Historical Marker mentioning the 1.8 miles as designated for a Game and Parks Commission



hike-bike trail was erected at the point between Lowell and Newark where the railroad crossed Nebraska 10.

During the summer of 1980, work was finally begun on the planking and railing of the longer, south bridge. Twelve Youth Conservation Corps members, under the direction of two superintendents, were hired for six weeks.

The Y.C.C. federally funded program sets forth a 30-hour week plus time release for educational outings. No power tools may be used so all planking was sawed by hand. Bolt holes were also drilled by hand. With 5,210 bolts and 950 pounds of nails, a lot of labor was involved. Only two of the youth had ever worked with tools so the labor itself was a learning process.

Two observation decks, the side railings and all but a few feet of planking on the 962-foot span were completed by fall. The Y.C.C. program was extended through 1981 and construction on the 298-foot north bridge was completed that summer. A retractable, wooden staircase on the south bridge provides access to the river during low water levels.

Ultimately, the north end of the railroad segment will be continued through the 11.4 miles of Bassway Strip and connect with Windmill State Recreation Area. The Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail is unique for it provides the only extended public access to the Platte River and its many educational and recreational opportunities in the area.

THE PAWNEE

Hiking or biking today along the Fort Kearny trail can be an escape from busy city life and with a little imagination one can visualize crossing an area which was seldom used by man.

However, not too many miles from here, you might have been awed by the sight of numerous earth lodges, some of considerable size, which formed one of the permanent villages of the Pawnee nation.

The village would be swarming with activity and noise... children playing games; boys herding horses among the tall



prairie grasses; men preparing for their semi-annual buffalo hunt; women making large clay pots, preparing hides and tending to other daily chores; and several scattered groups of

Pawnee could be seen chattering, joking and helping each other with their designated tasks. There would have been an abundance of barking dogs, the Pawnee's only beast of burden until they acquired horses.

In the distant fields one could see the women cultivating corn, pumpkins, melons, beans and squashes with hoes made from the shoulder blade of the buffalo, and by the river other Pawnee would be gathering various berries and other fruits,



digging edible roots and hunting small animals and game birds. You would have been able to view scenes that would soon disappear with the onslaught of Western settlement.

George Catlin, the famous artist-explorer, visited the Pawnees in 1831 and painted several portraits of the Grand Pawnee Chiefs.

This village would have been only one of several found in the Platte River Region between here and the Missouri River and would have been part of one of the four Pawnee Tribes: Chau-i or Grand; Kitke-hahk-io or Republican; Pita-hau-erat or Tapage; Skidi or Wolf. All four tribes in the 1830's numbered nearly 12,500. The Pawnee were most active in this vicinity between 1800 and 1840, establishing their winter camps.

Since the overland routes west crossed the Pawnee territory, the Indians were in constant contact with the whites and, like many other tribes, fell victims to many of their diseases. From a population of over 12,000 in the early 1800's, they were reduced by half in the 1860's. By the time they were placed on their Oklahoma Indian Territory reservation, they only numbered 1,500.

In 1848 the U.S. Government paid \$2,000 in goods to the Pawnee for this fertile land and timber to establish the Fort Kearny military post. By a treaty with the U.S. in 1857, which ceded all of their lands except a reservation on the Loup River, now Nance County, the Pawnee left their homes along the Platte.

The Pawnee of Caddoan stock were semi-agricultural, raising mainly corn and hunting buffalo. They were the most

dominant and advanced culture of any of the Nebraska Indians. They built earthen lodges for their permanent villages and used buffalo skin tipis when on the move. Wooden beams and poles formed the inner walls and roof with willow branches and grasses thatched to complete a solid wall. A hole was left in the center of the roof to allow the smoke from the cooking fire to escape. Sod pieces cut from the surrounding prairie were laid over the entire structure, overlapped like shingles. This man-made hill could support the weight of several individuals who frequently climbed on top to view the surrounding terrain.

The name Pawnee probably is derived from Pa-ri-ki, the term given to describe the unique hair style of the warriors. They shaved their heads leaving a tuft of hair on the top. They applied paint mixed from fat and shaped the hair in the form of a horn. The Pawnee called themselves "men of men."

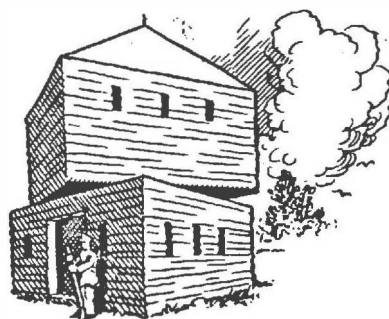
Contrary to popular belief, the Pawnee Nation was never at war with the whites, and during the Indian Wars many Pawnee enlisted as scouts for the U.S. Army to fight their natural enemies, the Sioux, Cheyenne and other tribes to the north and west.

FORT KEARNY

The need for a chain of military posts along the Overland or Oregon Trail was recognized by the government at an early date. In 1836, Congress passed an act providing for such installations.

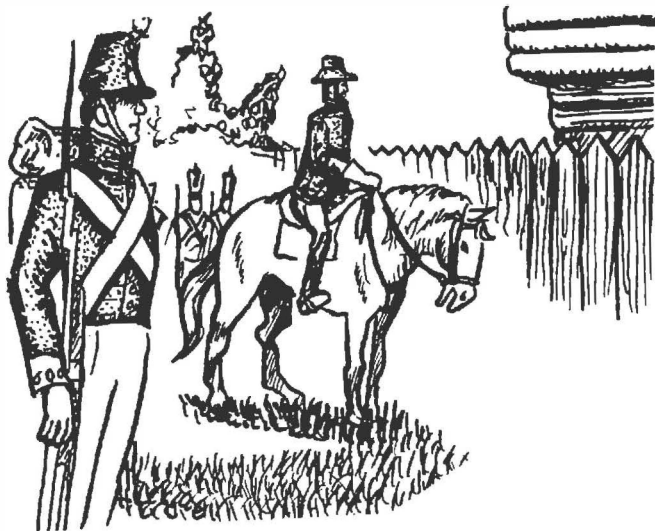
That same year, the first Fort Kearny was located on the Missouri, near the mouth of Table Creek, at the present site of Nebraska City by Col. Steven Watts Kearny. Actual construction of the fort did not begin until 1846. The buildings consisted of a two-story blockhouse, a log quarters for the men, stables and other necessary installations. The fort was garrisoned for a period of less than two years before it was discontinued because the location proved to be too far east to provide protection for emigrants on the Oregon Trail.

In September of 1847, Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury, an officer in the Corps of Engineers, left Fort Kearny at Table Creek with 70 men under orders to select a site for a military post at a suitable location along the Platte River. In his report to the War Department, Lt. Woodbury said, "I have located the post



opposite a group of wooded islands in the Platte River . . . 317 miles from Independence, Missouri; 197 miles from Fort Kearny on the Missouri and three miles from the head of the group of islands, called the Grand Island."

These islands start at Kearney and run to Grand Island for approximately 40 miles. They are the islands one can see and



walk on when using the Fort Kearny hike-bike trail. These islands supplied hay and grazing for 23 years. For a time corn was also raised for the fort's uses. Much of the timber, used as lumber for buildings at Fort Kearny, was acquired from these islands. Also, many soldiers and civilians forded the Platte at the location of the hike-bike trail, crossing from the trail on the north side of the river to visit the fort.

In the spring of 1848, construction began on the new Platte River post. Lt. Woodbury put all available troops to work, having at one time 175 men employed in making bricks, moulding adobe, getting out timber from the islands, working at the sawmill, carpentering and laying sod.

The fort was laid out in a regular square. The buildings surrounded a four-acre parade ground with a flagstaff erected in the center. Around the parade ground, Lt. Woodbury planted cottonwood trees which were taken from the islands on the Platte. Today, you can see a few of the remaining trees, which were planted over 130 years ago, at the historical park.

Fort Kearny rapidly developed into one of the most important forts on the Oregon Trail. Thousands of wagons and emigrants passed through Fort Kearny on their way westward. As the fort grew in the years following, better facilities were developed for the benefit of the Overland travelers. Large stores were started to provide supplies to posts further west, but the commanding officer at Fort Kearny was authorized to sell supplies at cost to the emigrants who needed them.

Fort Kearny also acquired a regular once-a-month mail and stagecoach passenger service. Thus, for the first time emigrants could trust their letters to a fellow emigrant or an army carrier. The post survived as an important stop on the Pony Express route from 1860-61 until the telegraph was completed.

During the 1860's, the appearance of Fort Kearny changed greatly and for the better. According to the Assistant Surgeon General's Report in 1867, the large sod and adobe buildings were replaced by frame structures. The older frame buildings were repaired.

The garrison at the fort was usually made up of two companies. Although Fort Kearny was in the heart of Indian country and exposed to danger, no major attack was ever made on the fort as was on posts farther west.

After 1854, hostility among the Plains tribes became more widespread. In 1864, a wave of violence broke out along the Platte and wagon trains were attacked, members of the trains

killed and scalped and wagons burned. Stage stations were attacked and burned. People began to leave their homes to flee eastward. Plans were made to prevent possible attacks.

At Fort Kearny, freighting and emigrant trains were held until sufficient numbers were available so they would be able to defend themselves. Soldier guards were sent with stage coaches, and earthwork fortifications were built in case of an attack on the post. By the end of 1865, the main Indian troubles shifted farther west, but Fort Kearny continued to be an important point on the Plains until the Union Pacific Railroad was built in 1866-67. The last function of any importance for the fort was to provide protection for the crews constructing the railroad.

On May 22, 1871, an order was issued that Fort Kearny be discontinued and its garrison be transferred to Omaha and its stores to Fort McPherson. In 1875 the buildings were torn down and the materials moved to North Platte and Sidney Barracks. In December, 1876, the military reservation was disposed of to settlers under the homestead laws. In a few years, only the cottonwoods surrounding the parade ground and the remains of the earthworks marked the place.

In 1928, the Fort Kearny Memorial Association was formed. Funds were raised and the 40 acres where the buildings of the post had stood were purchased. Lack of funds prevented further development on Fort Kearny State Historical Park until the passage of a new law in 1959. This bill provided funds for state park areas and their development.

In 1960, Fort Kearny was officially classified as a state historical park and the Nebraska Game, and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Historical Society designed a plan



for the development and interpretation of this historic military post.

In 1962, the stockade was rebuilt. In 1966, the Blacksmith Shop was reconstructed and in 1968, the Museum-Visitors Center was completed. The dedication and opening of the park was held in June, 1968. Development of the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail began in 1978.

Thousands of visitors pass through the fort each year and for a few hours "step into" its military history.

THE PLATTE RIVER

Overlooking the Platte River from one of the two railroad bridges on the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail, you are viewing one of the captivating entities of Nebraska as well as a geologic uniqueness.

The Platte River is formed by the North and South Plattes at their junction in western Nebraska somewhat over 100 miles from where you stand. It flows the length of the state to provide water and recreation for thousands of persons. Water level in the Platte has always been seasonal. In spring it can be a raging torrent, while in mid-summer a duck can have a hard job finding a place to light. In August there may be a few holes with water remaining from the spring rains, but in a very dry year even these will vanish.

Too much water in the spring and too little water in the fall became more of a problem as farmers in Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska began to divert water for irrigation further affecting the regularity and volume of flow.

Considerable regulation of flow followed the completion of Kingsley Dam and resultant Lake McConaughy. While the dam eliminated spring floods and allowed regulated release of stored water throughout the summer, an unexpected result was the creation of numerous islands and luxuriant vegetation growth in the river channel. Already what geographers call a braided or multichannel stream, the Platte became even more so as spring floods no longer flushed loose sand downstream.

Probably the first white men to see the river were the



French who called it "La Riviere Platte," applying the name around the year 1739. In all, some 31 different names, Indian, French, and Spanish, have been given to this river which runs sometimes well defined, other times appearing to be laid on top of the earth with no banks and no apparent central direction. All names incorporate "flat water" reflecting perhaps the words of one unidentified early settler who described the Platte as "a mile wide, a foot deep, too wet to plow and too thick to drink."

Indians lived near or on the river for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years before the first white man saw it. During the years of "Westward expansion," thousands of settlers traveled along the Platte River to Oregon, California, Colorado and even to Sante Fe.

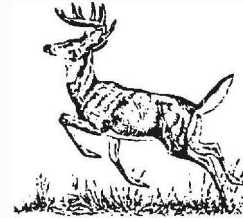
Each appreciated the river for their own reasons, but many must surely have found it offered a peaceful interlude at the end of a long and difficult day. You will do the same.

MAMMALS

Mammals are man's closest relatives among the fauna of the Hike-Bike Trail. Approximately 50 different species can be found in the various habitats offered by the Platte River flood plain through the trail.

Most people have some knowledge of the larger and easier to find mammals, but the smaller forms make up the majority of species in the area. You will have to look a bit harder for them, but they are just as interesting and important as their larger relatives.

"Mammal watching" is not as easy as bird watching. The hiker cannot rely on a pair of field glasses and patience to



White-tailed deer

observe very many mammals. Because animals have secretive behavior and are active at night, the daytime hiker will miss many of the mammals along the trail unless one is extra observant. Luckily, mammals leave behind them a variety of "signs" which can help the hiker identify their presence. Tracks, scat (solid waste droppings) and hair are examples of signs that commonly found that give clues to the mammals active along the trail.

There are several species of mammals which the hiker can expect to see in the flesh, however. Perhaps the most noticeable and the best loved is the white-tailed deer. These graceful creatures are very abundant in the trail area. They feed primarily on browse and grass and they are most likely to be observed in the early morning and late evening. Look for their tracks in the loose sand next to the trail. A very good deer run crosses the trail a few yards north of the main bridge.

The raccoon is another familiar animal that is quite abundant in this area. Normally they are active at night but are occasionally seen during the day. Raccoons dine on a wide variety of foods and are frequently seen working the edge of the river for frogs, crayfish, mussels and fish. Hollow trees are their preferred den sites.

Coyote tracks and scat are often seen along the trail. These common carnivores feed primarily on rodents but will eat just about anything that is edible including some plant material. Their usefulness in controlling rodent populations



Spotted skunk

cannot be understated. The red fox is another rodent-eater. These small cousins of the coyote are rarely seen but fairly common in the area.

Two species of skunks, the striped and the spotted, are also found in the trail area. Feeding on mice, insects, eggs and

some plant material, these mammals can occasionally be seen during the day. The mink is another carnivore sometimes seen along the river during the day. This mammal feeds mainly on small rodents, eggs, frogs, fish and crayfish. It also dens in the river banks.

Of the many different types of rodents in the area, the beaver is the largest. Although these mammals are famous for their dam-building, few dams are built in this area. Most beavers dig dens in the river bank and depend on the deeper parts of the channels for a permanent water supply. The muskrat is another water rodent that dens in the river banks. It feeds primarily on aquatic vegetation and occasionally frogs and fish and is often seen during the day.

PERMANENT BIRD RESIDENTS

Birding has become a popular year around sport. With approximately 645 breeding species in the United States and Canada and an estimated population of 20 billion, the bird watcher interested in keeping a life list has a real potential. Serious amateur and professional birders have recorded over 600 species north of the Mexican border. Many more watchers have life lists over 500, while many amateurs have surpassed the 300 mark. Others simply enjoy being outdoors, and each bird observed is enjoyed for itself alone.

Nebraska claims about 400 species of birds with about 30 listed as permanent residents in the Kearney area. A checklist of birds observed around Fort Kearny is available, free of charge, at the Visitors' Center.

Anyone can begin birding by relying on their eyes and ears. Observing birds is fascinating, but identification puts a challenge into the sport. The only essentials are a pair of good binoculars (7x35 is adequate) and a handy field guide. Many books are available. Three suggestions are: "The



Western Meadowlark

Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds"; "Peterson's Field Guide to Western Birds", and "A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America" put out by the Golden Press. A friend with birding expertise is a real asset to have along.

Basic identification begins with noting the size. Compare the unknown with a known bird (such as a robin). Is it larger,

smaller or the same size? Next, note the shape. Is it sleek or stubby? Does it have a crest?

Is there outstanding color on the body, head, rump, legs or tail? Is there an eye ring, an eye stripe? Are there wing bars or patches? Observe the tail. Is it long, short, rounded,



Great Blue Heron

squared, forked or wedge-shaped? Note the bill. Is it long, short, straight, curved, crossed, thick or slender? Studying a bird guide ahead of time really facilitates field identification.

Now take time to learn about bird behavior. Is the bird solitary, or does it mingle in a flock? Does it feed on the ground, perch in low shrubs or prefer the treetops? Is its flight straight or undulating? If the male and female of a species differ in color, you have an added challenge. Refer to your bird book and try to find both. A trained ear will help you identify elusive birds only by their song.

Dress inconspicuously and walk slowly and quietly whether alone or with a small group. Look and listen, but do not disturb the birds or destroy their habitat.

Easily recognized species include the ringed-neck pheasant, cardinal, blue jay, bobwhite (or quail), western meadowlark (the state bird), rock dove (or pigeon), English (house) sparrow, crow, starling, common (purple) grackle, magpie, robin, black-capped chickadee, common flicker (formerly both the yellow and red-shafted species), mallard, and if lucky, the great blue heron.

The winter garb of the male American goldfinch (similar to the year-round coloration of the female) is drab compared to its brilliant yellow and black markings of summertime. This little finch has an undulating flight pattern and is usually observed in a flock. En masse, a flock will lift off from one bush and alight in another.

By searching tree trunks, one can frequently glimpse the hairy, downy and red-bellied woodpeckers. The downy is a smaller version of the hairy. Both are black and white and only the male of each species sports a red nape patch. The red-bellied woodpecker is "Zebra-backed" with a red cap and white rump. It is frequently confused with the red-headed woodpecker. Red covers the crown and the nape in the male red-belly, but only the nape on the female. Juvenals have the zebra-back but have brown heads with no red.

The tiny blue-black and white creature that prefers a head-down position on tree trunks is the white-breasted nuthatch, while true to its name, the Townsend's solitaire can be found alone, high in the top of a tree. Only if you have very sharp eyes will you see the small, horned lark for its body



Ring-necked pheasant

blends into the ground. Eastern bluebirds like to perch on fence wires.

Soaring or perched on high wires, one might see hawks. In the area year-round are the sharp-shinned hawk, the red-tailed hawk, the marsh hawk (the only hawk with a white rump patch) and the American kestrel (sparrow hawk).

At dusk in the southwest corner of the historical park, you may see a great horned owl swoop down low hunting for a meal. During daylight hours this huge bird is very difficult to locate as it sits motionless high in the trees. But look, you may be lucky.

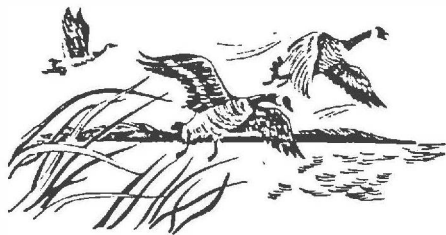
MIGRATING BIRDS

Waterfowl

The Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail offers an impressive sight when thousands of waterfowl frequent the area during spring migration. Waterfowl usually start arriving in late February or early March. Numbers will build to a peak around mid-March and then taper off to a few into April. These dates may vary from year to year, because an early or late spring will change arrival peak periods.

Ducks, geese and swans comprise the waterfowl family. . . web-footed swimming birds with wide, flat bills. There are 145 species found worldwide, and North America claims 45 that are native breeders while another five species regularly visit from Eurasian breeding grounds. In the continental United States, 37 species are found regularly, with 16 common to Nebraska. This does not include the three species of mergansers. Of the 16 species, 9 are "dabblers" or river-pond ducks and the others are "divers".

The two most common dabblers found along the Platte during spring migration are mallards and pintails. Others are



Canada Geese

blue and green-winged teal, shovelers, gadwalls, wigeons, wood ducks and, only rarely, black ducks. Diving ducks may also be observed along the Platte but usually frequent larger, deeper bodies of water. The seven species commonly found in this area are redheads, canvasbacks, ringnecks, scaups, goldeneyes, buffleheads and ruddies.

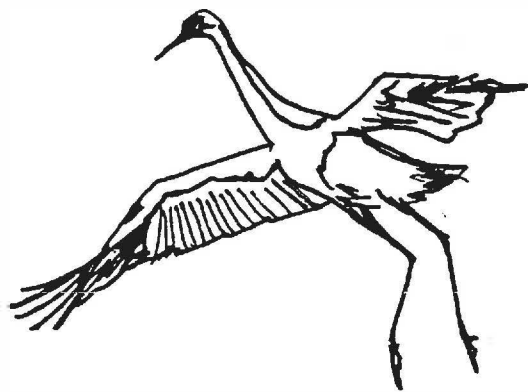
Three species of geese use the Platte during spring migration. Canada and white-fronted are most numerous with a

few snow geese scattered in. Swans are rarely observed in this area, but if the occasion should arise, they can be identified by the very large size and pure white plumage.

The best times to observe waterfowl along the Platte River are during the early morning or late evening hours when the birds are going to or returning from feeding. Things to look for when identifying waterfowl include differences in size, shape, plumage patterns and colors, color of feet, wing beat, flocking behavior, formation, maneuvers and voice. Identifying waterfowl can provide many hours of enjoyment and is a restful form of entertainment.

Sandhill Cranes

One of the most spectacular bird phenomena of North America is one seen each spring in the Platte Valley in central Nebraska, when hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes stop here during late February, March and early April to feed and rest before continuing their migration to northern states, Canada, Alaska and even Siberia. These cranes stand about 3 feet or more in height and have a wingspread of nearly 7 feet.



Sandhill Crane

They congregate by day in fields within a few miles of the Platte River in flocks that range from 2,000 to 5,000 or more. They feed on waste corn, tender vegetation, worms, mice, frogs and the like. Toward night, they gather by the thousands on selected fields nearer the river. When darkness falls they fly to the river to spend the night standing in shallow water on submerged sandbars, usually some distance from the banks of the stream.

Autumn does not give a repeat of the enormous spring-time concentrations in Nebraska. Although some of the cranes stop here on their way south, most of them fly over the state to land in Kansas or go by way of Colorado. They winter in southern states and Mexico.

As far as our hike-bike trail is concerned, you probably will see hundreds of the birds in the fields and in the air well before you reach the trail, particularly if you approach from the south. While on the trail itself, you will be more apt to see these long-legged, long-necked creatures flying overhead rather than in any field.

From both bridges on the trail shortly after sunset, use

your binoculars or spotting scopes and look a mile or so downstream. If you are lucky, you'll see some of the birds standing in shallow water and others coming in for a landing. A better place to see this sight is from the bridge on Nebr. 10, a good 1½ miles to the east. You will be somewhat closer to the birds and will be looking into the western sky with its better light. Also, looking in the opposite direction you can usually see many more birds settling down for the night.

Other Birds

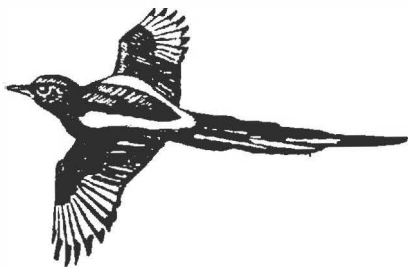
There are many migrating birds other than waterfowl and those given here will likely have departed the Fort Kearny area by June 1.

On the sandbars or water's edge, there should still be some migrating sandpipers or related birds: Semipalmated plovers, looking like miniature killdeer, and tiny Baird sandpipers, almost always in small flocks running around like mechanical wind-up toys. You might also see the larger grayish greater yellowlegs or lesser yellowlegs, both with white rumps and long yellow legs, (which give them their names). Sandpipers are confusing to many people. Observe long and carefully with your binoculars and use your bird books extensively in identifying them.

Black-headed Franklin's gulls, about the size of pigeons, and the larger white-headed ring-billed gulls might also be seen. The related black terns with their deeply forked swallow-like tails could be present, too, usually in small numbers. Their black color should make identification almost foolproof. They will more often be seen flying rather than sitting on the sandbars.

Along various parts of the trail, watch for the trim and beautiful tree swallows, shiny green above and white below. There could also be several kinds of thrushes, robin-like in shape (not surprising for robins are thrushes). These will be mostly brown in color and very secretive. Look for the Swainson's thrush, gray-cheeked thrush and perhaps even a veery. Note colors of the cheeks, back and breast, the presence or absence of eye rings and the amount of streaking below.

Beginners at bird watching often talk about "brown thrushes." Since most thrushes are brown, that name is not very helpful. Many people misidentify the brown thrasher by that name. This bird, a common summer resident and quite common along the trail, is not a thrush at all, but is closely



American Magpie

related to the mockingbird. It can be told by its very long tail, heavy streaking beneath, and by a very reddish cast to its upper brown plumage.

Other migrants still on the possible list include the yellow-rumped warbler, orange-crowned warbler, black-and-white warbler and others. These are small birds about the size of house wrens, generally very active and difficult to locate in

trees and bushes. The name "warbler" is a bit misleading for most warblers are not noted for beautiful songs.

If you are lucky enough to be on the hike-bike trail very often, you might keep a detailed record of the birds you see. Then you will soon learn just when a particular species has disappeared for the year and also just when a bird from northern areas first shows up on its way south.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Approximately 24 species of amphibians and reptiles are believed to frequent the area around the Hike-Bike Trail. Most are secretive animals that avoid contact with humans whenever possible and are active only at certain times of the day (or night). None are active during the winter months.

To observe these interesting and sometimes very colorful animals, one will need to leave the trail and explore the suit-



Leopard Frog

able habitat alongside it. Since many of the species live in association with water environments, Bassway Strip SWA, to the north and east with its sandpits, marshes and riparian habitat, is an excellent area to explore.

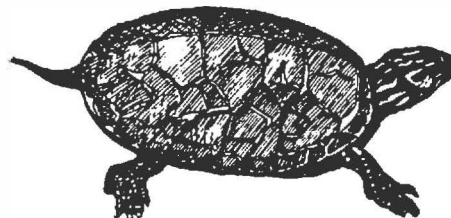
Tiger salamanders may be found in some of the smaller pools (the ones lacking predatory fish) especially during March and April when they return to the water to reproduce.

Tiny cricket frogs and chorus frogs (body lengths five-eighths to one inch) may also be found in smaller pools and marshes. These also mate in the early spring and are most easily located by their calls at this time of year. The familiar frog of the biology laboratory, the spotted leopard frog (body length one to four inches) may also be found in or around almost any body of water in the area.

The largest North American frog, the bullfrog (body length up to eight inches), may also be found in almost any of the aquatic habitats. The bullfrog breeds from May through August and during this interval its deep bass call "jug-o-rum" makes it easy to locate.

Painted turtles, snapping turtles and spiny softshell turtles also inhabit many of these waters and may often be found sunning themselves on logs or other objects if one approaches the sandpit cautiously.

The only truly aquatic snake of the area is the northern water snake. It is almost always found in or near the water. It sometimes basks in the sun on logs or low-hanging limbs above the water. Northern water snakes are brownish blotched snakes that get rather large (up to 40 inches long) and are



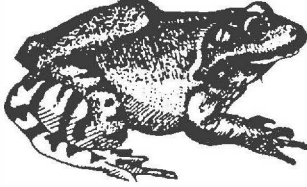
Western Painted Turtle

sometimes mistakenly called "water moccasins." They are not poisonous but the adults do have long recurved teeth that can inflict a painful bite. They normally try to avoid people, but when cornered, they will become aggressive and strike savagely.

Two other snakes, the red-sided garter and plains garter, are also commonly found in the riparian habitats of the area. Adult garter snakes are beautiful snakes (20 to 28 inches long) and may be readily identified by the stripes that run the length of the body. They also are nonpoisonous but may bite if handled carelessly.

Several nonpoisonous snakes are also inhabitants of the area. The bullsnake, western hognose, prairie ringneck and eastern yellow-bellied racer have all been reported from the general area and could on occasion be encountered.

There are no official records of poisonous snakes in the area. However, the region is on the edge of the known dis-



Bullfrog

tribution of the prairie rattlesnake, and it is possible, although not likely, that isolated individuals might wander into the trail vicinity. To be on the safe side, it is advisable to avoid contact with brown blotched snakes that have a dark band extending from the eye to the angle of the jaw.

Several species are less dependent upon the water and may be found in the sandy and wooded areas. Woodhouse's toad and the great plains toad are common inhabitants of these areas. Both are more active at night, frequently burrowing into the soil or hiding under objects during hot weather, making them somewhat difficult to find during the day.

The ornate box turtle, one of Nebraska's best known turtles, also inhabits the area. It is easily identified by its high, arched shell, with radiating yellow lines.

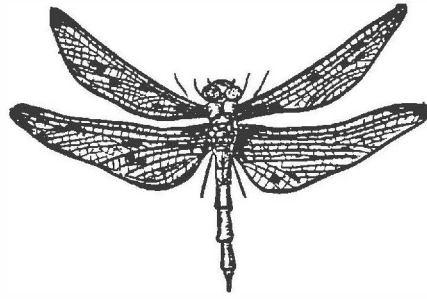
In the springtime around midday, the prairie (six-lined) racerunners are active and fairly abundant in the semi-open well-drained areas with sandy soil. These are slender, medium-sized lizards (6-8 inches total length) with greenish heads and brown tails. Six longitudinal stripes along the body and their rapid movements also assist in their identification.

Earless lizards, prairie lizards, many-lined skinks and northern prairie skinks are also possible inhabitants of the area. The earless lizard has its ear openings covered with scales which make it appear to have no ears. Male prairie lizards have two long narrow light blue patches, one at each side of the belly. Both skinks are moderate-sized lizards (about six inches long) glossy brown in color with dark longitudinal stripes. None are poisonous.

BEETLES, BUGS AND BUTTERFLIES

Insects are the dominant group of animals on earth today. Close to 900,000 have been described and many more are still unidentified. Several groups are very ancient, having been on earth for more than 300 million years. During this time they have adapted to life in many different habitats and developed unusual ways of surviving.

Because of the tremendous diversity, only a few of the groups that you might encounter along the trail will be mentioned. Recommended field guides to help in identification



Dragonfly

are: "*How to Know the Insects*" by H. E. Jacques and "*A Field Guide to the Insects*" by Borror and White.

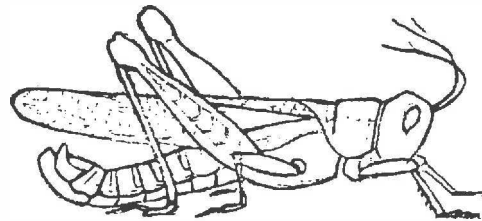
One has only to sit quietly to observe many of the species present. A pond hosts a surprising number along its shores, on its surface and on the vegetation in the water.

Many beetles can be seen coming to the surface for a supply of air before diving back into the vegetation. Whirly-gig beetles swim about on the surface. If you can capture one, look at the eyes. They are divided so that one part of the eye looks down into the water and the other part keeps watch above the insect.

Water striders are true bugs that walk about on the surface of the water. Despite their innocent appearance they can inflict a painful bite if handled carelessly.

Near the ponds and river, one can see several species of dragonflies. These are large and colorful insects with long slender bodies and wings marked with metallic colors. They spend a great amount of time in the air feeding on other insects and regularly patrol a well-defined territory. They are not dangerous at all. Their immature young live in the water, and the larger species feed on a variety of other insects and animals. Some even catch tadpoles and small fish.

Grasshoppers and their relatives can be seen or heard along the trail. It takes patience and sharp eyes to locate many



Grasshopper

of the species because they blend so well with the background. Many of the group are "singers" and provide an enjoyable background of sound to hikers and campers during the evening. It is a major challenge to locate the singers, as they cease their noise-making whenever anyone comes too close. Most grasshoppers are important food for birds.

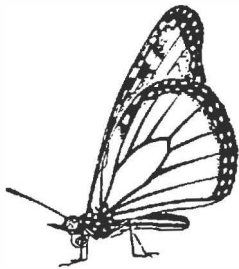
Among the most colorful insects seen by hikers are the butterflies. Groups likely to be encountered include the sulphurs, fritillaries, satyrs and swallowtails. Thousands of sulphurs flock to alfalfa fields during the summer, and they congregate in large numbers at pools left by recent rains. The fritillaries are medium to large butterflies with brownish or orange wings covered with black markings on the upper surface and white or silvery spots on the lower surface. Swallowtails are yellow with black markings on the wings. Satyrs

are gray or brown and have black, eye-like spots on the wings. These butterflies are seen most frequently in wooded places.

Other species seen in the area include the monarch or milkweed butterfly, the painted lady and the red admiral. The former is a large species with orange and black wings. Its larva, or caterpillar, feeds on milkweed plants of certain kinds and incorporates some of the plant chemicals in its own body making the species very distasteful to potential predators. The red admiral has black and orange wings with prominent white spots on the forewings.

Numerous species of true flies inhabit the area. It takes an expert to distinguish between the groups but any one can experience their bites. The most annoying are the mosquitoes.

Some species can transmit diseases caused by various parasites, and one parasite that is increasing in frequency is the area is the dog heartworm. Pets can be examined by veterinarians for the presence of this parasite. Many other species of flies can deliver painful bites and one can only endure them. A plentiful supply of insect repellent is a must if you spend any time along the trail or camp in this area.



Monarch Butterfly

In late spring, wood ticks can become plentiful in the area. Although they can be disease-carriers, around Fort Kearny they are mostly just bothersome. However, a few precautionary measures are advisable to prevent infestation. Before venturing into wooded areas, spray tick repellent liberally over your body and clothing. Wear a hat or scarf, long sleeves, and long pants. Avoid tramping through underbrush and walking under low-hanging branches.

Brown in color, a tick has a round, flat body, four pairs of legs, and a tiny head with a pincer-like mouth.

Always check your clothing and body after any spring outing. If you find a tick attached to your body, be careful when removing it. A tick usually can be made to release its hold by placing a pad saturated with alcohol, fingernail polish remover, cooking oil, or even oleo on the tick, particularly if slight tension is applied with a pair of tweezers. If the head is left embedded in the skin, see your doctor.

PRAIRIE PLANTS

Prairie vegetation that had grown virtually undisturbed for years along the railroad bed was badly damaged by heavy machinery in the process of removing the old Burlington-Northern track during the development of the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail. In due time, however, it began to reappear.

The name for nature's way of mending man's destructive activities is called succession. It is a process whereby successive groups of plants and animals live on an area, each successive group changing the soil slightly. Eventually, a stable plant community called the climax community develops. This climax community for the area along the trail is wetland



Coneflower

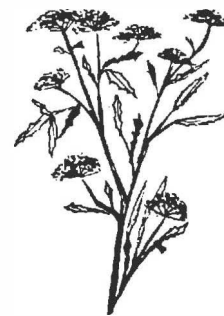
prairie dominated by big bluestem, switchgrass and cordgrass.

The first stage of succession is known as the "weedy" stage and characteristic plants include annual brome or cheatgrass and annual broadleaf weeds. An attempt to help the successional process has been made by seeding a mixture of perennial grasses such as ryegrass, smooth brome grass, orchard grass, Kentucky bluegrass, western wheatgrass and the needle and thread grass. However, only the last two are species native to prairies here.

Grasses and weeds provide organic matter to build up and help hold the soil from eroding away on the steep banks. All of the grasses commonly found along the trail are cool season grasses that grow and flower before the hot summer temperatures arrive. Most of the native prairie species do not grow much until summer.

A few undisturbed patches of prairie vegetation are located between the two bridges, for the most part, on the east side of the hike-bike trail. Sub-irrigated prairies normally are made up of several species of grasses, such as, big bluestem, switchgrass, Indiangrass, prairie cordgrass and wild rye. Most of the grasses in this true or tallgrass prairie do not form seeds until late July and early August.

Most of these lowland prairies have been overgrazed and

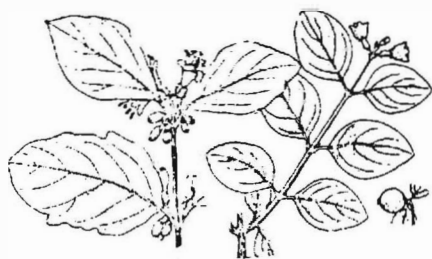


Water Hemlock

the grasses listed above (called decreasers by range managers because they decrease under heavy grazing pressure) have been replaced by less productive species of grasses. The areas along the trail have been protected from grazing since they were part of the Burlington-Northern right-of-way. Because of this protection, the areas along the trail between the two bridges look much as the prairie did when first pioneers followed the Platte through Nebraska on the Mormon and Oregon trails.

Since a prairie will suffocate itself if its growth is not occasionally mowed, grazed, or burned, these areas will probably have to be burned periodically.

In the native prairie parcels along the trail, the most abundant wildflower to blossom in late spring is prairie rag-



Wolfberry

wort (or groundsel), a member of the sunflower family, identified by its many bright yellow blossoms. Its scientific name is *Senecio plattensis*. The last part of the name was given because the plant was found abundantly along the Platte River. On the ragwort blossoms, insects can be seen sipping nectar, eating pollen or just resting. Many of these insects will help to pollinate the flowers.

Another fairly abundant spring prairie flower is the spiderwort. Wort means plant or herb. The spider part of the name of this three-petaled, dark blue flower comes from the observation that as the stem is broken apart, a profusion of mucilage is drawn out into thin threads suggesting a spider web. Unlike the ragwort which is known for its medicinal uses, the young leaves and stems of the spiderwort can be added fresh to salads and the flowers can be candied.

Other plants to blossom in late spring are wild rose, wild grape, the broad-leaved purple four o'clock, goatsbeard (looking like a large dandelion) and prairie dogbane which has very tiny, white flowers and is found only near the river.

Among the plants flowering in mid-summer along the trail is woolly or tall verbenas. It has blue flowers arranged on what appears to be a rope. There are several species of verbenas in Nebraska but this one is the most common. It is especially found in disturbed or overgrazed sites.

Various sunflowers are in abundance. Seen along the trail is the sand sunflower which is much shorter than the common sunflower. Another member of the sunflower family is daisy fleabane. It has white outer flowers (ray flowers) while the disc flowers (inner flowers) are yellow.

Two other species of yellow wildflowers that bloom in summer are prairie coneflower and black-eyed Susans. Cone-



Sunflower

flower is so named because its yellow ray flowers are attached to a cylindrical cone-like structure. Black-eyed Susans look

somewhat like a sunflower except they have much smaller leaves.

At the north end of the south bridge, on the west side of the trail, is a shrub known as snowberry or wolfberry. It is also called buckbrush. This plant provides good protection for birds and mammals in winter, and deer and rabbits will feed on the twigs occasionally.

In late summer showy milkweed appears along the trail, as well as in the ditches. It has large leaves, a milky sap and lavender blossoms. Milkweeds are poisonous to many species of animals, including man, but parts of the plant are edible if prepared properly.

One of the most poisonous plants found in Nebraska blossoms in July. . . water hemlock. Its flower can be confused with elderberry. Human poisoning from this species most frequently occurs when its tuberous roots are mistaken for an edible plant such as Jerusalem artichoke.

Two plants with fern-like foliage are common in the ditches. In the summer, prairie mimosa (or Illinois bundle-flower) is not yet in flower but can be identified by last year's stalk and the dark brown bundle of small pods.

The fern-like yarrow, with its white flowers, is very conspicuous at this time of year. This plant was introduced from Europe and is now common in much of the United States. It has been noted in herbals as being useful in treating a variety of diseases. Various Indian tribes of North America utilized preparations to treat nearly every ailment imaginable. During the Civil War, it was so widely used to treat wounds that it became known as soldiers' woundwort.

Lots of prairie forbs (broadleaved plants with showy flowers) are also found in this area. Among the forbs that flower from late August into October are the tall or giant goldenrod (Nebraska's state flower), asters, prairie clovers and other goldenrods.

If you become interested in plants and want to be able to identify them yourself, two helpful guides with colored photographs, are: "*Nebraska Wild Flowers*" by Robert C. Lommasson and "*Nebraska Weeds*", published by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

SHRUBS AND TREES

There are about 60 species of native trees in Nebraska, perhaps 30 of native shrubs and 15 or 20 wood vines. In addition to these natives many kinds of woody plants have been introduced from other parts of the world.

Southeastern Nebraska has the edge on other parts of the state in numbers of native species. The Pine Ridge and Panhandle regions have a few species of woody plants that are more common in the Rocky Mountains and Black Hills. Central Nebraska, including the middle reaches of the Platte Valley, has relatively few species of trees, shrubs, and vines growing with a minimum of human help.

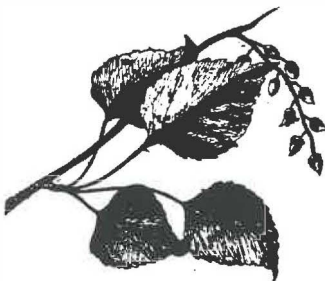
Part of the enjoyment of outdoor experiences such as are available at Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail comes from learning about your temporary surroundings. One of the obvious ways to make these experiences even better is through plant identification. Trees and other woody plants have somewhat of an advantage in that you can see your subjects year-round, in contrast to grasses and other herbaceous kinds. Although tree identification is not especially easy, neither is it difficult. You may be surprised at how much fun you can have in learning to spot clues that separate a boxelder from a green ash. Even

without leaves, trees have a certain characteristics that make it possible to tell what kind you are looking at.

Unless you can join up with someone already familiar with the trees and shrubs, you will probably decide to get a book to get started. One of the better woody plant identification aids for Nebraska is "A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs" by G. A. Petrides. This is one of the well-known Peterson Field Guide Series, maybe best known for the titles on birds. The tree and shrub book concentrates on leaf structure, twig and bark characteristics, and tree silhouettes (both summer and winter outlines). Explanations of basic terms, plant anatomy, excellent line drawings and color art are among the strong points of all the Peterson series, and the three/shrub book is no exception.

Rather than try to cover a large number of woody plants at one times, let's look at 10 kinds of trees and shrubs you can see from the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail. Both native and introduced kinds are on our list.

COTTONWOOD (*Populus deltoides*) – The largest common trees in the Platte Valley, cottonwoods usually tower far above those of other species. Some cottonwoods might reach 80 feet or more at maturity. The shiny, medium green leaves are somewhat triangular and toothed at the edges. Cottonwood leaves will rustle in the slightest breeze, even when leaves of other trees seem perfectly motionless. Twigs are usually greenish yellow; older branches may be gray and dappled with irregular black spots. Trunk bark of old cottonwoods is dark gray, deeply ridged and often broken into scale-like plates. Cottonwood gets its common name from the fluffy shreds of "cotton" attached to the tiny seeds. The early summer cotton showers spread seeds long distances from parent trees.



Cottonwood

EASTERN REDCEDAR (*Juniperus virginiana*) – Although several species of needle-leaf evergreens grow in the central Platte Valley, only redcedar is native to the region. Pine and spruce are examples of introduced evergreens that are planted in farmstead windbreaks and in residential or park landscapes. Redcedars may reach 30 feet or more at maturity and gener-

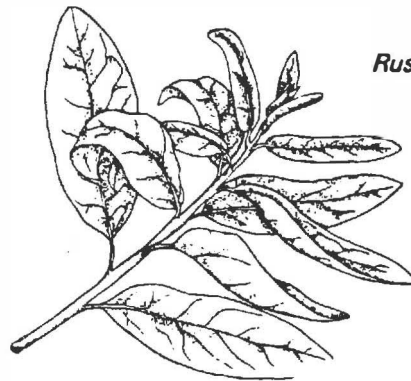


Eastern Red Cedar

ally have cone or pyramid-shaped crowns. Blue or bluish-gray "berries" (comparable to cones of pine or spruce) may be seen among the deep green foliage almost any time. Cedar

berries are eaten by several kinds of wintering songbirds and are great favorites of the aptly named cedar waxwing.

SANDBAR WILLOW (*Salix exigua*) – Usually shrubby, d likely to grow in dense thickets, this native willow is especially abundant on moist, sandy areas. In shrub form, sandbar willow may range from 3 to 8 feet tall or 12 to 15 feet when it assumes tree proportions. Leaves are long, narrow and pointed at both ends. Noticeable, widely spaced teeth are distributed along leaf edges. The light yellow to orange twigs are thin and flexible. Older bark is generally dark brown with occasional reddish spots, especially on larger tree-like specimens.



Russian Olive

RUSSIAN OLIVE (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) – During the growing season, small trees with silvery gray leaves stand out among the otherwise green foliage. These are almost certainly Russian olives, originally introduced from Eurasia and planted in Nebraska windbreaks. Twigs and small branches range from gray to copper brown. Many young shoots dry up and become spiny projections on the tree's upper limbs. Bark of the main trunk is dark gray with occasional reddish streaks appearing when the outer layer becomes shredded with age. Fruits of Russian olive do indeed resemble tiny leathery olives. These "berries" have a single stony seed and may remain on the branches well into winter.

ROUGHLEAF DOGWOOD (*Cornus drummondii*) – This native shrub usually grows to heights of 5 to 10 feet and forms dense thickets. Songbirds will nest in the outer branches of dogwood clumps and cottontail rabbits find shelter among the closely spaced small trunks. Leaves occur in pairs on opposite sides of the reddish to gray hairy twigs. Three to five pairs of veins extend from the middle of each leaf outward to each edge. Flat-topped clusters of creamy flowers appear from mid-May to late June, sometimes so thick as to give dogwood thickets a snow-covered effect. Fruits also occur in flat clusters of half-inch berries, maturing in early autumn.

AMERICAN ELM (*Ulmus americana*) – The vase-shaped outline of a mature American elm is especially prominent in widely spaced trees. Mature specimens might reach heights of 60 to 75 feet, although few large trees of this species remain following the spread of Dutch elm disease. Greenish flowers appear on American elms in late March to early April, a few weeks before leaves come out. Fruits are half-inch discs with a single brown seed at the center of each disc. Leaves have a lop-sided appearance and are edged with prominent tooth-like indentations. Upper leaf surfaces are deep green, while the lower surfaces are lighter and slightly rough. Leaf veins form a conspicuous herringbone pattern.



CHOCKECHERRY (*Prunus virginiana*) — The most widely distributed native cherry in the Midwest, chokecherry usually grows in thickets as a shrub 5 to 8 feet tall. Widely-spaced individuals may occur as small trees of up to 15 feet at maturity. Twigs and bark are reddish brown and have a shiny surface. The bark is usually heavily marked with conspicuous horizontal lines called lenticels. Leaves have glossy dark green upper surfaces, paler undersides and are edged with fine teeth. Livestock poisoning is occasionally reported from cattle feeding on chokecherry leaves, although this is unlikely when other forage is present. In late April to early May, drooping clusters of white flowers make their appearance on chokecherry plants. Then in early July small bunches of half-inch dark purple to nearly black fruit send their signals to birds and people that the crop is ripe. If you haven't tried chokecherry jelly, you're missing a real treat.

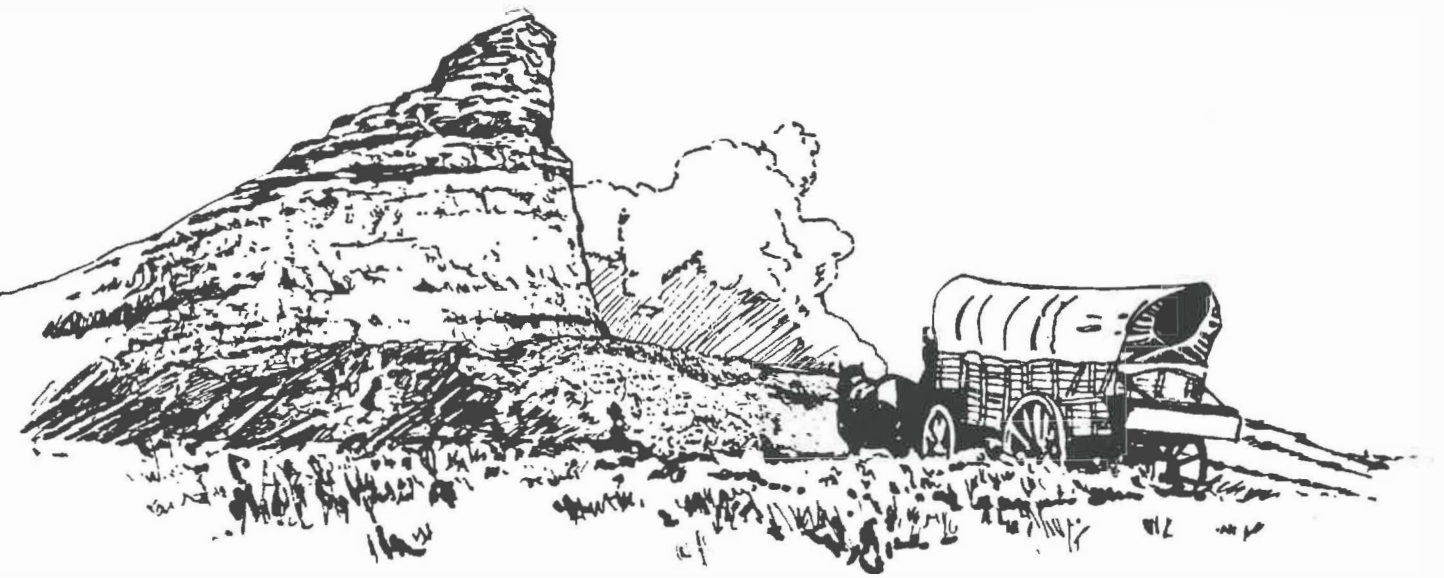
HACKBERRY (*Celtis occidentalis*) — This is one of Nebraska's most widely distributed native trees. In the central Platte Valley, it will attain heights of 30 to 40 feet from a

straight trunk which divides into three or four stout main branches. Leaves are covered with fine, soft hairs and usually taper to a conspicuous thin point at the end. Leaf veins resemble a net; many fine lines radiate in all directions between the principal veins that extend from the middle of the leaf. In early fall, hackberry leaves often turn bright yellow. Flowers appear in May, but they are well hidden among the leaves. Hackberry fruits resemble small gray or bluish cherries and hang on thin stalks. Fruit pits are stone-like and covered with small ridges.

GREEN ASH (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) — The sturdy green ash usually grows to heights of 35 to 50 feet in this area. The species is marked by a straight trunk and a rounded crown. Twigs are rather stout, gray with a yellowish tinge, and have a few dark lines running short distances down the length. Leaves occur in pairs on opposite sides of a twig. Each ash leaf is made up of 5 to 9 distinct leaflets, forming a compound leaf. Fruits of green ash are borne in loose drooping clusters and appear in late summer. An individual fruit called a samara or "key" is an inch or so long and consists of the seed with a papery wing. Ash seeds may be spread by birds or, if not eaten, they drop to the ground in a brief fluttering flight, like a tiny helicopter.

WHITE MULBERRY (*Morus alba*) — This medium-size tree was introduced into the U.S. from Eurasia for ornamental and windbreak plantings. A closely related native species, red mulberry, is native to eastern Nebraska. Leaves of the white mulberry are quite variable, ranging from rounded or three-lobed to an irregular "mitten-shape" in which a small "thumb" is separated from the main part of the leaf by a quarter-inch space. Twigs are smooth and yellowish to light brown. Fruits mature in mid-summer and resemble compact bunches of tiny white or greenish grapes. Songbirds, squirrels, raccoons and skunks are among the wildlife species that feed on mulberries.

The Pony Express On The Oregon Trail



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

The Pony Express On The Oregon Trail

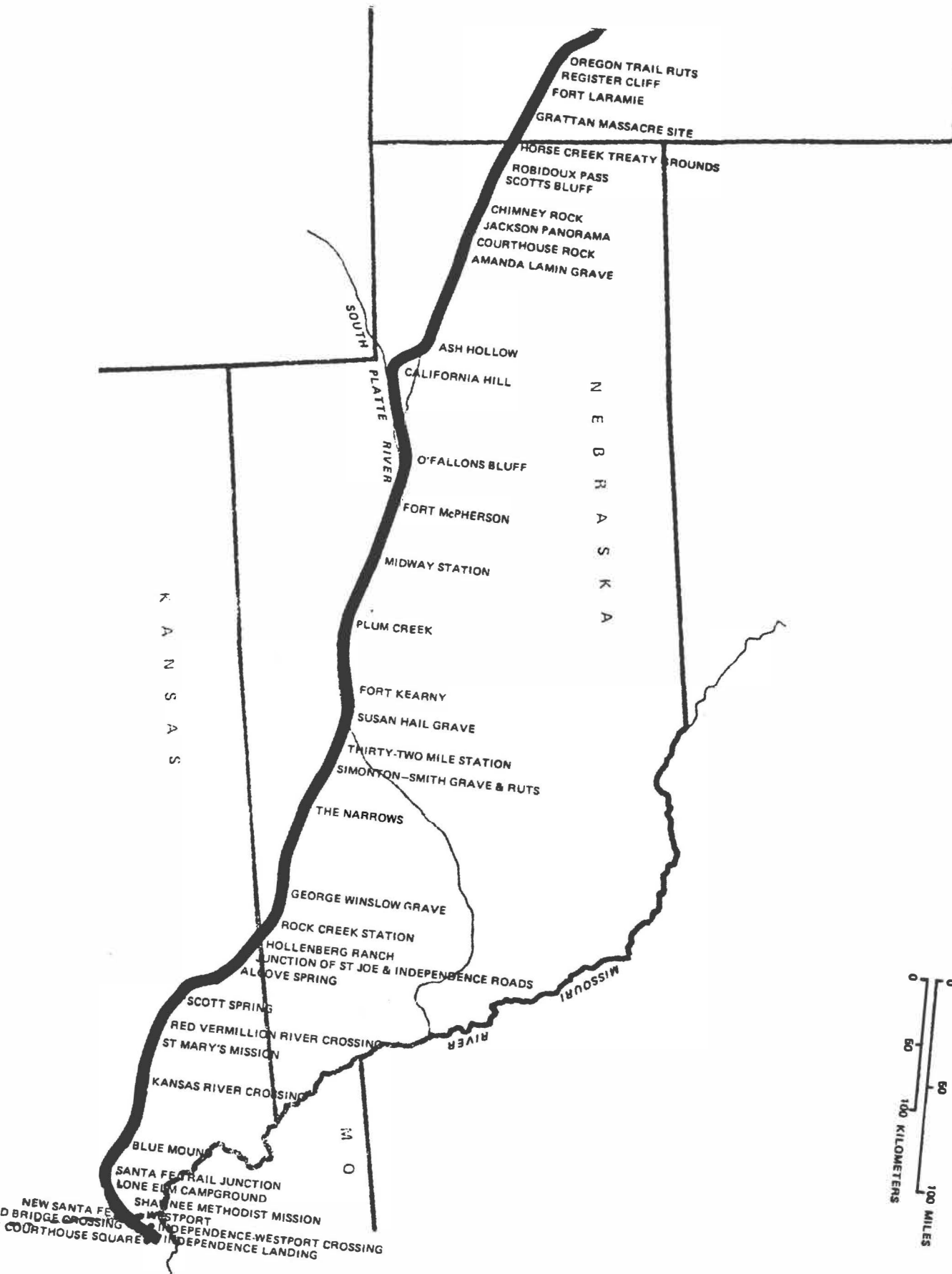
**Rock Creek Station, Nebraska,
to Fort Laramie, Wyoming**

**By Ted Stutheit
Chief of State Historical Parks
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
1977-1988**

About the Author

A painstaking and faithful historian, Ted Stutheit was chief of historical parks for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission from 1977 until his death in 1988. Prior to that time, he served as superintendent at Fort Kearny State Historical Park from 1962 to 1970, when he was promoted to chief of recreation and wayside areas and then to assistant chief of state parks in 1973. He left the Commission for three years to work for the National Rifle Association, returning in 1977 to head up the historical parks program.

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As you journey across Nebraska, you cross and recross the Oregon Trail, just as you cross and recross the Platte River, which it paralleled. Today, we watch in fascination as space craft blast off almost routinely to perform a variety of tasks and return to Earth. Perhaps because of these wondrous accomplishments, it is difficult for us to comprehend that it was only a little more than a century ago that California and Oregon were almost as remote to most Americans as the moon and planets are to us today.

Over this great artery and others journeyed restless fur traders, government explorers and thousands of ordinary Americans . . . individuals and whole families in search of new homes and dreamers whose destiny led to the founding of new communities . . . all of them involved in a daring excursion that would change the course of American history.

It took uncommon courage to venture into a strange and forbidding land, drawn only by the promise of a better life. Pioneers on the Oregon Trail faced myriad obstacles — climate, the terrain, the great distance, personal hardships, sickness, scarcity of food and water, and, sometimes, hostile Indians to list only a few. Remember . . . most of these travelers were amateurs in this wilderness, traversing the vast region beyond the Mississippi River. Most of them did not merely pause and then return; they stayed and populated the land, helping to build America.

Communication in those days was difficult at best. There were no telephones, no radio, no TV. Thus, was born the Pony Express, with its daring young riders, braving the perils of the wilderness to carry the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in an astonishing 10 days. Although the "lightning mail" streaked across the continent for little more than a year, it rode straight into American folklore.

Outlined here are the "stations" where the young riders changed horses, switched riders, grabbed the mail and sped on their way. Intermingled are other important sites along the trail as it crossed Nebraska.

***"Rock Creek Station" was the Nebraska Station No. 2 on the Pony Express Route. Nebraska Station No. 1 was southeast of here and known as "Rock House". The Pony Express Route entered Nebraska in the S.W. corner section (SW¼—Sec. 31—T.1N, R.5E of Gage county, crossing immediately northwestward into the S.E. corner section of Jefferson County. "Rock House Station", where the Oketo cut-off rejoined the main pony route, is in NE¼ NW¼, Sec. 15, T.1N, R.4E, about three miles northeast of Steele City. In (Root and Connelley), it is called Otoe Station.**

"Rock Creek Station" later became notorious because of the infamous episode involving David McCandles and "Wild Bill" Hickok. Located in the SW¼ NE¼, Sec. 26, T.2N, R.3E, Jefferson County, and about six miles southeast of Fairbury. Other names for the station were Pawnee (Root and Connelley) and "Turkey Creek" — (Burton). Nearby is Old Whiskey Run Ranch.

According to Dawson in 1859 McCanley built a toll bridge over Rock Creek and a ranch on the east bank of the stream, and those structures became the pony station. This was built of hewn logs and are pictured in a daguerreotype photograph (Original in California State Library).**

***Nebraska Pony Express Stations 3 and 4 were also located in Jefferson County. No. 3 - "Virginia City" was located about 4 miles north of Fairbury in the NE corner, Sec. 27, T.3N, R.2E. Other names used were Graysons (Root and Connelley) and Whiskey Run (Allen). Lone Tree, in the middle of the SW¼, Sec. 25, one mile south of Virginia City, crops up as an alternate site.**

***Nebraska Station No. 4 — "Big Sandy" was an important home station. The site lies within the SE¼, NE¼, Sec. 15, T.3N, R.1E., about 3 miles east of Alexandria, in Jefferson County. The Nebraska City road joined the Oregon Trail, a short distance west of Big Sandy. According to Dawson, the owner and operator of the station was Dan Patterson who, in 1860, sold it to Asa and John Latham. Also associated with the site are the ranches of Ed Farrell and Daniel, the latter a post office.**

The Jefferson County Historical Society members have worked diligently to make their whole county a living museum. Among important and interesting sites you may wish to visit at a later date when more time is available are Quivera Park, Smith Lime Kiln, Dripping Springs, Knobel Lime Kiln, and the George Winslow Grave Site.

The George Winslow Grave site is located nine miles northwest of Rock Creek Station and is one of the famous gravesites on the Oregon Trail. Although historians have estimated that 30,000 persons died on the trail between 1842 and 1860 (an average of 15 per mile), the actual number of marked and identified

gravesites remaining today is quite limited. Thus each positively identified and marked gravesite which has survived is respectfully honored. The George Winslow grave is one of these. Winslow died on June 8, 1849, and his grave was marked by others of his company. Winslow's sons returned to Nebraska in 1912 to erect a more permanent monument at the site, and the Winslow family still makes periodic pilgrimages to the grave.

**George Winslow wrote a letter to his wife from Independence, Mo., May 12, 1849. Mrs. George Winslow gave it to her grandson, Carlton Winslow, in whose name it was presented to the Nebraska State Historical Society, together with an excellent copy of a daguerreotype of George Winslow, taken in 1849. In the letter he writes:

"My dear Wife: We have no further anxiety about forage: millions of buffalo have existed for ages on these vast prairies, and their numbers have been diminished by reason of hunters, and it is absurd to think we will not have sufficient grass for our animals.

We have bought forty mules, which cost us \$50 apiece. I have been appointed teamster, and had the good luck to draw the best wagon. I never slept better in my life. I always find myself in the morning -- on my bed, rather-flat as a pancake. As the darn thing leaks just enough to land me on the terra firma by morning, it saves me the trouble of pressing out the wind; so who cares?

My money holds out very well. I have about \$15 on hand out of the \$25 which I had on leaving. We engaged some Mexicans to break the mules. To harness them they tied their fore-legs together and threw them down. The fellows then got on them and wrung their ears which is the tenderest part. By that time they were docile enough to take the harness. The animals in many respects resemble sheep; they are very timid, and when frightened will kick like thunder. They got six harnessed into a team, when one of the leaders, feeling a little mulish, jumped right straight over the other one's back.

I do not worry about myself -- then why do you for me? I do not discover in your letter any anxiety on your account; then let us for the future look on the bright side and indulge in no more useless anxiety. It effects nothing, and is almost universally the bugbear of the imagination.

The reports of the gold region here are as encouraging as they were in Massachusetts. Just imagine to yourself seeing me return with from \$10,000 to \$1,000,000. I do not wonder that General Taylor was opposed to writing on the field. I am now writing on a low box, and have to 'stoop to conquer'.

Your Loving Husband,
George Winslow. "

On May 16 this company of intrepid men, rash with the courage of youth, set their hearts and faces toward the west and began their long overland journey to California, and by night had crossed "The Line" and were in Indian country. Though slowed by frequent rains and mud they made their way up the Kansas River. With mud sometimes hub deep, and broken wagon-poles as a hinderance they reached the lower ford of the Kansas, just below the Rock Island Bridge at Topeka on May 26th, having accomplished about 50 miles in 10 days. The wagons were driven onto flat boats and poled across by 5 Indians. The road then became dry, and they made rapid progress until the 29th, when George Winslow was suddenly taken violently ill with cholera. Two others of the party also suffered symptoms of the disease. The company remained in camp three days and with the sick seemingly recovered, it was decided to push on. Winslow's brothers-in-law, David Staples and Bracket Lord, or his uncle, Jesse Winslow, were in attendance of George Winslow, giving him every care possible. His condition improved as they travelled and on June 6th they reached the place where the trail crosses the Nebraska-Kansas state line. Mr. Gould wrote:**

"The road over the high rolling prairie was hard and smooth as a plank floor. The prospect was beautiful. About a half-hour before sunset a terrific thunder shower arose, which baffles description, the lightning-flashes dazzling the eyes, and the thunder deafening the ears, and the rain falling in torrents. It was altogether the grandest scene I have ever witnessed. When the rain ceased to fall the sun had set and darkness closed in."

(Their location was just east of Steele City, Jefferson County.)

To this storm is attributed George Winslow's death. The next morning he appeared as well as could be expected, but by 3 o'clock his condition worsened, and the company encamped on Whiskey Run. He failed rapidly, and at 9 a.m. the 8th of June, 1849 he died. For George Winslow the trail ended here.

From Rock Creek Station the tour will head out for Fort Kearny. Westward from Jefferson County the trail crosses Thayer County, cuts northwest across Nuckolls County, slices across the southwest part of Clay County, enters Adams County just south of Highway 74 then swings northwest to a point just south of the Platte River before entering Kearney County.

While enroute to Fort Kearny numerous important sites will be by-passed to keep your tour on a reasonable schedule. Picture in your mind one of the exciting chapters along this segment of the Oregon Trail, the famed Pony Express, lasting just eighteen months, from April 3, 1860 to October 24, 1861.

Through the ages to come, the Pony Express will live in the minds of man. And with it should live the history of the three men, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell who founded, owned and operated it. The gallant riders who became immortal because of their perserverance, fidelity to purpose and personal sacrifice will forever be one of the great expressions of free enterprise in America.

*At a cost of nearly \$100,000 the express was put in operation between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. About 500 horses of superior stamina, including Kentucky breed and California Mustangs, were purchased for \$175 each, far in excess of the figure for ordinary horses of the time, that being from \$25 to \$50. More than 80 riders of the Express, "young, skinny fellows unmarried" were employed at beginning wages of \$50 per month plus board. About 190 Pony Express stations were established, complete with station keepers, stables, animals and equipment.

The earlier stations, which served stage coach passengers and provided spare teams, were located at approximately 25 mile intervals so that nearly 50 percent of the needed Pony Express stations were stage stations already in existence and were destined to see double duty. This left about 95 brand new stations to be established, since the limit of the horse going at top speed was in the neighborhood of 12 to 15 miles. As a general rule, every second Pony Express station was a previously established stage station. The new ones were thrown together hurriedly and stocked for the new service.

In the beginning, each rider rode three mounts for a total distance of around 45 miles to a "home station." Then he would carry the mail going in the opposite direction to the previous home station.

Mail was sent by the Pony Express originally for \$5 per half ounce, but later this amount dropped to \$2 and then to one dollar per half ounce. It was carried in four flaps on the corners of a leather mochila which was thrown over the pony rider's saddle at each relay station. The riders started from St. Joseph and Sacramento on a once-a-week basis, but later this was stepped up to two times a week.

The original goal for the approximate 2,000 miles was 10 day delivery. The fastest time on record from terminus to terminus was 7 days and seventeen hours recorded while delivering by special relay the inaugural address of President Lincoln to California citizens. In this event, the Pony Express is credited as being a very important factor in cementing the new state of California to the threatened union in 1860-61.

In 1912 Robert Harvey of the Nebraska State Historical Society and President of the Oregon Trail Commission made the first systematic effort to identify stage stations, Pony Express stations, and the general course of the Oregon-California Trail through Nebraska.

Over the years since the 1912 trail marking, interested individuals have shown a deep concern in properly identifying sites along this great road west. Among them was Joseph G. Masters, Omaha who with others made an effort to identify the Old Pony Stations.

In 1959 Merrill Mattes, then Regional Historian, Region Two, National Park Service, Omaha and Paul Henderson, a History Enthusiast and Overland Trail Authority from Bridgeport, Nebraska undertook a study to fulfill the lack of an adequate narrative of the Pony Express in Nebraska at the request of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Mattes and Henderson made a field trip over the trail between Fort Kearny and the Wyoming line in October 1959. All data then available was further analyzed and additional interviews conducted with persons having special knowledge of the subject. From information gleaned from many, including Messrs. Harry Williams and Paul Jenkins of Gothenburg; Mr. Warren Doolittle of North Platte; and John Oliver of Bridgeport, Nebraska, a scholarly text was completed in time for the Pony Express Centennial in 1960. This entire text by Mattes and Henderson was printed in Nebraska History, Volume 41, Number 2, June 1960 and is reprinted in a Booklet available at the State Historical Society.

*Nebraska Station No. 5 — "Millersville" is located about 2 miles north of Hebron in Thayer County. It was operated by George B. Thompson and called "Thompson's Station". (Root and Connelley)

*Nebraska Station No. 6 — "Kiowa" is located about 10 miles northwest of Hebron, Thayer County in the S.E. corner of NE¼, Sec. 16, T.3N, R.4W, Jim Douglas was the station keeper. The old trail reached the Little Blue River about one mile east of this station and followed along its left bank to beyond Spring Ranch.

***Nebraska Station No. 7 — "Oak Grove":** The mail contract for 1861 indicated but does not name this station. This is the last Thayer County station, the site being about one and a quarter miles southeast of Oak, in the NW¼, Sec. 15, T.3N, R.5W. Al Holliday served as station keeper, while a "Majors and Waddell Store" was reported to adjoin. Little Blue Station, 4 miles northwest, was probably a later stage station. Among contemporary ranches in the vicinity were Roper's, Emory's and Eubanks. E. S. Comstock owned the Oak Grove Ranch.

The Narrows —

Forty-two miles west of the George Winslow grave the emigrants approached a troublesome portion of the trail known as "The Narrows". Just northwest of the town of Oak (Nuckolls County—approximately 1 3/4 miles). Here the Oregon Trail was squeezed between the Little Blue River and a stretch of high, rugged bluffs which were impassable for wagons. The trail became so tight through portions of this area that there was room for only one wagon at a time to pass through this narrow strip between the bluffs and the river. Until the Indian Wars of 1864 the area was only a minor Oregon Trail landmark but in 1864 the NARROWS suddenly assumed a much more sinister meaning, for the geography presented the Indians with an ideal spot to ambush an emigrant train, a freight train or a stagecoach.

In August of 1864 the telegraph line into Fort Kearny crackled with messages of depredations up and down the Platte Valley. But here, there was no telegraph communication and that August, Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians of Nebraska seized the opportunity presented by the withdrawal of Federal troops from the west during the Civil War to make a concerted effort to drive the encroaching white settlers from their land. During August, 1864, nearly every settlement and way station between the Big Sandy and Julesburg (400 miles) was attacked. Settlements and isolated farms were abandoned or destroyed, and travel ceased on the Oregon Trail for several months. A local family name Eubanks was attacked in the vicinity of the Narrows.

****The Massacre on the Little Blue occurred on Sunday, August 7, 1864.** The attack seemed general along the Little Blue, extending east within a mile of Kiowa Ranch (Thayer County). At this point one of the Eubank boys was killed and scalped. Two of the Eubank boys were killed and scalped nearby. It was stated that nine of these were killed. William Eubank and the others were killed, (also nearby) — all on August 7, 1864. The wife and child of Mr. Eubank junior were carried away in captivity. Mrs. Laura Roper was also carried away by the same band, and another little Eubank child was killed because it would not cease crying.

Some six months later the two women and child were brought in by the Indians to an Army Post near Denver, receiving the ransom which the Government offered for all white women and children captives.

Among those killed on this day was W. R. Kelly at the Oak Grove Ranch, and a Mr. Butler. A Mr. Ostrander received a wound that soon afterwards caused his death; and George Hunt, a County Commissioner of Saline County, received a bad wound in the leg.

The bodies of Mr. Kelly and Mr. Butler were placed in a small smokehouse by the surviving settlers, who had not time to bury them in their flight. These bodies were found by the Indians a day later, who set fire to the building and cremated them. They also burned the ranch buildings, which were built by Charles and Preston Butler in 1859. These buildings were two in number, 40 x 22, the main building being two stories in height, constructed of hewn logs with a clapboard roof.

The Emory stagecoach incident happened on the 9th of August, 1864. Emory was driving westward along the trail and about 5 or 6 miles east of the Narrows he spied ambuscaded Indians in a clump of willows just as he was about to descend a long, steep hill. Turning his horses around, he started on his race for life with his nine passengers. The Indians broke cover and chased him shooting their arrows into the stage, and would have been successful in capturing the stage and its occupants had not George Constable's freight train hove in sight. Perceiving the flying stagecoach, with the Indians in close pursuit, he immediately corraled the train, into which protection Emory drove the stagecoach, thus saving themselves from the Indians. Mr. Constable was killed a few days later, on the divide between Elk Creek and the Little Blue River, by the Indians, and his body was buried on the breaks of the river."

(For years, large quantities of crockery, metal and other objects remained as visible evidence of the wreckage of burned wagons — but through the years most have vanished).

(Note: A present day visitor will find viewing the site quite difficult due to a combination of restrictive terrain and lack of access. Alterations in the course of the river and the subsequent erosion along the

bank have cut into the Narrows and obliterated the Oregon Trail. Dense vegetation now lines the river bank and bluffs, and unlike the Oregon Trail days, there are now few vantage points from which a visitor may view the Narrows. The best place from which to see the Narrows is located at a point along the Oregon Trail, just off the graveled county road one-half mile west of the little town of Oak.)

***Pony Express — Nebraska Station No. 8 — "Liberty Farm"**

The origin of this most interesting name is obscure. The site of this home station is within the NE¼, NE¼, Sec. 32, T.5N, R.7W., just one-half mile northeast of Deweese, in Clay County, on the north bank of the Little Blue River. It is marked by Nebraska Monument No. 26. In 1859 Allen reported: "Jct. of Fort Riley Road 19 miles from Oak Grove, U.S. Mail Station No. 12, 1½ miles east of this place." This junction is marked by Nebraska Monument No. 26½. Successive station keepers in 1860-61 are named as James Lemmons and Charles Emory. In 1864 Indians burned out J. M. Comstock here. Liberty Farm was succeeded by the Pawnee Ranch.

***Pony Express — Nebraska Station No. 9 — "Spring Ranch":**

There was a Spring Ranch destroyed by Indians in 1864. Evidence is not conclusive that this was a Pony Express Station since it is not mentioned in the Mail Contract, but it is in the logical spot distance-wise between Liberty Farm and Thirty-Two Mile Station, a long 25 miles apart. It may coincide with the Lone Tree Stage Station of (Root and Connelley). Nebraska Monument No. 29 places the ranch in the N½, SE¼ SE¼, Sec. 8, T. 5N., R. 8W in Clay County. The trail left the Little Blue River a few miles beyond this point.

Thirty-one wagon miles up the trail from the Narrows and located in Adams County about 6 miles south of Hastings on U.S. 281 and east one-half mile on a graveled county road is the important Simonton-Smith gravesite and ruts.

During the Indian raids of August, 1864, another wagon train was suddenly attacked by warriors of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. This was the Simonton-Smith train, eight wagons and eight men enroute from St. Joseph, Mo. to Denver with a consignment of hardware. On August 7th, the train was attacked and all eight men were killed. The bodies and smoking ruins of the wagons were discovered by two young couples out for a ride from Thirty-Two Mile Station, five miles to the west.

The riders rushed back to the station and gave the alarm. The dead were evidently buried several days later by troops from Fort Kearny, but as a local historian cautions, "so many have claimed credit for this humane act that it appears beyond any doubt they are the most thoroughly buried people in the vicinity."

Marked by a simple wooden post, the site is located on the edge of private farmland. Directly south of the grave marker, on the opposite side of a small farm pond, is a short 300-yard stretch of clearly defined Oregon Trail ruts. Though these ruts have eroded somewhat, they are well stabilized by ground cover. The ruts may be seen by taking a short walk south from the gravel county road along the edge of a field.

*"Thirty-Two Mile Station", is the site of another of the series of way-stations established during 1858 and 1859 along the Oregon Trail to serve the growing numbers of stagecoaches and freighter wagons which were joining the emigrant trains along the great roadway west. Named for its distance from Fort Kearny, Thirty-Two Mile Station never consisted of more than one long, low log-building. In 1860 it became a Pony Express Station (Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 10). In 1861 it was a "Home" station for the Overland Stage, where hot meals were served to travelers. The station operated by George A. Comstock was abandoned in August of 1864, its proprietors and visitors fleeing to Fort Kearny for safety, and the Indians subsequently burned the station to the ground. 32 Mile Station, site of Pony Express Station (Nebraska No. 10 — Sec. 6, T.6N, R.10W — Adams County) is now in the middle of a plowed field, just off a county road. A small marker at the side of the field commemorates the site. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places as an archeological site.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 11 — "Sand Hill" was located one and a half miles south of Kenesaw within the (SE corner of NE¼, Sec. 10, T.7N, R.12W), on the crest of the divide between the Little Blue and Platte River drainages. The name refers to the difficult sandy wagon road which called for double-teaming. This station also appears as "Summit Station" (Root and Connelley), "Water-Hole" in (Allen), and "Fairfield" in (Chapman's interview with William Campbell). In 1863 it was described by Root as "one of the most lonesome places in Nebraska". This station was another casualty of the Indian Wars of 1864.

Two miles north and two and a half miles west of Kenesaw, Nebraska is the Susan Hail grave site. Susan Hail was a young emigrant wife from Missouri who died suddenly on June 2, 1852, at the age of thirty-four. The speed of her demise led to the legend that she had drunk from a water source poisoned by Indians. A more probable cause is cholera or dysentery caused by drinking water polluted from being too near a campground or a buffalo wallow, for both those diseases can kill rapidly. Her grave was immediately marked, and the same legend holds that her grieving husband returned all the way back to St. Joseph, where a headstone was obtained and brought back to the gravesite in a handcart (some stories say a wheelbarrow). Ironically, Susan Hail's husband, who did somehow ensure that she would not be forgotten, is himself unknown.

In addition to the gravesite, this site is important for other reasons. Susan Hail is buried at the precise spot where the Oregon Trail broke over a small rise and came in view of the Platte River. The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny road passed north of this site about a mile and a half, joining the main Oregon Trail a little more than six miles west. There were several alternate roads in this vicinity. This was one of the great moments in the experience of the emigrants, for the first leg of the journey was now almost complete. Arrival at the Platte River meant that they were within striking distance of Fort Kearny, the first sign of civilization in this remote country. The Platte River was broad and flat, with little or no timber, quite unlike its appearance today. Perhaps because the broad flat treeless valley during spring flood once resembled a sandy seashore, early travelers called this spot "The Coast of Nebraska". (Also it is noted some writers of the day wrote about the white canvas topped wagons moving through the deep prairie grass resembling "Ships at Sea" as they moved across miles of waving grasses).

Both northwest and southeast of the Susan Hail grave (Sections 18 and 19) are fairly extensive grassed over Oregon Trail traces, made by the passage of thousands of animals and wagons as they descended the low sandy hill towards the river.

Note: It has been recommended as early as 1975 by Historian Merrill Mattes and as recently as a March 1981 comprehensive report on historic sites and trail segment status by the National Park Service, United States Department of Interior, that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should seek adequate funding to purchase approximately thirty acres of pasture land. This site which would be an unmanned park administered from Fort Kearny State Historical Park, fifteen miles to the west would be called "Coast of Nebraska" as proposed by Merrill Mattes and the National Park Service.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 12 — "Kearney Station"

This was a home station, kept by M. H. Hook, and marked the end of jurisdiction of E. A. Lewis, St. Joseph — Fort Kearny Division Superintendent. The site is found within the NE¼, Sec. 18, T.8N, R.13W., about one and one-half miles northeast of present Lowell, Kearney County. Burton refers to "Kearney Station, in the Valley of LaGrande Platte," seven miles from the Fort of that name. This station had numerous other identities, among them Dogtown or Valley City (Root and Connelley); Junction City (Andreas***); and Hinshaw's Ranch (Harvey Map of 1862).

The townsite of Lowell, mentioned by Mattes and Henderson* is a famous Kearney County frontier town that by today has dwindled to only a few houses. The Lowell school one of the last governmental institutions remaining in this old county-seat, closed its doors in the 1960's and by now has vanished from the scene. At its peak Lowell was a bustling community and for its short span was one of the most important towns in central Nebraska. A United States Land Office was located there and until its removal to Bloomington in 1874, it among other things, drew large crowds. It was (according to Andreas***) an important shipping point for cattle from the plains of the southwest. Its streets were, for a few years at least, continually thronged by all of the frontier types, and many times the town was the scene of disturbances from the half drunken cowboys, roughs and gamblers who at times frequented the four saloons in operation. A local group has recently marked a site known as "Boot Hill" near Lowell.

Fort Kearny records disclose that near this vicinity the U.S. Army kept a herd of subsistence beef cattle corraled during the 1860's and these cattle became a prime temptation to roving Indians. A few miles west on the trail, emigrants would have their first glimpse of the flag flying above Fort Kearny's parade ground, well before the buildings came into view. Six years after Fort Kearny was terminated another community, Newark, came into existence upon the great trail. Only a few remnants of the town remain. Even the little church has been moved away to a cabin site just northwest of Fort Kearny Park near the Platte River. Newark, first occupied in 1877, once boasted a grocery, dry goods store, furniture store, one hardware, an implement dealer, a grain elevator, a lumber yard, a hotel, livery barn, school-house, two coal yards and a large railroad depot as it was situated on the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad which crossed the Platte River a little more than a mile east of the Fort where it made a junction with the Union Pacific Railroad at the site of present day Kearney, Nebraska in Buffalo County. It is noted

nearly 200 carloads of wheat were shipped from Newark in 1881 (Andreas***). According to (Andreas***) a newspaper, the Newark Herald, was printed here from November 1880 to April 1882 by R. M. Hardman. In 1882 he moved the paper to Minden where when combined with the existing "Bee" it became the Kearney County Gazette.

Fort Kearny was truly "The Gateway to the Great Plains". It was here at the Fort where the throngs of emigrants from the jumping off places of the Kansas City areas, St. Joseph, Omaha-Council Bluffs and later Nebraska City came together to continue the great migration to South Pass and beyond. It was here also, that those emigrant throngs would start to visualize the mythical elephant. Although mammoths and mastodons did roam this land as recently as during the Ice Age of 20,000 years ago, they were speaking of one particular elephant, "The Elephant", an imaginary beast of great and fearsome dimensions which according to some, was but another name for going to California. The popular symbol of the great adventure was more than that, it was an inner feeling that having taken the plunge with courageous hearts, they were making a brave assault on the prairies, mountains and deserts. Merrill Mattes wrote in his book "The Great Platte River Road": "Thus, on his first day out of St. Joe in 1852, John Clarke quipped, 'All hands early up anxious to see the path that leads to the Elephant'. In 1849 James D. Lyon, ten miles east of Ft. Laramie, was defiant: "We are told that the Elephant is in waiting, ready to receive us. If he shows fight or attempts to stop us on our progress to the golden land, we shall attack him with sword and spear. . ."

No one has quite determined the origin of this imaginary beast, which was sometimes more vivid in their minds than the real rattler or buffalo herds. The elephant seldom appeared except when danger lurked, and even then he was only an occasional apparition. A Martha Morgan wrote, "I think I saw the tracks of the Big Elephant."

Fort Kearny was established by the U.S. Army in 1848 to protect the growing traffic along the Oregon Trail from the threat of Indian attacks, and was ideally situated to do the job. Today, it is a State Historical Park, administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Since the visitor will be enlightened at the park, additional space will not be taken on the Fort Kearny story.

***Pony Express Nebraska Station No. 13 - "Fort Kearny":** Although claims are made to this effect, it is improbable that Fort Kearny (spelled with two "e's" in the mail contract) itself had a Pony Express Station. True, the Holladay Stage Line from St. Joe and the Western Stage Line from Omaha (via the north side of the Platte and Carson's Crossing) made this Fort itself a major objective, and in 1859 Holladay had a log structure "40 rods west of the Fort." Pony riders conceivably paused here to pick up or deliver occasional military or civilian mail, perhaps at the sod post office. However, it is more likely that the Pony Station and stable itself was at Doby Town, two miles west of the Fort and just off the reservation. (Note: For these reasons of conflicting documents it is difficult to pin-point the exact location. In a government report by Sterrit M. Curran (later Captain Curran at Fort Kearny) there is no listing at Dobytown (Kearny City) on June 28th, 1860 of a Pony Express or Stage Station, however Curran did place a William F. Hays, as an agent for Russell, Majors and Waddell at someplace in the vicinity just one day prior to his visit to Hook's Station. He also listed a Peter Brady, a stage driver the same day he recorded Agent Hays and these were quite obviously not located with Dobytown).

The first Pony Express Station west of Fort Kearny was "Platts" Station No. 14. Platt's Station was approximately 5 miles southeast of Odessa and is named so in the mail contract. It is spelled (Platte by Root and Connelley). The "Seventeen Mile Station" (Burton), where his stage halted to change mules, was probably Platt's Station.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 15 - "Garden":**

Garden is probably the Craig's (of Root and Connelley), and may also be the Biddleman Ranch appearing on the Harvey Map of the Nebraska Trail, in 1862. It could also be the one known as "Shakespear", indicated by Dr. Clark in 1860. Its exact location is not known but apparently was located about six miles southwest of Elm Creek in Phelps County.

***Well known "Plum Creek" was Pony Station No. 16** and everyone agrees on the name and the place, the SW corner of Sec. 8, T.8N, R.20W, about 10 miles southeast of Lexington. Nearby is a small cemetery where there are buried fourteen victims of an Indian attack on June 16, 1865. Other accounts and well documented by military records of Fort Kearny and telegraph copies put the date as August 7th, 1864 with eleven men as victims. Plum Creek was first noted as a good campsite and later became an Overland

Stage Station and Pony Express Station, which was located near the creek. After the Sioux Indian attack on August 7, 1864 a small garrison of troops were stationed at Plum Creek. On the Oregon Trail in these troubled days numerous small garrisons were established by troops sent from Fort Kearny to build new ones or fortify old road ranches as far east as Columbus and two on the trail between Rock Creek Station and the Platte River and west of Fort Kearny, at intervals all the way to Julesburg. On November 25, 1864, another stagecoach was attacked near Plum Creek, with two passengers being wounded. In August of 1867, another wagon train was attacked at Plum Creek. Sometime shortly thereafter, the station was attacked, burned and abandoned.

The small cemetery at Plum Creek is owned by Phelps County and for years a small legend panel and necessary cleaning maintenance has been provided by the staff from Fort Kearny State Historical Park. In addition to the 1864 victims, the cemetery is the burial site of Sarepta Fly, a twenty-four year old emigrant wife and mother who died in 1865. There is some question, apparently, if the Iowa men killed near Plum Creek on August 7, 1864, are even buried at the little cemetery. Some sources say these men were interred about one and a half miles east of this place.

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 17 — "Willow Island" is offered in (Allen) as a variant "Willow Bend". 59 (Burton) refers to it as a "drinking shop at Willow Island Ranch." The site is about six miles southeast of Cozad, Dawson County, on the N½, Sec. 8, T.9N, R.22W, near the south end of the Platte River bridge southeast of Darr. Some sources place Pat Mullaly's ranch and station at this site. R.C. Freeman, an employee of Mullaly, followed Mullaly as owner and operator of the ranch. The log cabin on the site was purchased by Dawson County American Legion Post No. 77 and moved to the park in Cozad for the use of Boy Scouts. It was dedicated in September 1938 and marked with a plaque relating its history as a ranche on the Oregon Trail and as a Pony Express Station.

*Thirty-two miles west from Plum Creek is "Midway Station" Nebraska Station No. 18. Midway, an important home station located in the NW¼, Sec. 35, T.11N, R.25W, three miles south of Gothenburg, on private property known as the 96 ranch, whose owners have demonstrated a personal commitment to preserving it through the years. The remarkable cabin, built of heavy adzed timbers has been protected by construction of a concrete floor underneath and a shingle roof above, which protects the older cedar and sod roof from deterioration. Midway is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is believed to be the only extant Pony Express Station in the State of Nebraska still standing on its original location. It is maintained by the Nebraska State Historical Society, under a cooperative agreement with the owners of the 96 ranch. The station is not manned, and the average of six visitors per week who show up are escorted by the wife of the ranch's foreman, who lives next to the station. Access is by a private ranch road, which is clearly marked "No Trespassing". The general area of the station is located directly in the center of the working headquarters of a large ranch operation, and is surrounded by barns, silos, machine shops, storage sheds and a feed yard. It does not adapt well as a place to visit due to its location as mentioned, but as the area now exists, very few tourists avail themselves of it. It is regrettable that this very important station does not have better access. Another Pony Express Station stands four miles north of Midway, in the Gothenburg City Park. This is the structure that is heavily advertised as a tourist attraction along Interstate 80 and attracts a flow of 40,000 visitors annually. The Midway Station on the 96 ranch south of Gothenburg bears the circular bronze pony express plaque of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association plus another that states that on June 8, 1860, pony rider Jim Moore rode from Midway to Julesburg, Colorado, and back in record time, in an emergency situation caused by Indian troubles. David Trout was station keeper in 1863. Midway received its name, (Root and Connelley), because it was equidistant on the stage line from Atchison to Denver. It was also referred to as "Heavy Timber" (Allen), Smith's East Ranch (Harvey Map of Nebraska — 1862) and as Pat Mullaly's home station.

*The next pony station west on the Oregon Trail was "Gilmans" — Nebraska Station — 19. This station is indicated only by (Root and Connelley) and the U.S. Mail Contract. It is surmised to be near the SW corner of Sec. 21 T.12N, R.26W, in Lincoln County.

(Note: it is possible Mattes and Henderson meant Sec. 31, T.12N, R.26W, as there is no Section 21 within miles of the trail at this point, one being north of the river the other in the hills to the south). For more details — see "Pump on the Prairie" by Musetta Gilman — 1975 — she locates Gilmans Ranch at Sec. 4, T.11N, R.26W.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 20 — "Machettes": This is a mystery station, the site being on the Williams' Upper 96 Ranch, Lincoln County, four miles east of Fort McPherson. It is not mentioned

in Burton, Allen, Root and Connelley or other published authorities, nor can "Machette" be identified in any other available contemporary sources. However, say Mattes and Henderson, there is the weight of local tradition, reflected in this wording on a monument in the SW corner, SE¼, Sec. 19, T.12N, R.27W: "Erected by the people of Lincoln County, 1931, to commemorate the Pony Express riders. The log blacksmith shop nearby is the original building used for shoeing horses." Mr. Williams told Mattes and Henderson that the indicated "Blacksmith Shop" stood there as of their writing in 1960. Also it was reported to them that another larger two-story squared log building which used to stand there, was donated by Mrs. C. A. Williams and moved in 1931 by the American Legion to the city park in Gothenburg, on U.S. 30, several miles east and on the north side of the Platte River, where it now is a prime tourist attraction (1960). It was rebuilt as a one-story structure. The affixed tablet indicates that the original building was built in 1854 as a trading post and ranch house (by Machette?). In 1860-1861 (the tablet explains) it was used as a pony express station; from 1862-1932" as an overland station; dwelling, bunk house and storage house on the Upper 96 ranch."

Mattes and Henderson added - - that along with the lack of contemporary records of Machette's, there is the fact that the pony stations averaged fifteen miles apart, and it is just sixteen miles between Gilman's station, and Cottonwood Springs or McDonald's station (see below), the authenticity of both of which is unimpeachable. What then was "Machette's" doing in between? The structure now in Gothenburg seems to have much in common with the doubtlessly authentic Midway Station. If, then, of the same vintage, could the answer lie in supposing that "Machette's" was in existence in 1860-61 as a ranch but not actually as a Pony Express Station? Or, could the mysterious "Machette" actually be a corruption of "McDonald", and could the upper 96-Gothenburg structure actually be the original McDonald's station, transplanted sometime later after the 1860's to the upper 96?

(Note: To alleviate a portion of the mystery, it may be said that there was indeed a Machette documented as definitely being, at some point, in this vicinity of Lincoln County in 1860. One day before Government employee Sterrit M. Curran wrote about the Gilmans just east of here a few miles, Curran visited and wrote about Samuel Machette, a trader from Missouri and his young wife Susan Machette, 17 years old, on June 15th 1860. Samuel Machette as a trader must have had a substantial supply of all kinds of goods as he valued them at \$5,000. Also living with the Machettes were Lucy Riley, a cook, from Ireland and his clerk, a William H. Sexton from his native state of Missouri). See details - mentioned in "Pump on the Prairie" - Gilman - 1975 -

*Nebraska Station No. 21 - "Cottonwood Springs" - This place, or "McDonald's Ranch", was another station on the pony run and, like many others discussed here, doubled also as an Overland Stage Station, being midway between Fort Kearny and Julesburg. The site, marked by a monument, is on the east side of Cottonwood Creek in the NE¼, Sec. 15, T.12N, R.28W, on a graveled road less than a half-mile east of the latter (1864) Fort Cottonwood, which became Fort McPherson, and one mile southeast of the present Fort McPherson National cemetery. In 1860 Burton refers here to "The Foul Tenement" where he threw himself upon a mattress to sleep; but in 1863 Root says it was a "Home Station" and "nearly everything about the premises appeared homelike." In 1864 Capt. Eugene F. Ware reports:

Cottonwood Springs, when we arrived there, was one of the important points on the road. McDonald had a year or so before our arrival, built, as stated, a cedar-log structure store-building. The main building was about twenty feet front and forty feet deep, and was two stories high. A wing 50 feet extended to the west. The latter was, at the eaves, about eight feet high and fifteen feet deep in the clear. Around it in the rear was a large and defensible corral, which extended to the arroyo coming out of the canyon. It had been a good trading point with the Indians, and there was stage station there, and a blacksmith shop kept by a man named Hindman. In the stage station was a telegraph office. There was also on the other side of the road a place where canned goods and liquors were sold, kept by a man named Boyer, who had lost a leg, and whom the Indians called "Hook-sah", which meant "Cut-Leg". MacDonald had dug, in front of his store, and cribbed up, an inexhaustible well, which was said to be forty-six feet deep; it was rigged with pulley, chain, and heavy oaken buckets. MacDonald and those at the place had formerly had a good trade with the Indians, but now it was all ended, and they were in danger.

*Here is a two-story log building, with appendages. (A photo of this appears on page 64 of Ware.) The upper-96 Ranch was a two-story log building. Again, it is suggested that these might be one and the

same building, perhaps torn down and re-assembled at the latter point. It is not certain that the structure Ware describes was the 1861 pony express station, but it is a reasonable hypothesis. Pending further revelations — Also — Refer to "Pump on the Prairie — Gilman — 1975.

Note: (Cottonwood Springs — Fort McPherson is a fascinating historical region, but sadly lacks adequate interpretation of this very important section of Lincoln County and how it relates to Nebraska history).

Fort McPherson was established in September 1863, when the U.S. Army foresaw the need for an intermediate military post between Forts Kearny and Laramie on the Oregon Trail. The purpose of the new fort was to protect the emigrants, stagecoaches, freighters, and railroad workers who were travelling the Great Platte River Road in ever-increasing numbers from the potential attacks of the Plains Indians who were growing more and more restive as the great funnel of western migration threatened their lands and way of life. The army's timing could not have been better, for the Indian uprising of 1864 followed closely upon the establishment of the fort. Fort McPherson became a camping, resting and refitting spot along the Oregon Trail as well as providing sanctuary during the Indian Wars.

Originally named Cantonment McKean, the post was subsequently known as Fort Cottonwood before being renamed Fort McPherson in 1866 in honor of the Civil War General James B. McPherson. The fort was abandoned in 1880, but not before 107 of its acres were rededicated in 1873 as the Fort McPherson National Cemetery. Intended as a burial ground for Civil War Veterans, the cemetery also holds the remains of veterans from the Indian Wars (including reburials from abandoned posts such as Forts Robinson and Kearny, Nebraska and Fort Laramie, Wyoming), the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. One monument in the cemetery marks the burial site of twenty eight soldiers from the Grattan "Massacre" of 1854, whose remains were moved from Fort Laramie in 1891.

Between Cottonwood — (Fort McPherson area) and O'Fallons Bluff, 26 miles west were numerous other important sites (see "Pump on the Prairie — Gilman — 1975).

*Nebraska Pony Express Station — No. 22 — "Cold Springs" — This site, named by (Root and Connelley), would be in the NW corner, Sec. 20, T.13N, R.30W, vicinity of Box Elder Creek, Lincoln County, fifteen miles west of Cottonwood Springs, and two miles south and one mile west of present North Platte. It is easy to confuse this station with Jack Morrow's Ranch or "Junction House" (so named by proximity to the forks of the Platte), which was 12 miles from Cottonwood. (Root and Connelley clarify this point).

Masters has a Box Elder station "three miles west of Cottonwood Springs", named by Sheldon Davis. This short distance would not admit a Pony Express Station so close. Suggest read Gilman 1975 -- Pump on the Prairie.

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 23 — "Fremont Springs": Although just when the explorer Fremont visited this place is another good mystery, the name was consistently used except by an obscure traveler of 1860 named Dr. Clark, who speaks of "Buffalo Ranch." This is spoken of as a home station, which seems reasonable in view of the fifty mile distance from Midway. This station was unlike its neighbors.

According to (Burton) "The building is of a style peculiar to the south, especially Florida, — two huts connected by a roof-work of thatched timber, which acts as the best and coolest of Verandahs." The site was located about 1 1/2 miles south of Hershey.

*Nebraska Station No. 24 — "Danseys": There was an early Indian Agent, Benjamin O'Fallon, for whom the Platte River Bluffs here were inexplicably named. The mail contract refers to "Dansey's" presumably the Pony Express proprietor. (Burton) speaks of "Halfway House" and (Root and Connelley) (Root) describes the section embracing O'Fallons bluffs as "undoubtedly the best place between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains for skulking indians to hide."

O'Fallons bluffs was a vexing piece of terrain which had to be negotiated, and thus became an important Oregon trail landmark. Here, a series of high, sandy bluffs crowded down to the south bank of the South Platte River, forcing the emigrants to make a wearisome three-mile detour up and over the rolling sandy hills. Compared to the relatively easy going which they had experienced so far along the broad valley of the Platte, O'Fallons bluff represented a time-consuming delay in their journey. About 1000 feet of well preserved ruts are visible and marked by excellent interpretive devices and legend signs on the east bound rest area, just off I-80, on the Nebraska Dept. of Roads site.

*Pony Express Station — Nebraska No. 25 "Alkali Lake" — Dr. Clark in 1860 calls this Pikes Peak Station. The station is indicated but is given no name in the Mail Contract. Otherwise the name "Alkali Lake"

is unanimous. The site like others in this area, has not been definitely located. It was located about two miles southwest of Paxton, Keith County.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 26 — "Gill's":** This was the point of the Texas Trail crossing of the 1870's. In 1860 it was called Gill's in the Mail Contract, but Sand Hill by Root and Connelley. Nobody else bothers to mention it; it was just another obscure relay station. It was about one and one half-miles south of Ogallala, Keith County.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 27 — "Diamond Springs":** Nebraska monument No. 40, located .9 miles west of Brule, Keith County, on the side of U.S. 30, reads: "Diamond Springs .8 miles southwest." This was probably a home station, though it is uncomfortably close to Julesburg, which was also a home station. Two miles west of this place was the Beauvais Ranch, with buildings of hewn logs, which enjoyed considerable fame through the 1850's and 1860's. With such an establishment handy, why shouldn't it serve as a station? This question is not completely answered.

Beauvais is at one of the famous South Platte River Fords, variously identified as Upper Crossing, Ash Hollow Crossing, Fort Laramie Crossing and Old California Crossing. The emigrant crossers here went across Old California Crossing and over the plateau to reach Ash Hollow on the North Platte River, but the Pony Express did not follow this route.

East of North Platte, Nebraska the Platte River had split into its two major forks, with the South Platte running generally west and south towards Denver and the North Platte towards Fort Laramie and Casper, Wyoming. Sooner or later, the emigrants were forced to cross the South Platte in order to reach and follow the North Platte River towards South Pass, the gateway over the Rockies. Although several crossing sites were used over the years, the most important one was at California crossing, fifty three miles west of O'Fallons Bluff, for that crossing led directly to Ash Hollow, the best approach to the North Platte River. The wide sandy South Platte always presented a formidable obstacle to emigrants and freighters. The crossings were accomplished by the "cold turkey" method, with men, teams and wagons plunging into the river and swimming, floating or struggling across the waters and quicksands as best they could. Inevitably, there were many wrecks, drownings, and deaths from exposure because in May and early June when the emigrants reached the river, the South Platte was swollen from melting mountain snows.

On the north bank of the South Platte River, the emigrants then faced another obstacle, called California Hill. This necessitated a climb of 240 feet in elevation in just over a mile and a half, in order to reach the plateau between the North and South Platte rivers. This was the first major grade faced by travellers, and it was given perhaps undue notice because they had yet to see any really steep terrain such as they would encounter farther west.

Oregon trail ruts leading up California Hill are plainly visible today, in some places more prominently so than others. Neither the ruts nor the crossing site are interpreted or marked except for the small monument along U.S. 30.

The Pony Express continued on up the south side of the south Platte River and ***Colorado Pony Station No. 1 — "Frontz"** station is just two miles east of present Julesburg, in Sedgwick County, Colorado. Variants are "South Platte Station" (Root and Connelley) and "Butte Station."

***Colorado Pony Express Station No. 2 "Julesburg"** — this site is not to be confused with various other later Julesburg's, is the original Old Julesburg. It is well marked, and is one and one half miles southeast of Ovid, In Sedgwick County, Colorado. The place was named for Jules Reni, who had the inevitable trading post. (Root and Burton) both offer rather vivid descriptions of the unsavory establishment. Old Julesburg was a very busy place, primarily because it was at the junction of the main roads up the South and North Platte rivers, respectively called the Pikes Peak or Denver road, and the California Road or Overland Trail. The stages and Pony Express used the latter route, here fording the south Platte (wide and rough during spring runoff) to a point just above Lodgepole Creek, then following that stream westward to a point three miles east of present Sidney, then crossing Lodgepole and heading north. This route was surveyed by Lieutenant Bryan of the topographical engineers in 1858 and was called "Jules Stretch." Old Julesburg was sacked by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in February 1865. The site of Fort Rankin (later called Fort Sedgwick), a mile or so west of Old Julesburg, should be noted. From here the Pony Express re-enters Nebraska. ***Nebraska Station No. 28 — "Nine Mile Station":** This site is about two miles southeast of Chappell, in Deuel County. The site is in Sec. 26 T.13N., R.45W.

***Nebraska Station No. 29 — Pony Express Station — "Pole Creek No. 2":** Oddly enough, this is named in the U.S. mail contract, but yet no traveler mentions it. Its location is vague, being in the vicinity of

Lodgepole, roughly half way on the twenty four mile stretch between nine mile and Pole Creek No. 3. It is possible that it may be identical with the site of a ranch occupied here by E. Farrell in 1865.

***Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 30 "Pole Creek No. 3":** — This site in NW corner, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 35, T.14N, R.49W. was on the north side of Lodgepole Creek on the old St. George Cattle Ranch, about three and one-half miles east of Sidney, Nebraska. Old maps identify this as the Stage ranch of Rouliette and Pringle, with well fortified buildings part dug out, part sod and part logs. The Ford must have been at or near this point. This place had importance as the junction of the Old California Road and Stage route heading for the North Platte, and a new stage route heading due west for Bridger Pass and Salt Lake City. (This is the "Lodgepole Route" which later became the Union Pacific Route to Cheyenne). (Burton's) description of "Lodgepole Station", although serving him as a Stage station, may be taken as a rare contemporary description of a Nebraska Pony Express Station:

"The Hovel fronting the creek was as built like an Irish shanty, or a Beloch Hut, against a hill side, to save one wall, and it presented a fresh phase of squalor and wretchedness. The mud walls were partly papered with "Harpers Magazine", "Frank Lieslie" and "New York Illustrated News"; the ceiling was a fine festoon —work of soot, and the floor was much like the ground outside, only not nearly so clean. In a corner stood the usual "bunk", a mass of mingled rags and buffalo robes; the centre of the room was occupied by a ricketty table, and boxes, turned-up on their long sides, acted as chairs. The unescapable stove was there, filling the interior with the aroma of meat. As usual, the materials for ablution, a "dipper" or cup, a dingy tin skillet of scanty size, a bit of coarse gritty soap; and a public towel, like a rag of gunny bag, were deposited upon a ricketty settle outside. There being no "lady" at the station on Lodge-Pole Creek, milk was unprocurable. Here, however, began a course of antelope venison, which soon told upon us with damaging effect. (Burton was forever complaining about the terrible food at these stage stations).

***Nebraska Pony Station (un-named) No. 31** - This station does not appear on official records, and the existence of something here is mentioned only by Mrs. Carrington, in 1866, who tells of a "Government Well" to furnish water for the mail stations. Reconnaissance of the site has revealed evidence of structures. There had to be a relay station somewhere along the 25-miles between Pole Creek No. 3 and Mud Springs. This site was about 3 miles south and one mile west of Gurley, Nebraska on U. S. Highway 385.

***Nebraska Station - Pony Express - No. 32 - "Mud Springs"** - This site is located about 12 miles southeast of Bridgeport, in Morrill County. It is within a one-acre tract donated by Mrs. Etta A. Scherer as a small park. This was a home station, the first since Julesburg. Archeological search of the building remains confirms the ground plan made of the site by Lt. Caspar Collins in 1864. The Pony Station and Stage Station are doubtless identical. Troops from Fort Laramie occupied Mud Springs in February 1865, and had a lively battle with Indians retreating from the siege of Julesburg. James McArdle was the station keeper.

Three historic wagon routes northward from mud springs to the vicinity of Courthouse Rock have been identified. After many years of confusion on this point it now appears that the Pony Riders used the left fork to Pumpkinseed Crossing and Courthouse Rock, passing southwest of this landmark. It should be noted that the main trail used by the covered wagon and stage coaches passed to the north of the Rock. Information leading to this discovery may be credited to John Oliver who came to this neighborhood as a boy in the 1880's and knew James Moore, who had been a Pony Express rider.

***Nebraska Station - Pony Express - No. 33 - "Courthouse Rock":** Most pony stations were also used as stage stations or trailside ranches, but because of the requirement of an approximate fifteen mile interval, many pony relay stations had to be built "from scratch". Good examples of this are the unnamed station near Gurley and the Courthouse Rock Station. Courthouse Rock Station was five miles south and one and a fourth miles west of Bridgeport in the NE corner, SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 31, T.19N., R.51W.

Meanwhile off to the east, after negotiating the climb up California Hill, the emigrants traveled for 18 miles across the high tableland between the South and North Platte Rivers before dropping into the North Platte valley through Ash Hollow. Ash Hollow, one of the major landmarks on the Oregon Trail was labeled, "the Gateway to the North Platte Valley." In addition to being a physical landmark, Ash Hollow was one of the most famous campsites on the entire trail, for it offered wood, pure water, and grass for the stock. Entrance to Ash Hollow was by way of Windlass Hill, where the Oregon Trail dropped from the high tableland into the ravine which formed Ash Hollow. This 25° slope of 300 feet length was the first

really steep grade encountered on the Oregon Trail, and the impression it made upon emigrants was particularly vivid. The hill was usually negotiated by rough-locking the wagon wheels and using ropes to carefully lower the wagons. An 1849 emigrant complained that it took three hours to safely descend the hill. Nine miles northwest of Ash Hollow is the site of Blue Water Battlefield. The small cemetery at the mouth of Ash Hollow is the resting place of the remains of Rachel Pattison, an 18 year old emigrant wife who died in 1849 of cholera.

Fifty miles west of Ash Hollow is the gravesite of Amanda Lamin, a twenty-eight year old emigrant, born in Devonshire, England, who died of cholera in 1850. The grave was marked with the inscription "Amanda, consort of M. J. Lamin" which has given rise to much speculation and several legends concerning Amanda's real status in life. The gravesite stands on a small knoll overlooking the North Platte River, and was marked by the State of Nebraska in 1912. It is in the middle of private pastureland. About a mile to the west, Courthouse Rock, becomes visible on the western horizon. About a mile east of Amanda Lamin's grave are a unique set of Oregon trail ruts crossing private land. These are not as dramatic ruts, such as those seen at Rock Creek, California Hill or Ash Hollow, but they have a special quality of their own. Wagons spread out almost a half a mile in width as they crossed this land and left a wide swath of shallow ruts which now appear as a series of gentle ripples crossing the pasture, much as if an emigrant train had crossed this land during the rainstorm and left shallow tracks of dozens of wagons which pulled through the boggy ground. The Amanda Lamin gravesite is a little over seven miles west of where Highway 92 turns right after crossing the river at Broadwater, NE and is in a pasture to the right of the highway. There are no markers along the road pointing the way. Another reference point to enable one to locate this site is that it is just a few hundred feet west of the junction of U.S. Highway 385 with State Highway 92 and not quite a half mile north of Highway 92.

Courthouse Rock was first noted by Robert Stuart in 1812, and quickly became one of the great guiding landmarks for fur traders and Oregon Trail emigrants. Located seven miles west of Amanda Lamin's grave in Morrill County, it is a massive sandstone protubercence south of the Oregon Trail which was variously likened to a courthouse or a castle. A smaller feature to the east was called the jailhouse or jail rock. In the words of an 1841 traveller, "it rises in an abrupt quadrilangular form, to a height of three to four hundred feet, and covers an area of two hundred yards in length by one hundred and fifty broad. Occupying a perfectly level site in an open prairie, it stands as the proud palace of Solitude, amid her boundless domains."

Courthouse Rock is four miles south of the Oregon Trail, but emigrants, diaries record many curious and energetic travellers who took the time to visit and climb the rock. From its base, Chimney Rock is visible fourteen miles to the west, the next guiding landmark on the trail. Appearing today, just as it did to the emigrants, it is protected by the city of Bridgeport and the Nebraska State Historical Society, each of which owns eighty acres of land. The State Historical Society has a seasonal interpretive trailer at the site during the summer months. Courthouse and Jail Rock are on the National Register of historic places, and are reached by Highway 88.

In 1866, William Henry Jackson, a bullwhacker for a freighting company using the Oregon Trail, paused on a small knoll ten miles west of Courthouse Rock, and drew a sketch of the panoramic view of the North Platte Valley to the west, including the famous landmarks of Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff. Jackson later achieved fame as a pioneer artist and photographer of the west, and this sketch, which he turned into a water color painting in 1931, is now one of his most famous. In the painting Chimney Rock is visible to the left, and Scotts Bluff is in the distance at the far right. Jackson used some artistic license in drawing those landmarks, for Scottsbluff is not visible from the site.

Chimney Rock, four miles west of Jackson Pandrama and fourteen miles west of Courthouse Rock was the most noted landmark on the Oregon Trail. Captain Benjamin Bonneville described it in 1832 as a "singular phenomenon, which is among the curiosities of the country. It is called the chimney. The lower part is a conical mound rising out of the naked plain; from the summit shoots up a shaft or column, about one hundred and twenty feet in height, from which it derives its name. The height of the whole. . . is a hundred and seventy five yards. . . and may be seen at the distance of upwards of thirty miles." Chimney Rock is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic site. Eighty three acres of land surrounding the base are owned by the state of Nebraska and managed by the State Historical Society, which maintains an interpretive trailer along Highway 92, about one and a half miles north of the rock.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 34 — "Chimney Rock" was located between the landmark and the river, but just where is not definitely known. There are two traditional sites, both now obliterated along with emigrant graves by modern road graders and gravel quarrying. Mr. Oliver quoted James Moore to the effect that the pony station was at Facus Springs, about nine miles northwest of Bridgeport, where the pony cut-off rejoined the main trail (near the center of Sec. 24, T.20N, R.52W). Burton's stage station here was north of Chimney Rock, "near a spring on a hill", which seems to match the Facus Spring site. The second possible site, which coincides more with the distance given in the U.S. mail contract, is further west, being two miles south and one mile west of Bayard (SW corner, Sec. 5, T.20N., R.53W.).

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 35 "Ficklin's Springs": Shumway is in error in calling this "The Scottsbluff Station". The name is blank on the 1861 mail contract. This station was named for Benjamin F. Flicklin, described as "Route Superintendent", with managerial charge of the entire line between St. Joe and Sacramento. The site, with visible surface remains, is marked on State Highway 86, one mile west of Melbeta in Scotts Bluff County. This was another Pony Station built expressly by the men who laid out the Pony Line, and not primarily a Stage Station. It was located in the NW corner, SW¼, Sec. 13, T.21N., R.54W.

Later, however, like most of the other stations described, it was used as a telegraph station, and for a brief period in 1865 was occupied by troops who dug breast works. In 1871, according to Shumway, the sod structure, was appropriated by Mark M. Coad for his open range cattle ranch. Foundation stones are in evidence today. Burton refers to a ranch called Robidoux's Fort, somewhere between Chimney Rock and the pass at Scottsbluff (which is clearly identifiable as today's Mitchell Pass). Could this ranch (which is in no way to be compared with Robidoux's Trading Post of 1849 at Robidoux Pass, fifteen miles or so further west) have been the Ficklin's Spring establishment, a Pony Express Relay Station? It is not unlikely that one of the Robidoux clan of 1849 would have re-established themselves on the main trail in later years.

*Nebraska Station — Pony Express No. 36 — "Scottsbluff": The story of old Fort Mitchell, 1864-1868, about two and one-half miles northwest of Mitchell Pass at a bend of the North Platte River, has been given to readers of Nebraska history in detail. On the other hand, almost nothing is known of this Pony Express Station believed to exist in this same approximate location in 1860-1861. When the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry contingent from Fort Laramie built Fort Mitchell they do not seem to have been aware of a Pony Express station or any previous structure at the site. At least the military records fail to disclose any such recognition. On the other hand, the "Odometer Book of the Survey for the Fort Kearny, South Pass and Honey Lake Wagon Road, 1857" in the National Archives specifically refers to "old houses, once mail station and trading post of the American Fur Company." In any event, the 1861 mail contract definitely shows a Scott's Bluff Station twelve miles west of Ficklin's and fifteen miles east of Horse Creek. Allen has his "U.S. Mail Station" of 1859 as "3 miles west of the Gap". This puts it quite near if not right at the Fort Mitchell site.

Scottsbluff is the last of the famous landmarks along the Oregon Trail in Nebraska. An 1849 emigrant with a flair for words left the following description of his reactions as he approached the great landmark: "The bare hills and water-worn rocks on our left began to assume many fantastic shapes, and after raising a gentle elevation, a most extraordinary sight presented itself to our view. A basin-shaped valley, bounded by high rocky hills, lay before us, perhaps twelve miles in length, by six or eight broad. The perpendicular sides of the mountains presented the appearance of castles, forts, towers, verandas, and chimneys, with a blending of Asiatic and European architecture, and it required an effort to believe that we were not in the vicinity of some ancient or deserted town. It seemed as if the wand of a magician had passed over a city, and like that in the Arabian nights had converted all living things to stone." (Quoted in Merrill Mattes — Scottsbluff National Monument, Nebraska,) (Wash: NPS Historical Handbook series No. 28, 1958) pp. 25-26.

Scottsbluff is a National Monument, with 2988 acres administered by the National Park Service.

Five miles southwest of Scottsbluff National Monument is the area of Robidoux Pass. It is privately owned and used for cattle range. Robidoux Pass, the key to the original Oregon Trail route through Scottsbluff, is a broad U-shaped opening in the semi-circular line of bluffs composing the Scottsbluff chain. The ordeal of the climb to its summit was mitigated by abundant water and wood, two commodities that had been quite scarce along the Great Platte River Road, with the exception of Ash Hollow.

The pass took its name from Joseph E. Robidoux (a name famous for its variances in spelling), an early trader who established a trading post and blacksmith shop here in 1848. At that time, Robidoux's Post was the first habitation encountered west of Fort Kearny on the Oregon Trail. Emigrants camped

here taking advantage of the plentiful wood and water, and rented Robidoux's blacksmith forge for .75 cents an hour in order to make minor repairs to wagons and equipment and to shoe horses, mules and oxen. Robidoux also offered a small selection of supplies to the emigrants, and whiskey at \$5 per barrel. His prices were usually considered exorbitant. After the Mitchell Pass Route was established in the early 1850's Robidoux's trade declined and the post was abandoned. One hundred eighty acres of Robidoux Pass are on the National Register of Historic Places, and Robidoux Pass is a National Landmark.

Horse Creek Treaty Grounds.

Fourteen miles west of Robidoux Pass, the largest assemblage of Plains Indians in history, approximately, 10,000, occurred in 1851. This was a Peace Council called by the Federal Government to protect the traffic along the great road up the Platte River as the Indians became nervous and resentful of the growing army of emigrants on wheels. Most of the Plains tribes were represented, to the surprise of the Government. Since the huge accompanying horse herd needed forage, the treaty council was moved from its original location at Fort Laramie to the mouth of Horse Creek, where ample grass was available. There the first Fort Laramie treaty was signed, establishing tribal grounds and giving the emigrants the right to travel the trail unmolested — it lasted about three years.

***Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 37 — "Horse Creek":** This station is named in the Government Mail Contract and is further identified by Allen in 1859 and Burton in 1860. Located about two miles northeast of Lyman on the west bank of Horse Creek, it may be found in the center of Sec. 25, T.23N., R.58W., Scotts Bluff County.

Burton vividly pictures Horse Creek Station, which doubled for Stage and Pony Express Stations:

"Presently we dashed over the Little Kiowa Creek, forded the Horse Creek, and, enveloped in a cloud of villainous mosquitoes, entered at 8:30 p.m. the station in which we were to pass the night. It was tenanted by one Reynal, a French creole — the son of an old soldier of the Grand Armee, who had settled in St. Louis — a companionable man, but an extortionate; he charged us a florin for every 'drink' of his well-watered whiskey. The house boasted of the usual squaw, a wrinkled old dame, who at once began to prepare supper, when we discreetly left the room."

***Wyoming Pony Express Station No. 1 — "Cold Springs"** — the point where the Oregon Trail · California Road Pony Express Route leaves Nebraska is in a field usually growing sugar beets — just west of the County Road between Lyman and Henry, in Scotts Bluff County.

Little is known of "Cold Springs Station, believed to be about two miles southeast of Torrington, Wyoming. Burton describes this point, about 12 miles west of Horse Creek Station, as the place where "in 1854, five Indians, concealing themselves in a bed of a dwarf arroyo, fired upon the mail wagon, killing two drivers, and one passenger, and then plundering it of \$20,000 dollars."

***Wyoming Station — Pony Express — No. 2 "Verdling's Ranch"** — In 1859 Allen speaks of Beauvais' Ranch; in 1860 to Burton it was Badean's. The latter name seems most nearly correct since this was certainly the establishment of James Bordeaux, one time proprietor of the Fort Laramie Trading Post, eight miles further west. In 1854 he manned a trading post at this point for the American Fur Company when there occurred nearby the misunderstanding with Sioux Indians which led to the extermination of Lieutenant Grattan and twenty-eight soldiers. In 1860 the place consisted of "A single large store, with out-houses full of small half-breeds."

***Wyoming Pony Express Station No. 3 — "Fort Laramie":** Fort Laramie, the extensive remains which are now protected as a National Monument, was one of the great military posts of the trans-Mississippi-West, flourishing from 1849 to 1890. One might suppose that this would therefore be one of the important Pony-Express stations of 1860-1861. However, very little light is thrown on this subject by the meager official records.

There were stations at Bordeaux's (Verdling's) and Ward's (Sand Point), nine miles east and west respectively from the fort.

This suggests that there was a Pony Station somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the post itself. (As in the case of Fort Kearny, it may not have been within the immediate garrison area). That the Fort Laramie Station was some distance west of the fort area is suggested by this passage from Burton, keeping in mind the fact that for every Stage Station there were, on the average, two Pony Stations:

"The hours and halting-places were equally vilely selected: for instance, at Forts Kearny, Laramie, and Bridger, the only points where supplies, comfort, society, are procurable, a few minutes of grumbling delay were granted as a favour, and the passengers were hurried on to some distant wretched ranch, apparently for the sole purpose of putting a few dollars into the station masters pockets."

Surviving buildings at Fort Laramie which existed in 1860-1861 include the imposing frame two-storied officers quarters called "Old Bedlam", the stone magazine, and the adobe-stone sections of the Sutler's Store. The stone portion of the latter structure is known to have been used as a post-office in the 1850's when John S. Tutt, Post Sutler, and Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder served as postmasters. Whether it was the post office in 1860 is unconfirmed. It is known that it served as the post office during the 1870's and the 1880's. In any event three Fort Laramie buildings still standing saw the Pony Express riders come and go. Thus Fort Laramie National Monument is one of the principal shrines of the Pony Express route.

REFERENCES

- * The Pony Express: Across Nebraska from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie by Merrill Mattes and Paul Henderson — 1960.
- ** For Dawsons' Pioneer Tales of The Oregon Trail — 1912.
- *** Andreas — History of Nebraska — 1882.

About the Pony Express

The famed Pony Express lasted just 18 months . . . from April 3, 1860, to October 24, 1861. Through ages to come, though, it will live in the minds and hearts of Americans as a thrilling chapter in the settling of the West.

Remembered, too, should be the three dedicated men who founded, owned and operated it — William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell. The gallant young riders who carried the “lightning mail” also claimed immortality with their perseverance, fidelity of purpose, and personal sacrifice. They all made the Pony Express one of the greatest expressions of free enterprise in America.

The Express was put into service between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, at a cost of \$100,000. About 500 horses of superior stamina, including Kentucky breeds and California mustangs, were purchased for \$175 each, far more than the figure for ordinary horses at the time, which ranged from \$25 to \$50.

Russell, Majors & Waddell hired 80 riders — “young, skinny fellows unmarried” — at beginning wages of \$50 per month and board. About 190 Pony Express stations were established, complete with station keepers, stables, animals and equipment.

The earlier stations, which served stagecoach passengers and provided spare teams, were located at about 25-mile intervals. So, about half of the necessary stations needed to serve the Pony Express already existed and saw double duty. That left about 95 brand new stations to be established, since the limit for a horse going at top speed was in the neighborhood of 12 to 15 miles. As a general rule, every second Pony Express station was a previously established stage station. The new ones were hurriedly thrown together and stocked for the new service.

In the beginning, each rider rode three mounts a total distance of about 45 miles to a “home” station. Then, he would carry the mail going in the opposite direction to the previous home station.

Mail sent by Pony Express originally cost \$5 per half ounce, but this amount was later dropped to \$2, then \$1. The mail was carried in four flaps on the corners of a leather mochila, which was thrown over the pony rider's saddle at each relay station. In the beginning, the riders started from St. Joseph and Sacramento on a once-a-week basis, but this was later stepped up to twice a week.

The original goal was 10-day delivery for the 2,000-mile trip. The fastest time on record from terminus to terminus was 7 days and 17 hours recorded when delivering by special relay the inaugural address of President Abraham Lincoln to citizens in California. With this effort, the Pony Express is credited with cementing the new state of California to the Union, which was about to be torn apart by civil war.

The Making of a Follower of the
Oregon Trail
by Kim Naden
Franklin, Nebraska

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The Making of a Follower of the Oregon-California Trail

by Kim Naden*

In late July 1979 Dr. Philip S. Holgren, chairman of the history department at Kearney State College (Nebraska) took the graduate students of his Frontier History course on a hot, humid field trip to the nearby Oregon-California Trail gravesite of Susan Hail. It was while I was standing in the original swales that I first became fascinated with the history and route commonly known as the Oregon Trail.

I applied for a grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities to allow for the research, study, and routing of the trail as it passed through Nebraska. Using the original land surveys and available maps at the Nebraska State Historical Society, I found it was possible to trace the route of the trail across the state by field-checking each section and then comparing the topography of the land. My library work included readings of overland diaries and related material which allowed me to place historical incidents that occurred along the trail's route.

After earlier crossing the state to secure permission from what seemed like countless landowners and renters, I spent almost the entire month of June 1980 in walking the approximately 430 miles of the "original" trail across Nebraska.

In an effort to double-check the maps from the Kansas line to Fort Kearny, that distance (nearly 130 miles) was retraced in early June 1981.

By the summer of 1982, as a result of the research grant and my walks, I completed a manuscript which accurately located the routes of the Oregon-California Trail across Nebraska, section by section, and also "humanizes" the trail by plotting and siting many historical incidents where they were likely to have occurred. I also made a map of the Nebraska Oregon-California Trail by using United States Geological Survey maps. The maps show an accurate route of the main trail, mileage markers across the state, locations of markers, monuments, and historical sites (Pony Express, graves, and camping locations of such travelers as Fremont, Cross, etc.) Because of my own personal crossing and field-checking, the maps include identification of more numerous traces of the trail than Gregory M. Franzwa's excellent book, *Maps of the Oregon Trail*. Both the manuscript and maps are on deposit at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, Nebraska.

My interest of the Oregon-California Trail has allowed me to become acquainted with other trail enthusiasts. In the spring of 1984 James L. Germer, a young lawyer from Hebron, Nebraska, asked me for assistance in retracing some of the trail through either Jefferson or Thayer Counties,

*Mr. Kim L. Naden is a charter member of OCTA.



Naden is shown in a swale near Rock Creek. From here it descends into a small dell and then

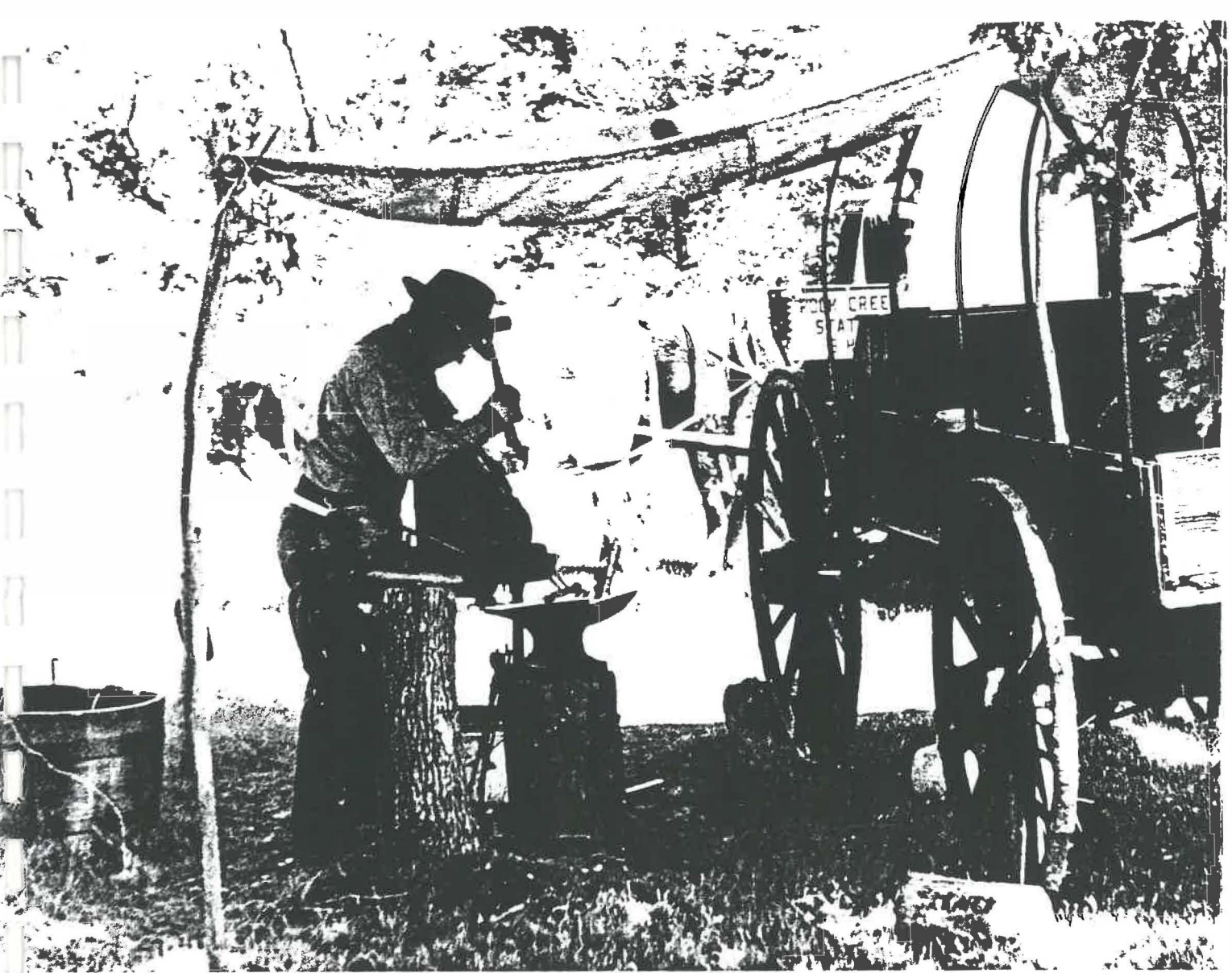
exits with more swale evidence from time to time.

Nebraska. As Jefferson County provides excellent examples of numerous ruts of the trail, and as time permitted the spending of only a few days of walking, we decided to retrace the trail's route from the Kansas boundary line at the southwest tip of Gage County to the Fairbury Municipal Airport — nearly 20 miles.

Arriving at the state line early on Sunday morning June 3, we found ourselves much in the same situation of many earlier emigrants over a century-and-a-quarter ago. The day was bright with the sun to our backs, the sky a bright blue with fluffy white cumulus clouds, and all around us the rolling uplands and fields of green with the lush growth of spring. Independence, Missouri, the start of the trail, lay approximately 190 miles southwest.

We began our modern-day trail walk over the fields by noting the triangular granite marker located along the Kansas-Nebraska boundary line between the counties of Gage and Jefferson (Nebraska), and Washington (Kansas). As we crossed the Gage-Jefferson boundary line we noted that perhaps it was in this general area that the ill-fated gold-seeker, young George Winslow, camped during this same week of June (6) 1849. The next day Winslow, a victim of cholera, was laid to rest northwest of present Fairbury where modern followers of the trail may still see his original gravestone.

Walking along at a fresh, unfatigued pace of three miles an hour, the two of us saw a deer bound away — surely something very common to the emigrants passing through this same area. We



A blacksmith was working at his anvil when Kim L. Naden and James L. Germer arrived at Rock

Creek in the summer of 1984.

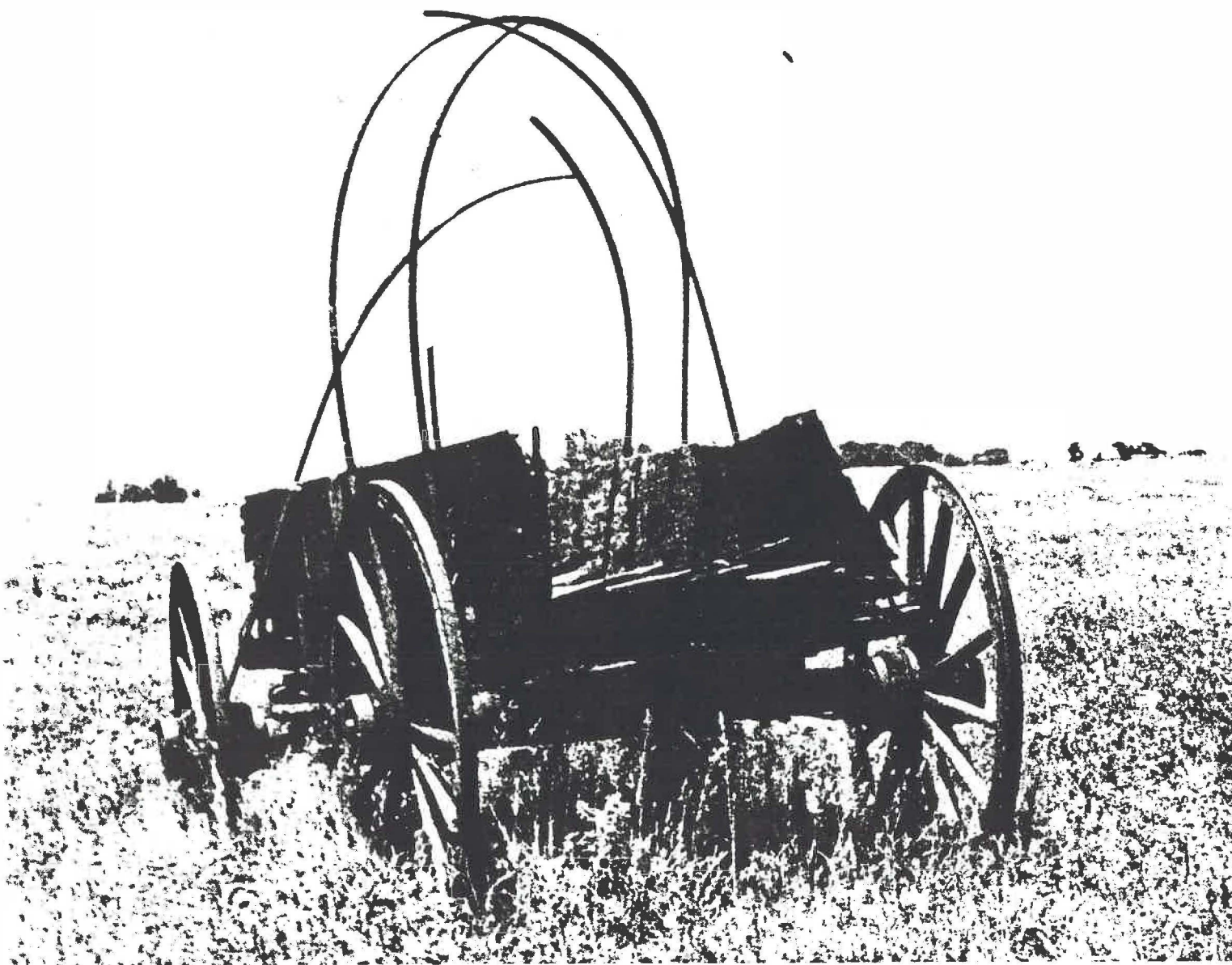
also noticed several examples of original trail ruts and a short distance thereafter the trail climbed the crest of the divide between the tributaries of the Big and Little Blue Rivers. The route across Jefferson County runs basically parallel along the Little Blue Valley, and although we had to walk across pastures wet with early-morning dew, waded through waist-high wheat, and leg-tiring, knee-high alfalfa, the walk along the natural roadway was enjoyable as the morning's breeze was cool and to our backs.

Farms and trees now and then obstruct the modern traveler's view, but because of the beautiful morning, I was reminded of emigrant Gilbert Cole's observation of a particular Monday morning in 1852 in an area very close to where we were walking:

Monday morning came, and at sunrise started on the trail that led up the hollow and on to the great plains of Kansas and Nebraska. The day was bright and clear. The sight before us was the most beautiful I had ever seen. Not a tree nor an obstacle was in sight; only the great rolling sea of brightest green beneath us and the vivid blue above.¹

Along this portion of our walk were several of the many gray granite markers that track the Oregon California Trail as it crosses the state. These markers are the result of Ezra Meeker's recrossing

1. Gilbert Cole, *In the Early Days Along the Overland Trail in Nebraska Territory in 1852* (Kansas City, Missouri: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1905), p. 17.



They also encountered this dilapidated wagon, placed near the great swale of the Oregon-

California Trail at Rock Creek Station.

of the trail in the very early 1900s. Meeker's crossing aroused new enthusiasm in America's interest in the Oregon Trail, and several years later, in 1911, the Nebraska state legislature authorized a series of markers to be placed across the state. Those primarily involved in the project were the state surveyor (Robert Harvey, who had surveyed part of the Oregon Trail route in his younger days), the secretary of the Nebraska State Historical Society (A.E. Sheldon), and the state regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Less than six miles out from the state line we crossed an area containing Fremont Springs, (a camping spot of Captain John C. Fremont and his expedition on Tuesday, June 21, 1842), and a Pony Express station known variously as Rock House, Otoe, or Caldwell Station.

The historically-minded people of Jefferson

County have done an excellent job of marking the trail as it crosses their county by providing many metal markers along the roadsides. These markers are indeed most helpful for the modern traveler. Coming upon one of these familiar markers reminded me of an incident that happened approximately in the same area where Jim Germer and I were walking. In 1873 after the trail near was no longer in intensive use, J. Sterling Morton crossed the trail near the small village of Steel City and observed: "it was a gorgeous band of sunflowers, stretching in a direct line northwestwardly as far as the vision could reach — a most impressive sight."² In 1984 the "gorgeous band of sunflow-

2. J. Sterling Morton, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, editor-in-chief, Albert Watkins, I (Lincoln, Nebraska: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1911 edition), p. 87.



California State Library, Sacramento

Kim Naden would have seen this had he arrived at Rock Creek 125 years ago. The East Ranch is

in the foreground. West Ranch is dimly visible across the creek.

ers'' no longer marks the route of the trail, but the overall vastness of open space which the trail follows is just as impressive as it was in 1873.

Traces of wagon swales became more evident as we approached the tenth mile. Locating one of these original ruts is always exciting and reassuring as it justifies the geographical location of the hiker — this is truly the "right path." In this area, several miles from the famous Rock Creek Station, Jim found what he considered to be the highlight of his walk — an Indian arrowhead lying on top of plowed ground and evidently just waiting to be picked up. Although it is not unusual to find trail artifacts when crossing the trail (crochery shards, metal parts, etc.), it seemed highly unlikely such a find would happen so easily. Jim was extremely pleased with the find of the arrowhead and the smile on his face showed it.

A large 30-foot-wide swale greeted us less than a mile from Rock Creek Station, and we descended into a wooded area at the northwest corner of a section. As we left the edge of the woods and followed the slope leading into a narrow clearing, we came upon a swale that was easily visible and located in the path where wagons once rolled between two large stone slabs.

Much to our delight we found some wild strawberries as we entered the section containing Rock Creek Station, which is located at the bottom of the upland slopes. Because of the excellent restoration work done by the Nebraska State Game and Parks Commission, Rock Creek was easy to cross. A modern-day bridge has been erected for the traveler's convenience. On this particular day Jim and I witnessed the workings of a blacksmith who was spending the day at Rock Creek Station. He was

busy hammering away on an anvil, making some object of usefulness. A scene like this must have been a common sight at Rock Creek Station during the trail years, but, much like the past emigrants, Jim and I paid little attention to what was being made as we were busy filling our canteens.

By now it was noon and the two of us needed a rest. Our three-mile-an-hour goal had fallen by the wayside. We were tired, hot, and thirsty, but felt we had to go on in order to maintain our schedule so that we could be picked up at the correct time at the Fairbury airport.

Leaving Rock Creek in the giant swale that exits at the station, we proceeded northwest along the trail with the Fairbury water tower as our general directional guide.

The rigors of crossing the trail caught up with us toward the middle of the afternoon. The back of our necks and arms were sunburned, our feet were tired and hot, thirst became more of a problem, our legs were getting tired of wading through the wheat and alfalfa fields, and the fields laying fallow slowed us down as the clods of earth became difficult to traverse. I felt sorry for myself, until I remembered that Jim and I were faring much better than a Mr. Mossman who crossed the same general area in 1852. His companion, Enoch Conyers, came through the same territory on Saturday, June 5, 1852. His journal noted:

June 5, 1852 George Mossman was so very sick that our train called a halt. A few minutes after we stopped George Mossman breathed his last. We laid him out in his wagon and came on about nine miles and stopped to bury the young man and eat our lunch.³

Northwest of the school are several visible swales — always a welcome sight to the traveler. Our pace had now dropped to barely two miles an hour and we noticed that although we enjoyed each other's company, we did not talk very often. We came to the conclusion that when a person is tired, even talking takes a certain amount of energy — and causes even more thirst. We also concluded that the emigrants probably reacted in the same way as they plodded along the trail.


In this area the wagon road crosses an area of rolling uplands. Because much of the land is in

pasture, original ruts are more evident than in other parts of the county. Gilbert Cole followed the trail in 1852, and I thought of him, the region, and the view of what the trail must have looked like in this general area. His journal noted:

Our trail now lay along the uplands through the day, where we could see the long line of covered wagons, sometimes two or three abreast, drawing itself in its windings like a huge white snake across this great sea of rolling green. This line could be seen many miles to the front and rear so far that the major portion of it seemed to the observer to be motionless.⁴

Located along the Oregon-California Trail and east of Fairbury is a vacant little red brick schoolhouse with a large Oregon Trail monument of red granite erected in 1912 (Jones School — District 39). From near the school it was easy to see the modern directional guide of a tall white-capped silo approximately three miles distant. Mile fifteen had already been crossed before reaching the school and it was of some small comfort to realize we had less than five miles to walk.

After crossing the last portion of the trail in what Jim called "splendid enlightenment through arduous misery," we reached the last visible swales of the day's journey. Unable to get there because of a backed-up pond and stream that fed it, we finally arrived at the airport by crossing the stream and plodding a short distance farther where we were picked up.

The two of us had crossed nearly 20 miles of the trail on a spring day very similar to a day the emigrants had seen. We were stiff and our feet were tired and sore, but we sported no bothersome blisters. Although there were more sights to see ahead (more swales, George Winslow's grave, Little Sandy Station, Big Sandy Pony Express Station, and the beginnings of Eighteen-Mile Ridge), we were out of time and energy. We had taken our cameras along to record what we saw as modern travelers of the trail, but yet we felt a link to its past. And along with a sense of personal accomplishment, we felt a comradeship with the emigrants who went the same way in a different era. Jim and I thought of our new knowledge of the Oregon-California Trail as more than just textbook history. For us, because of this one day of our lives, history became real. 

3. Todd Webb, *The Gold Rush Trail and the Road to Oregon* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 72.

4. Cole, op. cit., p. 23.