

*We Remember...*



*Beyond the Wide Missouri*

**Oregon-California Trails Association  
Independence, Missouri**

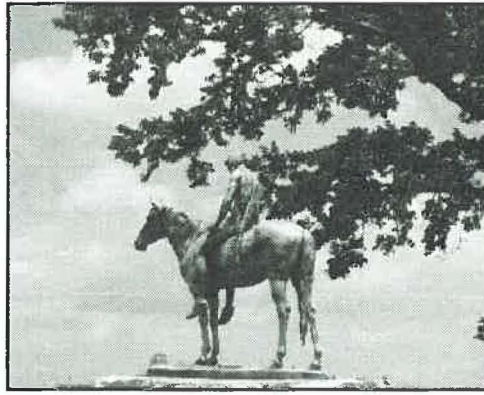
# *We Remember...*



## *Beyond the Wide Missouri*

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention  
Oregon-California Trails Association  
August 7-12, 2000  
Greater Kansas City**



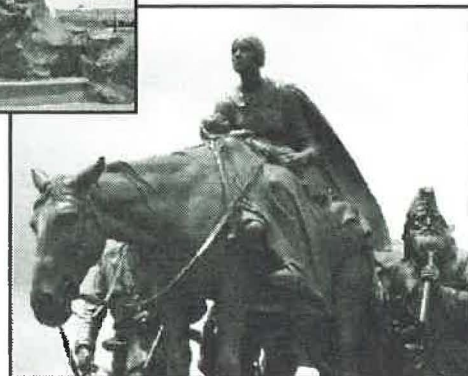


### *...and at the outset*

Each of these essays clings to the history of people and places here, near the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers. None are exhaustive, all are informative and each has a pearl: something you do not now know. Prepared by many trail devotees, they are background information for OCTA 2000 convention, a reminder that it all started here.

West of the Missouri River lay lands so vast that development crossed the date boundaries of three centuries. Those earliest of men and women were wanderers, marking the land for millennia with foot trails, never considering one location for permanent settlement. Their followers, on rude boats laden with furs or supplies, noted the confluence of two rivers before the larger one curved north and considered the spot a likely location for trade. At the turn of the nineteenth century came the men with pen in hand to chart the land, and they saw a potential site for a fort. In just five decades came multiple settlements; and by the turn of the twentieth century at that bend in the river was a city: Kansas City. As we enter the twenty-first century, this city is at the heart of a large metropolis: two states, seven counties, one hundred nineteen municipalities and closing in on two million residents.

In the heart of the city are monumental statues that summarize, although not by design, the city's history. **The Indian Scout** in Penn Valley Park faces north to the confluence of the rivers. At Case Park, also overlooking the rivers, is a new heroic statue of the **Lewis and Clark** party. In Westport, tiny Pioneer Park has three bronze statues of heroes of both Westport and the West: **Jim Bridger, John Calvin McCoy and Alexander Majors**. The enduring sign of settlement everywhere is the **Pioneer Mother**, located in Penn Valley Park alongside the Westport Route of the Santa Fe, Oregon and California trails. These statues mostly are ignored by residents and are gazed upon with mild curiosity by the occasional visitor but just might be "sacred ground" to members of OCTA: they are our story.



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## **Lewis and Clark in Kansas City – Crossroads of Discovery**

**Francis E. Cuppage, MD**

The year was 1804. The Corps of Discovery was on its way to explore the recently purchased Louisiana Territory, a large tract of western land that President Thomas Jefferson and the United States had obtained from France. While the boundaries of the territory were uncertain, the expansion of U.S. territory from the purchase would nearly double our land area. Jefferson's vision was to utilize this new territory for better access to Pacific ports for trade with the Orient and to gain right of possession of the vast Pacific Northwest which England, Spain, France and Russia all coveted. Central to this territory was the Missouri River. Jefferson believed the headwaters of the Missouri would be found in the Shining, or Rocky, Mountains and would be only a short distance from the headwaters of the newly discovered Columbia River that flowed into the Pacific Ocean. These two river systems, if navigable, could provide the long-sought Northwest Passage across North America that had eluded explorers for years. Jefferson chose his private secretary and neighbor, Meriwether Lewis, to lead the expedition, named the Corps of Discovery. They were to explore the Missouri River to its headwaters, cross over the Continental Divide and follow the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. They were to map the territory, describe the natural history of the region and establish peaceful relations among all resident Indian nations.

Lewis and his co-captain, William Clark, traveled by keelboat down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River, arriving across from St. Louis in the fall of 1803. The Corps spent the winter at Camp Dubois near present-day Wood River, Illinois. In the spring they set out with a carefully selected company of U.S. Army volunteers and boatmen in two pirogues and a keelboat to begin their ascent of the Missouri River. Moving up the Missouri River, they reached the area of present-day metropolitan Kansas City in June 1804.

Delayed briefly by fog, the Corps of Discovery passed the mouth of Mill Creek where it joined the Missouri River. The date was Tuesday, June 26, 1804. As the Corps passed the creek, then called the Labeenie, Clark noted a large number of wild apples. French fur traders had told him that the apples would be ripe and delicious when the leaves turned in the fall. Deer were feeding in great numbers along the banks. They saw many buffalo, bear, deer and wolves. Raspberries, apples and wildflowers were abundant. Coal deposits, seen in the adjacent cliffs, would become the home of the Brush Creek Coal Mine that would produce coal from the area until 1904. The group killed a large rattlesnake that had been sunning on the bank. Passing a sandbar, they observed a great number of the now-extinct Carolina parakeets. That afternoon they camped in present-day Kansas City, Kansas, just above the mouth of the Kansas River. Clark commented, "The Country about the mouth of this river is verry fine on each Side."

The Corps stayed in this camp until June 29. During this short visit, used to rest the party and dry the pirogues and gear, Clark dispatched a hunting party. The hunters proceeded up the Kansas (Kaw) River, saw buffalo and killed and dressed several deer. The meat was used for food while the cured hides would be needed for replacement of clothing, constantly wearing out. Clark observed that the high lands along the north side of the Kansas River provided a good view of the surrounding countryside and would make an ideal site for a fort. Clark also noted that the Kansas River received its name from an Indian tribe, the Kanza, that dwelled along its banks in two villages about twenty and forty leagues up the river. The Indians at that time were out on the plains hunting



buffalo. When the pirogues were dry the Corps proceeded on, but before leaving the camp Clark set a court martial for two of the men. One, John Collins, was found guilty of being drunk on duty. The other, Hugh Hall, was found guilty of stealing the whiskey. Collins received 100 lashes on his bare back, and Hall received fifty. Flogging was not unusual at that time, and their punishment was considered necessary to maintain discipline within the Corps. The two punished men continued upriver with the explorers.

Clark observed that the Kansas River was 366 miles above the mouth of the Missouri at St. Louis. At its mouth the Kansas River was some 230 yards wide, and the larger Missouri River was about 500 yards wide. On July 4, near present-day Atchison, Kansas, Clark described the plains to the west:

“...the plains of this country are covered with a leek green grass, well calculated for the sweetest and most nourishing hay-interspersed with copses of trees, spreading their lofty branches over pools, springs, or brooks of fine water. Groups of shrubs covered with the most delicious fruit is to be seen in every direction, and nature appears to have exerted herself to beautify the scenery by the variety of flowers, delicately and highly flavored, raised above the grass, which strikes and perfumes the sensations and amuses the mind, throws it into conjecturing the cause of so magnificent a scenery...in a country situated far removed from the civilized world to be enjoyed by nothing but the buffalo, elk, deer, and bear in which it abounds and...savage Indians.”

In 1804 the Missouri River was much wider and flowed more slowly than at present due to continuous dredging and channeling for barge traffic. While movement up the river by paddle, pole and tow rope at that time was arduous, it would be significantly more difficult today. Nevertheless, the Corps' 1,600 mile journey up the Missouri River to the Mandan Indian villages in present-day North Dakota was difficult to say the least.

In 1806, on their eastward return from the Pacific, the Corps passed the mouth of the Kansas River on Monday, September 15 and landed about one mile below for a short rest. Lewis and Clark climbed a hill on the south side of the Missouri, again noting this a good site for a future fort or town. Lewis and Clark could not know that this land around the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers would become a metropolis. The observation point is now commemorated in a small park off Jefferson Street. The Corps noted the beauty of the bottom lands; but they were bothered by mosquitoes all along the lower Missouri River and quickly moved on down the river, reaching St. Louis on September 23, 1806.

The explorations of the Corps would describe a vast territory. In spite of the lack of a convenient Northwest Passage to the Pacific, their exploration and mapping enabled the commerce of fur trade and agriculture as well as the migration and trade along the Oregon-California and Santa Fe trails. Westward expansion became centered in the metropolitan Kansas City area.

See: G. Moulton, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, Vol. 2.

Francis E. Cuppage, MD, is a retired physician and professor of pathology at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Present interests include medical history, primarily of the overland trails and the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803-1806.

## Facing West - Fort Osage

### Eric Fowler

Fort Osage was constructed during 1808-1809 on a tall bluff above the Missouri River, a site that may have been selected in June 1804 by Lewis and Clark during the early days of their Voyage of Discovery. At that time the fort was the westernmost outpost of the United States in this part of the Louisiana Purchase. There were soldiers garrisoned at the fort; but it was the "factor," the U.S. government's civilian employee who bartered and traded with the Indians, who held the most important post at the fort. At Fort Osage, the factor almost could be considered a minister plenipotentiary of the United States to the Osage and Kansas Indians as well as a jack-of-all-trades.

George Champlin Sibley, the only factor at Fort Osage during its existence, helped select the fort's final site, lay out and build the fort. He assisted with drafting and having the Osage and Kansas sign treaties during his twenty years at the fort. In addition, Sibley was responsible for ordering and stocking the goods for which hundreds of Osage and Kansas traded at the trading post, known as the "factory." He was responsible also for determining the quality and value of the furs Indians brought to trade and for shipping the furs to St. Louis for sale. Sibley was chosen the first justice of the peace and postmaster for this large area and in the early 1820s served as Indian agent to the Osage. He had to keep accurate books of the factory's income and expenses. In short, Sibley operated a business, and he ran a successful one. Fort Osage was one of only a few of the nearly twenty government-operated factories that consistently turned a profit.

Even with all the above responsibilities, a factor needed to know how to deal with other people and groups that stopped at the fort. In Sibley's case, these travelers included nearly everyone of consequence in the annals of western exploration and expansion from 1808 to the late 1820s: Sacajawea, Daniel Boone, William Clark, Pierre Chouteau, Manuel Lisa, Joseph Robidoux, Stephen Long, the Osage chiefs White Hair and The Walking Rain, Mike Fink, Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger and groups such as the Astorians and the Missouri Fur Company. The earliest steamboats on the Missouri River, the *Western Engineer* and the *Expedition*, stopped at Fort Osage. The earliest Santa Fe traders, such as William Becknell, the Coopers and Joel Walker, were acquainted with Sibley and stopped at Fort Osage. Employees at the fort included Dr. John Robinson, who had been to Colorado and Santa Fe as early as 1806-1807 with Zebulon Pike, and Lilburn Boggs, who later became governor of Missouri.

Eventually, business at and visitors to Fort Osage faded away. The Indians were moved to reservations where private traders, licensed rather than employed by the government, bartered with them. Settlers homesteaded the area, and towns such as Independence appeared. Other forts were built further up the Missouri River, but Sibley stayed at Fort Osage. He had a considerable financial stake in the area, as evidenced by his purchase of land around the fort; he even bought the fort itself after it was decommissioned in 1822. He hoped Fort Osage would continue to serve as a jumping-off place for western-bound traffic; but by 1830 overland traffic passed through Independence, and river traffic steamed on by the fort. By the late 1820s and early 1830s, according to local legend, the log buildings and stockade had been removed and recycled by the new settlers in the area. The fort and Sibley were gone.

Luckily for history buffs, in the 1930s the Native Sons of Kansas City began a push to rebuild Fort Osage. The factory, using parts of the original foundation, and the main blockhouse were reconstructed by the early 1950s. Today, the rest of the fort has



been substantially rebuilt by and is operated by the Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department, which enables the fort to be appreciated by the thousands of visitors each year. They have a magnificent view up and down the Missouri River from the factory's back porch and from the main blockhouse's second floor gun portals. Modern visitors don't see the original Indians or the steamboats, but they do see period reenactors and an accurate reproduction of trade goods and buildings to depict this area's earliest outpost of the Louisiana Purchase.

The primary sources to tell the story of Fort Osage are readily available, a good portion of them in St. Louis at the Missouri Historical Society. Many other documents can be found in the Federal Archives. Also see:

Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972.

William W. Graves, *The First Protestant Osage Missions: 1820-1837*, Oswego, Kansas: The Carpenter Press, 1949.

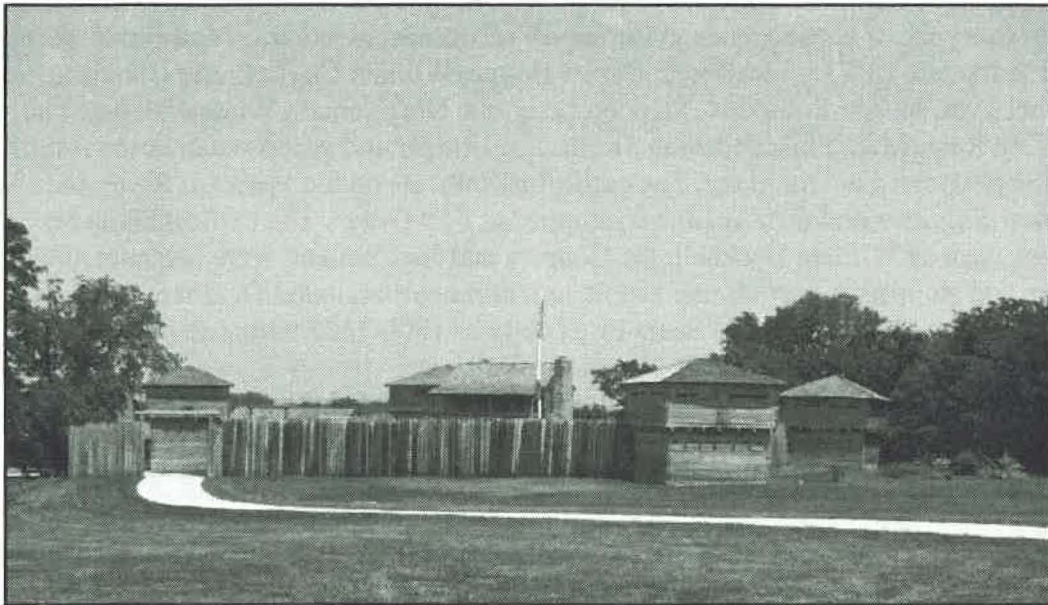
Kate Gregg, ed., *The Road to Santa Fe*, Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1952.

Kate Gregg, ed., *Westward with Dragoons*, Fulton, MO: 1937.

Charles T. Jones, Jr., *George Champlin Sibley: The Prairie Puritan*, Independence, MO: Jackson County Historical Society, 1970.

Ora Brooks Peake, *A History of the United States Indian Factory System: 1795-1822*, Denver: Sage Books, 1954.

Eric Fowler was born in Kansas City and is a life-long resident of the Independence, Missouri area. He was the live-in caretaker at Fort Osage in 1976 and 1977 and considers Fort Osage the most important historic site in all of western Missouri and eastern Kansas.



**Fort Osage is located in eastern Jackson County near Sibley, Missouri**

## **What Would We Have Done Without Them?**

### **The Mountain Men**

**Eva Allen, Robert Dorian, Joanne Chiles Eakin, Harmon Mothershead**

This brief summary of just a few highlights of the assorted careers of the mountain men is designed to remind us that everything that was hard about the crossing and subsequent settlement of the West would have been infinitely harder without them. The early wagon trains were not blind probes into unknown space but were focused movements of people, led by men who knew the way.

#### **1820**

Joseph R. Walker joined a party of fur trappers to New Mexico, a venture halted by the Spanish military.

#### **1822**

Joel P. Walker was a member of the first trading party to Santa Fe and met his brother Joseph returning home along the same path. William Henry Ashley and Andrew Henry embarked on their fur-trading venture by advertising for "enterprising young men" to engage in fur-trading in the upper Missouri River country. Among those who would become known as "Ashley's men" were James Beckwourth, Jim Bridger, James Clyman, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Hugh Glass, David Jackson, Jedediah Smith, Milton and William Sublette and Ashley's partner, Andrew Henry. The 1822 and 1823 expeditions were thwarted by the Arikara Indians. W. Sublette stayed in the mountains trapping for the next three years. Smith explored the Platte-Sweetwater-South Pass route.

#### **1823**

Hugh Glass survived not only a grizzly attack but also being abandoned as nearly dead by other trappers.

#### **1824**

Smith explored the Platte-Sweetwater-South Pass route.

#### **1825**

Fitzpatrick led Ashley's trade caravan to what would be the first rendezvous, this year along Henry's Fork of the Green River. Bridger became the first European man to see the Great Salt Lake. Joseph Walker was a member of the Sibley party marking the Santa Fe Road. Ashley himself, after a terrible winter en route, arrived at the Green River with a pack train of supplies for the rendezvous.

#### **1826**

The very successful Ashley-Henry Company sold out to a threesome of David Jackson, Jedediah Smith and W. Sublette.

#### **1827**

Bridger, still trapping and exploring, traveled through South Pass. Joseph Walker settled down to become sheriff of Jackson County, Missouri. W. Sublette, along with Moses "Black" Harris, left the mountains January 1 for St. Louis to lead the supply caravan back for the rendezvous.

#### **1828-1829**

Smith leads a party of eighteen to retrace his exploration of the previous year; only Smith and three others survive.

#### **1830**

The rendezvous this year was serviced with supplies brought, for the first time, by wagon caravan using the route that would become known as the Oregon Trail. At the



rendezvous, Smith, Jackson and W. Sublette sold out to the Rocky Mountain Fur Co., composed of Fitzpatrick, Bridger, M. Sublette, Henry Fraeb and Jean Gervais. Bridger was among the first explorers to visit the geysers and other natural wonders of what would become Yellowstone National Park.

#### 1831

Fitzpatrick and Harris headed to St. Louis to confirm the supply caravan with the Smith, W. Sublette and Jackson Co.; but that threesome already had left to enter the Santa Fe trade. Fitzpatrick did catch up with them and obtained the supplies but was so late for the rendezvous that Fraeb had been sent to find him. Fraeb met Fitzpatrick on the Platte River and took the supplies to the rendezvous while Fitzpatrick again headed for St. Louis, this time to confirm plans for the 1832 rendezvous. The Smith, W. Sublette and Jackson Co. was split permanently during this season: Smith was killed by a Comanche war party while ahead of the trade caravan scouting the route.

#### 1832

Joseph Walker left his sheriff position to guide Captain Benjamin E. Bonneville for a combined exploring and fur-trading adventure to the mountains. Bridger and Fitzpatrick were in the mountains. W. Sublette led Nathaniel Wyeth and the New Englanders to the Oregon country. W. Sublette formed a partnership with Robert Campbell that lasted for ten years. Among their accomplishments was the construction of the Fort William, later to be known as Fort Laramie, in 1834.

#### 1833

Joseph Walker followed the Humboldt River then crossed the Sierra Nevada, the first European to describe what is now Yosemite National Park.

#### 1834

Another realignment: Fitzpatrick, Bridger, M. Sublette, Lucien Fontenelle and Andrew Drips formed the Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company.

#### 1835

W. Sublette and Campbell sold Fort William to the Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Co. and Bridger took control of the fort.

#### 1836

Fitzpatrick led the trade caravan, and the Whitman-Spaulding missionary party that was heading to Oregon, to the rendezvous. Also along was Joshua Pilcher of the American Fur Co. who bought the assets of Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Co.

#### 1837

The supply caravan this year included the Sir William Drummond Stewart-Alfred Miller party, led by Fitzpatrick.

#### 1841

Fitzpatrick led the combined Fr. DeSmet and Bidwell-Bartleson parties west.

#### 1843

W. Sublette made his last trip to the mountains with the Stewart party. Bridger led the Whitman party to their mission site. He, with Louis Vasquez, built Fort Bridger. Joseph Walker, eastbound, met the Chiles party from Independence and led them from Fort Laramie to California. Fitzpatrick led Fremont's second expedition.

**Eva Allen** is a Kansas City native who earned a BA in English and Spanish and a MA in English. She currently works as a writer at Hallmark Cards. **Robert Dorian** is a historian whose main interest is the trans-Mississippi west and its exploration and commerce in the 1800-1855 era. He also is a living history interpreter of that era. **Joanne Chiles Eakin** is a genealogist of note and edits *The Kansas City Genealogist* and *The Blue & Grey Chronicle*, a Civil War newspaper. She has published more than thirty books on these subjects. **Harmon Mothershead** is Professor Emeritus, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville.

## Who Were They? The Men of the 1825 Sibley Survey Robert Dorian

The idea for a survey of the "Road to Santa Fe" sprang from the mind of U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Beginning in early 1824, Benton brought attention in both Missouri and Washington City to the rapidly expanding trade with the interior of Mexico, generally called the "Santa Fe trade." In January 1825 Benton addressed the Senate, requesting that the "Road to Santa Fe" be marked from Fort Osage to the boundary with Mexico. The bill that passed called for the road to be marked from Fort Osage to "the settlements of New Mexico" if the Mexican government would permit it. On March 3, 1825, President James Monroe signed the bill that appropriated \$10,000 for the survey and \$20,000 for treating with the Indians for the right of way.

Three commissioners were appointed to carry out the survey. Although not in the military they were addressed as Colonel, common at the time for individuals working for the government, as an indication of their importance. **Benjamin H. Reeves**, from Howard County, Missouri at the head of the trail, had just been elected Lt. Governor of the state. Reeves represented the State of Missouri as well as the people actually involved in the trade, and he resigned his political office to become a commissioner. **Thomas Mather**, from Kaskaskia, Illinois, was an important Mississippi Valley merchant who had been involved in Illinois politics and was a direct descendant of Cotton Mather of the Salem witch trials fame. **George C. Sibley** had been appointed by President Thomas Jefferson assistant factor at Fort Bellefontaine, near St. Charles, Missouri, in 1805. He was fired by the factor, Rudolph Tillier, in a disagreement over Tillier's unorthodox accounting procedures. Sibley went to Washington and laid the whole matter before John Mason, Superintendent of Indian Affairs. This resulted in Sibley being appointed chief factor of Fort Osage, the new trading post to be built for trade with the Osage, where he served from 1808 until the fort closed in 1822. [See accompanying essay, "Fort Osage"]

The following men filled key positions in the survey party. **Surveyor Joseph C. Brown** came to St. Louis in 1815 from Virginia. In October of that year he was appointed deputy surveyor of the Fifth Principal Meridian Survey. In 1816 he surveyed the Osage Line from Fort Osage to the Arkansas River with his assistant, Archibald Gamble. In 1820 he completed the survey of the Incorporated Limits of St. Louis City. In 1823 he surveyed the western boundary of Missouri from the Kansas River south to the Arkansas line and also the Missouri-Arkansas boundary. He was the surveyor with the best reputation in the state at the time. Appointed **Secretary, Archibald Gamble**, also from Virginia, became a bank clerk upon arriving in St. Louis. After one year he was appointed Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court, and the next year he advanced to Clerk of the Circuit Court, a position he held for eighteen years. In 1821 he married Louisa Easton, sister of George Sibley's wife, Mary. Gamble was well qualified for the position, but the appointment led to accusations of nepotism. **Pilot Stephen Cooper**, a veteran of the War of 1812, was an experienced Santa Fe Trail traveler. **William S. (Old Bill) Williams** served as interpreter for the treaty negotiations with the Osage and Kansa and was hired en route.

Others employed as hunters and chain men included Joseph R. Walker who later became famous as a mountain man, his brother John Walker, Andrew Broadus, Dudley Dedmon, Daniel East and George West who served as a wagoner and interpreter. Six other wagoners, twenty laborers and two servants brought the party to forty men.



Seven wagons left St. Louis on June 22, 1825, arrived at Franklin July 3, celebrated Independence Day at Franklin and moved on to reach Ft. Osage July 12. The party departed on Sunday, July 17; but Sibley remained behind, allegedly awaiting the arrival of a piece of black ribbon to serve as a hatband. He caught up with the survey party encamped on 142 Mile Creek on August 3. Most of the travel was at night because of the abundance of Green Flies that bothered both the livestock and men during daylight. The flies aren't mentioned west of the Cimarron River.

On August 5 they arrived at the Neosho River and waited for the Osage chief, accompanied by Old Bill Williams, to arrive to negotiate the right of way treaty. The treaty concluded with the Osage on August 10 gave the United States the right to survey the road through the lands of the Osage and gave traders the right to use the trail freely, all for the sum of \$800 in goods.

The smooth progress of the survey ended near the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian at present-day Dodge City, Kansas. Disagreement among the commissioners about how to proceed finally was resolved by Sibley advancing to Santa Fe to await permission to continue the survey while Commissioners Mather and Reeves returned to Missouri. It was not until June 14, 1826 that Sibley received a letter from Mexican Governor Narbona permitting the survey party to examine the road through Mexico but do no marking. The departure of the party was further delayed until August 24, waiting in vain for the return of the other two commissioners. Little is known regarding the return trip other than the party reached Walnut Creek by September 23 and was back in Missouri by October 12, 1826.

By January 1827 the commissioners decided to correct the course of the road the following summer with only Sibley accompanying the correction expedition. Green flies, lack of meat, dangerous lightning strikes and illness were among the reasons that caused Sibley to comment: "And thus ends a most disagreeable trip...."

Bob Dorian is a historian whose main interest is the trans-Mississippi west and its exploration and commerce during the period 1800-1855. He also is a living history interpreter of both civilian and military personas of that era.

## **Independence, Missouri**

### **William Bullard**

For Lewis and Clark and the fur traders who followed them, the Missouri River opened western travel. Within a few years of the return of the Corps of Discovery, William Clark had located Fort Osage as the westernmost fort in the United States. In those early years the area around Fort Osage became the point of departure for the Santa Fe Trail. Since the river swung north along what is now the border of Missouri, Santa Fe traders had to take to a land route somewhere in the Jackson County region.

In 1827 the State appointed commissioners to select a county seat for the newly created Jackson County. The commissioners, ignoring their instructions, placed the county seat not in the center of the county as directed, but on the geographically highest point of the county, which contained seventeen large springs. The settlement was governed by the county court (a system of appointed or elected "judges" who actually served as administrators or commissioners) until 1849 when the city incorporated and elected its first council and mayor, William McCoy. At the time Independence was established the landing port was at Blue Mills located between Fort Osage and Independence. Later, a second site, the Wayne City landing, was selected in what is now Sugar Creek, Missouri. First-time visitors to Independence usually are surprised to find that the city is some miles away from its two landing sites just as its rival, Westport, also was miles away from the river. Experience, however, taught the early merchants that a settlement located along the river landing tended to periodically disappear, along with the landing, because of floods and droughts. Wayne City, initially a part of the city of Independence, was developed in the early 1840s. The land between Wayne City and Independence was sparsely developed during the migration era, and most development is post-World War II.

By the time that emigrants to the Oregon Territory began arriving at local ports, Independence was a thriving trade center. It had a reputation for honest trading, a reputation largely established by the Aull Brothers of Lexington, Missouri, who also opened a store in Independence. In 1832 Charles Latrobe wrote:

The town of Independence was full of promise, like most of the innumerable towns springing up in the forests of the West, many of which, though dignified by high-sounding epithets, consist of nothing but a ragged congeries [heap or pile] of five or six log huts, two or three clapboard houses, alias grogshops, a few stores, a bank, printing office and barn-looking churches. It lacked at the time I commemorate, the last three edifices, but was nevertheless a thriving and aspiring place.

In 1846 Francis Parkman described a different Independence:

The town was crowded. A multitude of shops had sprung up to furnish the emigrants and Santa Fe traders with necessities for their journey; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from a dozen blacksmith sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired, and the horses and oxen shod. The streets were thronged with men, horses, and mules; the public houses were full of Santa Fe men and emigrants. Groups of hardy-looking men hung about the stores, and Santa Fe and emigrant wagons stood in the fields around.

Parkman noted that among the crowd were some of the vilest outcasts in the country, although he also noted with satisfaction that very few of them were fellow New Englanders. He could not understand whether the migration came from "a desire of shaking off restraints of law and society" or "an insane hope of a better condition in life." Jessy Quinn Thornton, a cultured Virginian, saw the same people and said of them:



The majority were plain, honest, substantial, intelligent, enterprising, and virtuous. They are indeed much superior to those who usually settle in a new country.

The reader must draw his own conclusions.

Emigrants often arrived during the winter months so they could be ready to depart as early as possible in the spring. They had to have their wagons assembled if they had bought them in knockdown cartons in St. Louis or they needed wagon repairs and, in many cases, new wagons. They needed harness and tackle, and they needed food, medical staples, tools, implements, etc. Above all, they needed oxen or mules. Independence met all of these needs out of a scattering of buildings around the square and in houses, tents, cabins and livestock pens spread out over several square miles. Streets had been cut but stumps not removed, as was the practice in road building of that era. Street frontages were occupied mostly by brothels, grog shops, blacksmiths and wagon makers. The emigrants could not leave until the grass had grown at least four inches tall so the oxen could graze, and they spent the frigid winters trying to pick up information about the trip and make themselves a part of trains that might be successful. Emigrants made the round of stump speakers who bragged of their organizational skills and knowledge, rarely more than that of their listeners, then selected a train and applied. Fortunately, there were many mountain men available to act as guides. In fact, the initial choice of leaders was not as important as it had appeared during the winter. By the time the trains reached eastern Kansas, most of them had been broken into other trains; and the switching among trains, once started, continued all the way to Oregon and California.

Looking back at this incredible adventure it is startling to see that the boom in Independence lasted only about ten years, although the Santa Fe Trail lasted a longer time. The fortunes of the outfitting towns constantly waxed and waned: flooding along the Missouri River often ravaged the river boat landings, and many towns were virtually abandoned during the cholera epidemics. During the gold rush, for example, both Independence and St. Joseph hired pitchmen to roam the wharves at St. Louis spreading false rumors that its competitor was a death camp of cholera.

Present-day citizens of Independence, Westport (Kansas City) and St. Joseph still get touchy with one another about which city sent out the most emigrants. In truth, none of these locations kept accurate records of the number of people who passed through; and we can only guess at a total of 250,000 to 500,000 people who jumped-off from various locations.

See: Charles Joseph Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America*. London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1835.

Francis Parkman, Jr., *The California and Oregon Trail: being sketches of prairie and Rocky Mountain life*. New York: Geo. P. Putnam, 1849.

J. Quinn Thornton, *Oregon and California in 1848*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849.

William Bullard is a retired Independence city planning director, city manager and director of the National Frontier Trails Center.

## **The Indian Removal Act of 1830**

**Mary Conrad**

The movement of Indians from east to west was a recurring event for decades as first the colonial governments and then the American federal government signed treaties with various tribes, offering lands further west in exchange for abandoning lands where Euroamericans had settled. Promoted by President Andrew Jackson, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 codified removal of Indian tribes east of the Mississippi River as official policy. It also stated specifically that the national government could forcibly remove any Indians not in compliance. Many years earlier President Thomas Jefferson helped solidify the policy of removal. Falling in step with many others with what is now thought of as a paternalistic view, Jefferson believed Euroamericans and Indians could not live together peacefully. They believed Indians should move west and learn the ways of "American" society through the guidance of Christian missionaries. [See accompanying essays on Reverend Thomas Johnson and Isaac McCoy]

Indians usually were placed, through treaties, just beyond Euroamerican settlement. After the War of 1812, pressure to move Indians further west increased with the demand for land by the fast growing Euroamerican population. While removal did not become official federal policy until 1830, Indians moved to and through what is now the Kansas City area prior to that time. By 1775, the Osage were well established in the area now known as Missouri and Kansas. The first group of Shawnee arrived in 1825. The land west of Missouri was designated Indian Territory; and while any permanency of the designated territory beyond Missouri was doomed by future land demands, this was not necessarily evident to all at the time of the creation of the "permanent" Indian land. Many Indians continued to visit the river towns in western Missouri after moving to Indian Territory. These Indians were paid by the federal government for their eastern lands so they had ready cash; and an Osage, Kansa, Shawnee, Delaware or Wyandotte with money to spend was a common sight.

In 1806 on an expedition through the West and Southwest, the explorer Zebulon Pike called what we know today as the Plains the "American Sahara"; and he proposed the land could be used as a buffer between the United States and the Spanish territory if inhabited by Indians. Stephen Long, on an exploratory expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1819 and 1820, coined the phrase "Great American Desert" as he passed through the Plains. For as long as the belief in the unsuitability of the Plains for Euroamerican settlement persisted, the Indian Territory created by the Indian Removal Act remained intact.

The terms of the Act dictated that only Indians and supporting Euroamericans, such as missionaries and sutlers, could reside within the territory. Traders between Santa Fe and Missouri and later Oregon and California emigrants legally could pass through but not stay in what is now Kansas. Thus travelers to and through Indian Territory needed to obtain supplies at the western edge of Missouri. Entrepreneurial Indians could and did provide services and supplies to travelers within the Indian lands.

At the time of the passage of the Indian Removal Act, Independence was an established town. While the Town of Kansas (Kansas City) and the town of Westport were not yet platted, the area near the river landing, which later some would name the Westport Landing, already was an active commercial community. Within a few years, both those towns were platted and became outfitting and/or supply centers for traders, emigrants, Indians and missionaries.



While the area that is now Kansas City remained an access point to Indian Territory for a time, a variety of pressures put an end to that geographical position. From the start, the Territory was a leaky frontier. "...[A]dventurers and settlers willfully exceeding the limitations set forth in Indian agreements" found places to live. Indian lands west of Missouri were so vast the U.S. Army could not keep out illegal trespassers. As the Euroamerican population continued to increase rapidly, pressure to open the Plains for settlement reached a fevered state. The discovery of gold in California and the continuing westward construction of railroads also drew Euroamericans westward.

By the 1850s, the policy of removal generally had ended. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened territorial lands to Euroamerican settlement, and within seven years Kansas had become a state. Just a few decades earlier, President Jackson had persuaded many Indian tribes to move west so as to retain their own autonomous governments without interference from state governments. However, encroaching Euroamerican settlement ensured the creation of state governments in the midst of the Indian lands.

As long as Indian Territory remained intact, the western edge of Missouri continued as a commercial center for those residing in or passing through Indian lands; but a familiarity with the Plains was developing. Belief in the "Great American Desert" theory began to dissipate. As settlement increased on the Plains beyond Missouri, the area around Kansas City was no longer the last supply depot before leaving the United States. With the opening of Indian Territory to any settlers, some Indians chose to remain and others moved to Oklahoma. The growing number of towns in Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma drew trade away from the frontier area of Kansas City.

See Thomas D. Clark, *Frontier America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Scribner's, 1969.

Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, New York: Gordian Press, 1966 [1932].

Vine Deloria and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice*, Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983.

Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal*, Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1972 [1932].

Patrick Frazier, ed., *Many Nations: A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Indian and Alaska Native Peoples of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996.

Francis Paul Prucha, *The Indians in American Society*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985.

Mary Conrad is a high school librarian. She has edited the newsletter for OCTA Trails Head Chapter for twelve years and has coordinated a regional History Day competition for eight years.

## **Isaac McCoy: Baptist Missionary & Indian Advocate**

**William S. Worley**

Born in southwest Pennsylvania in 1784 as the American Revolution ended, by 1790 Isaac McCoy had moved with his parents to the Louisville area of northern Kentucky. At age nineteen he had determined to become a missionary Baptist minister, somewhat in contradiction to the Primitive Baptist non-missionary faith in which he was raised. He married sixteen-year-old Christiana Polke in 1803, and they moved to Indiana Territory where he farmed and preached until his ordination in 1810. Following that time, he continued both activities but also began to seek financial support from the Baptist Convention to serve the Ottawa Indians located in western Indiana where the McCoy's lived. In the latter half of the 1820s he moved his wife and family to southwest Michigan where they established Carey Mission.

He had little actual schooling, but over the years McCoy accumulated more than 1,000 volumes for his own personal library. He trained himself as a surveyor and contracted with the War Department to lay out the boundaries of a number of Indian Reservations both in his initial areas of service and in Indian Territory west of Missouri beginning in 1828. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s he traveled frequently to Washington City to attend sessions of Congress and to confer with Indian Agency officials in the War Department. When he moved his family to Jackson County, Missouri, in 1832, he almost certainly had the largest library in western Missouri. He also worked to give his sons a college education, most graduating from Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky; and his daughters attended seminaries that functioned as finishing schools. Together, he and Christiana had thirteen children; but by the time McCoy died only one son, John Calvin McCoy, who is credited with founding the town of Westport and being one of the organizers of the Town of Kansas, remained alive. [See accompanying essays, "John Calvin McCoy: Founding Father" and "Indian Removal Act of 1830"]

McCoy came to advocate the removal of Indians from areas in the East to lands beyond Missouri. In this he differed from other Baptist missionaries who even sued in federal court to prevent such removals. McCoy's position was that it was inevitable that the Indian peoples should have to adapt to settled ways and become United States citizens. He believed that the best way to accomplish this, from the Indian perspective, was to place them in an area mostly removed from white influence. McCoy further advocated the creation of a real Indian Territory, just like Iowa or Arkansas Territory, that would ultimately become an Indian state in the Union. He carried this advocacy all the way to the passage of a bill by the U.S. Senate in 1837 that authorized just such action. Opposition in the House of Representatives blocked its forwarding to McCoy's friend President Martin Van Buren for his promised signature. McCoy was well acquainted with the political worthies of the day – Andrew Jackson, Van Buren, Henry Clay and Vice-President (under Van Buren) Richard Johnson, like McCoy, an Indian educator.

McCoy worked as a contemporary of and in competition with Thomas Johnson at the Shawnee Methodist Mission, now a state historic site in Fairway, Kansas. [See accompanying essay, "The Reverend Thomas Johnson"] The Shawnee Baptist Mission operated from 1832 to 1854, also in Indian Territory; but nothing remains of the Baptist mission which was located on a ridge overlooking the Kansas River in present-day Kansas City, Kansas.

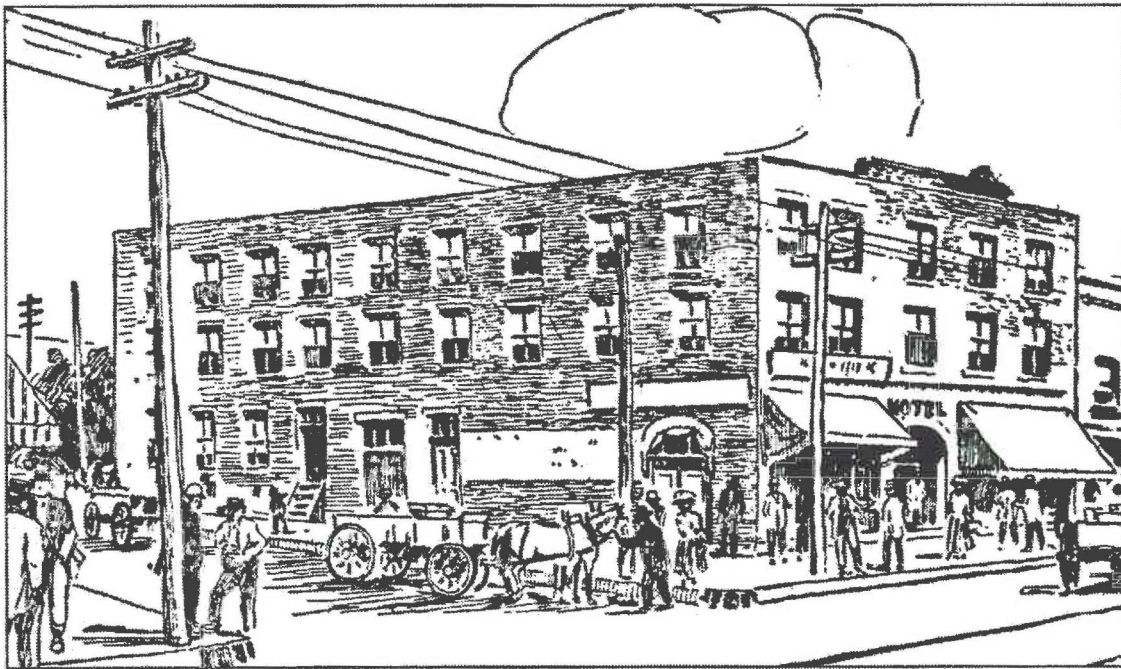


In 1842 Isaac and Christiana McCoy returned to Louisville where he helped organize the American Indian Missionary Society and served as its founding secretary until his death in 1846. He was buried in Louisville, and Christiana returned to western Missouri to live with son John Calvin. After her death in the early 1850s, she was buried in the McCoy family plot at Union Cemetery in Kansas City.

Isaac McCoy had the habit of copying all of his correspondence with others as well as keeping his incoming mail. In the 1880s son John Calvin donated the bound letter books and other manuscripts of his father's work to the Kansas State Historical Society. This large volume of reports, letters and journals provides one of the larger collections of historical sources connected with any Indian missionary activity in the United States.

William S. Worley is Director, Kansas City Regional History Institute – University of Missouri-Kansas City and also is a well-known speaker in first person impersonations of early famous Kansas Citizens.

**The Harris House Hotel in Westport  
Built in 1844, this sketch was drawn in 1912**



State Historical Society of Missouri

## John Calvin McCoy

### Orvis N. Fitts

In August 1830 a small party of six people, two on horseback and four on foot with a string of eight pack horses, passed through the public square of the frontier village of Independence, Missouri. Leading the procession was Isaac McCoy, a tall spare gentleman who was a Baptist missionary to the Indians and a surveyor. He was sent by the Secretary of the Department of War to establish the boundaries of the military reservation, Cantonment Leavenworth, and the boundaries of lands assigned to certain Indian tribes being resettled from their original tribal lands in the East. Bringing up the rear, riding a small gray horse, was Isaac's nineteen-year old son, John Calvin McCoy, destined to become the founder of Westport and one of fourteen co-founders of what would become Kansas City, Missouri.

John Calvin McCoy was born September 28, 1811, in Vincennes, Indiana, and educated at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky. As he had a flair for math, he, too, became a surveyor and joined his father as an assistant. In 1833, McCoy built a two-story log structure on what is now the northeast quadrant of Westport Road and Pennsylvania Street. With two partners, J.P. Hickman and J.H. Flournoy, he went into business to trade with the Indians and the wagon trains going west. That same year he platted, but did not file, the site of Westport and was appointed its first postmaster in 1834. The appointment changed the town name to West Port, two words. However, McCoy had submitted the one word name, and over time the name Westport, one word, prevailed.

Merchandise for McCoy's store came by steamboat up the Missouri River and was offloaded at the Wayne City landing near Independence. It took his wagons the better part of three days to make the round trip from Westport to Independence to retrieve his goods. In 1834 McCoy found a natural outcropping of rock on the south bank of the Missouri River near the foot of what is now Grand Avenue in Kansas City, Missouri. He persuaded the steamboat captain of what was perhaps the *John Hancock* to land his trade goods on that site, only a one day, eight mile round trip from the Westport store. With his business established, McCoy finally filed his Plat of Westport at the courthouse in Independence on February 13, 1835. His landing on the Missouri River became known as Westport Landing, and in 1837 he began operating a ferry across the Missouri.

The possibilities for a town at this landing site must have been obvious because McCoy joined with fourteen men to form a town company that in 1838 purchased the 257-acre Gabriel Prudhomme estate for \$4,220. The following year he platted a fifteen acre town site at the Westport Landing, and the men named it "Town of Kansas." Thomas Smart opened the first trading house, and by 1843 there was Evan's Tavern, a warehouse and two houses. Due to a question of legality in the sale of the Prudhomme estate, however, title could not be given on any of the real estate. It was not until 1846 that land sales were finalized for the Town of Kansas. In 1852 the brick forty-six room Union Hotel was built, and expansion soon began up the steep bluff south of the river. As development proceeded south, the name was changed to City of Kansas, and by 1889 it was Kansas City, Missouri.

Meanwhile, McCoy had married Virginia Chick in 1837, and their daughter, Eleanor, was the first white child born in Westport. Virginia died in the cholera epidemic of 1849, and the next year McCoy married a widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Woodson Lee. He



became a wealthy man through real estate investment, lost his fortune in the panic of 1873, repaid his debt and lived to be an esteemed elderly citizen.

McCoy wrote many historical articles for various newspapers, and his writings constitute much of what is known about the early history of Westport and Kansas City. They remained separate towns until Westport was annexed in 1897 and legally absorbed by Kansas City in 1899. Today, Westport still retains its identity, and most citizens in this far-flung metropolis still refer to Westport when patronizing shops and restaurants in the former frontier village. In his later years McCoy was quoted as saying he had “no idea of founding a great city” when, in 1833, he platted Westport. He died September 2, 1889, just a few days short of his seventy-eighth birthday.

Orvis N. Fitts is a retired naval aviator, Southwest Pacific Theater, a retired executive of Amoco Oil Co. and an extremely active historian. He has chaired or directed most area historical associations and is a member of the rest. He is regularly called upon for his knowledge of Westport, Civil War battles, early Kansas and Kansas City history.



**Westport Historical Society**

**John Calvin McCoy**

**The Reverend Thomas Johnson**  
**Controversial Missionary**  
**Barbara Magerl**

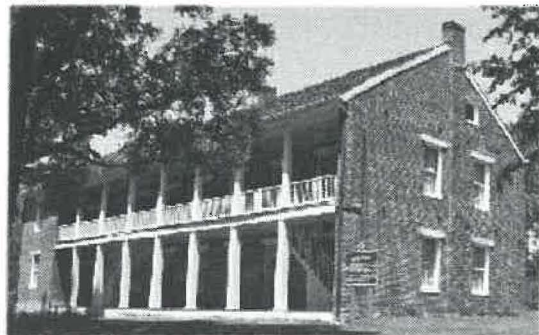
The Indian Removal Act of 1830 [See accompanying essay, "Indian Removal Act of 1830"] led to the resettlement of nearly thirty Eastern tribes, with the Shawnees receiving a reserve adjacent to the Missouri state line. Determined to "Christianize the heathens," the federal government asked the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church to set up a Shawnee mission and school. In September 1830 twenty-eight year old Reverend Thomas Johnson, considered a religious man and able administrator suited to the frontier, was appointed to do so. However, religious competition already existed.

Isaac McCoy, a successful Baptist missionary in the Great Lakes region, was appointed in 1828 a U.S. Commissioner for the Indian Removal project and was sent to survey lands west of Missouri for Indian use. In September 1830, after discussions with leading Shawnee, he left on a survey feeling assured of establishing a Baptist mission. When McCoy returned just two months later, only two Shawnee chiefs agreed to his mission. Others favored the assertive Methodists who were ready to build their mission near the Kansas River in present-day Kansas City, Kansas. Undaunted, McCoy proceeded with his original plans for a mission. [See accompanying essay, "Isaac McCoy."] By 1833, the Society of Friends (Quakers) of Indiana opened another Shawnee mission nearby.

Basic differences between the Baptists and Methodists involved religious practices and attitudes toward Indian culture. McCoy's group taught in the Indian language and operated a day school. Johnson's group wanted to separate children from parental influence by boarding the students and insisting on English in teaching and services. The low-key Quakers, who had won Indian admiration in Ohio, relied on attracting converts primarily by example. While the missions achieved some interdependence, rivalry existed. Religious bickering almost led the Shawnee to request closing the Baptist and Methodist missions, allowing only Quakers to remain.

Ambitious Johnson traveled east to propose that all tribes in the general area of his mission, not just the Shawnee, attend one school - HIS - to learn academics and useful trades. He was so persuasive that in 1838 the Methodist Board of Missions in New York agreed to donate up to \$10,000. More importantly, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agreed to pay half the construction cost of a new facility plus an annual subsidy of \$2,500. In 1839 construction began on 2,000 acres the Shawnee offered near the Missouri state line, along the Westport Route of the Santa Fe Trail. The mission became a nationally praised "Gateway to Indian Territory," a showcase for both the BIA and Methodists. It had more buildings than any Indian mission to date, including two brick schoolhouses and, allegedly, 200 students.

The slavery issue split the Methodist Church into northern and southern divisions in 1844, and the Indian missionaries then aligned themselves with the southern faction, their primary supporters. Virginia-born Johnson created controversy by keeping slaves in a territory where





anti-slavery forces hoped to prevail, a point the Quakers reported to Washington, D.C., to no avail. As white settlers moved west, they coveted previously “worthless” land, Indian Territory. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created new territories for white settlement, and most Indians were removed to a newly-defined Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma.

In the push for Kansas statehood Johnson was a leader. Whether Kansas would allow slavery was up to a vote of its few residents; and in the first election, pro-slavery Missourians crossed the line by the hundreds and won. Johnson hosted the first Kansas Territorial Legislature meeting in 1854 that enacted pro-slavery laws. This “Bogus Legislature” was quickly denounced, and Free State residents triumphed in the second, well-guarded election. This set the stage for national headlines about John Brown, William Quantrill and the border wars of Bleeding Kansas. By 1857, 130,000 acres of the territory opened to white settlement. Johnson moved his family to his 600 acre farm in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1858, leaving his son Alexander to operate the mission. Two years later the remaining Shawnee complained to the government that few students remained at the poorly operated mission and requested that school funds be used at new district schools.

The Civil War soon changed everything in the area. Faced with dissolution of a nation, Johnson proclaimed his loyalty to the Union, and his son became a Union officer. In 1862 the government annulled the M.E. Church South contract to operate the mission. Johnson himself became a victim of border violence: on January 2, 1865 he was shot and killed by unknown assailants at his farm in Kansas City.

After the war’s end, ownership of the mission buildings and grounds became a federal case. Claimants included the Shawnee Nation which gave the land for the mission, the M.E. Church North which first sponsored it, the M.E. Church South which funded most of its existence and Johnson’s heirs who claimed property had been given to Johnson during his lifetime. In 1865 the U.S. gave title to the property to Johnson’s heirs. Controversy over that decision still exists, and as recently as the mid-1900s ownership was contested in federal court.

In his years at the mission, Johnson hosted many colorful figures in the Westward Movement. Guests in 1834 included Reverend Marcus Whitman, General John Charles Fremont and Methodist missionaries Jason and Daniel Lee. Francis Parkman visited twice in 1846 and Sir William Drummond Stewart in 1848. Fremont’s final expedition in 1848 camped there overnight.

Reviled and revered, Johnson lived a colorful, sometimes turbulent life. While nothing remains of the other two missions, which closed in the 1850s, Johnson’s legacy is today a state historic site, a landmark that gives its name to a large area of the county named for him. His prominent marker in the mission cemetery reads: “He built his own monument, which shall stand in peerless beauty long after this marble has crumbled into dust, a monument of good works.”

See: Kevin J. Abing, *A Fall from Grace: Thomas Johnson and the Shawnee Indian Mission Manual Labor School 1839-1862*. Dissertation for Doctoral Degree in Philosophy, Marquette University, 1995.

*Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission*, compiled by Martha B. Caldwell, Kansas State Historical Society, 1939.

Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, Kansas State Historical Society, 1972.

Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas – A Land of Contrasts*, Forum Press, Inc., 1980.

“Kansas,” World Book Encyclopedia, Field Enterprises.

Barbara Magerl is a freelance writer and Kansas City metro area tour guide. She is a charter member, past board member and former Vice-President of OCTA and is a founding member of the Trails Head Chapter.

## **The Western Frontier Military Road**

**Lee Kroh**

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was established to move Indian tribes located east of the Mississippi River to unoccupied land west of that river. Within the next four to five years, the government signed treaties and developed regulations to promote peace between the whites and the Indians and authorized the military to enforce the regulations.

The government often was derelict in protecting Indian rights provided in the treaties, and as a result Indians became increasingly upset with traders and illegal settlers who were putting considerable pressure on their way of life. As hostility continued to build along the western frontier between Indians and whites and also between some of the Indian tribes, it became quite evident that a road was a necessity to protect the western frontier. A road also would allow troop movement between the established forts: Fort Snelling on the Mississippi near St. Paul, Minnesota established in 1819 and Fort Jesup, Louisiana on the Red River, established in 1822. Called cantonments until 1831, forts along the way were Forts Towson (1823), Gibson (1824) and Coffee (1836) in Oklahoma Territory and Fort Leavenworth (1827) and Fort Scott (1842) in Kansas Territory.

In 1836 President Andrew Jackson approved the enabling legislation for the surveying and opening of a military road from the Upper Mississippi River to the Red River in Louisiana. Eventually, appropriations were made to survey the road from Fort Leavenworth to the Arkansas River near Fort Coffee, a section of the envisioned Western Frontier Road. Members of the so-called Dimmock Survey included Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, Captain Nathan Boone and civil engineer Charles Dimmock with Company H, First U.S. Dragoons serving as escort. They set out on September 1, 1837 on the 286-mile journey, observing the route going down trails already established. They surveyed the route on the return trip to Fort Leavenworth, completing the survey in only eleven days.

In 1838 the government contracted to build a road from Spring River, in present-day northeastern Oklahoma, to Fort Leavenworth. On October 15, 1838 a contract was granted in Jackson County, Missouri "By and between Capt. G.H. Crosman, a.q.m. U.S. Army, for the United States, of the first part, and Aaron Overton, of said county and state of the second part," to build Sections B and D of the military road in Missouri. Upon completion, the road would be measured; and the sum of \$199.99 per mile would be paid for Section B and the sum of \$149.47 per mile for Section D.

### **Excerpt from the contract for Sections B and D:**

"B" Beginning at the North Bank of "Widow Parson's fork" of "Grand River", and Extending northwardly to the south Bank of "Negro Fork" of "Blue River" [between 151 and 143 Streets on Kenneth Road in Johnson County, Kansas]...Its length 16 miles and fifty-two yards;--and "D" commencing at the North Bank of "Kansas River" and extending to "Fort Leavenworth"; its length twenty-two miles and eight hundred and eighty three yards.... The Work herein Contracted for, is to be entirely completed and ready for inspection by the Thirty first day of May, 1839, and as much sooner as possible.

Excerpt, Military Road Contract: National Archives Records, College Park, Maryland.

Lee Kroh is a member of OCTA and its Trails Head Chapter, the Santa Fe Trails Association and its Wet-Dry Routes and Missouri River Outfitters chapters and a charter member of the Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association where he presently serves as its Treasurer and Research, Mapping, Marking Chair.



## **Rendezvous on the Trail – Sapling Grove**

### **Craig Crease**

In the midst of a densely populated Johnson County, Kansas suburban subdivision lies one of the famed campgrounds on the Santa Fe, Oregon and California trails. A bit of parkland and a meandering creek exist, just a trace of what was once open prairie.

In his 1827 survey of the Santa Fe Trail George Sibley charted the road link by link, chain by chain. Measuring from the Missouri state line, nine miles south of the mouth of the Kansas River, he proceeded several miles to:

...a large mound No. 4. passing a smaller md.-No. 4 has a tree in it, and is S° 32-46 ½ chs. from "Sapling Grove" where there is an excellent fountain Spring, & a very good place to camp.

Descriptions of the topography of Sapling Grove include that of William Gray in 1838 who observed that at Sapling Grove a little stream ran northwest into the Big Blue River in Missouri. Gray was half right: the stream does run northwest at Sapling Grove but is a branch of Turkey Creek that actually runs into the Kansas River.

Dr. F.A. Wislizenus had this to say in 1839:

...[Sapling Grove]...in a little hickory wood, with fresh spring water....[The company] marched over the broad Santa Fe road, beaten out by the caravans.

The most compelling feature of Sapling Grove may be the role it played as the rendezvous point for the 1841 Bidwell-Bartleson party, generally recognized as the first organized overland emigration party to the Pacific coast.

...it is recommended that all companies and individuals intending to so emigrate, rendezvous at the Sapling Grove on the old Santa Fe' route, about nine miles west of the Missouri State line, against the 10<sup>th</sup> of May next....

This group of more than sixty departed from Sapling Grove on May 12, 1841. At Soda Springs the party split, and thirty-two men, one woman and one infant continued on to California.

Although that one event alone substantiates the historical importance of Sapling Grove, the campground also has other important ties to the trails. Joel Walker and his family stayed at Sapling Grove in the spring of 1840 before continuing on to Oregon and subsequently on to California. In May 1843, John C. Fremont most likely stayed at Sapling Grove as he departed on his second exploring expedition that led him into California. By 1849 hundreds of forty-niners would have passed by or stopped at Sapling Grove on their way to the gold fields, although by that time the name "Sapling Grove" had vanished into obscurity.

Visitors to the campground site today are generally there to play in Comanche Park at 83<sup>rd</sup> and Grant in Overland Park, Kansas. Only a few deliberately find their way to the site to pause and remember.

Sibley file-Field notes, May-July, 1827, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

W.H. Gray, Journal, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 29.

F.A. Wislizenus, "A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839."

*Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, Vol. 5, London: Fisher, Son and Company, p. 229-236.

Craig Crease has been researching trails in the greater Kansas City area for many years. In 1999 he was the first recipient of the Marc Simmons Writing Award from the Santa Fe Trails Association.

## The Great Migration of 1843

John Mark Lambertson

The floodgates of migration to Oregon and California opened in 1843, the year of "The Great Migration." The "lever" opening those gates was the economic depression that began in the United States in 1839. Falling prices for agricultural products hit rural communities especially hard, and the prospect of free, fertile land prompted many farmers to gamble with their futures and head west in the spring of 1843.

Two features dictated the best place to "jump off" from the edge of American civilization – a river and a town. The easiest way to travel was by water, making the Missouri River an all-important aquatic "highway" to the western frontier. Second, a community was necessary to outfit the emigrants with wagons, animals to pull them, foodstuffs, tools and other essential items. Independence, Missouri fit the bill perfectly.

Founded in 1827, Independence quickly became the eastern terminus of the great trading trail with Santa Fe in Mexico. Not only was Independence just off the Missouri River and only ten miles from the border with Indian lands, it also had numerous blacksmiths, wagon makers, farriers, merchants and livestock men. Nearby Westport, a "port" still a little farther to the "west" also was cashing in on its geographical location.

By mid-May nearly a thousand people and more than 120 wagons were scattered haphazardly around Independence and Westport, and fliers were circulated inviting all who planned to go to Oregon to meet on May 18th. The gathering was made at Fitzhugh's Mill, located along Indian Creek southwest of Westport near the state line. Over the following two days the Oregon Emigrating Company was officially organized, complete with inspections of equipment, written rules and a plan established for democratically electing officers. The leadership would not be selected until the party crossed the Kansas River several days later, giving emigrants time to become acquainted with each other.

Among those who participated in the organization of the company are names now famous in the annals of the American West: Jesse Applegate, James Nesmith, David Waldo, Peter Burnett and Dr. Marcus Whitman. On Sunday, May 21, 1843 the many wagons rolled across the western line of Missouri and the United States to embark on their adventure. The point where most of them congregated in Indian Territory was called "Elm Grove" campground, near present-day Highway 56 and Cedar Creek, although the "grove" consisted of only two trees and several bushes.

Two more days travel brought them to the Wakarusa River, whose steep banks were navigated with some difficulty by lowering the wagons down with ropes and pulling them up the other side. Another few days brought them to a rain-swollen Kansas River, too dangerous to ford. Tempers already were beginning to fray within the newly created "rolling commune," and the company showed signs of splintering as efforts to cross the river were attempted. Officers, who might have restored order, would not be elected until after the crossing. A ferry was built; and after much tedious labor, wagons were ferried across one by one. A capsized raft and one near drowning presented additional somber reality to the fractious company of independent-minded travelers as they struggled to form a community. Once across the Kansas River, the party regrouped, turned west again to continue on to the Oregon Country and into the pages of history.

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## **Prelude To A Tragedy**

### **The Reed-Donner Party**

#### **Patricia Traffas**

The desperate struggle for survival against massive forces of nature by the members of this wagon train is well documented and under continuing study yet still leaves a strong flavor of tragedy and grief. But there is so much more to their story – it is a story of hope, of dreams, of trail government, of decisions made and of the fortitude that imbued those who traveled the western trails.

Early in 1846, James Frazier Reed made plans to take his family west to California. His business in Springfield, Illinois, had been declining, although he had amassed a considerable fortune as a railroad man and furniture maker and was a leading member of his community at the age of forty-six. His wife, Margaret, in frail health, and their four children would accompany him. His elderly mother-in-law, Sarah Keyes, although blind and deaf, was determined to travel with them in hopes of reuniting with a son, Caddan, who had gone west two years earlier. The Reeds outfitted their wagons in luxurious fashion, even constructing one with a second floor where Mrs. Keyes could ride in comfort on her featherbed. Reed employed neighbors and teamsters to accompany his family, their wagons and stock for the westward journey.

A rendezvous on April 15, 1846, in Springfield, Illinois, found a total of thirty-two persons ready to travel to California. Two brothers, George and Jacob Donner, also from Sangamon County, Illinois, prepared their families to join the Reeds. The Donner brothers were both in their sixties and wealthy in their own right. Elizabeth accompanied her husband, Jacob, as did two sons from his earlier marriage and their own five children. George Donner traveled with his third wife Tamsen, two daughters from his second marriage and three daughters from Tamsen's previous marriage. Each Donner family had three wagons and, like the Reeds, required a number of teamsters to help out. A gunsmith from England, twenty-eight-year old John Denton, joined the crew. Tamsen Donner filled a wagon with books for instruction, paints, botanical notes and the like in hopes of establishing a seminary in distant California, as well as for instruction of her own family along the way. The governor of Illinois provided a letter of character and credentials for James Reed to carry. Reed was the organizer of the venture and had read and studied *The Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California* that Lansford Hastings had written the year before.

In the first week of May 1846, the Illinois contingent joined with many others in Independence, Missouri, planning to go west. Colonel William Henry (Owl) Russell was organizing a large wagon train, and the Reeds and Donners decided to join them. Among others preparing to go were Patrick and Peggy Breen with their seven children and Patrick Dolan, a bachelor, all who had roots in Ireland. The Breens drove a herd of horses and milk cows and traveled with three wagons pulled by oxen. With preparations complete, the wagons departed early the morning of May 12, 1846 from Independence to rendezvous with the larger emigrant company.

It was inevitable that wagon trains would organize, splinter off, reorganize and eventually stabilize into a cohesive unit. This occurred a few days out from Independence for the Reed and Donner families. There they met former Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs and joined his wagon train, making a total of seventy-two wagons. Some form of governing leadership was necessary, and interested men gave eloquent "stump" speeches, each extolling his own virtues and vying for the right to lead. This went on for several

nights until at last a leader was chosen: Owl Russell. It would take a firm leader to overcome challenges ahead. The party was faced with drought on the plains, little grass left after earlier wagon trains passed, Kansa Indians war-like along the trail and the Mormons (also headed west) who carried no love for Governor Boggs who had all but driven them from the State of Missouri.

Oxen died from oppressive heat, the travelers noted several graves adjacent to the trail and they were only two weeks out from Independence. On May 28 the party camped near the flooding Big Blue River, waiting for the water to reside. Near the river a small spring fed a branch running into the Big Blue. Edwin Bryant, soon famous for publishing in 1849 his recollection, *What I Saw in California: Being the Journal of a Tour by the Emigrant Route and South Pass*, and a member of this emigrant train, named it Alcove Spring. James Reed carved his name in a boulder near the spring. A black and white photo taken in 1931 distinctly shows these initials, "JFR," and the faint initials still were visible in the fall of 1999. While encamped there, on May 29 Sarah Keyes died. A lock of her hair was cut and braided, a custom of the times, and she was buried under an oak tree sixty yards off the trail at Alcove Spring. The English gunsmith engraved a stone to read:

**God in his love/and charity has/called in this/beautiful valley/a pioneer mother**

Mrs. Keyes was not to see her son Caddan but was spared future tribulations. The braided lock of hair was found clutched in Patty Reed's fist when she was rescued in 1847 in the snow of the Sierra Nevada.

The daughter of a Revolutionary War patriot, Mrs. Keyes was a Real Daughter. The Arthur Barrett Chapter of the DAR erected a monument to her memory near Alcove Spring.

Patricia Traffas is a member of OCTA and its Trails Head Chapter. While State Regent of the Kansas DAR she obtained funding and oversaw placement of historical markers along the Lewis and Clark Trail in Leavenworth, Atchison and Doniphan counties. [See photo page 43] She currently is serving the National Society DAR as Vice-President General.



## Who Was This Man, Joe B. Chiles?

Joanne Chiles Eakin

Irving Stone called him “one of the unforgettable giants in the monumental saga of the winning of America’s far west.” George R. Stewart named Chiles “a notable in the history of the trail.” Helen Giffen called him a “trail-blazing pioneer.” Joseph Ballinger Chiles lived in a time and with a heritage that allowed him to live a life of unique adventure.

Joe B. was born July 16, 1810, in Clark County, Kentucky, the eighth of nine sons born to Henry and Sarah Ballinger Chiles; and he grew to be a physically striking man with fiery red hair. Joe B. married Mary Ann (Polly) Stevenson in 1830, and that same year they moved to Jackson County. On January 19, 1836, Mary Ann died, leaving Joe B. with four small children to raise. He moved them into his mother’s home and then, after her death, to the home of his brother, Joel. When a call for volunteers to fight in the Seminole Indian War in Florida came, Joe B. and his brothers James and Henry joined the 800 Jackson County volunteers. Only 151 would return to be discharged at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis on March 18, 1838, among them Joe B.

Late in February 1841, Joe B. was in a tavern - probably Yoacham’s Tavern in Westport - listening to Antoine Robidoux, trapper and mountain man, recount his recent experiences on a trip to California. Many others were there, including William Baldridge and John Bartleson. After much discussion with his friend Baldridge, Joe B. enthusiastically began preparations for becoming a part of the first overland wagon train to California. Baldridge was corresponding with Dr. John Marsh who had been in California since 1836, and Marsh assured him taking a wagon train to California could be done. Baldridge, at the last minute, was unable to go so Joe B. joined John Bartleson, Michael Nye, Charles Hopper, Robert Rickman and John Bidwell. On May 23, 1841, with his wagon and two men, Joe B. caught up with the wagon train already on the trail. John Bartleson was elected captain. All of the thirty-one men, one woman and her child completed the journey, arriving at Sutter’s Fort on November 4, 1841.

After traveling around northern California, by January 1842 Joe B. had chosen a site in the Napa Valley region for his new home and named it Chiles Valley. Part of the agreement to obtain this California land grant was the construction of a flour mill in his valley. With plans in mind to establish the mill and begin farming his fertile valley, he joined thirteen men at Sutter’s Fort in April for their return journey to Independence, arriving September 9, 1842.

Joe B. spent the winter planning to return to California in the spring of 1843, and he and Baldridge bought machinery for the mill. By May 20, 1843, at Fitzhugh’s Mill some twelve miles west of Independence, the thirty men, six women and three mule-drawn wagons of Joe B.’s party headed west, a part of what has become known as the “Great Migration.” [See accompanying essay, “Great Migration of 1843”] While camped at Elm Grove, John Charles Fremont met the Chiles train. With Fremont was Thomas Fitzpatrick, an old friend of Joe B., who was interested in hearing about the 1841 wagon trip.

At Fort Bridger Joe B. met his long-time Jackson County friend, Joseph Walker. For \$300, Walker agreed to guide them into California by way of Owens Valley, an easier wagon route across the Sierra Nevada. However, he eventually separated from Joe B.’s train, and Joe B. blazed a most difficult route into California via the Malheur River, finally arriving at Sutter’s Fort on November 10, 1843. The mill parts had to be

abandoned before the climb over the mountains. Early in 1844, Joe B. reached his rancho named Catacula, and he and Baldrige began building the flour mill and an adobe house. After becoming a citizen of Mexico on November 9, 1844, he applied for a grant of two square leagues at Catacula.

By the spring of 1847, with the adobe completed and the mill running at full steam, Joe B. decided to return to Missouri to bring his four children to their new home at Rancho Catacula. For this trip he went to Sutter's Fort and joined Commodore Robert Field Stockton's company. By November 3, 1847, he was back in Independence.

The return wagon train to California included his children, his brothers Christopher and William and his nephew Isaac. Joe B. could not have imagined what had happened in January 1848 near Sutter's Fort while he was in Independence. Henry William Bigler recorded in his diary: "This day some kind of mettle was found in the tail of the race that looks like goald..." With this find, the entire future of California would change.

Joe B.'s mill prospered, and his brothers and nephew came to Catacula to help because Baldrige and the other workers had left for the mines. In 1853, with his family grown and business steady, the old restlessness overtook Joe B. - it was time to cross the country to Independence once again. This return to Jackson County in 1853 proved to be an eventful one: he met Margaret Jane Garnhart, and they were married on December 25.

On May 1, 1854, Joe B. headed a large wagon train whose loose stock included more than one thousand sheep, horses, mules and the first Durham cattle to enter California. Another first on this trip was the birth of a child on his train - his own son William born September 17, 1854, at the sink of the Humbolt River near present-day Winnemucca, Nevada. By early October, Joe B. was once again back in his adopted homeland, and this time he would stay.

Joe B. made seven trips between Jackson County and California. He established the first flourmill in northern California on his rancho in Chiles Valley. He was a property owner, agriculturist, owned fine vineyards, was a great hunter, raised fine Missouri mules and cattle and distilled whiskey. His group of friends included such luminaries as John Marsh, George Yount, John C. Fremont and General Vallejo. Respected by all, he was elected vice-president of the Society of California Pioneers from 1850-1853. Sadly, he left no records of his many journeys and experiences except a few letters. He died in Napa County, California, on June 25, 1885, and was buried in the St. Helena cemetery. Margaret Jane died July 17, 1900, and is buried at his side.

See: Irving Stone, *Men to Match My Mountains*.

George R. Stewart, *The California Trail*.

Helen S. Giffen, *Trail Blazing Pioneer*.

Bil Gilbert, *Westering Man, The Life of Joseph Walker*.

Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West*.

Joanne C. Eakin, *Pioneer Letters of the Chiles Family and Walter Chiles of Jamestown and Some of His Descendants*. Manuscripts, Chiles, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

Joanne Chiles Eakin is a member of numerous historical societies, a genealogist of note and edits both *The Kansas City Genealogist* and *The Blue & Grey Chronicle*, a Civil War newspaper. She has published more than thirty books on these subjects.



**Were It Not For Jessie...**  
**John Charles Fremont, Hero of the West**  
**William Bullard**

John Charles Fremont (1813-1890) is by all odds the nation's most puzzling hero. We recall him as the "Pathfinder," but he never explored any part of the continent that was not already fairly well known. He invariably lost most of his scientific collections. He seemed to be incapable of following orders. He was reckless to an extreme. He often seemed to be governed by a "Will to Fail" yet he was a superb cartographer. Above all, he was the husband of Jessie Benton Fremont, a wonderful writer. Fremont himself didn't write – writing gave him a nosebleed, he said. Instead, he paced around the room dictating to Jessie who turned disjointed tales into great American literature – romantic, thrilling and the very stuff of legend. Without Jessie, Kit Carson would be an obscure mountain man; and John Charles Fremont would be a cartographer, disgraced military officer and failed politician. But *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains* (1845) and *Geographical Memoir upon Upper California* (1848) made Fremont and Carson into American legends and Thomas Hart Benton into the triumphant voice of Manifest Destiny.

Fremont didn't graduate from Charleston College in 1831 – he was expelled a few months early for "incurable negligence." Joel Poinsett (for whom the flower is named), just returned from his ambassadorship to Mexico, secured for Fremont a post as mathematics instructor aboard the *USS Natchez* that cruised to South America in 1833. In 1836 Fremont served as surveyor for a projected railroad through the Smoky Mountains and that winter surveyed the Cherokee lands of North Carolina and Georgia. In 1838, again with the assistance of Poinsett, he traveled as assistant to Joseph N. Nicollet on a survey of Minnesota and the Dakotas. This experience was invaluable to Fremont, for Nicollet was a distinguished cartographer and natural scientist.

Returning with Nicollet to Washington, D.C. to prepare their maps, Fremont met his third patron, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, the nation's most ardent western expansionist. A social visit to Benton's home introduced Fremont to the Senator's four daughters, and Fremont and the youngest, sixteen-year-old Jessie, fell madly in love. Senator Benton ended the courtship by having Fremont sent to the Des Moines River to collect additional information for Nicollet. Fremont returned secretly six months later, and he and Jessie eloped on October 19, 1841.

One can only imagine the pleading until Senator Benton gave in and got Fremont a commission in 1842 to map the Oregon Trail to South Pass. Benton sent along his own twelve-year-old son, Randolph, to show that even children could make the journey west. Fremont engaged Kit Carson and expanded his charge to include an exploration of the Rocky Mountains. The group included Charles Preuss, a German cartographer who also was trained in botany, geology and in mapping. Preuss would join Fremont in his first three expeditions but hated the "childish" Fremont from the very start and became angrier each trip. Fortunately for Fremont, the Preuss diary, written in German was only recently published.

Fremont's route was well known to many Americans of that time, and his only discovery was the "tallest mountain in the Rockies," Fremont Peak, in the Wind River mountains. In fact, there are more than thirty peaks taller than Fremont Peak, but a romantic painting showing Fremont waving the American flag on the peak was a staple illustration in American history textbooks for the next one hundred years. The trip also

marked the first use of a rubber raft, destroyed when Fremont lost much of the expedition's notes and scientific gear, including the first camera in the West, while trying to shoot rapids. According to Preuss, the loss of the camera was insignificant, since Fremont couldn't take a decent picture anyway.

On his second expedition (1843) Fremont tried to follow the Arkansas River as a possible path through the Rockies but had to use South Pass. Since nothing was heard from him for months while he explored from the Great Salt Lake to Fort Vancouver to Sutter's Fort then home via the Spanish Trail, he enjoyed a hero's welcome upon his return – and a good thing. He had requisitioned a howitzer before leaving St. Louis, and he had been ordered back to Washington, D.C. because his commanding officer believed that Fremont intended to illegally enter Mexican Territory. Jessie received and opened the order just as Fremont moved out of St. Louis. She suppressed it and sent word to Fremont to move out on the trail as quickly as possible. As it turned out, Fremont did intend to enter Mexican Territory; but the howitzer had been used only to kill buffaloes for amusement, and it was abandoned in the Sierra Nevada. Again, Fremont's second expedition turned up no unknown information, although Brigham Young may have been inspired by Fremont's flowery description of the Great Basin.

In 1845 Fremont led a third expedition to survey the Arkansas and Red rivers, but instead he led his party straight to Sutter's Fort. The Mexican government, suspicious of a party of sixty troopers studying local flora, ordered him out of California. He got as far north as Klamath Lake when an American officer caught up with him in 1846. In July Fremont recaptured Monterey from Mexican insurgents and by January had recaptured all of Southern California. Commodore Robert Stockton, senior commander in California, who had advanced Fremont to the rank of lieutenant colonel, then appointed him governor. However, when Stockton's successor, Commodore William Shubrick, accepted what Stockton had denied, that General Stephen Kearny was Fremont's commanding officer, Fremont was conducted to Washington, D.C. He was found guilty of disobedience and mutiny and was dismissed from the army.

During the winter of 1848 Fremont attempted to cross the Rockies along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel with a privately financed expedition. It was a disaster; one-third of his thirty-three men perished, and the rest were lucky to reach Taos. Fremont organized another expedition in Taos to reach California by way of the Gila River in order to mine gold on his Mariposa grant.

Fremont's life over the next forty years was full of considerable achievement coupled with consequent disaster. He served as U.S. Senator from California in 1850 and 1851. In 1853 he led an expedition in search of a southern railway route to the Pacific. In 1856 he became the first presidential candidate of the Republican Party and was defeated by James Buchanan. He bankrupted himself on his Mariposa grant. With the outbreak of the Civil War he was made commander of the Department of the West, declared martial law in Missouri, unilaterally freed the slaves in Missouri and was relieved of his command by Lincoln. He was assigned another command but resigned when he was placed under a commander junior to him. During the 1860s and 1870s he bankrupted himself in railroad development. He was governor of the Territory of Arizona in 1878-1883. Thereafter, he lived in New York City, Washington, D.C. and in Los Angeles. In 1890 Congress placed him on a pension, and he died three months later.

William Bullard is a retired Independence city planning director and city manager and former director of the National Frontier Trails Center.



## **The Westward Travels of the Hudspeths**

### **Joanne Chiles Eakin**

Webster identifies entrepreneurs as those "...who undertake to carry out any enterprise." That the Hudspeths did. From hauling water in barrels in the middle of the night in a Kentucky land deal to raising fighting cocks, race horses and hound dogs in Missouri to planting rushes on an unclaimed island in the middle of the Missouri River, the Hudspeths were premier businessmen. They also crisscrossed the land between Independence, Missouri, and California many times in search of new fortunes. The Hudspeth name is multiple and confusing in western trail history. How many Hudspeths were there, and which ones traveled to the Far West?

William Hudspeth, father of this clan of travelers, was born in North Carolina May 1, 1778. He along with other members of the family moved to Warren County, Kentucky, and in 1802 he married Tabitha Beall with whom he would raise eight sons and three daughters. In the years after the War of 1812, newcomers began filling Kentucky, and William decided to sell his land and move further west. Jackson County, Missouri, was sparsely settled and had fertile soil so in 1826, together with his son Thomas and close friend James Hambright, William headed west. Each of the men purchased 200 acres for \$1.25 per acre near what would become known as Blue Mills before returning to Kentucky. William intended to return to Missouri the following year; but his wife, Tabitha, died, and the family did not make the move until 1828.

On his land, just off present-day Missouri Highway 24, he built a large two-story log house with porch and ell, later covered with walnut siding. One of the few homes in the area to survive the Civil War, it burned after being struck by lightning in 1939. Before he died he gave each of his surviving children one hundred acres and a fine horse. The Blue Mills Record Book, under the date August 18, 1867, lists "William Hudspeth - to plank for making coffin for W. Hudspeth & etc. \$5.00. By making coffin \$1.50."

The eleven children of William and Tabitha were Nathan, Thomas, Sylvia, Joseph, Missouri, Silas, Benoni, George, Robert, Joel and Malinda. Six of these grown children would travel to California; only four would return to Jackson County.

**Benoni Morgan Hudspeth** traveled in 1845 with John Charles Fremont's third western expedition and served as second lieutenant and later captain in the famous Bear Flag War in California. In 1849 Benoni organized the Hudspeth wagon train; and John J. Myers, son-in-law of Nathan Hudspeth who had traveled west with the Chiles party in 1843, served as guide. The Independence newspaper was filled with stories of the excitement about this Jackson County caravan, and friends and relatives were eager to join up. Nearly 250 persons left that April, many of them families with children. Benoni is credited with opening a new route from Sheep Point to the City of Rocks in present-day Idaho, now called the Hudspeth Cutoff. The trip was uneventful except for taking the cutoff that proved to save the travelers only a few miles and not any effort. It seemed a straight line, however, and over the years thousands of wagons would follow in the tracks of the Hudspeth train. Benoni died in California on November 10, 1850, and was buried in Sacramento.

**Thomas Jefferson Hudspeth** was the oldest son to make that 1849 trip to California. He sent a letter dated October 23, 1849, to his wife stating "...I am in tolerable good health. I have been sick and very low with Tiphos fever though I have recovered my health again." Thomas also gave instructions for the maintenance of his Jackson County property, listed prices for various commodities in California and wrote

“Silas, Ben, George and Robert came through in good health.” He described the difficulties of the overland trip:

“I would advise all my friends for to stay there and never attempt to Cross the mountains, it is a long Teadious trip and I consider it very unhealthy one. I would say from what I gathered from men who have just got through that there must be between three and five thousand graves from Independence to California. A man that has a family ort never to think of coming on this trip. Tell John Hambright not to even think of coming but I am here now and I have no doubt but I will make enough to do me the balance of my life, that is plenty. But if I was in Missouri and I knew as much about the hardships of the journey as I now do, I would not make the trip for all the gold in California.”

Less than a month after writing the letter, Thomas Jefferson Hudspeth was dead, probably of typhus or typhoid fever.

**Silas, Joel, George and Robert Hudspeth** also joined the 1849 Hudspeth wagon train and returned to Jackson County with a significant amount of gold and silver in a little morocco trunk. Joel, George and Robert made another trip to California in 1854; and, remembering Thomas’ need to replace two oxen at a cost of \$90 on the first trip, they drove a herd of sixty, two-year old steers. These would be broken as needed and sold, at considerable profit, to outfits stalled along the trail. The little trunk was filled once again when they returned home. It is said that the Hudspeth men never touched a shovel handle while in California. The money brought home in that little trunk on the 1849 trip was the result of the labor of others, obtained mainly from gambling and trading.

The Hudspeth name loomed large in the early history of Jackson County with descendants continuing into this century. The name also is engraved in western trail history, a shortcut in name only but a famous name.

See: A Memorial & Biographical Record of Kansas City & Jackson Co., 1896.

*History of Jackson County*, 1881.

W.Z. Hickman, *History of Jackson County*, 1920.

Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West*.

George R. Stewart, *The California Trail*.

Irving Stone, *Men to Match My Mountains*.

Anna G. Ford, *Through the Years With the Hudspeths*.

Hudspeths & Hambrights of Missouri, mss. by Mrs. Paul M. Campbell.

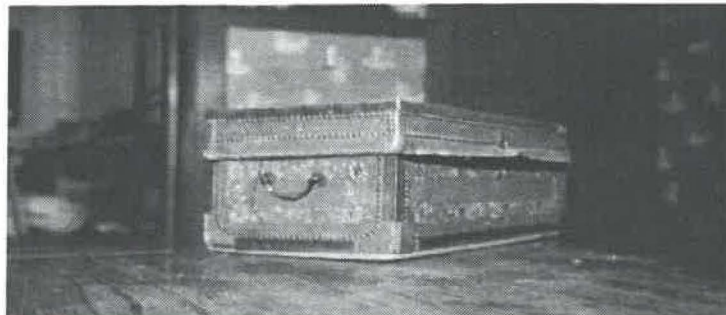
Fremont records and U.S. Army records in the National Archives, Washington, D.C..

Letters and records in Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

Research files of Joanne Chiles Eakin.

Joanne Chiles Eakin is a member of numerous historical societies, a genealogist of note and edits both *The Kansas City Genealogist* and *The Blue & Grey Chronicle*, a Civil War newspaper. She has published more than thirty books on these subjects.

### **The Hudspeth brothers’ trunk now is at the National Frontier Trails Center in Independence, Missouri**





## Steamboating on the Missouri

### Harmon Mothershead

Steamboating on the Missouri River was always hazardous, generally profitable and absolutely essential for the development of the trans-Mississippi West. The first steamboat to ply the Missouri in trade was the *Independence*, which left St. Louis on May 15, 1819. It arrived to great fanfare at the town of Old Franklin eleven days later, then proceeded up the river some 250 miles to Chariton before returning to St. Louis on May 28, 1819. At that same time the Yellowstone Expedition, a federally sponsored exploration to determine the navigability of the Missouri River, left St. Louis on its mission. Three of their four steamboats left early in June: the *R.M. Johnson*, the *Expedition* and the *Thomas Jefferson*. The latter hit a snag in the Osage Chute rapids at the mouth of the Osage River and sank. The other two ascended the river to near present-day Atchison, Kansas, on September 18, went into winter quarters and returned to St. Louis the next spring. The fourth steamboat, the *Western Engineer*, was smaller and lighter with a draft of only twenty inches. It left St. Louis a few days later, arrived in Old Franklin on June 24, in Atchison August 28 and proceeded up the river to Council Bluffs where it went into winter quarters.

The Missouri River determined the location of fur-trading posts, military forts, Indian agencies and jumping-off places for overland travel from the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the completion of the transcontinental railroads. Steamboat traffic on the Missouri developed slowly in the 1820s; but as the number of towns and population along the river grew, and as Far Western trade increased, so did steamboat traffic. The first regular service between St. Louis and Ft. Leavenworth began in 1829. During the next two decades the number of steamboats operating on the lower Missouri probably reached nearly one hundred with most of them running a regular schedule on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Steamboating on the Missouri River was a new experience for boat operators. They soon discovered, just as keelboaters had, that cargoes should be loaded forward so if the boat struck a sandbar the cargo could be shifted to the rear and the boat, hopefully, backed off the sandbar. A device made of spars and capstans - called a grasshopper - was employed for the same purpose. Winds, particularly on the upper Missouri, caused steamboats to anchor close to a bank, bluff, timber or any other possible shelter to prevent stacks from being blown off. On the lower Missouri the current sometimes was so strong that normal operations could make no headway. Captains often tied the safety valves down in order to get maximum power, only to blow the boilers to pieces along with the boat, its passengers and cargo.

The plush years of Missouri River steamboating were 1845-1870. Many engaged in ferrying operations at numerous locations along the river. Some fifty boats conducted regular trade between St. Louis and St. Joseph and points along the way during the decade of the 1850s. Boat owners listed their boats with agencies that arranged all matters of commerce, cargo and schedules. Four agencies in St. Louis - Wall and Scott, T.H. Larkin and Co., Thomas Lapsley Co. and R.F. Sass - dominated the trade. So great was the competition that all passenger rates were reduced to \$7.00 per trip by 1855. Freight rates were far less stable than passenger rates. They varied from port to port, season to season, year to year and according to type of cargo. Boats on the lower Missouri maintained a regular schedule, but north of the mouth of the Platte River schedules were determined more by the conditions of the river than by the nature of the

trade. Ice, ice blocks, floods, droughts, winds, currents, depths of water and fuel sources determined the movement of boats along the upper Missouri.

As the eastern railroads reached the Missouri River and the number of western travelers and emigrants increased so did the steamboat traffic. In the decades of the 1850s and 1860s the industry operated at maximum capacity. Depending on the size of the boat 100 to 250 passengers might crowd the decks while seventy to 150 tons of freight filled the lower decks and cargo holds. Oxen, mules, horses, wagons, wagon parts, military goods, mining machinery and equipment, annuities to Indian agencies, trade goods, clothing, whiskey, molasses, food stuffs of all sorts, printing presses, in fact nearly everything imaginable made up the cargo. Passengers were just as dissimilar: mountain men, military personnel, government officials, emigrants, Mormons, Indians, missionaries, gamblers, miners, adventurers, opportunists and speculators all were to be found.

The pinnacle of Missouri River steamboat navigation probably was 1858. Sixty regular packets served Kansas City, St. Joseph, Omaha, Council Bluffs and numerous other ports. However, competition for the delivery of freight and passengers was just around the corner. The completion of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railway to St. Joseph in 1859 was the first in a series of blows that began the slow decline in total traffic upon the river which culminated in the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad to Bismarck in 1872. In its day, steamboating on the Missouri River was one of the most exciting, adventurous and profitable businesses in the history of the State of Missouri, but the combination of railroads and their bridges brought this remarkable era to a close.

See: William E. Lass, *A History of Steamboating on the Upper Missouri River*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962.)

Edgar A. Holt, "Missouri River Transportation in the Expansion of the West," *Missouri Historical Review*, XX, 1926.

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Courtesy State Historical Society of Missouri

*The Saint Joseph*



## Parkville, Missouri

### Harold Smith

When Missouri was admitted as a state in 1821, its western boundary ran due north from its southern border and intersected with the point where the Kansas River flowed into the Missouri River, a point now between the two Kansas Cities. The boundary line continued straight north from that intersection to where the Missouri River began angling to the west. The land between the western boundary and the river was Indian Territory. Negotiations in 1836-1837 led to what was called the Platte Purchase in which this land passed from Indian Territory to the state of Missouri.

The portion of this territory that became Platte County was good land for growing tobacco and hemp, and white settlers rapidly moved into the area. Among those occupying the site of present-day Parkville by the end of 1837 were David English and George S. Park. English had settled at a natural landing on the Missouri River and built a warehouse nearby. Park, who was absent in Texas for much of the following two years, acquired that property from English in the fall of 1840 and immediately established a post office under the name Parkville. However, a plat for the town was not completed and the first lots sold until 1844. The town grew slowly at first; but Indian trade was a profitable source of business, and Parkville was in a position to benefit from westward emigration.

Park was one of the founders of the first church in 1845, which continues today as the Parkville Presbyterian Church. Soon, other denominations organized churches, and schools were established. By 1853, with a sawmill, lumberyard and brickyard in operation and an abundance of building stone available, the log cabins that once dotted the landscape gave way to more modern structures. There were new grocery, drug, dry goods and furniture stores, a flour mill and warehouses, offices for doctors and lawyers and shops for blacksmiths, carpenters, saddlers, shoemakers, tailors, tinsmiths, wagon makers and other tradesmen. East of town next to the White Alloe creek, George Park erected a hotel. Here he began publishing the town's first newspaper, the *Industrial Luminary*, in 1853. It continued until 1855 when its opinions led some pro-slavery sympathizers from the northern part of the county to march into town and throw the press into the river.

Traffic on the Missouri River was heavy in the mid-1850s, and Parkville was one of the stops for the delivery and shipment of supplies. On September 5, 1856, the steamboat *Arabia* slammed into an uprooted walnut tree lying just beneath the surface. Its hull was pierced, and the boat flooded and quickly sank. All passengers survived and were taken the short distance to Parkville and housed in Park's hotel.

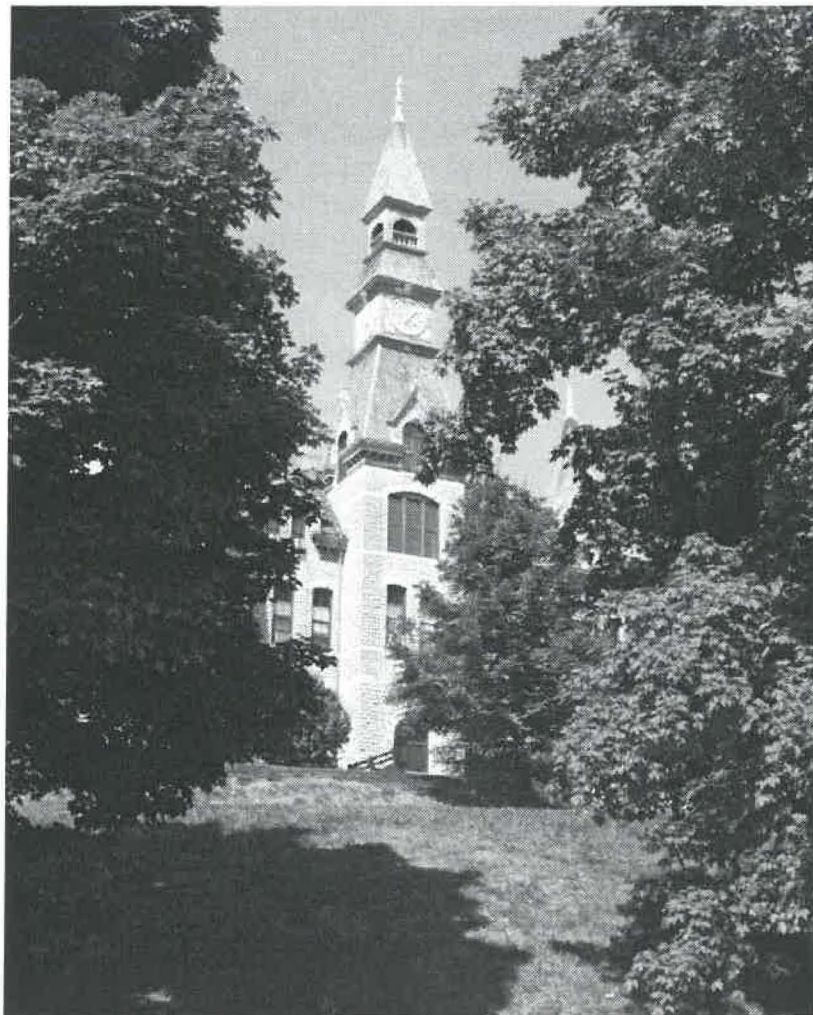
George Park observed the importance of the coming of railroads as the nation's population moved west and was instrumental in obtaining a charter for the Platte County Railroad in 1853 and the Parkville and Grand River Railroad in 1857. The Civil War interrupted plans for the latter, but the former eventually evolved into the Missouri Valley Railroad that brought service to Parkville in 1869 and a boost to its economy. The town, which had declined during the war years, made little progress toward economic recovery, however, until after the founding of Park College in 1875.

Park earlier had tried to establish a college but was unable to bring it to fruition. In his later years he made his home in Illinois, but he retained his extensive land holdings and his desire to start a college in Parkville. Introduced to John A. McAfee in 1875, Park provided the means for McAfee to move from Highland, Kansas, along with a number of students, to establish what became a self-help work-study college chartered in 1879. This

program of work and study prevailed for poor students for more than three-fourths of a century. The building whose spires rise above the campus is Mackay Hall. Built almost entirely by student labor between 1887 and 1893 and with stone quarried on campus, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites.

The Missouri River channel changed many times over the years until it finally was stabilized in the 1930s. The present-day river front park bears the name English Landing Park in honor of the David English family who first occupied the town site. This land itself did not exist in their day as the edge of the river at that time was as far inland as the present-day railroad tracks. Many other changes have occurred in Parkville; but several homes built in the nineteenth century have survived, and a number of equally old downtown Parkville buildings continue to offer services and retail wares to a new century of customers.

Harold Smith is Book Review Editor for *Overland Journal*, an officer of the Friends of the National Frontier Trails Center and Librarian Emeritus, Park University, Parkville.



**Mackay Hall**



## **Historic Weston, Missouri**

### **“Boom Town” of the Platte Purchase**

**Sandra Miller**

Weston was the first city founded in the six-county Platte Purchase of 1837. Joseph Moore, a discharged Dragoon soldier from Fort Leavenworth ferried across the river and took up a claim on what would become the city of Weston. It was once rumored he actually traded a barrel of whiskey to a man named McPherson for the parcel of land. Unable to successfully carry out his plan for a town, Moore enlisted help and sold a half interest to a young lawyer named Bela Hughes. Educated and well connected, Hughes used his influence to secure promising and enterprising settlers.

Arriving by steamboat, wagon and coach, southerners with skills in growing hemp and tobacco poured into the newly acquired land. Some were wealthy, slave holding families while others were poor farmers seeking a better life in a new land. Peter H. Burnett, one of the early leaders of the Oregon Trail movement, began his career as a small town lawyer at Martinsville (present-day Platte City), Missouri. He was elected Platte County's first prosecuting attorney in 1839.

Word of the business and farming success of Weston spread quickly. From the East came doctors, lawyers and zealous land speculators. Prominent German settlers developed the downtown area into profitable retail outlets supplying nearly all of the surrounding counties. During the early years of Fort Leavenworth, the United States government relied on Weston merchants to provide many of the supplies needed by the fort. Officers, enlisted men and their families also ferried across the river for their personal trading and entertainment.

An early day Weston minister, the Reverend James McNamara, recorded in his journal in 1851:

Weston, while not the County seat, is yet the chief town of Platte County, Mo. Taking all things into consideration, it is an important place. After payday at the garrison, it is the immediate resort of the free and easy soldier. The Quarter-Master has torn [thrown] millions into the coffers of the traders at Weston. Two or three times a year, the streets and shops of the town are also crowded with various tribes of Indians. The traders at Weston, in a word, did an immense business. In all my travels, I have never seen a town where money, in gold and silver, was so plentiful.

Early in the 1840s, business leaders Benjamin Holladay and Theodore Warner introduced Weston to a profitable market trade with the Mormons in Utah. They were in need of supplies; and Holladay and Warner seized this opportunity, making Weston the first center for the Salt Lake trade. They went on to amass millions of dollars with their connections to the Pony Express and Overland Stage Lines. Holladay would become known as "America's Stage Coach King" and the father of modern transportation. His brother David founded the Holladay, now known as McCormick, Distillery in Weston.

With such a favorable location on the Missouri River, rapid growth soon made Weston the second largest port on the river. By 1850, with more than 300 steamboats a year docking at the Port of Weston, the population grew to 5,000 people. As a booming retail outlet just across the river from Ft. Leavenworth, the town also became a popular outfitting and jumping-off point for emigrants traveling west. Hundreds crossed the river at Weston's Rialto Landing.

On May 5, 1851, an Oregon-bound company of Ohioans outfitted at Weston and crossed the river on the Rialto Ferry to Ft. Leavenworth. The company consisted of eighteen wagons, 150 head of cattle, eight women, their children and forty men “fit for

duty." Brothers D.H. and William McClure, hotel proprietors in Weston, also signed on with this group as did Quincy A. Brooks, Mr. and Mrs. Presley George, Victor Trewitt, Dr. Eggers, Weston attorney Mr. Hardin, Mr. Cartwright and a Dutchman named Shadel.

The slavery issue already had brought tension and unrest to the Missouri-Kansas border. Weston, with its location directly across the river from Fort Leavenworth, became a center of frenzied political activity. The 1854 passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act sparked volatile demonstrations on the streets of Weston, and the business community paid a high price and suffered the consequences. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 would bring the agonies of divided loyalties as loved ones went off to battle, business failed and homes were lost.

A chain of other destructive events would bring change and devastating financial loss to the Weston area. A fire in 1855 destroyed nearly half of the downtown buildings. A deadly cholera epidemic took the lives of hundreds of residents. In 1859, not only did a major flood cripple the steamboat trade for months but the Hannibal-St. Joseph Railroad bypassed Weston as a railhead.

The final blow came in 1881 when flooding of the Missouri River completely destroyed the Port of Weston. When the waters receded, steamboats were left high and dry on the muddy banks of the wharf. The Missouri River now flowed two miles away against the Kansas bluffs. Weston's population dropped to less than one thousand people.

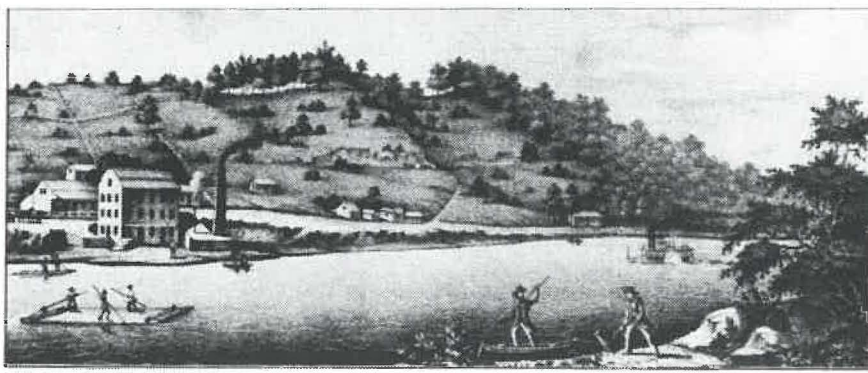
Near the end of the nineteenth century, while no longer the boomtown it had once been, the small city did manage to survive as the hub of Platte County. With the end of slavery also came the end of the hemp business. Farmers could not afford to pay wages for the long backbreaking work of turning the plant into rope. While this was a bitter pill, farmers began to concentrate on tobacco and corn. Eventually, Weston became the only tobacco market west of the Mississippi. The Weston Distillery (McCormick) and the Royal Brewery also contributed to the economy.

Today, family traditions left behind by Weston's early pioneers have remained a common thread among the 1,700 residents of this romantic hamlet. Known nationwide for its outstanding progress in historic preservation, the town has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in Missouri.

See: Paxton's *Annals of Platte County*

Quincy A. Brooks, letter, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, Kansas State Historical Society, 1972.

Sandra Miller, a retired banker and native of Weston, is the author of *Memories of Weston, Missouri*, published in 1992, and is completing a second volume to be published September, 2000.



State Historical Society of Missouri

**R.B. Price drawing of the Weston riverfront, 1853**



## **Atchison, Kansas**

### **Jacqueline Lewin**

Atchison's recorded history dates back to July 4, 1804, when the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery traveled up the Missouri River. William Clark wrote in his journal:

Passed a Creek 12 yds. Wide on L.S. coming out of an extensive Prairie reaching within 200 yards of the river, as this Creek has no name, and this being the 4th of July the day of the independence of the U S. Call it 4th of July 1804 Creek, we dined (on Corn) Capt. Lewis walked on Shore above this Creek and discovered a high Mound from the top of which he had an extensive View, 3 paths Concentrating at the mound

For many years, this earliest name of the creek that runs through present-day Atchison was forgotten, and it became known as White Clay Creek. Recently, the name has been changed back to 4th of July 1804 Creek. The mound that Lewis climbed is the high bluff on the north side of Atchison.

The first white settler in the area was George M. Million. Arriving in 1841, he farmed the bottom land on the Missouri side of the river. He soon found that he could make a good living operating a flatboat ferry and did so for the next seven or eight years. In 1854, he moved across the Missouri River and "squatted" on the present-day site of Atchison. Soon others settled near his cabin at the ferry landing. These early settlers were not particularly interested in the issues of slavery extension or national politics that were affecting the Missouri-Kansas Territory border area further south. They were looking for better farmland to move their families to or were interested in claiming land that they could sell later at a profit.

With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Kansas Territory was opened for settlement. The New England Emigrant Aid Society was formed in the East to move people of abolitionist sentiment into Kansas. Rumors spread among Missouri pro-slavers that this corporation was being formed by eastern abolitionists to take over Kansas and make it a free state. On July 20, 1854, Dr. J.H. Stringfellow and several others from Platte County, Missouri, crossed the Missouri River at Fort Leavenworth and came to the valley of present-day Atchison. They purchased the claim of George Million and organized a town company. They regarded the Emigrant Aid Society as a fanatic group of abolitionists who were not wanted in Kansas Territory. The spokesman for the town company was Missouri Senator David Rice Atchison. In addition to promoting Kansas as a slave state, he hoped to use this panic to further his career and to defeat Thomas Hart Benton in the upcoming U.S. senatorial election. The county was established in July 1855, and, as the new town, was named for Atchison. The sale of town lots began on September 24, 1854, but the town was not officially incorporated until August 30, 1855.

Atchison grew quickly, particularly because it was on the westernmost bend of the Missouri River. In 1856, just a year after being incorporated, there were fifty new buildings; and a few years later there were eight hardware stores, twelve dry goods stores, eight wholesale grocery stores, nineteen retail grocery stores and twenty-six law firms. Two well known freighting firms controlled banking in early Atchison: Alexander Majors and Company and Smoot, Russell and Company. Because of the good steamboat landing, these contractors also chose Atchison as the outfitting point for goods bound for Salt Lake City. Atchison soon became the leading city for freighting across the plains. The route from Atchison connected with the older Fort Leavenworth Road. The post office recognized the good route from Atchison – especially since the town was in a loyal

free state – and made it the eastern terminus of mail to the west. During the last month of the Pony Express, the eastern terminus of the horse-relay mail delivery was moved from St. Joseph to Atchison. In 1872 the railroad to Topeka and Wichita was opened. This was the first unit of what would become the great Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway system.

Today, Atchison is known as the home of Benedictine Abbey, established in 1857 about five miles north in the town of Doniphan. In 1859, the Abbey was moved to Atchison, and St. Benedict's College was established. In 1863 seven Benedictine Sisters arrived from Eichstatt, Germany. They opened Mount St. Scholastica Academy, a boarding school for girls, which is still in existence today. Atchison is also known as the 1897 birthplace of famed aviatrix Amelia Earhart. Her disappearance in 1937 while flying around the world remains a mystery.

Two of today's main industries in Atchison had their roots more than 120 years ago. The Atchison Casting Corporation supplied wagon trains and the railroad with metal parts. The Blish-Mize Company began as a supplier of axle grease and horseshoes and a distributor of hardware to the west.

See: Fr. Peter Beckman, OSB, *Kansas Monks: A History of St. Benedict's Abbey*, Abbey Student Press, 1957.

David Dary, *Entrepreneurs of the Old West*, University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Sheffield Ingalls, *History of Atchison County, Kansas*, Standard Publishing Company.

Samuel A. Johnson, "The Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Conflict." *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI. No.1, February, 1937.

Merrill Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road*, University of Nebraska Press, 1969.

Frank A. Root, and William E. Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California*, W.Y. Morgan, 1901.

James R. Shortridge, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Kansas*, University Press of Kansas, 1984.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Vol. 1, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1905.

Jacqueline Lewin has been a member of OCTA and Gateway Chapter since 1985. She served two terms on the board of directors and is a past president of OCTA. Professionally, Jackie is Curator of History at the St. Joseph Museum.

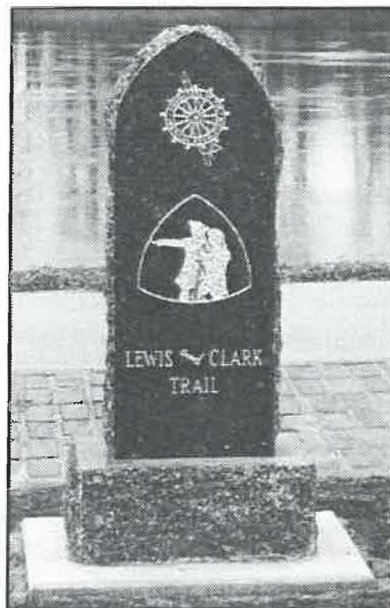


Photo by Shirley Coupal

**This Lewis and Clark marker with the DAR Insignia, a spinning wheel with thirteen surrounding stars, is located along the Missouri River in Atchison.**



## **What's In A Name?**

### **St. Michael's Prairie to Blacksnake Hills to St. Joseph, Missouri**

**Jacqueline Lewin**

St. Joseph, Missouri, is located on a prairie adjacent to the Missouri River and encircled on the other three sides by loess bluffs. The prairie where St. Joseph would grow was first known as St. Michael's Prairie. It is not known when or why that name was given to the prairie. However, it might be surmised that a member of the French fur-trading St. Michael family camped there some time in the mid-1700s. The earliest record of the site is on the 1795 map of the James MacKay expedition that was commissioned by the Spanish government primarily to open commerce with the Indians of the Upper Missouri River.

Lewis and Clark, who led the first United States government-sponsored expedition up the Missouri River, noted St. Michael's Prairie in their journals on both their 1804 outgoing and 1806 homebound trips. In fact, a night was spent at St. Michael's Prairie on September 12, 1806. At St. Michael's Prairie, the men of the Lewis and Clark expedition gathered information from Robert McClelland and his group of Indian traders about what had happened in the United States since their departure two years earlier.

The American Fur Company controlled the fur trade in the Blacksnake Hills area, and in 1826 Joseph Robidoux paid the company for permission to trade in its territory. By the fall of 1826 Robidoux had a trading post at the mouth of Roy's Branch. Probably due to spring floods and the rising of the Missouri River, Robidoux moved his post about a mile downstream to the mouth of Blacksnake Creek in St. Michael's Prairie and named it "Le Poste du Serpent Noir." The American Fur Company withdrew in 1830, leaving Robidoux in complete control.

While traveling up the Missouri River in April, 1833, in pursuit of scientific knowledge, Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied passed the Robidoux post and wrote in his journal:

... on the 24th we saw the chain of the Blacksnake Hills... Near to the steep bank a trading house has been built, which was occupied by a man named Robedoux, an agent of the Fur Company. This white house, surrounded by bright green prairies, had a very neat appearance...

Missouri received statehood in 1821, but the northwest corner of present-day Missouri was not included. This was Indian land known as the Platte Territory. As a non-Indian, Robidoux had to obtain permission from the United States Army at Fort Leavenworth to live in the Platte Territory. In 1837 the Platte Territory was purchased from the Indians who were moved across the Missouri River to Kansas Territory. Settlers now were legally able to move into the Platte Territory, and many of them settled around Robidoux's post.

St. Joseph's official history dates to 1843 when it was incorporated and the plat filed by Joseph Robidoux. The population began to grow, and it soon became a major jumping-off place for people traveling west. The earliest wagon train to leave the St. Joseph area was led by Cornelius Gilliam. This Oregon-bound train, which departed in 1844, crossed the Missouri River at Caples' Landing near present-day Amazonia, Missouri. In 1848, gold was discovered in California; and during the major migration years of 1849, 1850 and 1851, St. Joseph led all other jumping-off points in number of emigrants. In the 1860s, the slogan "Pike's Peak or bust!" was commonly seen in St. Joseph as many gold-seekers jumped-off for Colorado.

On May 3, 1849, James Tate wrote in his journal:

Went in to St. Jo and took our place at the ferry. About 40 teams ahead at each boat. They cross about 35 teams per day on Each boat and some times there is a great contention about these rights.... This is the finest place I have seen on the river for crossing an eddy on both sides, and very narrow and good landings on both sides. St. Jo is beautifully situated and improving very fast, it now has a population of 14 hundred, three churches, Presbyterian Methodist and Catholic.

On April 24, 1850, W.S. McBride wrote:

We arrived at St. Joseph about 10 o'clock A.M. Never, probably since Peter the Hermit preached the Crusade had such a motley groupe of men been collected together. St. Joseph resembled in some respects a vast besieged city - Along the bluffs to the west, were some springs, long rows of tents were pitched closely under the bluff rocks. All the principle roads leading to the town were thickly beset with white tents on either side - while the height immediately to the south of the town were also covered with tents waggons, & horses, and thronged with men. The streets were crowded with men, horses, mules, oxen, & waggons so it was almost impossible to get along....

St. Joseph continued to look west for many years. As the eastern terminus of the Pony Express, it played a major role in maintaining communication between the east and west coasts. The city served as a major wholesaling center, reaching its zenith in the 1880s and 1890s. St. Joseph was known the world over for its number of millionaires and the character of its wholesale houses. In the early 1900s, St. Joseph had the fourth largest stockyard in the world.

Today, the town of approximately 75,000 people extends beyond the prairie, onto the bluffs and out on the rolling hills to the north, west and south. The St. Joseph River Front Park marks the site where thousands of wagons boarded a ferry and began their journey west. Monuments and markers throughout the town recognize Lewis and Clark, Joseph Robidoux, the Oregon-California emigrants and the Pony Express. The wealth of the wholesaling years is remembered in the number of stately Victorian mansions and the remnants of the once-numerous warehouse buildings.

St. Joseph now serves as the region's agricultural center. Major industries include Wire Rope Corporation and Hillyard Chemical Company (most gym floors are treated with Hillyard's floor finish). In addition, Stetson Hats has a factory in St. Joseph as does the Chase Candy Company, maker of the locally famous Cherry Mash chocolate bar.

See: Jacqueline Lewin, and Marilyn Taylor, *The Saint Joe Road*. St. Joseph: St. Joseph Museum, 1992.

Sheridan Logan, *Old Saint Jo*. The Stinehouse Press, 1979.

W.S. McBride, "Journal." Original manuscript (HM16956) in the archives of the Huntington Library, 1850.

Merrill Mattes, "Joseph Robidoux" in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* edited by LeRoy Hafen, Vol. VII. Glendale: Arthur Clark Company, 1971.

James A. Tate, "Diary." Typescript copy of original manuscript in the Joint Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia, Missouri, 1849.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. *Moximilian, Prince of Wied Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1844, Vol. XXII of Early Western Travels*. Cleveland: Arthur Clark Co., 1906.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Vol. VI*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905.

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## The Blue Jacket Crossing of the Wakarusa River

Mary R. Gage

One of the first challenging river crossings on the Oregon-California Trail was the Wakarusa River near present-day Lawrence, Kansas. After the mid-1850s, one of the fords on the Wakarusa came to be known as the Blue Jacket crossing, named for the Shawnee Indian Chief, Charles Blue Jacket, who operated a roadhouse near the ford for travelers along the trail. The actual location of this roadhouse is disputed as is the site of the crossing named Blue Jacket. Even the spelling of Blue Jacket, sometimes Bluejacket, has changed as well as which Blue Jacket, Charles or one of his brothers, established the roadhouse. For the purposes of this essay, three fords across the Wakarusa, all east of Blue Mound, will be examined and will be referred to as the **western crossing**, the **middle crossing** and the **eastern crossing**.

Aubrey Haines wrote that the Blue Jacket crossing is located in the NW 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of Section 14, the location of the western crossing. An early chain of title, beginning in 1860, indicates that Charles and Eliza Bluejacket (sic) were the owners and “Grantors” of the NE 1/4 of Section 14 to Griffith Jenkins on April 4, 1860. In addition, another early chain of title from 1858 to 1864 shows a Carl Bundshu owned the quarter section of land, the NW 1/4 of Section 14, adjacent to that owned by Blue Jacket. His grandson, Henry Bundshu, spoke to the Kansas City Possee of Westerners in February 1962. In his speech, covered by the *Kansas City Star*, Henry states, “He (Carl Bundshu) bought twenty acres of land on the Blue Jacket ford of the Wakarusa, near the town of Eudora.”

William Phillips, correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, chronicled his adventures traveling back and forth between pro-slavery and free state forces. A careful reading of Phillips’ narrative provides some details of the landscape around a ford on the Wakarusa that aptly describe the western crossing. He writes:

The Missourians had moved their camp down into the timber of the Wakarusa, and pitched it a quarter of a mile below the ford on the California road. This became the celebrated Wakarusa camp.

Later he relates:

He (Marshall Jones) rode down to the ford with me. As we approached it I saw a wagon on the bed of the creek; it appeared to be loaded with merchandise, doubtless designed for some unfortunate merchant in the interior....The bed of the Wakarusa is nearly dry at the ford, and very wide. At the opposite side from Lawrence the road goes through a narrow cut in the bank; and here the sentries were posted, armed with long rifles and revolvers

The ford at the western crossing has a narrow cut, visible today, in the sandstone bluffs along the eastern bank. Trail expert Gregory Franzwa believes that the well-defined swales leading to the western crossing, on land now owned by the Gage family, represent the most extensively used ford in the area.

There were two other crossings downstream, or further east: the middle crossing approximately one mile and the eastern crossing one and a half miles, that also were used by emigrants as fords across the Wakarusa River. The middle crossing is between Spring Creek and the Little Wakarusa at the location of the now extinct settlement of Sebastian. In 1936 Irene Paden saw evidence of ruts at this site and described an almost perpendicular approach to the river. Yet the ramshackle two-story frame house attributed to Blue Jacket that Paden described near this crossing does not fit early descriptions of

the roadhouse as a two room log house connected to a smaller one room log house by a covered breezeway. It is possible that Paden found a later and more substantial dwelling, perhaps built in the 1860s or 1870s when frame houses were beginning to be constructed in this area.

Teacher Ronald Becher led a group of gifted/talented students from the Highland Junior High School in Kansas City, Kansas, in researching the literature and examining the various sites of the Wakarusa fords. His written conclusions tend to agree with the evidence Paden found that the middle crossing was most commonly referred to as the Blue Jacket crossing. This crossing and the one farthest east both have more difficult approaches than the western crossing.

As there were many trail routes west from the present-day Kansas City metropolitan area, it is possible that early travelers on the Fremont-Westport Trail used the easternmost ford while later travelers on the "California Road" used the less perilous western crossing.

Grandmother Gage (Marjorie H., wife of John B. Gage) recalled for me in 1992, a few months before her death at the age of ninety-three, that in the 1920s she remembered seeing scratches made by the axles of wagon wheels on some old oak trees at the farm. In the field above the western crossing of the Wakarusa, next to the ruts of the old trail, the trees provided a bit of shade, a farewell gift for travelers heading for the treeless plains.

See: Aubrey Haines, *Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail*, Gerald, MO: Patrice Press, 1981.

William Phillips, *Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and Her Allies*, Boston: Phillips, Samson & Co., 1856.

Irene Paden, *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner*. Copyright 1943 by Irene Paden. Reprinted by arrangement with The Macmillan Co. by Arcturus Books, 1970.

Ron Becher, "Oregon Trail Fords of the Wakarusa River," *Overland Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1990.

Mary Gage, her husband and their four children lived for several years on the Gage farm in a 100-year old farmhouse near the Blue Jacket Crossing of the Wakarusa River. Although she recently moved "into town," Mary continues to guide teachers, students and trails enthusiasts to the crossing. She has a M.S. in Geography and is a free-lance writer.



## Lawrence, Kansas

### Mary Gage

The founding of Lawrence, Kansas, in the mid-1850s was a political statement. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 left the decision of whether to enter the Union as a slave or a free state to the voters in the new territory. Northern abolitionists, determined to stop the westward spread of slavery in the United States, organized the New England Emigrant Aid Society that sent trainloads of emigrants to establish a "free state" settlement in the new territory of Kansas. These first settlers arrived from Massachusetts in 1854 and named their new settlement Lawrence, after Amos A. Lawrence, the Boston financier and secretary of the Emigrant Aid Society. Lawrence quickly became the center of free state activities, a station on the Underground Railroad and a refuge for freed slaves.

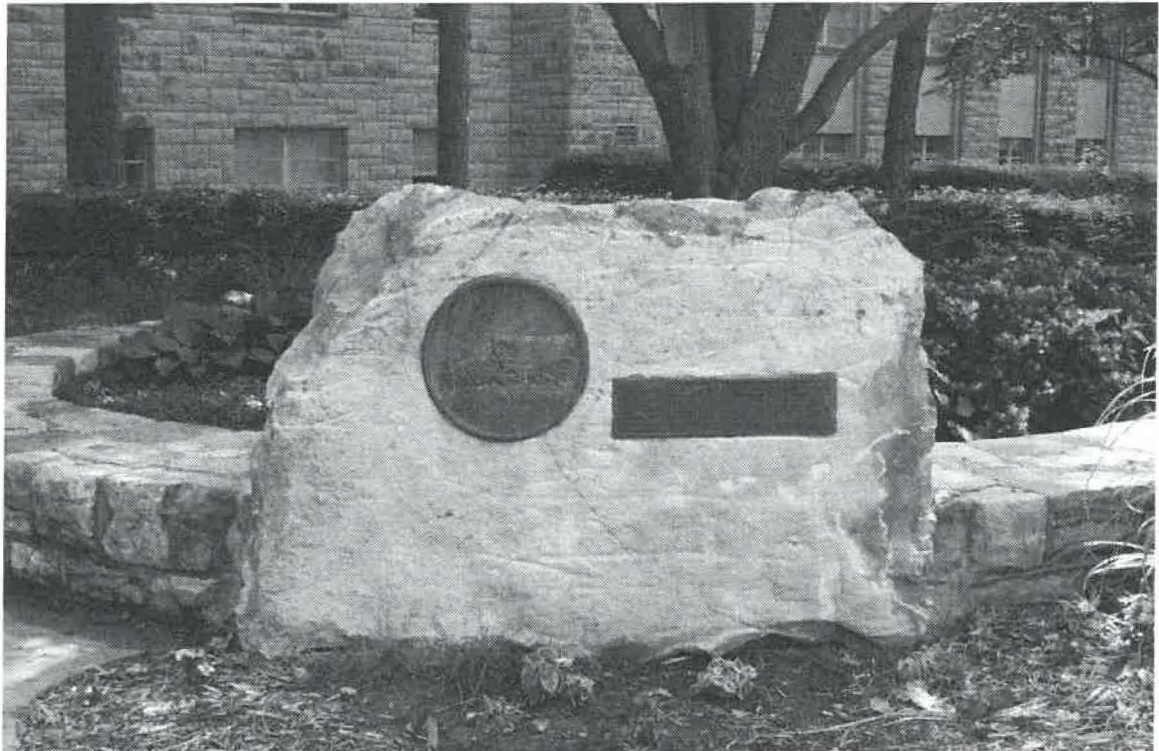
An advance team, led by Dr. Charles Robinson earlier in the year, had chosen the site for the new town. Historians believe that Robinson, the future first governor of Kansas, may have passed through this area in 1849 when he traveled along the Oregon-California Trail to the California gold fields. The trail followed a high ridge between the valleys of the Wakarusa and Kansas rivers. The ridge, later to be christened Mt. Oread by the new settlers, is today the heart of the campus of the University of Kansas. In 1849, Robinson would have noticed a broad level plain to the north and east of the ridge bounded by the Kansas River. It was an ideal town site with fertile soil, an abundance of water and timber and proximity to both the Santa Fe Trail and "California Road."

In spite of the many advantages in the area to settlers, the new town of Lawrence was a dangerous place to live. Some historians contend the Civil War began well before 1861 with the guerrilla border warfare between the Lawrence-based "Jayhawkers" and the pro-slavery Missouri "Bushwackers." In fact, Lawrence was sacked and burned twice during its first decade of existence. Pro-slavery forces from nearby Leecompton, Kansas, bent on destroying the free state presence in the territory, attacked the town in 1856. The town rebuilt and persevered, only to be attacked in a more deadly and devastating raid in 1863 by William Quantrill and his company of 450 Missouri "irregulars." Much of the town was burned, and close to two hundred men and boys were murdered. Markers and memorials to the victims of what has become known as Quantrill's Raid can be found throughout Lawrence, most notably at the Oak Hill Cemetery and Pioneer Cemetery.

Years before the dramatic beginnings of Lawrence, emigrants traveled through the area on their way to Oregon and California. It is generally agreed that the travelers came from the southeast, passing near Blue Mound, the first major natural landmark along the trail. They crossed the Wakarusa River at the one of several fords and continued northwesterly to climb the steep slope of Mt. Oread. This section of the trail through the grounds of University of Kansas is memorialized in a marker at the western end of Jayhawk Boulevard near its junction with West Campus Road. The marker reads:

Beginning in 1849, there plodded up the southern slope of Mount Oread a vast emigration bound for the golden land of California. One branch of the great California and Oregon Trail thus passed over the very ground now part of the University campus and many a camp fire gleamed on summer nights from the crest where now throngs of students tread.

Plaque by Dr. Howard R. Driggs, President American Pioneer Trails Association  
Setting by Class of 1916 (reset June, 2000)



The stone and bronze marker is a fine structure; however, one may notice that due to its placement the oxen and covered wagon depicted are heading east instead of west.

Covered wagons traveling to Oregon and California were a common sight for the new residents of Lawrence. Sara Robinson, the wife of Charles, settled in Lawrence in 1855 and wrote these observations:

The roads for many days have been full of wagons - white-covered, emigrant wagons. We cannot look out of the windows without seeing a number, either upon the road through the prairie east of us, which comes in from Kansas City, where most emigrants leave the boats and buy wagons and provisions for the journey, or going on the hill west, on their way to Topeka, or other settlements above.

The travelers continued their westward trek. Present-day U.S. Highway 40 between Lawrence and Topeka closely follows the original trail. Driving west along the hilltops today's traveler can capture a sense of "riding the ridges," as did the wagons of 150 years ago.

See: David Dary, *Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas: An Informal History*. Lawrence, KS: Allen Books, 1982.

Gregory Franzwa, *The Oregon Trail Revisited*. Tucson, AZ: The Patrice Press, 1997.

Edward E. Leslie, *The Devil Knows How to Ride: the True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders*. New York: Random House, 1996.

Charles Robinson, *Kansas, Its Interior and Exterior Life*. Boston: Croby, Nichols and Co., 1856.

Mary Gage, her husband and their four children lived for several years on the Gage farm in a 100-year old farmhouse near the Blue Jacket Crossing of the Wakarusa River. Although she recently moved "into town," Mary continues to guide teachers, students and trails enthusiasts to the crossing. She has a M.S. in Geography and is a free-lance writer.



## Unwanted Baggage – Diseases on the Trail

### Robert H. Dorian

In the nineteenth century it was thought that one's health was governed by four "humors" that resided in the bodily fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These humors were in balance in healthy individuals; but imbalance resulted in illness, and bodily fluids were removed to allow the new fluids to return the system to balance. The removal of bodily fluids was accomplished by a number of treatments: by the use of emetics and/or cathartics to empty the digestive tract; by raising blisters and lancing them and by bleeding. Although this depletive system of medical treatment was losing favor in the medical community by the early 1840s, many doctors still supported its use. Medical sales of emetics, such as ipecac, alum, tartar emetic, ammonium carbonate, zinc sulfate, senega, syrup of squill and mustard; and cathartics, including six different mercurials of calomel, Rochelle salts, Epsom salts, potassium sulfate, rhubarb, senna, Jalap, Castor oil, aloes and gamboge give evidence of their heavy use. In addition to these purgatives, there were spring lancets, thumb lancets and the scarificator, a mechanical device having between six and twenty-four small blades used to make cuts in soft tissue, all for blood letting. Cupping glasses and cupping tins also were used to treat disease. Surviving these depletive methods required a very strong constitution. With the use of lead acetate for indigestion, mercury for syphilis and calomel that contained mercury for almost all preparatory treatments, the treatment often was as dangerous as the illness. Following are several common illnesses afflicting emigrants.

**Asiatic Cholera** In 1849, cholera was rampant in Missouri and in other parts of the country. Many travelers along the trails to the West were felled by cholera. More than twenty per cent of St. Louis doctors died in the cholera epidemic. Early symptoms of Asiatic (epidemic) cholera include loss of appetite, pain in the back and abdomen, noise in the ears, paleness of the face, feebleness of the pulse, copious sweating and diarrhea. The stools are usually described as resembling rice water (whitish color, thin and watery) and are one of the symptoms used for diagnosis. The second stage includes very painful muscle cramps starting in the calves and eventually extending to the muscles of the trunk. Concurrently, the pulse sinks rapidly, the extremities become cold, the features become sunken and intense thirst develops. The skin is bathed in sweat and becomes bluish, leaden or violet color. Soon the hands and feet become shriveled as if in water for an extended period. Often the patient retains his full senses through all of this. In the final stage, the breath becomes cool, little blood comes from lanced veins and muscles tighten into a rigid cramp. Death from cholera could occur in as little as four hours from its commencement, but the usual course was two to three days.

**Dysentery and Diarrhea** Diarrhea is described as frequent liquid evacuation of the bowels; and dysentery is described as an inflammation of the large intestine accompanied by fever, frequent mucous or bloody evacuations, acute colicky pains and a frequent, vain and painful desire to evacuate. Dr. Samuel Ackerly lists seven different variations of diarrhea: crapulosa, biliosa, mucosa, hepatic, lenterica, caliac, and vermosa (worms). Treatment of dysentery began with bleeding and calomel followed with the administration of opium, usually laudanum, to relieve pain. The recommended treatment for diarrhea was ten drops of laudanum. If the condition persisted, castor oil, a mild laxative, was given to help remove the irritating matter from the bowels. The depletive nature of these treatments led to dehydration and often death.

**Malaria** Diaries describe malaria by any of its many names: ague, ague and fever, miasmal fever, intermittent fever, bilious fever, remittent fever, marsh fever, common country fever and chills and fever. Malaria was endemic to the United States west of the Appalachian Mountains and thought to be transmitted by “miasma” or vapors from rivers and streams. The symptoms were chills followed by fever and a greatly weakened state. Jesuit missionaries returning from Peru introduced the use of Peruvian, or Jesuit, bark to treat malaria in mid-seventeenth century Europe. From the cinchona tree, the bark was ground and taken orally in poorly regulated doses. Nevertheless, it was the best treatment available for malaria until 1820 when French chemists Pierre Pelletier and Joseph Caventou isolated the active ingredient, quinine. Dr. John Sappington of Arrow Rock, Missouri, was a leading proponent of the treatment of malaria with quinine. He sold his “Sappington’s Anti-Fever Pills,” containing one grain of quinine, throughout the malarial area. In 1843 Dr. Sappington wrote *The Theory and Treatment of Fevers*, which detailed his use of quinine in the treatment of malaria and other fevers. The effectiveness of quinine was well known by most on the Missouri frontier.

**Measles** Measles is considered a common childhood disease and is nearly eradicated in the United States. In the rural society of mid-19th century America, it often was not encountered until adulthood. When large groups of people gathered, such as emigrants traveling west, there often were outbreaks and many fatalities. The rigors of travel and poor diet probably contributed to the number of deaths.

**Smallpox** While evidence of smallpox was found in the pocked faces of the Indian population everywhere and the disease considered endemic, it did not cause as much trouble for the emigrants, many of whom had been vaccinated with cow pox and were immune. No method of treatment of smallpox proved effective, and the extreme stress on the body fighting such a widespread infection often made the patient susceptible to other maladies.

**Typhoid Fever** Some other names for typhoid fever are most descriptive: typhus fever, typhus gravior, spotted fever, putrid fever, camp fever and hospital fever.

The most characteristic symptoms of typhus are, along with fever, prostration of strength; a dark-red or dusky hue of the countenance, with suffusion of the eyes; stupor, dark sordes [secretions of the mouth] about the tongue, teeth &c., constipation of the bowels in the earliest stage; the peculiar odor; the peculiar eruptions [spots not raised as in measles] and the collapse of the last stage.

The recommended treatment during fever was applying along the spine assorted external stimulants such as mustard, a solution of ammonia, oil of turpentine or Cayenne pepper, aided by the application of heat then followed by a cathartic to empty the bowels. Traveling along the trail, little could be done other than place the patient in a wagon and wait for him to recover or die.

More emigrants died from disease than from accidents or Indian attack. The symptoms and treatments are nearly unimaginable by today’s standards, and it is not difficult to understand that the medical treatment of that era was, for the most part, ineffective at best and quite harmful at the worst.

See: *Hooper’s Medical Dictionary*, 1831.

George B. Wood, *A Treatise on the Practice of Medicine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot and Co., 1849.

Robert Dorian is a historian whose main interest is the trans-Mississippi west and its exploration and commerce in the 1800-1855 era. He also is a living history interpreter of both civilian and military personas of that period.



## Harry S. Truman and the Trails

### Niel M. Johnson

Harry Truman's interest in the overland trails is evident as soon as one enters the main lobby of the Truman Library. The eye is drawn immediately to the large colorful mural on the opposite wall which features people, places and activities related to the overland trails to Santa Fe, Oregon and California. Truman's interest in the trails began in his childhood when he listened to stories that his grandfather, Solomon Young, told about his adventures in freighting from 1846 to 1866. In those years Young made a dozen trips from Jackson County, Missouri, to Salt Lake City and to San Francisco with a variety of cargoes. In 1950, President Truman told trails historian, Dean Wood, "I regret very much that I was not old enough to make a record of historic reminiscences of that trail he told to me." Unfortunately, we have no account written by Solomon Young about his experiences on the trail. Whatever he may have written probably would have been destroyed in 1893 when the original home on Young's farm in Grandview, Missouri, burned down.

It is not clear that Truman was aware of the following article, a most interesting eyewitness account in the Salt Lake City *Deseret News* on August 16, 1860. It related:

A train of some forty wagons, propelled by one hundred and thirty yoke of oxen, arrived on Thursday last, about the same time that Capt. Walling's Company came in, belonging to Mr. Solomon Young of Jackson, Mo., and freighted with merchandize for Mr. Ranshoff.

The wagons were coupled together in pairs, one behind the other, each pair having on board about sixty hundred pounds and drawn by six pairs of oxen--the usual number attached to those large cumbrous heavy wagons that have been much used in freighting merchandize and Government stores across the plains.

Mr. Young is of the opinion that the coupling of two wagons together in that manner is the most economical way of freighting to this Territory, as the same amount of freight can be hauled more easily on two light wagons than one of those heavy concerns, heretofore used for freighting purposes, and by hitching them together the expense of teamsters is lessened one half. Light wagons are unquestionably better than heavy one for such service, but we are not so sure that there can be anything saved, all things considered, by the coupling operations.

Mr. Young's cattle look remarkably well and, as we are informed, he did not lose a single ox by accident or otherwise during the trip.

In a letter in 1950, Truman wrote Westport historian Louis Honig that the Mormon archives in Salt Lake City had a "most interesting record" about one of Solomon's trips. Truman was referring, however, to his grandfather's first venture to Salt Lake valley. He wrote:

On his first trip with his own outfit and his own Bills of Lading the consignee who happened to be the United States Government at Salt Lake City refused to accept the goods because the Colonel in charge wanted another freighter to haul them. My grandfather made a deal with Brigham Young and came out whole on the matter.

Solomon Young did not take freight to Santa Fe or to Oregon. He concluded his freighting career in 1866 and settled down as a farmer south of Kansas City on what is now known as the Truman Farm in Grandview, Missouri. [The Truman Farm is part of the Harry S Truman Historic Site administered by the National Park Service.]

In addition to the influence of his grandfather, Truman's interest in the trails stemmed from his reading of history. He wrote in his memoirs: "Rome's supremacy over such a long period of time was in large part due to her wonderful roads...." He believed

that much of American history could be understood in terms of the westward expansion of trails and roads and in the evolution of the railroads. Truman's first job after graduating from high school in 1901 was as a timekeeper for a contractor who was building a roadbed for a second track on the Santa Fe Railroad in northern Jackson County, Missouri, where the original Santa Fe Trail had passed in the 1830s. After his father's death in 1914, young Truman would serve for a time as a road overseer in Washington township in Jackson County. He became prominent in Missouri in the 1920s and early 1930s as presiding judge (chief commissioner) for the county court system and instigated and directed the building of one of the country's best county road systems.

In November 1937, in a letter to friends in Grandview who had organized a township celebration, Senator Truman wrote:

My grandfather ran a wagon train from New Santa Fe to Salt Lake City and San Francisco. It required three months to make the trip to Salt Lake City and six months to go to San Francisco, with ox teams for power and wagons for cars. On one occasion my grandfather was gone for two years, and my mother and her younger sister didn't know him when he returned. That was in 1854, eighty-three years ago.

In his final legislative act as U.S. Senator, Truman introduced Senate Bill 147 in January 1945 to "provide for the establishment of the Russell-Majors-Waddell National Monument." He did this partly at the urging of a great-granddaughter of Alexander Majors, Miss Louisa P. Johnston, who lived in the house built for her ancestor in 1856. The house still stands north of the site of New Santa Fe at Eighty-first Street and State Line Road in Kansas City, Missouri. A major backer of the bill was Truman's own National Old Trails Road Association, [see accompanying essay, "President for Life"] led by its treasurer-manager, Frank A. Davis. Truman also had a personal interest in this proposal because, as he told Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes in 1946, Solomon Young "was well acquainted with Majors and Waddell both." The bill was deferred, later revived and passed in the Senate but died in a House committee.

Truman maintained a strong interest in the history of the Santa Fe Trail. In August 1950 the *Kansas City Star* published an article by Dean Wood describing the results of Wood's research on the route of the Santa Fe Trail from Westport Landing to the town of Westport and beyond. Truman wrote Wood that as presiding judge of the Jackson County Court he had ordered a survey of the entire trail from Independence to Santa Fe. He also had research done on the route of the trail "from the foot of Grand Avenue [in Kansas City, Missouri] to its connection with the Santa Fe Trail from Independence and Santa Fe." He said the map was in the office of the highway engineer in the Independence Courthouse. [Unfortunately, the location of that map today is unknown.]

In a second letter, Truman wrote that if he would go out to Bryce Smith's farm near Red Bridge [now the northeast corner of Minor Park], he would find a Daughters of the American Revolution granite marker at a point where Wood could see the old wagon tracks as they were in pre-Civil War days. He wrote that tracks also could be found at the old Palestine churchyard on Blue Ridge Boulevard about a half-mile north of the trail crossing at Bannister Road. He mentioned there had been other markers of the old Santa Fe road closer to Independence, but they had been obliterated by new construction projects.

In January 1951, stirred by the gift of a print or painting of old Westport Landing from some media people, Truman described to the donors how the trailhead of the Santa Fe Trail had moved upriver from its first site in Franklin, Missouri. In regard to the Wayne City Landing, which was two miles north of Independence, he mentioned the first railroad track laid to Independence. He said the track had "... wooden rails with wagon



tires nailed on top of them and the motor power was a pair of oxen. The remains of that old railway were discovered when we built the concrete highway down to [the] Cement Plant which is where Wayne City Landing formerly was.”

Thomas Hart Benton, at the urging of former President Truman, painted his famous mural, “Independence and the Opening of the West,” in the lobby of the Truman Library. In the course of this project, Truman gladly accepted Benton’s invitation to apply a few strokes of blue to the sky in the upper right hand part of the mural. The project was completed in 1961, and Truman called it Benton’s “best mural.” It became a source of pride to Truman and a continuing object of delight to the several million visitors who have entered the lobby since the public opening in 1957.

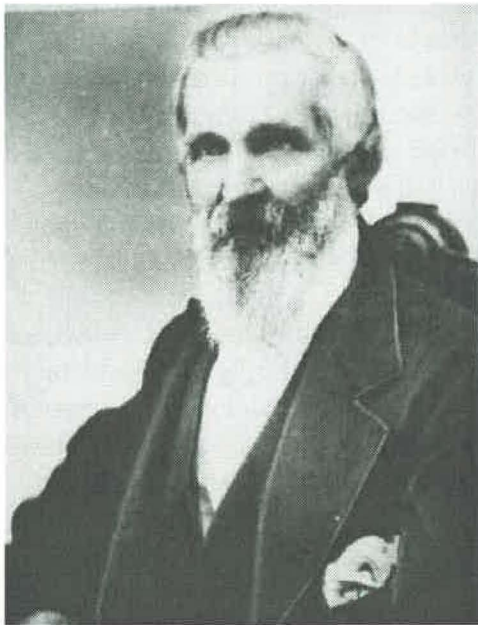
Portions of this essay are reproduced from: Niel Johnson, “Truman and the Trails,” in *Overland Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1988, pp. 25-29.

Pictures courtesy Harry S. Truman Library.

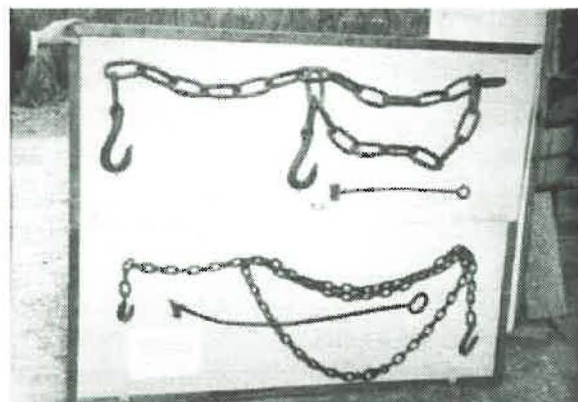
See multiple files in Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decisions*, Volume I (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1955), 147.

Niel Johnson has been a public school teacher, historian of the Army Weapons Command, college instructor and, from 1977-1992, archivist and oral historian at the Harry S. Truman Library. His most recent publication is *Power, Money, and Women: Words to the Wise from Harry S. Truman*, published by the Jackson County Historical Society.



Soloman Young, Harry S. Truman’s grandfather



The wagon chain at the top was used by Young to tie freight wagons in tandem.

**President for Life**  
**Harry S. Truman and the National Old Trails Road Association**  
**Marilyn Bryan**

Harry S. Truman held two presidential offices. He was, at the same time, the thirty-third President of the United States and President of the National Old Trails Road Association (NOTRA) headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri.

The concept that resulted in the National Old Trails Road Association originated with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Between 1903 and 1911 various state chapters recognized the need to mark historic trails in their states where evidence was fast disappearing. The Missouri State Chapter of the DAR envisioned re-blazing the trails through their state, building a modern highway in memory of the pioneers that pushed westward. Their 1911 project was an attempt to gain approval for a memorial Missouri State Highway to be built from St. Louis up the Boone's Lick Road and on into Kansas City following the Santa Fe Trail. In 1912 the Missouri Chapter boldly expanded their concept to embrace a National Road, a paved modern highway from the point where the Potomac empties into the Atlantic Ocean extending all the way to the Pacific Ocean, and took their idea to the National Society of the DAR. The National Society established the National Old Trails Committee that proposed a highway reaching from the eastern terminus of Braddock's Road, over the Cumberland Road (National Pike) and Boone's Lick Road to the Santa Fe Trail and on west to terminate in Los Angeles. They designated this combination of roads the National Old Trails Road, 3,050 miles in length. The DAR Old Trails Bill to establish this highway was introduced into Congress twice but failed to pass. An outgrowth of this DAR effort was NOTRA, incorporated by a group of men in 1912 to assist the DAR with what was now referred to as the National Highway. These men represented those with a vested interest in improving driving surfaces throughout the United States, thereby promoting tourism. By 1913 NOTRA had 7,000 members in support of the political and practical aspects of the effort.

Meanwhile, Harry Truman grew up; and after trying his hand as a bank clerk, farmer, military officer and retailer, he found his niche as a politician, elected first in 1923 as a Jackson County, Missouri, county judge (commissioner). When he was defeated for re-election in the fall of 1924, Truman, who loved cars and the open road, took a sales position with the Kansas City Automobile Club and recruited about a thousand members, earning a commission of \$5 per membership. At that time, Frank Davis, manager of the Club's touring bureau, also was secretary of NOTRA. It was during his tenure in sales with the Automobile Club in 1926 that Truman became associated with NOTRA and, following the death of founder Joseph M. Lowe, became its second and last president.

Such a paved road would, understandably, have significant commercial advantages for states and municipalities along the route. During 1926 and 1927, Truman toured nearly every inch of the proposed National Old Trails Road and assisted in establishing its four geographic divisions: Cumberland, Mississippi Valley, Santa Fe and Grand Canyon.

World War I proved to both state and federal legislatures that the U.S. highway system was inadequate. By 1924, NOTRA and the Automobile Association were lobbying to build roads and to mark the trail with road signs. The new DAR national chairman relegated continuing efforts on that issue to other groups and resolved to create monuments, not markers, to commemorate the National Old Trails Road as it passed



through twelve states. What resulted were twelve Madonna of the Trail monuments that were installed and dedicated in 1928 and 1929. NOTRA guaranteed the cost of the monuments; and Truman, now back in county administration as presiding judge, gave dedicatory speeches.

Highway building efforts of NOTRA continued throughout the 1930s with Senator Harry Truman speaking on its behalf. Painted metal road markers were placed along the road depicting George Washington on a U.S. shield, thirteen stars and the words, *National Old Trails Road, A Memorial to the Pioneers*.

Truman long maintained an interest in the old road and liked to tell stories about its history. He asserted, "I can tell you stories of nearly every town on the famous National Old Trail Road from Baltimore to Los Angeles." During his senate career, in a speech to junior high students in Independence, Missouri, Truman reveled in this story about Martin Van Buren's opposition to road building in Indiana.

It is said that Van Buren was something of a dandy in his dress and manner. He made a speech at Indianapolis during his campaign for President and was driving west through what is now Plainfield to make another. There was a famous mud hole near this elm that the taxpayers were trying to get the United States to fix but couldn't. Some wag sawed Mr. Van Buren's single-tree while he was speaking in Indianapolis and when he came to the mud hole it broke, he got stuck, had to get out and get muddy. When he became President he authorized the construction of a plank road from Indianapolis west past the mud hole.

As President of the United States, Truman kept the trails in mind when he took his morning walks in Washington, D.C. In July 1947 Truman wrote to Frank Davis: "I took a walk this morning at quarter to seven and passed the Zero Milestone twice - once going and the next time coming back." This marker, dedicated by President Harding, marked the eastern terminus of the National Road.

After the death of Davis in 1948, NOTRA fell victim to a lack of headquarters leadership. A modest man, Harry S. Truman, President of the United States, wrote in June 1949 to J.W. Becker, a NOTRA executive committee member:

We are keeping the National Old Trails Association alive as best we can. Of course, Frank Davis was the spark plug of that. We really haven't anyone now who looks after its interests and it is not possible for me to work on it due to other things I have to do at this time.

Harry Truman acknowledged his responsibility to the trails throughout his lifetime. As late as 1961 Truman wrote to fellow NOTRA member, W.L. Young of Council Grove, Kansas:

When the Caravan came to Independence I...signed their scroll as President of the National Old Trails Road Association. No one has ever been elected to succeed me so I guess I am still the President.

When Harry S. Truman died on December 26, 1972, NOTRA, which had kept the spotlight on trails for nearly forty years, died with him.

See: Multiple files in Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

Ann Arnold Hunter, *A Century of Service, the Story of the DAR*. Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1991.

David McCullough, *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

Marilyn Bryan, who holds a Masters Degree in Business Administration, is retired Vice President, Human Resources for DT Industries, Inc., an international engineering and manufacturing firm, headquartered in Springfield, MO. A member since 1990, she is active in OCTA and the Gateway Chapter. Her ancestors settled along the St. Joe Road.

## **How They Did It**

### **The Daughters of the American Revolution Marked The Trails**

**Shirley S. Coupal**

Exploring historic trails throughout the metropolitan Kansas City area, one will encounter a granite stone, a bronze plaque or both. More than likely, engraved somewhere on the marker will be these words: Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR, D.A.R. or the insignia, a spinning wheel with thirteen surrounding stars. In no other part of the country has the DAR marked the trails as well as they have in Kansas and Missouri. The Kansas Daughters instigated marking the trails in 1903 with the Missouri Daughters following in 1909.

#### **The DAR Marks a Trail**

In the early years, memories of old trail travelers were considered all that was needed to verify where the trail went. Old settlers and county commissioners were relied upon to determine where to place the markers. Today, the National Society (NSDAR) requires more exacting verification. Whether placing a new marker or rededicating an old one, the following requirements must be fulfilled before the NSDAR gives its permission. The design of the marker with the exact wording and DAR insignia placement must be submitted. Verification of the historical significance of the site must include documentation by primary source materials or scholarly secondary source materials. Letters from two non-DAR historical experts supporting the accuracy and significance of the presented facts must accompany the application. A complete description of the site including maps or drawings is required. Finally, written authorization to place the marker must be obtained from the property owner.

#### **The Santa Fe Trail**

From their beginning in 1896, the Kansas DAR wanted to preserve the history of the westward expansion as their eastern sisters had preserved the relics and battlefields of the American Revolution. State Regent Fannie Geiger Thompson proposed saving a part of history that was fast fading, vestiges of Kansas' first highway, the Santa Fe Trail. It is doubtful that this was her idea alone as publications of the day concerning the Santa Fe Trail would have created interest in several circles. It was, however, Mrs. Thompson's dream to place markers along the trail. At the fourth state conference in the fall of 1902 she outlined her project and urged the Kansas DAR to take up this important work. Unfortunately, before her dream could be realized, diphtheria took her life.

Emma Hills Stanley was appointed to fill the remainder of Mrs. Thompson's term and to continue the Santa Fe Trail project. Being the wife of popular former Governor William E. Stanley helped the project gain support in the Kansas Legislature, the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS), the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Santa Fe Railroad. Other Kansas DAR state officers made significant contributions, among them Zu Adams, the State Registrar who commissioned Roy Marsh to make a map of the Santa Fe Trail and Isabelle Cone Harvey, the State Vice Regent who helped select the granite marker in memory of Mrs. Thompson. Mrs. Harvey was very much opposed to the composite stone and bronze plaque markers that the Santa Fe Trail Marking Committee wanted to place along the trail, and she lobbied the committee until they agreed that granite markers would last longer and were less likely to be damaged.

Using George Sibley's 1825 survey map, recollections of trail travelers and old settlers, Roy Marsh traced the trail across Kansas for the DAR and the Kansas State



Historical Society. In 1905, the Legislature appropriated \$1,000 for this project, and in 1906 another \$584 was collected from school children on Trail Day - Kansas Day. Due in part to the generosity of the Santa Fe Railroad and the overwhelming support of the county commissioners and local friends in the involved counties, this money bought eighty-nine engraved red granite stones. In addition, DAR chapters and Old Settlers associations purchased six special markers for various commemorations. In 1915, Mrs. Cordry published her book, *The Story of the Marking of the Santa Fe Trail*, still considered the authority on where and why the markers were placed. No two are alike: each has its own distinctive shape and wording arrangement and were hand carved and engraved.

Following the Kansas DAR marking of the Santa Fe Trail, the Missouri DAR began marking the old covered wagon trails in 1909. They formed a committee that secured Missouri State funds to locate the original Santa Fe Trail. Using that appropriation, they marked the Santa Fe Trail from New Franklin to the Kansas State line in present-day south Kansas City with suitable boulders and monuments.

### **The Oregon Trail**

The Kansas DAR did not repeat the success it had marking the Santa Fe Trail in Kansas. Between 1910-1915, news of Ezra Meeker retracing the Oregon Trail made an impression, and the Kansas DAR started their campaign to mark that trail in 1914. As they had in 1904, they went to the Kansas Legislature for funds. The political climate of the Kansas Legislature had changed, however; and money, which had been generously appropriated a mere ten years earlier, was not forthcoming. The bill to mark the Oregon Trail died in committee because Ways and Means feared a dangerous precedent in view of the numerous trails in the state.

Four DAR chapters did mark sites on the Oregon Trail in Kansas in Gardner, Lawrence, Lecompton and Tecumseh. Two additional sites were marked: where the Pike Trail crossed the Oregon Trail near Barrett and at the grave of Sarah Handley Keyes, daughter of a Revolutionary War patriot and member of the Donner-Reed party who died and was buried at Alcove Springs near Marysville.

### **The Madonna of the Trail**

In 1922, the President General of the NSDAR appointed Mrs. John Trigg Moss of St. Louis chairman of the National Old Trails Road Committee. [See accompanying essay, "President for Life"] Eventually it was decided that the National Old Trails Road would be marked with twelve large statues, one for each state through which the National Old Trails Road passes. This idea came to Mrs. Moss from a picture of a statue erected to Sacagawea in Portland, Oregon. She and her son worked on her idea and presented final sketches to St. Louis sculptor August Leimbach. His finished model, a pioneer mother as a symbol of women whose courage, faith, strength and love settled the West, was named the "Madonna of the Trail." The statues were erected in 1928: the Kansas Madonna is in Council Grove and the Missouri Madonna in Lexington, both on the Santa Fe Trail.

Twisting and turning along modern section roads on a cloudy day one could easily feel lost. But there, at the next turn, is the rosy granite marker, comfort indeed that one is still on the trail and in the footsteps of traders, emigrants and the DAR.

See: Multiple letters, compilations and publications of the DAR in the archives, Kansas DAR Library, Dodge City, KS  
The Annals of Kansas 1886-1925 in two volumes: Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society.

Shirley Coupal's vocation is Night Laboratory supervisor at Childrens Mercy Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri. Her avocation, however, is the DAR and history, especially concerning the settlement of Kansas.

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