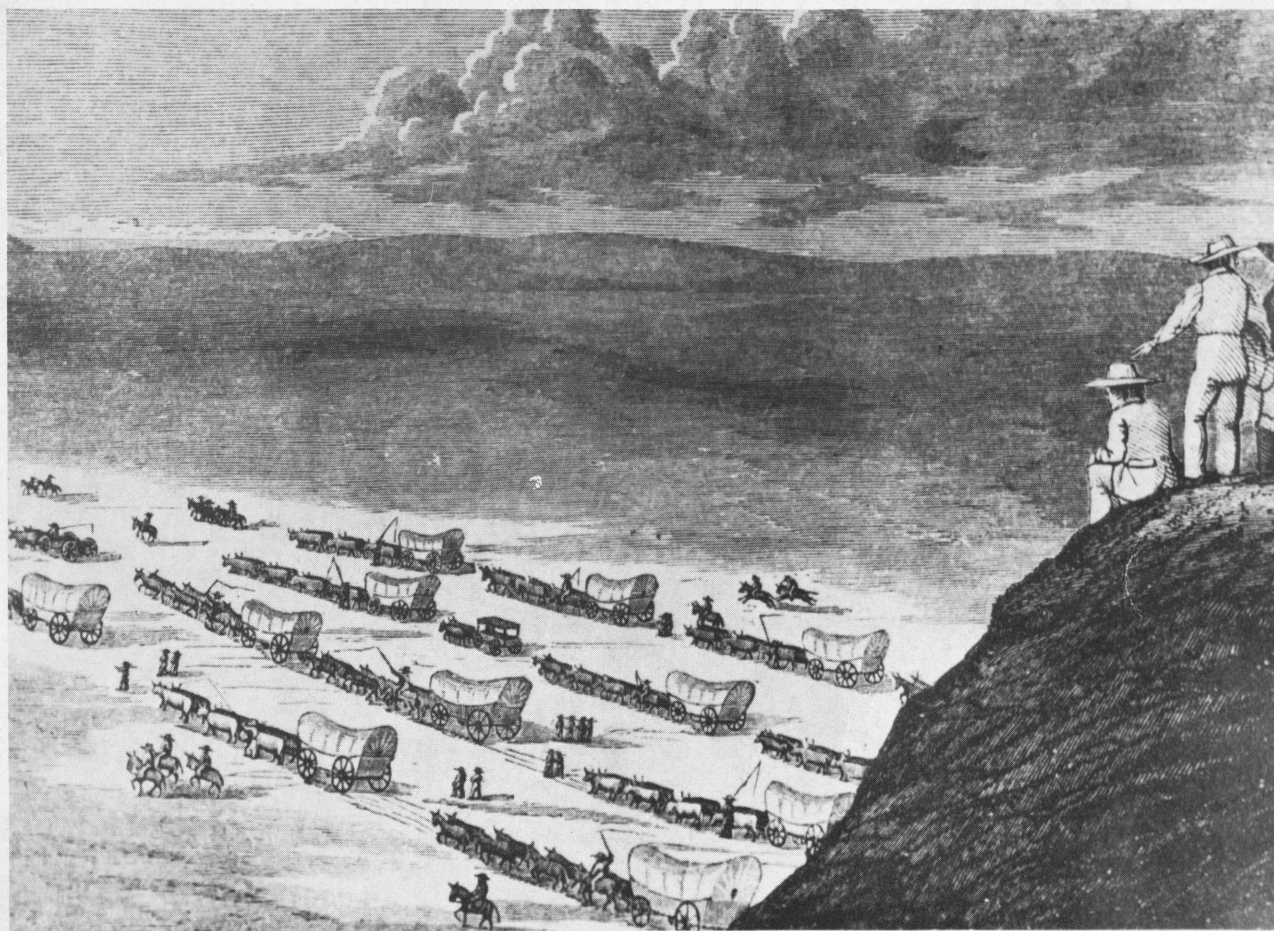


ON KANSAS TRAILS

Traveling with Explorers,
Emigrants, and Entrepreneurs



The University of Kansas
Division of Continuing Education

ON KANSAS TRAILS:

Traveling with Explorers, Emigrants, and Entrepreneurs

**Division of Continuing Education
The University of Kansas**

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March of the Caravan. From Josiah Gregg,
Commerce of the Prairies (1844).
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Acknowledgments

On Kansas Trails: Traveling with Explorers, Emigrants, and Entrepreneurs is a 26-part radio/newspaper series. It focuses on routes and travel in Kansas both as a historical and geographical reality and as a metaphor for the settlement and transformation of the state. Drawing on recent research of social historians, travel literature, and anthropological and literary works, this series provides fresh perspectives on the state's history.

On Kansas Trails has been aired on twenty-seven radio stations and published in eighty-six newspapers across the state. Because of its wide appeal, we have prepared this bound volume as a permanent resource for classroom use and for the pleasure of those individuals who want to know more about travel on Kansas trails.

Much of the credit for this series belongs to three individuals: Rita Napier, Sondra McCoy, and Katie Armitage. Rita served as the primary researcher and prepared twelve of the articles. Sondra and Katie each wrote several articles for the series. With Barbara Watkins, the project director, they created the model for On Kansas Trails and organized its contents.

Paula Schumacher also deserves a large measure of credit. She served as the project assistant, writing one article and helping transform the material from the radio to the newspaper to the bound-volume versions. Donna Butler and Jean Valk helped edit the newspaper version.

Jerry Harkness produced the radio version of On Kansas Trails and Rachel Hunter served as music consultant. Glenn Price narrated the series. All of these individuals have contributed significantly to the quality of this series.

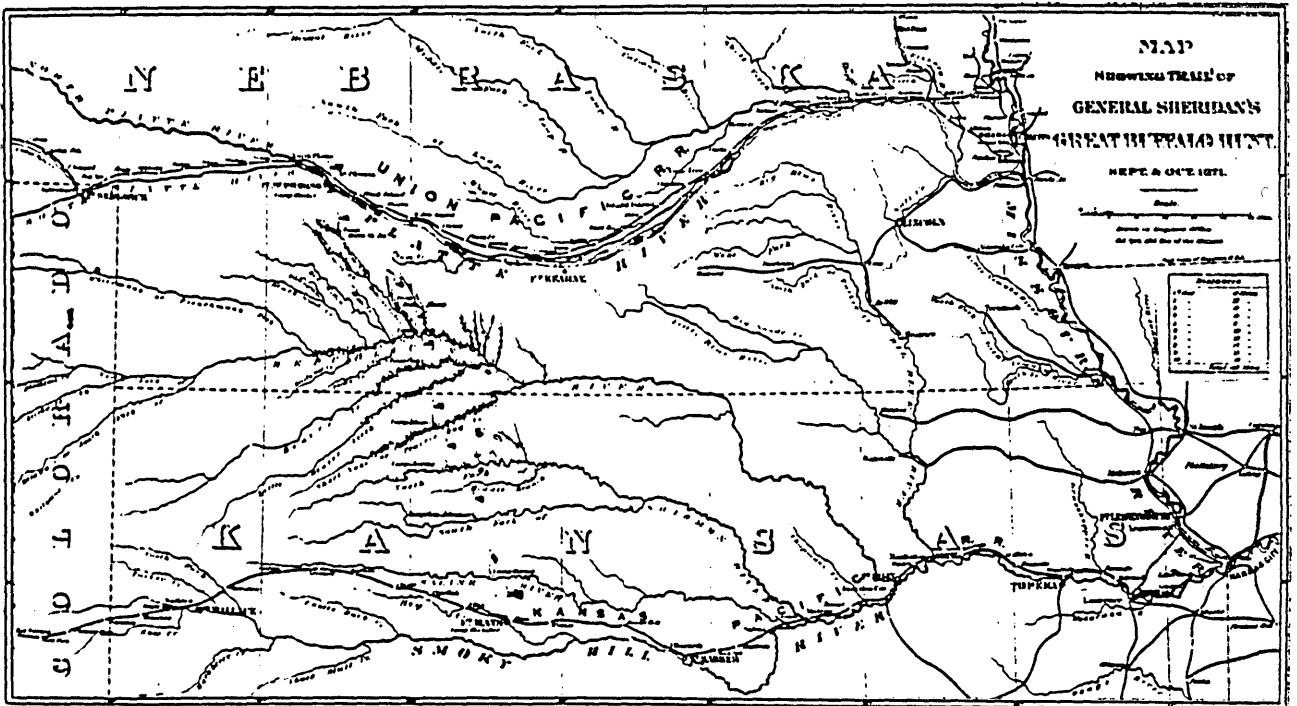
With the following exceptions all maps and illustrations in On Kansas Trails are used courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society:

University of Kansas Spencer Library, Kansas Collection:
"Early trails of Kansas" (pp. 28, 40); "Routes to the gold fields of Western Kansas" (p. 48); "Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad. German recruitment booklet" (p. 84).

University of Illinois Press: "The Pawnee Trail" (p. 4).
Detail from "Map of an Exploring Expedition to the Rocky
Mountains in the Year 1842." Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence,
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Marion County Historical Society, Marion, Kansas: "Ranches
along the the Santa Fe Trail" (p. 32). From Sondra van Meter,
Marion County, Kansas (Hillsboro: Board of Directors of the
Marion County Historical Society, 1973), p. 23. Reprinted with
permission of the Marion County Historical Society.

Library of Congress: "Le Page du Pratz's map of Louisiana."
(p. 12).



Route of General Sheridan's "Great Buffalo Hunt." 1871.

I. Buffalo Trails

This series on historic trails in Kansas will take you on both ancient and modern roads--from buffalo trails to I-70. These great highways have carried travelers to food and water, to dreams of gold, or to a new start in life.

Buffalo trails preceded those made by people. Coronado wrote of the buffalo on the Plains:

After traveling nine days I came to some plains, so vast that in my travels I did not reach their end, although I marched over them for more than three hundred leagues. On them I found so many cattle . . . there was not a single day, until my return, that I lost sight of them.¹

As Coronado and his men sought Quivira, a fantasy land of riches, they lived entirely on buffalo in their journey to the north. The advance guard marked their path with dung, which also made good fuel on the treeless plains.

Later, travelers were awestruck by the huge, "moving, black mass of buffalo." One traveler, William D. Stewart, wrote his impressions.

How many buffaloes were in that herd? And the answer, no one could tell, the herd was not less than twenty miles in width--we never saw the other side--at least sixty miles in length, maybe much longer; two counties of buffaloes! There might have been 100,000, or 1,000,000, or 1,000,000,000.²

J.R. Mead, a commercial hunter and trader, described how the migration of a massive buffalo herd in 1860 cut trails.

There had been few buffalo in the country that summer, and grass was fine. In the fall the first wave of returning buffalo stopped in the valley. . . . They kept coming until the valley was full before they crossed the river. In a week's time nearly all the grass was eaten off close to the ground. Then, for the next three weeks, there was a steady wave of buffalo passing to the south day and night. The unceasing roar

continued, and when their myriads had passed, the surface of the earth was worn like a road cut into innumerable paths. Three weeks later I went forty miles west, and found vast herds of buffalo still passing south.³

Grazing herds made trails that were short, crooked, and useless to travelers. Migrating herds, however, made wide straight paths between major grazing grounds and water. Indians and later explorers eventually followed these paths and established trails. The Pawnee Trail from the Platte River in Nebraska to the buffalo range in Kansas probably followed such a buffalo trail partway. Zebulon Pike may have used an ancient road between the Solomon and Republican rivers developed by buffalo and Indian alike.

American trappers, soldiers, sportsmen, and buffalo hunters brought a different spirit to the plains. Soldiers killed buffalo for sport, often taking only the tongues. Sportsmen sought out buffalo as big game and killed them in a bloodletting frenzy. In 1871 the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia participated in one such hunt with Generals Sheridan and Custer. One eyewitness wrote an account of the scene.

[The Duke] leaped from the saddle in a transport of astonishment, turned the horse loose, threw the gun down, cut off the tail as a souvenir, and then, setting down on the carcass, waved the dripping trophy and 'let go of a series of howls.' . . . [His party] first solemnly embraced their prince, by turns, then fell into each other's arms. The trophy was passed from hand to hand till all were plastered with blood and dirt.⁴

The real exterminators of the buffalo were the professional hunters who flooded Kansas between 1872 and 1874. The discovery that buffalo hides made fine leather set off a massive slaughter. Some hunters, like J.R. Mead, appreciated the balance of nature on the plains and the buffalo, yet joined in the killing.

Over this entrancing land roamed countless numbers of buffalo, elk and deer. Beaver built their dams and sported undisturbed in the rivers and streams. Glossy black turkeys were as common as chickens about a farmhouse. Eagles soared aloft. . . . On every side was animal life, and no one to disturb the harmony of nature except the occasional roving bands of the red men of the wilderness. . . . Nature here supplied all things their needs required, free to all alike.⁵

Yet Mead chose profit over preservation.

[My rifles] had their fill, for to my shame be it recorded that they laid low 2000 buffalo and other of God's creatures in proportion during some years of

service.⁶

Frank Meyer, however, thought buffalo hunting was just a business.

When I went into the business, I sat down and figured that I was indeed one of fortune's children. Just think! There were 20,000,000 buffalo, each worth at least \$3--\$60,000,000. . . . I could kill a hundred a day, \$300 gross, or counting everything, \$200 net profit a day. . . . Was I not lucky I discovered this quick and easy way to fortune?⁷

The great herds were probably thirteen million strong before Europeans and Americans came to the plains. From 1872 to 1874 hunters-for-profit destroyed up to three million buffalo. New technology--refrigerated railroad cars and better rifles--encouraged slaughter.

Kansas ceased to be a slaughter pen in the late 1870s, but by 1889 there were only about 1000 remaining buffalo. The days of the vast buffalo herds and the trails they carved had ended.

Notes

¹George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, eds., Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, 1540-1542, vol. 2 (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), p. 186.

²Quoted in David Dary, The Buffalo Book (New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. 26.

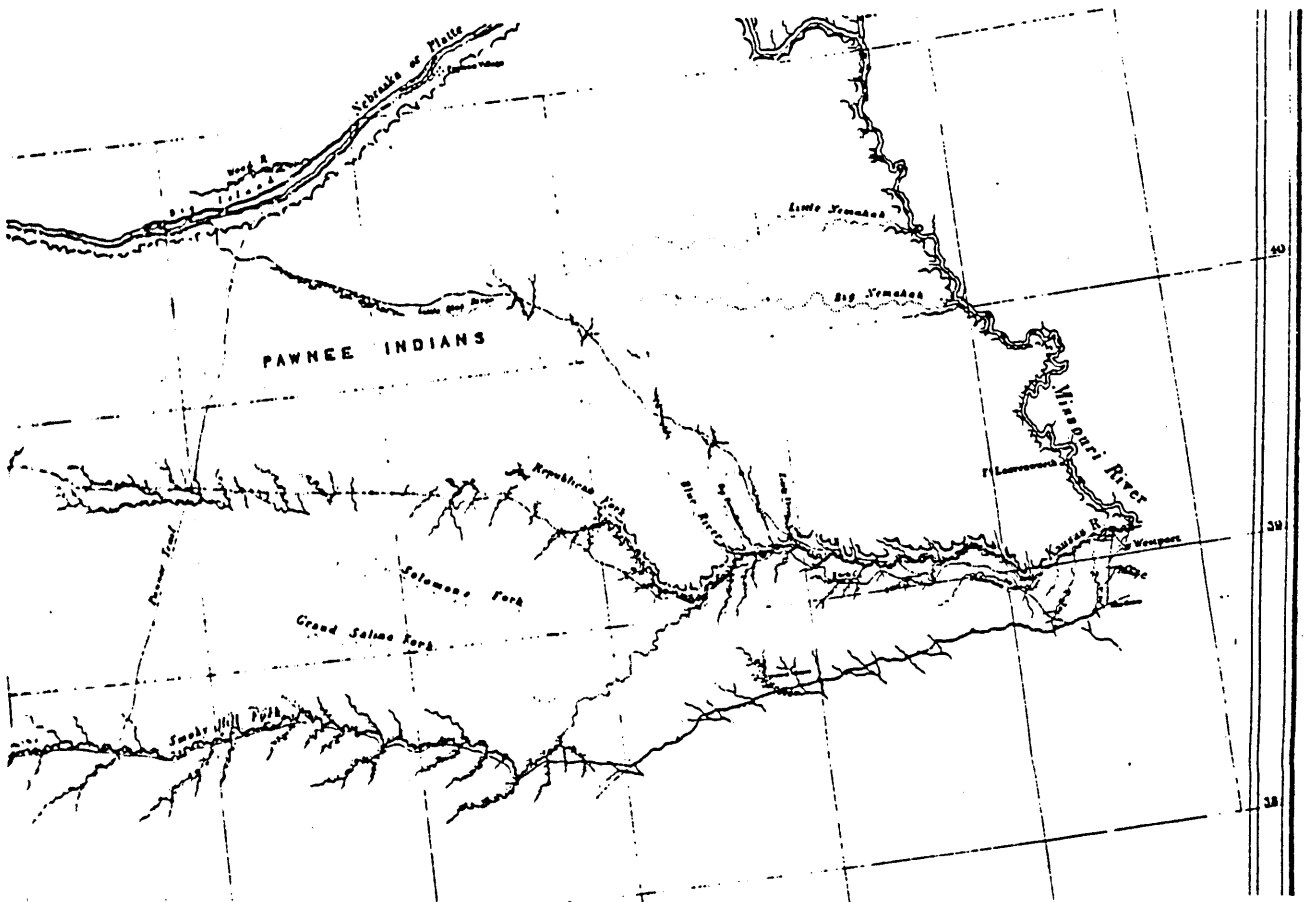
³J.R. Mead, "The Saline River Country in 1859," Collections of the Kansas State Historical 9 (1905-1906): 17-18.

⁴James Albert Hadley, "A Royal Buffalo Hunt," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 10 (1907-1908): 570.

⁵Mead, "Saline River Country," p. 8.

⁶Mead, "Saline River Country," p. 9.

⁷Quoted in David Dary, The Buffalo Book, p. 103.



The Pawnee Trail.

2. Traveling in a Sacred Manner: The Pawnee Trail

The way Pawnee Indians traveled was distinctly different from that of European or American explorers, traders, and settlers. For the Pawnee, traveling to buffalo-hunting grounds as a tribe was a sacred undertaking. Because successful hunts were necessary for the tribe's survival, they made ceremonial preparations for summer and winter tribal hunts and traveled, camped, and hunted in a sacred manner.

Every June and November the Pawnee band chiefs met to plan their trip down the trail from their villages on the tributaries of the Platte to the Kansas buffalo-hunting grounds. Anthropologist Gene Weltfish describes the ceremonial preparation for a hunt in 1867.¹

The chiefs met twice a year just before the tribe planned to leave for the buffalo hunt. . . . Each chief would bring his own eagle feather that he would wear on top of his head to represent Heaven itself during the creation. Eagle Chief had a quantity of soft white feathers . . . placed on the head at the base of the eagle feather to represent the clouds on which Heaven traveled while the creation was in progress.

Each face was painted with a bow-shaped vault-of-the-heavens design with a blue line across the forehead and down the cheeks. Another blue line down the center and along the nose represented the breath of heaven. The leaders seated themselves in a design like the Corona Borealis, their cosmic counterpart. Impersonating the holy Heaven itself, they were responsible for a successful hunt.

The leaders, now become gods, discussed the creation. They talked about the necessity of recognizing power in the earth and acting with humility, moderation, and conservation.

After the sacred part of the ceremony, they discussed practical aspects of the hunt: choosing the hunt leader, the time to leave, the length of the trip, the number of miles to travel each day, the proper food, and equipment.

Each person made careful preparation for the 900-mile round trip. Men and women prepared the necessary travel equipment, tools, and food. Women gathered together clothing, digging

sticks, floor mats, tents, mortars, bowls, spoons, ladles, and brass buckets. They packed hundreds of pounds of dried corn, beans, pumpkin, and buffalo meat. Some made extra moccasins. The men readied horses, gear, weapons, and tobacco. Arrowmakers rushed to complete enough new arrows for the hunt.

The Pawnee preserved their sacred relationship even as they traveled. In 1867, for example, nine hundred or more Pawnee organized themselves into four columns that represented villages and were spaced in the proper celestial order.

Each night they pitched their curved-roof summer tents in a pattern representing the constellations of the stars. Pumpkin-Vine village, for example, camped in the West under the protection of the Evening Star, while Wolf-in-Water camped in the Southeast under the Wolf Star sacred bundle.

It was ten camps to the Kansas hunting grounds. The Pawnee found the migrating buffalo herd near the Republican River in June 1867. Historian Rita Napier describes the hunt.

The entire tribe made a concerted attack on the herd. Well organized and disciplined, the hunters lined up in cosmic order. Everyone chanted 'softly, softly.' The prophet of the hunt signaled the end of his ritual. The hunters surrounded the herd. The men butchered their kill and the women dried it in camp. After four tribal hunts the bands dispersed to return to their villages by their favorite route on the Pawnee Trail.

The Pawnee Trail was actually a series of trails since each band favored a slightly different route. There was no map of the trail. But, according to Weltfish:

[T]he Pawnee had a detailed knowledge of every aspect of the land they would traverse. Its topography was in their minds like a series of vivid pictorial images, each a configuration where this or that event had happened in the past to make it memorable. This was especially true of the old men who had the richest store of knowledge.

The trail probably began as narrow traces cut by moccasined feet, dogs, and travois and likely saw use in trade and warfare as early as the thirteenth century. The Indians from Harahey who came to visit Coronado in 1541 in Quivira at the Great Bend of the Arkansas River may have traveled the Pawnee Trail. The trail may have continued as well into Oklahoma where the Pawnee visited their Wichita kindred.²

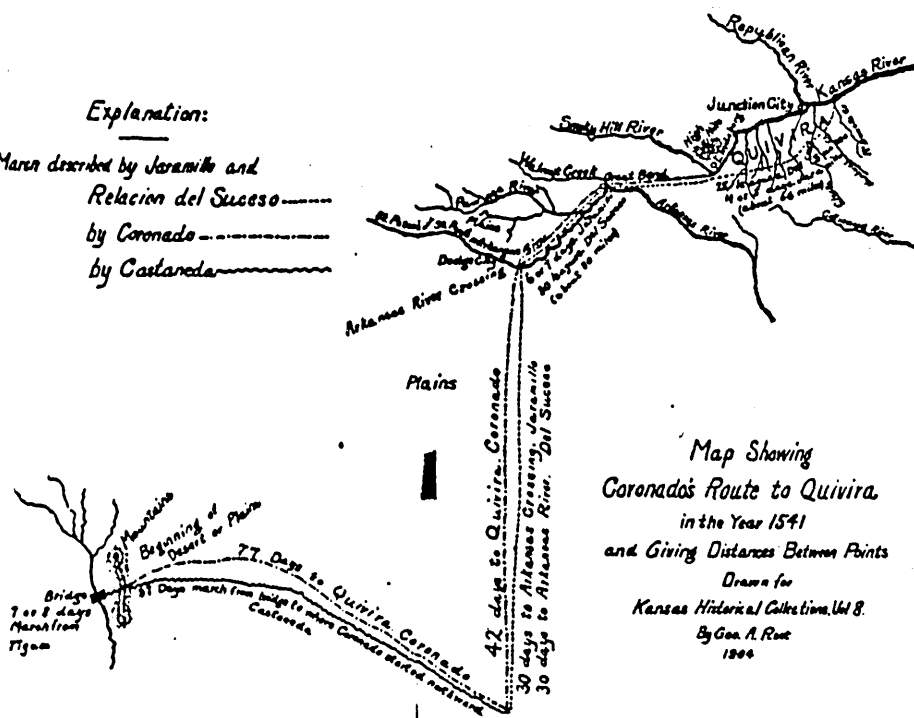
After the Pawnee got horses in the sixteenth century, the trail broadened and became more distinct. The Indians continued to use the trail for hunting and warfare into the nineteenth century. Passing by, overland travelers and explorers often noted the trail.

Notes

¹Gene Weltfish, The Lost Universe (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), p. 159. The following discussion of the hunt is based on Weltfish.

²Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, eds., The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 180-81; Homer Socolofsky and Floyd Self, Historical Atlas of Kansas (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), p. 17.

Explanation:
 March described by Jaramilla and
 Relacion del Suceso -----
 by Coronado -----
 by Castaneda ~~~~~



Map Showing
 Coronado's Route to Quivira
 in the Year 1541
 and Giving Distances Between Points

Drawn for
 Kansas Historical Collection, Vol. 8.
 By Gen. A. Root
 1896



Coronado's route to Quivira in 1541.

3. Fabled Journeys and Furs: Spanish and French Exploration in Kansas

Europeans in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries spoke of a land of riches in the New World. Quivira, fabled land of gold, was thought to be in what is now Kansas.

Coronado and other Spanish and French travelers peopled Quivira with their hopes and dreams.

Quivira is in a land where there is a river in the level country . . . two leagues wide in which there were fishes as big as horses. . . . [T]he lord of that country took his afternoon nap under a great tree on which were hung a great number of little gold bells, which put him to sleep as they swung in the air. . . . [E]veryone had their ordinary dishes made of wrought plate, and the jugs and bowls were gold.¹

To find Quivira, Coronado used trails that Indians had made for exploration, travel, and trade. These trails often followed the paths of migrating buffalo.

Coronado started his trek with a caravan of about 300 men, 1500 horses, mules, and stock. On the plains they suffered from lack of provisions and subsisted entirely on buffalo. Because supplies were so short, Coronado sent most of his party back to Mexico. In his final push to Quivira, he stripped the force to thirty of his best horsemen and horses.

Coronado gave us our first picture of the Apache who then inhabited the high plains, including western Kansas. Of the Apache, he wrote:

After seventeen days of travel, I came across a rancheria of the Indians who follow these cattle. These natives are called Querechos. They do not cultivate the land, but eat raw meat and drink the blood of the cattle they kill. They dress in the skins of the cattle and they have very well-constructed tents. . . . They have dogs which they load to carry their tents, poles and belongings.²

At the Arkansas River Coronado's expedition crossed at a ford long used by Indians and buffalo. They found the land

pleasing and similar to Spain, but this land of fable was without riches.

[The houses] are of straw, and the people are savage. . . . They have no blankets, nor cotton. . . . All they have is the tanned skins of the cattle they kill. . . . [T]he herds are near where they live, at quite a large river.³

Coronado spent about a month in Kansas and then returned to Mexico by another, shorter route--an Indian trading route that later became part of the Santa Fe Trail. After Coronado, other Spanish explorers journeyed to Quivira, still seeking riches and territories to conquer.

The French began their explorations of the area much later--at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Knowledge of Kansas and its people had advanced little since the sixteenth century. The French trail to Kansas was up the Missouri River from St. Louis. Like the Spanish, the French desired territory, but they sought it through trade and alliance with local tribes rather than through conquest.

One of the goals of the French was to stop Spanish expansion in the Southwest. French trader Etienne Veniard de Bourgmont had married an Indian woman and established good relationships with the tribes. His government ordered him to make peace with tribes in the area, implement a French plan for territorial expansion, and find a route to Santa Fe.

In his peacemaking efforts, Bourgmont first traveled to the Kansa Indian villages on the Kansas River and its tributaries. The Kansa welcomed him. At the "Grand Village de Quans" one of the chiefs greeted him:

We have watched you during the years that you have passed among us; you have never deceived us. Thus we love you, we are listening to you, and we shall follow you wherever you wish; we have no other will than yours.⁴

Later Bourgmont traveled to central Kansas with delegations of Missourians, Osages, and Otos on his diplomatic mission. On this march to the Padouca tribe, Bourgmont followed an Indian trail along the banks of the Kansas River.

The Frenchmen brought guns, sabers, axes, knives, combs, awls, kettles, bells, beads, clothes, rings, and boxes of vermillion. Bourgmont stood among the piles of glittering merchandise, urging peace, trade, and safe passage to the Spanish lands.

The Padoucas responded favorably.

When the French come to see us, we will receive them

well and in case they want to go to the Spaniards to trade, we will guide them there. [The Spaniards] are only a distance of twelve marching days from our village; every spring they come to see us, they bring us horses and bring us a few knives and a few awls and a few axes, but they are not like you, who give us here a quantity of merchandise, such as we have never seen.⁵

Though the treaty was indecisive and did not stop Indian trade with the Spanish to the southwest, Bourgmont's trip increased French power on the plains. When Bourgmont returned to France with a delegation of Indians, Louis XV raised him to nobility for his accomplishments.

Notes

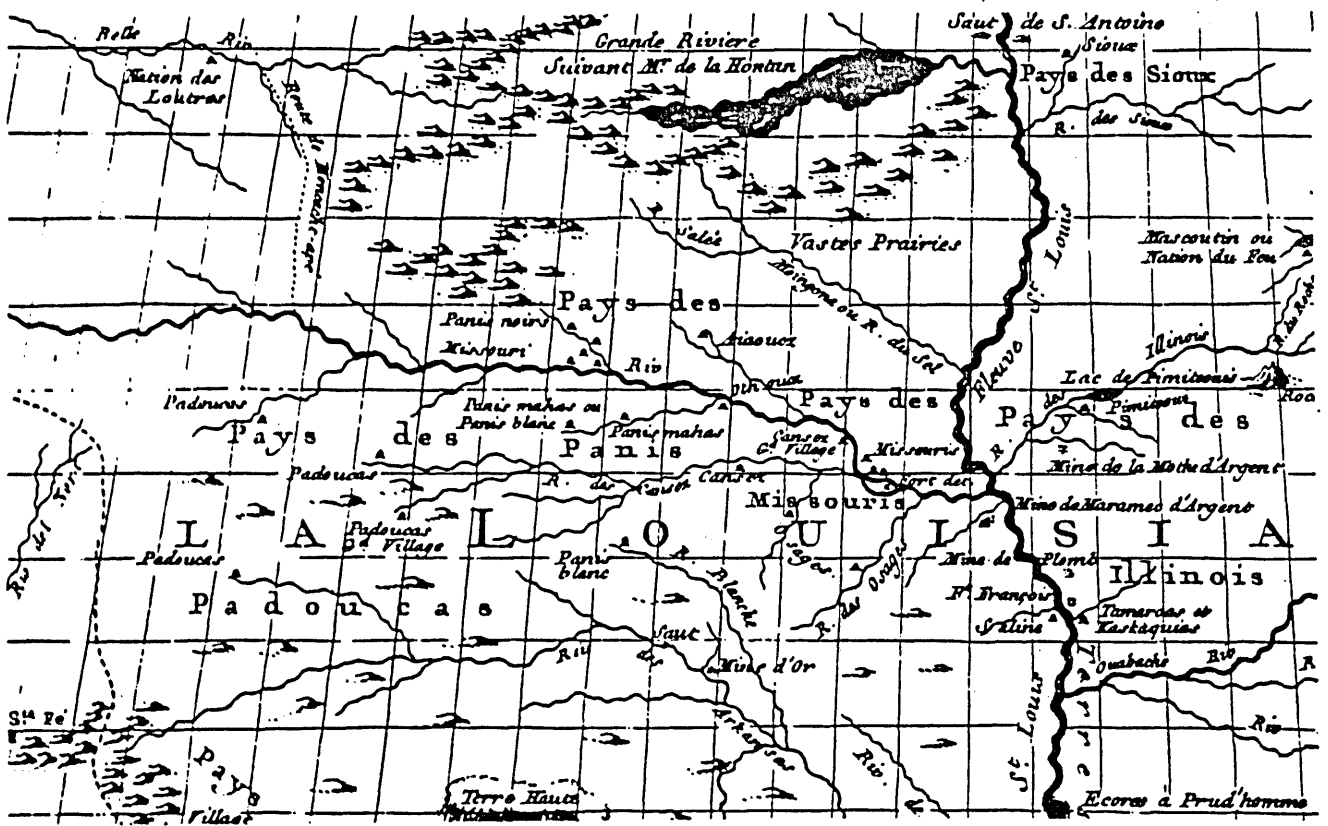
¹George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, eds., Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, 1540-1542, vol. 2 (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), p. 185.

²Hammond and Rey, Narratives, p. 186.

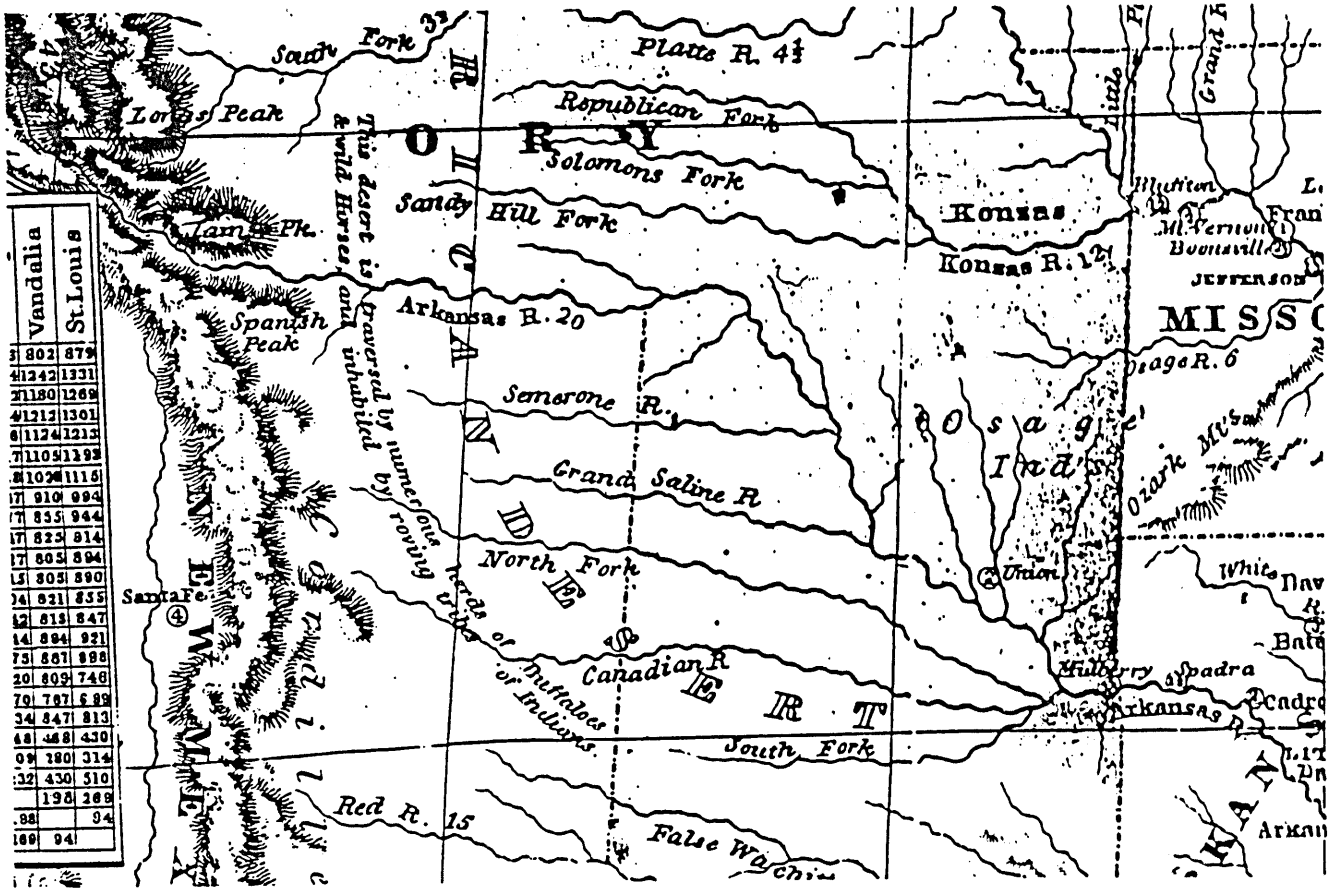
³Hammond and Rey, Narratives, p. 188.

⁴Quoted in William Unrau, The Kansa (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 62.

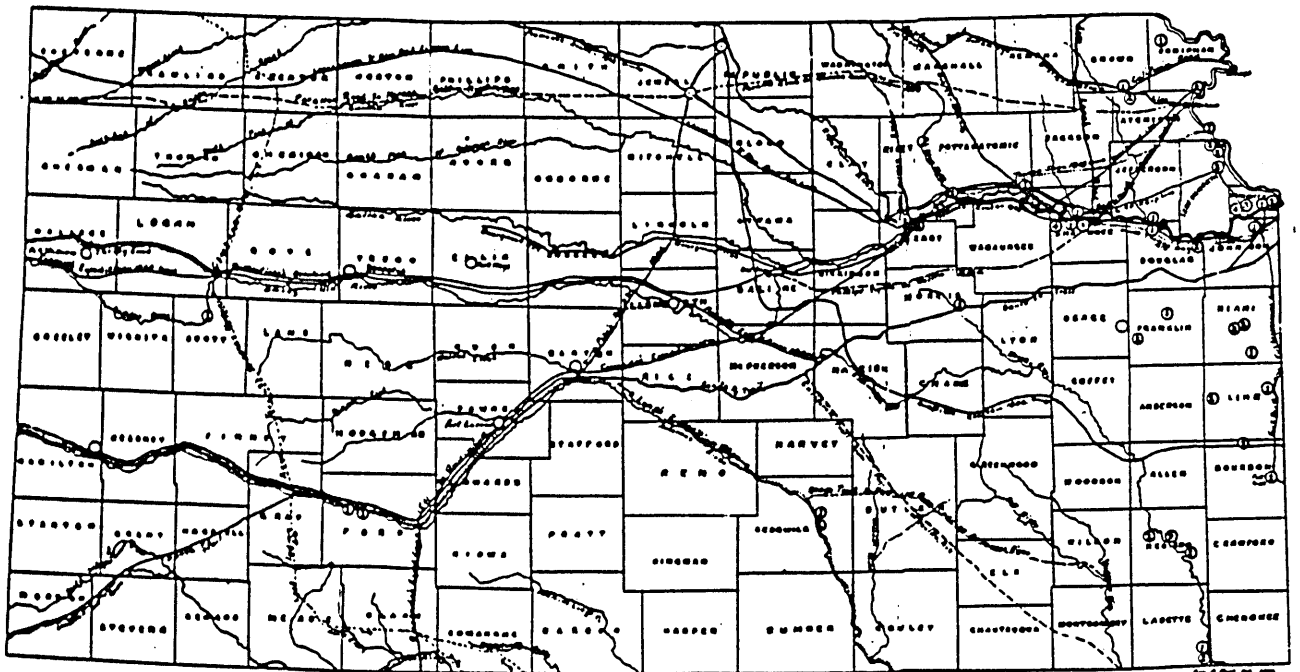
⁵Pierre Margry, Explorations of the Tributaries of the Mississippi and Discovery of the Rocky Mountains, 1679-1754, Part VI of Discoveries and Establishments of the French within the West and within the South of North America, 1614-1754 (Paris: Imprimerie Jouast et Sejoux Rue Saint-Honore, 1886), p. 338. A copy of a translation by Beatrice Paddock (1936) is in the Kansas Room, Wichita Public Library, Wichita, Kansas.



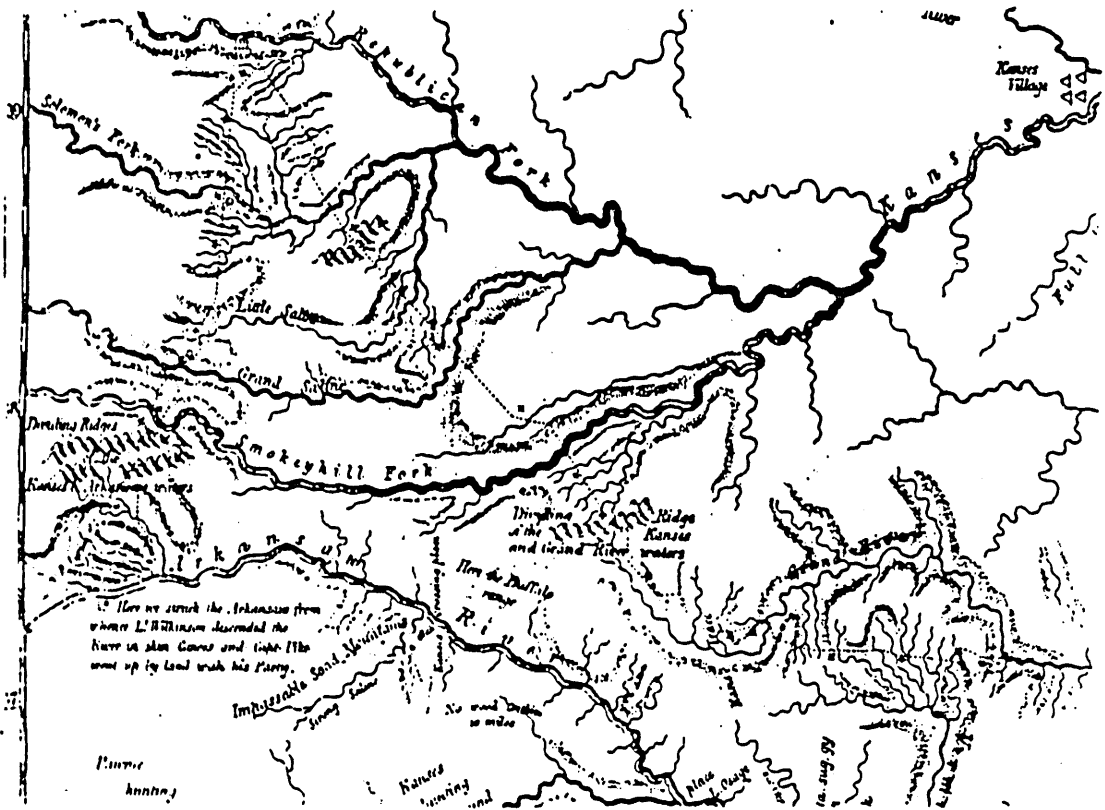
Le Page du Pratz's map of Louisiana. 1758.



The "Great American Desert." 1828.



Early routes across Kansas. Etienne Bourgmont's route (1724) crosses from the Missouri to central Kansas.



Detail of Zebulon Pike's map of Kansas. 1806.

4. Solving the Mystery of the West: The Early Explorers

[D]espite the fact that Lewis and Clark had made known . . . the width of the continent, the existence of numerous ranges of high mountains, the location and description of the major rivers of the Northwest and the rich resources of the whole region, what was eventually to become the American West was still largely a geographical mystery.¹

William Goetzmann
Exploration and Empire

In the early nineteenth century, explorers Zebulon Pike and Stephen H. Long wanted to solve that mystery with new data and maps. Because of the central location of Kansas, explorers regularly made trails along her rivers and across her plains in search of both knowledge and political advantage.

Zebulon Pike was a spy for the governor of Louisiana and a double agent for the United States and Spain. Pike's official job was to help establish the western border of the Louisiana Purchase by locating the headwaters of the Red River and to make peace with several tribes. His unofficial instructions were to "spy out . . . [the] approaches and defenses" of Santa Fe.

Pike traveled northwest across Kansas from the Osage villages in western Missouri to the Pawnee villages in Nebraska. He then turned southwest across Kansas following a large contingent of Spanish soldiers and learned about the border area between the United States and the Spanish colonies. Pike returned to the United States in 1807. His writings created new images of the West, which he described as the "Great American Desert."

Stephen H. Long's expedition of 1819-1820 explored the upper reaches of western rivers and reasserted the United States' presence in the upper Mississippi and Missouri River reaches. He accompanied a military force that was to build a fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River.

Long's expedition pioneered the use of steamboats on the Missouri and was also the first United States expedition to include trained scientists to gather data. Zoologist Thomas Say and a group under his command explored the Kansas River valley to the great Kansa village at the mouth of Blue Earth Creek.

The Konzas river has a considerable resemblance to the Missouri. Its valley, like that of the Missouri, has a deep and fertile soil, bearing similar forests of cottonwood, sycamore. . . [The] trees become more and more scattered, and at length disappear. . . [T]he country [is] one immense prairie.²

Along Blue Earth Creek, however, Say noted the change in terrain.

The soil supports but a thin growth of grass, and the timber is far from abundant, consisting principally of different sorts of oak, confined to the margin of the creek, its ravines and tributaries.³

Northwest of the Kansa village, the soil changed abruptly.

The high prairies about the Vermillion and Blue Earth creeks are barren, almost naked and inhabited by some orbicular lizards [horned toads]. About Grasshopper Creek the soil is fertile, the grass dense and luxuriant.⁴

Here was information settlers could use in selecting farmland. Yet these scientists agreed with Pike that the land to the West was a desert.

In ascending the Konzas river, one hundred . . . miles from the Missouri, you discover numerous indications of an approach to the borders of that great Sandy Desert.⁵

Earlier travelers on trails into the West often regarded the wilderness as foreign or fearsome. But, to new scientist-explorers like Thomas Say, the land was the object of scientific description to determine how to conquer and transform it. They sought in the wilderness exotic plants and animals and new species.

The naturalists also included Indian people as objects for scientific study. At the Kansa village, Say systematically recorded data on food, dress, marriage customs, chastity, leadership, and warfare.

At this village they ate very well.

[The Kansa] commonly placed before us a sort of soup composed of maize . . . boiled in water, and enriched with a few slices of bison meat, grease, and some beans, and to suit it to our palates, it was generally seasoned with rock salt, which is procured near the Arkansas river. They also make much use of maize roasted on the cob, of boiled pumpkins, of muskmelons.⁶

Though Say approached the Kansa as a scientist, he was

influenced by his own cultural assumptions. Like most explorers before him, he depicted the female as a drudge who did all the work, while he never mentioned work done by men.

The females, like those of other aborigines, cultivate the maize, beans, pumpkins, and water-melons; gather and prepare the former, when ripe, and pack them away in skins, or in mats, for keeping; prepare the flesh of the bison for drying, . . . attend to all the cooking; bring wood and water; and in other respects manage the domestic concerns, and appear to have over them absolute sway.⁷

Say and his colleagues were also handicapped by their lack of experience as explorers. When a Pawnee band accosted them, they lost their packhorses and some baggage. The exertion of the journey, the food, and the exposure to the elements made some of the scientists ill. They aborted their exploration of the Platte territory and returned to their steamboat.

The expedition made little headway in 1819. They wintered at Council Bluffs rather than going on to the Yellowstone. The following year, the expedition was ordered to explore the Southwest instead. They explored to the Rocky Mountains, climbed Pike's Peak, and returned in two groups via the Arkansas and Canadian rivers.

The information these explorers provided whetted the nation's appetite. Wagon trains soon began to travel to Santa Fe and mountain men spread out to explore the territory.

Notes

¹William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 8.

²Edwin James, Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 20 . . ., in Reuben Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels 1748-1846, vol. 14 (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1905), p. 173.

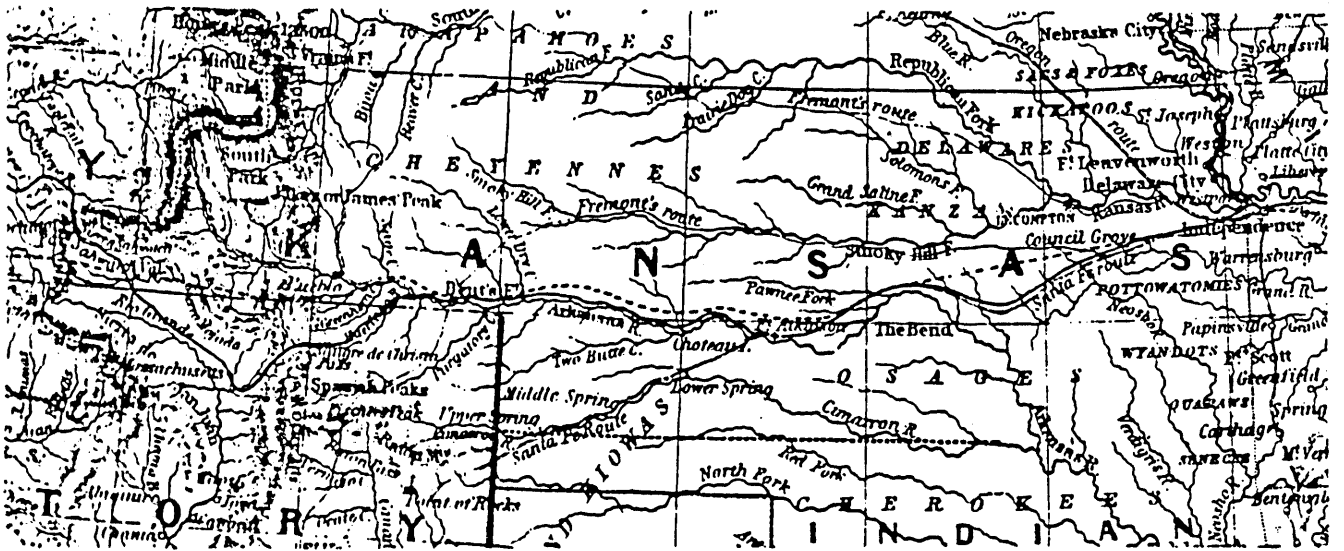
³James, p. 200.

⁴James, p. 210.

⁵James, p. 212.

⁶James, pp. 190-91.

⁷James, p. 197.



A new map of the United States of America (showing John Charles Fremont's route across Kansas). 1856.

5. Making the Eagle Scream: John Charles Fremont

In the 1840s the United States launched a new period of exploration in the West. These expeditions were to acquire information that would encourage emigration, settlement, and economic growth. The symbolic leader of this expansion, John Charles Fremont, and his mentor, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, "helped shape the exact contours of America's western domain."¹

The army sponsored Fremont's three expeditions. They were actually "secret missions" whose purpose was known only to Benton, Fremont, and a few close associates. Historian William Goetzmann wrote:

In short, all three times that he went out into the West in 1842-45, Fremont was on secret missions that nevertheless committed the government to a position and a policy far beyond anything publically acknowledged.²

Fremont made the American eagle scream: the United States would expand to the Pacific. He played key roles in establishing the United States presence in the far West: determining the Oregon boundary, acquiring California, and publicizing resources and opportunities.

The public purpose of the 1842 expedition was to map the emigrant trail to Oregon. Instead, Fremont climbed the highest peak of the Wind River mountains and "planted a home-made eagle flag symbolizing American sovereignty."

In 1843 Fremont mapped the Oregon Trail, but once he had reached Fort Vancouver, he went beyond his instructions and explored parts of Oregon and California. Near Lake Tahoe he recklessly crossed the Sierras in winter. Finally he explored the Great Basin country.

In 1845, instead of exploring the Red River, Fremont blazed a new central trail through the Rockies. Then he participated in the Bear Flag Revolt in an attempt to link California's destiny to that of the United States.

For each of these expeditions Fremont assembled an international crew with extensive knowledge of the West. Fremont

wrote of his crew.

I had collected in the neighborhood of St. Louis twenty-one men, principally Creole and Canadian 'voyageurs,' who had become familiar with prairie life in the service of the fur companies in the Indian country. . . . [Kit] Carson . . . was our guide.³

Making extensive use of Indian knowledge, Fremont used Delaware guides as he broke a new trail south of the Kansas River in 1843. Even the mountain men, such as Jedediah Smith, relied heavily on Indian knowledge. Smith, for example, had Crow Indians construct a replica of the Wind River mountains out of sand on a deerskin to locate a pass.

These explorers often investigated territory that was new only to their own society. The real discoverers of many western trails were Indian people.

Fremont began each expedition in Kansas, outfitting at Cyprian Chouteau's post at Kawsmouth. Provisioning was a key aspect of exploration. Though explorers depended on hunting, they carried sugar, flour, coffee, and salt.

Once, when Fremont crossed the Kansas River, it was in flood.

Two of the men who could not swim came nigh being drowned, and all the sugar belonging to one of the misses wasted its sweets on the muddy waters; but our greatest loss was a bag of coffee, which contained nearly all our provision. It was a loss which none but a traveler in a strange and inhospitable country can appreciate.⁴

Fremont embraced the new adventures, but he also welcomed signs of his own society. On the first expedition in 1842, he wrote:

Traveling on the fresh traces of the Oregon emigrants relieves a little the loneliness of the road; and tonight, after a march of twenty-two miles, we halted on a small creek, which had been one of their encampments. . . . [The next day when we halted for lunch] a pack of cards, lying loose on the grass, marked an encampment of our Oregon emigrants.⁵

The clarity of his prose, edited by his wife, Jessie Benton Fremont, helps explain the popularity of his reports. For example, he vividly described an abrupt change in the environment near the 102 meridian.

At noon on the 23rd, we descended into the valley of a principal fork of the Republican, a beautiful stream with a dense border of wood, consisting principally of

varieties of ash, forty feet wide and four feet deep. It was musical with the notes of many birds, which, from the vast expanse of silent prairie around, seemed all to have collected here. . . . Shortly after leaving our encampment on the 26th, we found suddenly that the nature of the country had entirely changed. Base sand hills everywhere surrounded us in the undulating ground along which we were moving; and the plants peculiar to a sandy soil made their appearance in abundance.⁶

One of Fremont's great contributions was his popularization of accurate information about the West. His reports greatly assisted emigrants. These reports and the diplomacy he practiced on his secret explorations made Fremont one of America's great explorers.

Notes

¹William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 232.

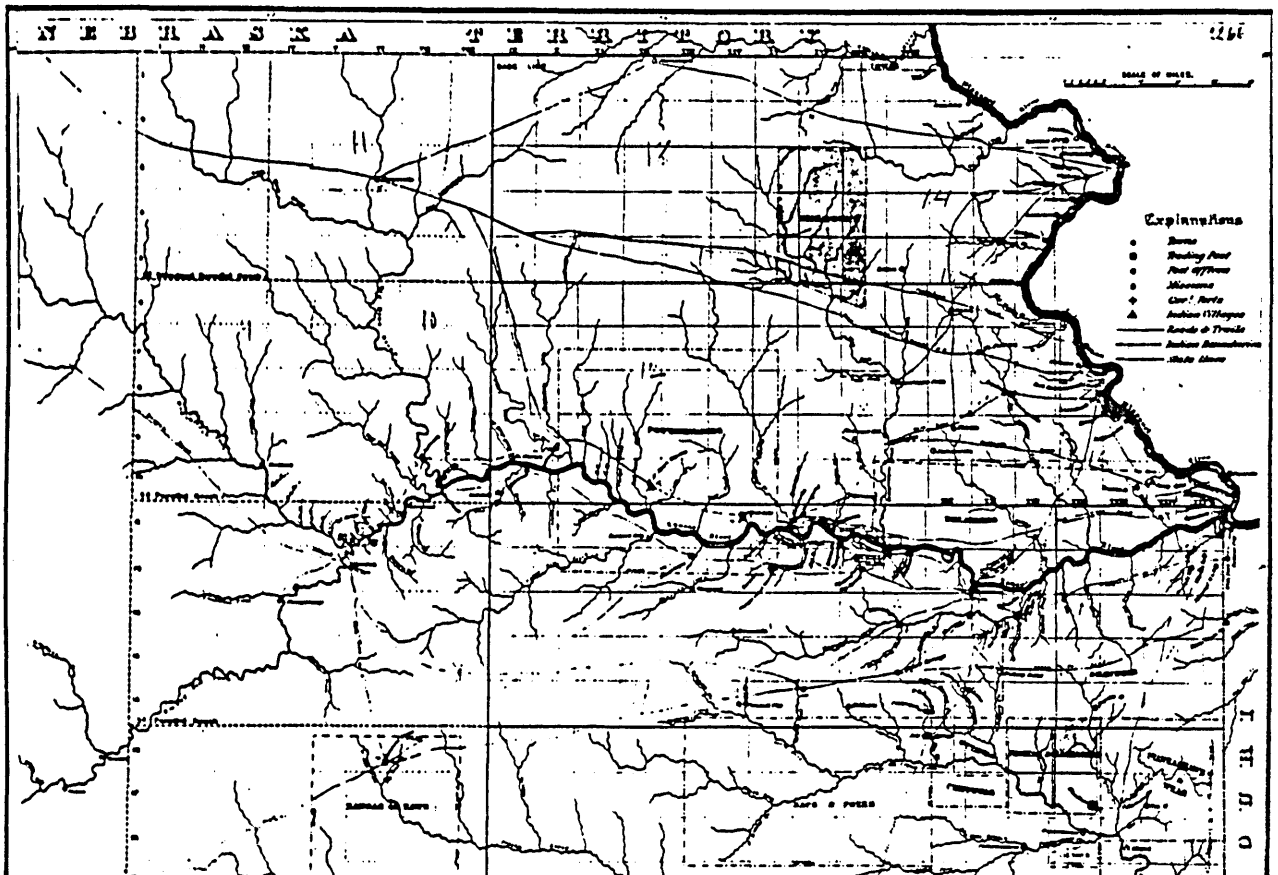
²Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, p. 240.

³Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, eds., The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, vol. 1 (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1970), p. 170.

⁴Jackson and Spence, Expeditions, p. 174.

⁵Jackson and Spence, Expeditions, p. 178.

⁶Jackson and Spence, Expeditions, p. 434.



The Missouri River.

6. River Highway to the Interior

For centuries travelers have followed the Missouri River to new homes, to adventure, and to empire. It is a highway to the heartland of the continent.

The Missouri and its tributaries, which drain half of the continent, led migrating tribes to the "heart of the world" in Dakota country and the Spanish to the fabled Quivira. On its banks the Mandans established great aboriginal trading centers and the Kansa built earth-lodge villages. Later adventurers explored the river's mysteries in search of the legendary Northwest Passage to the Pacific and the fabled riches of the Orient.

French traders traveled the river for reasons other than trade. On the upper Missouri dwelt the Mandans, a tribe that believed that people could transfer power from one to another through sexual relations. Mandan women thought the traders had immense power because of their trade goods, such as iron knives and brass pots, and thus sought them as sexual partners. Traders interpreted the women's behavior as promiscuous but were eager to accept their offers.

David Thompson, a British trader, commented:

[This sexual experience was] almost their sole motive for their journey hereto; the goods they bought, they sold at fifty to sixty percent above their cost; and reserving enough to pay their debts, and buy some corn, they spent the rest on women.¹

The traders sought these pleasures while condemning the women. They sought the exotic, even as they reviled it.

Traders and trappers also perceived the Missouri as a highway to profit. It was the major route of the French, Spanish, and Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The French trader Antoine Tabeau, like many others, fought the river snags and fierce mosquitoes along the eastern border of Kansas.

It was hardly possible to spread mosquito-nets over the boats and, of all the inconveniences and sufferings of the voyage, mosquitoes should be put down as the worst. . . . During the whole day the boats were enveloped as in a cloud.²

Still, profits were invitingly high and trade up the Missouri River highway flourished. The French established Fort Cavagnial in 1745 on the Missouri for trade and diplomatic relations with regional tribes. The fort was situated near the "Grande Village des Kanses" in what is now Leavenworth County, Kansas.

A commandant and troops manned the fort, which received summer and fall bateau convoys, bringing trade goods, supplies, and official correspondence by pirogue, raft, and Mackinaw boats. During the winter "voyageurs" traded energetically for furs, which they brought to the fort for storage and protection until they could be shipped downriver in spring. Slaves at the fort labored in a provisions garden, tobacco field, and kitchen garden to supply food and a little luxury to the fort's inhabitants. Fort Cavagnial was a formal post with soldiers in "bright coats, embroidered vests, and knee-britches."³

Lewis and Clark added another layer to the region's history in 1804 when they gave new names to rivers and places known only in French on earlier maps.

[W]e reached a creek on the south, about 12 yards wide, coming from an extensive prairie which approached the borders of the river. To this creek, which had no name, we gave that of Fourth of July creek. After 15 miles' sail we came to on the north a little above a creek on the south side, about 30 yards wide, which we called Independence creek, in honor of the day, which we could celebrate only by an evening gun, and an additional gill of whisky to the men.⁴

Naturalists, tourists, and painters also traveled up the Missouri in the nineteenth century. The advent of the steamboat made their trips quicker and more comfortable than those of the earlier explorers and traders.

Men like Prince Maximilian of Germany sought knowledge of this still relatively unknown land. Maximilian collected specimens of plants and animals and kept a journal record of his observations.

We saw in the neighborhood [of Fort Leavenworth] the beautiful yellow-headed Icterus Xantheocephalus. The black oak and other trees were in blossom, and many interesting plants. Near the banks, where the vessel lay, the beds of limestone were full of shells, of which we kept some for specimens.⁵

With the steamboat, trade and travel on the Missouri increased. In western Missouri farms and towns prospered. Travelers to Santa Fe, Oregon, and California crossed the Missouri River at the jumping-off points to the West. Finally in the 1850s, Kansas Territory was opened and settlers, politicians, tourists, and even newspapermen, flocked in.

Mark Twain, on his way to goldfield adventure in Nevada, wrote of his trip up the Missouri in 1862.

We were six days going from St. Louis to 'St. Jo.'--a trip so dull, and sleepy, and worthless that it left no more impression on my memory than if its duration had been six minutes. . . . No record is left in my mind, now, concerning it, but a confused jumble of savage-looking snags, which we deliberately walked over with one wheel or the other; and of reefs which we batted and butted. . . . The boat might almost as well have gone to St. Jo. by land, for she was walking most of the time anyhow. . . . I thought she wanted a pair of stilts, but I had the deep sagacity not to say so.⁶

The railroad superseded steamboat travel to Kansas in the 1860s, but the river and its traffic remained a significant part of Kansas history.

Notes

¹Quoted in George Catlin, O Kee Pa; A Religious Ceremony and Other Customs of the Mandan, John Ewers, ed. (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 5.

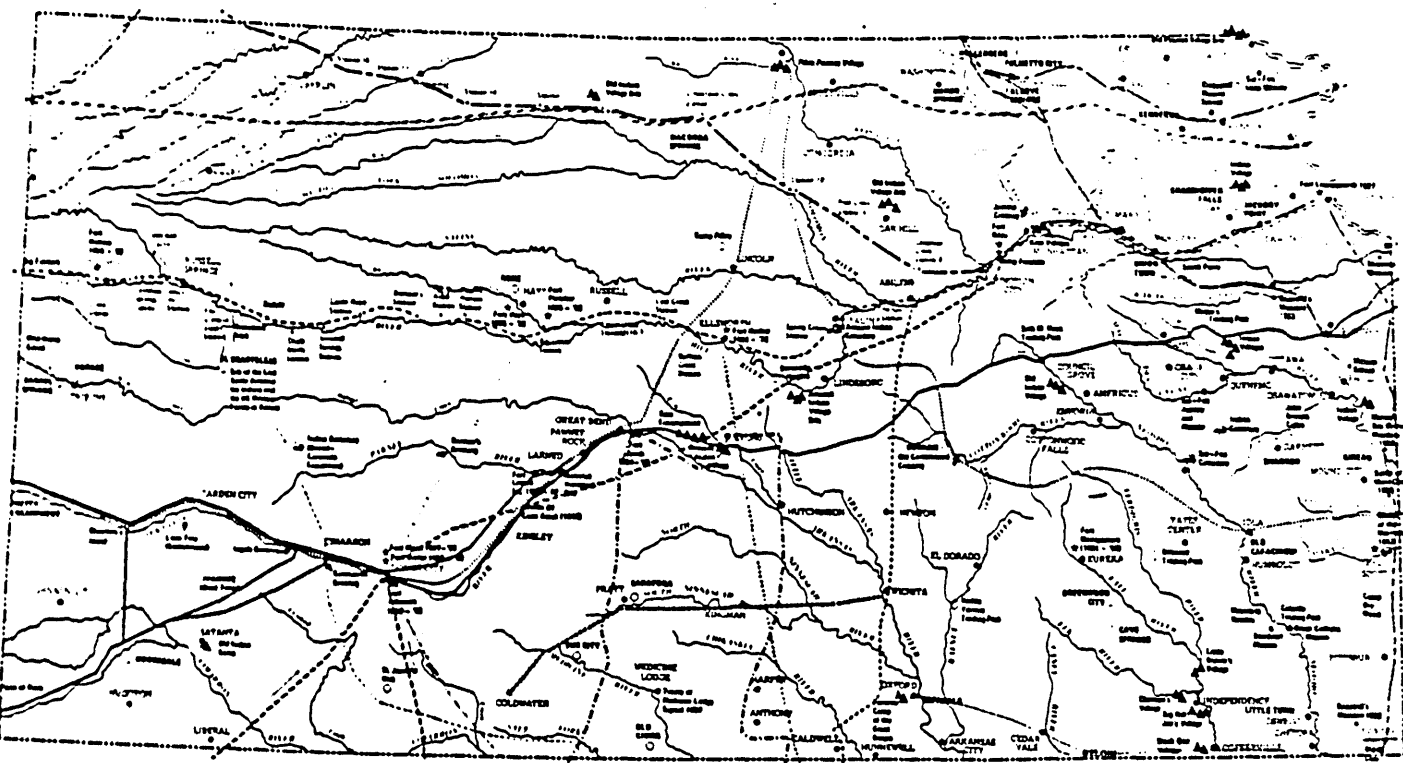
²Annie H. Abel, ed., Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 63.

³Charles E. Hofhaus, Chez les Canses (Kansas City, Mo.: The Lowell Press, 1984), pp. 53-88.

⁴Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, The History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, vol. 1, Elliot Coues, ed. (New York: Dover Publications, n.d.), p. 38.

⁵Prince Maximilian of Wied, Travels in the Interior of North America, vol. 1 (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1906), p. 254.

⁶Samuel Langhorne Clemens [Mark Twain], The Works of Mark Twain: Roughing It (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 50-51.



Early Trails of Kansas

LEGEND

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ————— Santa Fe Trail 1821-1872 Ll. Zebulon Pike's Route 1806 ----- Oregon Trail 1830-1870 ▨▨▨▨▨ Smoky Hill or Burdettfield Overland Dispatch 1869-1870 ▧▧▧▧▧ Fort Leavenworth-Fort Scott Military Road 1836-1866 ▩▩▩▩▩ Coronado's Route 1541 ▪▪▪▪▪ Parallel Road 1850-C. 1886 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖ Nathaniel Boone's Route 1843 ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ Chisholm Cattle Trail to Abilene 1867-1871 ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ Ellsworth Cattle Trail 1872-1874 ⊘ ⊘ ⊘ ⊘ ⊘ Cattle Trail to Dodge City 1875-1885 ⊚ ⊚ ⊚ ⊚ ⊚ Last Indian Raid Through Kansas 1878 ⊛ ⊛ ⊛ ⊛ ⊛ St. Joseph, Mo. to California Route 1842-1870 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊜⊜⊜⊜⊜ Fort Dodge to Fort Hays Route 1867-C. 1880 ⊝⊝⊝⊝⊝ Pony Express Trail 1860-1861 ⊞⊞⊞⊞⊞ Leavenworth-Pike's Peak Express 1859-1860 ⊠⊠⊠⊠⊠ Cannon Ball State Coach Road 1875-C. 1888 ⊡⊡⊡⊡⊡ Black Dog's Hunting Route ⊣⊣⊣⊣⊣ Fort Riley-Fort Kearney Cavalry Route 1853-1871 |
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7. Santa Fe Trail and Trade

It sounded like romance to hear of caravans of men, horses, and wagons traversing with their merchandise the vast plain which lies between the Mississippi and the Rio del Norte. . . . The journey to New Mexico, but lately deemed a chimerical project, had become an affair of ordinary occurrence.[†]

Senator Thomas Hart Benton, 1824

Persuaded by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, the United States Senate authorized surveying a road from the Missouri frontier to the Mexican boundary in the mid-1820s. They paid the Osage Indians \$800 for the privilege of marking a trail and using it free and unmolested forever.

This trail to Santa Fe, New Mexico, was one of the best natural roads in the nation. Level terrain, fordable streams, and ample grass and water made the route suitable for man and animal.

Mexican independence from Spain in 1821 opened trade between Mexico and the United States. Hugh Glenn of Ohio and Captain William Becknell of Missouri were first to take advantage of the opportunity. Becknell and four companions made the trip by packhorse in 1821.

On Becknell's second expedition in 1822, he used three mule-drawn wagons. This was the first wagon train to travel the Santa Fe Trail and the first to cross the Great Plains.

Trail starting points included towns in Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas. Most of the branches combined before joining the main trail at Council Grove. In the early years caravans were small and passage was usually safe. More often than not, Mexicans, Indians, and Americans met peaceably on the trail. Lt. Phillip St. George Cooke recalled such a meeting in 1829 of 500 military escorts and their 2,000 horses, mules, and jacks near Chouteau's Island within present-day Kearny County.

The two days this congregation spent together were highlighted by exchanges of military and social courtesies, buffalo hunting, feats of horsemanship,

Indian songs and rituals. Whereas, the American officers could offer as festive menu only buffalo meat, salt pork, bread, raw onions, and 'a tin cup of whiskey,' served on a green blanket. [The Mexican] Colonel Viscarra . . . provided an elaborate dinner including fried ham, 'various kinds of cakes, and delightful chocolate, and . . . several kinds of Mexican wines'--all served on a low table set with silver.²

Mexican proprietors engaged regularly in the Santa Fe trade. During the 1830s, they brought as much as \$300,000 of silver per trip, as well as furs and mules. Mexicans purchased goods in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Westport for shipment back to Santa Fe. Americans, too, found their trading profitable. Josiah Gregg, in his book Commerce of the Prairies, said traders netted average profits of twenty to forty percent from 1822 through 1843.³

In 1846, with the coming of the Mexican War, the Santa Fe Trail served as a military road to Mexico and California. After the war the military established forts close to the trail to protect travelers and settlers, to maintain peace between the Indians and whites, and to distribute food and supplies to the prairie tribes.

In 1849 a stage route carrying mail and passengers began operating monthly from St. Louis to Santa Fe. The freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, subsidized by large government contracts, dominated western wagon freighting for several years.⁴

Kansas pioneer J. R. Mead described the trail and its trade during its busiest years.

This huge trail, 60 to 100 feet wide, was worn smooth and solid by constant travel of ponderous wagons carrying 8,000 to 10,000 pounds each. Sometimes three wagons trailed together; from 10 to 30 constituting a train; drawn by 8, 16 or 20 oxen or mules each; coming in from New Mexico loaded with wool, hides, robes, or silver, returning with almost everything used by man, woman or child. The drivers were known as 'bullwhackers or mule skimmers,' mostly semi-Indian, half-civilized 'greasers,' faithful, patient, brown skinned, with hair of jet hanging to their shoulders, wielding long lashes with such skill as to cut a rattlesnake's head off at 20 feet, or cut through the tough hide of a refractory ox.⁵

The Santa Fe railroad, built near much of the old trail and completed in 1872 to the Colorado border, ended all but local use of the trail. Today, the historic highway is remembered through monuments and interpretative markers placed along it and by museums in Larned, Baldwin, and Ingalls.

An international highway, a commercial and communication route, a military road, an emigrant route, an economic lifeline for farmers--the Santa Fe Trail was all of these.

Notes

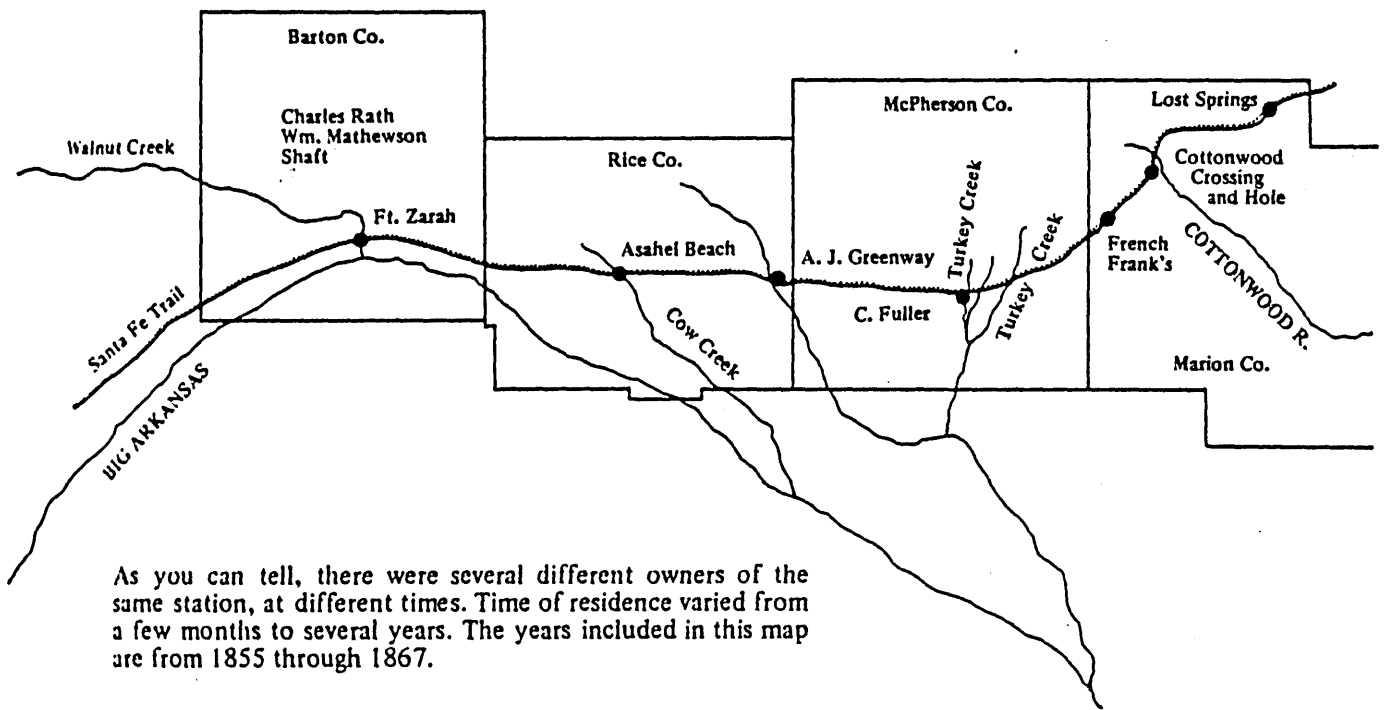
¹A.T. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, vol. 1 (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), p. 55.

²Louise Barry, "Kansas before 1854: A Revised Annals. Part Five, 1826-1829," Kansas Historical Quarterly 28 (Spring 1962): 57; William Connelley, A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans. vol. 1, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), p. 88.

³Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, Max Moorehead, ed., (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), pp. 265, 332-33.

⁴James R. Mead, "Trails in Southern Kansas," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 5 (1889-1896): p. 91.

⁵Alexander Caldwell, "Address of Hon. Alexander Caldwell," Transactions of Kansas State Historical Society (1883-1885), p. 452.



As you can tell, there were several different owners of the same station, at different times. Time of residence varied from a few months to several years. The years included in this map are from 1855 through 1867.

Ranches along the Santa Fe Trail.

8. Ranches along the Santa Fe Trail

We again invite the attention of our gentlemen and lady friends to the delightful programme . . . for a buffalo hunt, this present June. Buffalo are now plentifully, and indolently gamboling upon every hill around and about Little Arkansas, and the Cow Creek region. . . . The prairies are not destitute of those comforts so desirable to persons used to civilization.

Mr. Wm. Wheeler, Dr. A. I. Beach . . . have Ranches all the way out,--these points are as well fortified by art, as by the brave owners and employees that protect them. . . .¹

Lured by profits from selling buffalo hides, trading with Indians, and provisioning travelers, at least nine men established ranches close to the Santa Fe Trail in the 1850s and 1860s. Each summer, stage coaches, emigrant trains, and trade caravans crowded the trail. To accommodate them, the ranchers chose sites that had been used by travelers since trade on the Santa Fe Trail opened in 1821.

The Santa Fe was a major transcontinental trail through Kansas. It followed in part ancient Indian trails. Coronado traversed a section of the trail on his return to Mexico, and early French and American explorers beat the path deeper and wider as they sought trade with the Spanish and later with the Mexicans. After 1821 traffic from traders and military freighters made a major highway.

On the Little Arkansas River, William Wheeler built his ranch in 1858. The Council Grove Press reported:

The proprietor keeps always on hand, ponies, horses, cattle, mules, & other livestock to sell; besides the weary traveler can be entertained to heart's content. Mr. Wheeler has erected a splendid tollbridge across the Little Arkansas at that place.²

In 1855 William Allison and Francis Booth built a ranch at Walnut Creek crossing, 132 miles west of Council Grove. Located in the heart of the buffalo range and in the vicinity of many, sometimes hostile, Indians, the venture invited risks as well as

rewards. But the Occidental Messenger of Independence, Missouri, informed people:

The men at the head of this enterprise are well known here and distinguished for their energy and determination. They have no fear about them.³

Travelers were impressed with the ranchers and their ranches. William H.H. Larimer recalled:

Mr. Allison in his buckskin suit was a fine specimen of frontiersman. He kept a fine stock of Indian goods and had a good trade with the Indians. All around the ranch buffalo by the hundred, undisturbed, were grazing like cattle. We here found plenty of corn for our mules, and bacon, flour, sugar, coffee, and other prairie entrees for ourselves.⁴

Ohioans Ashel Beach and his son Abijah chose the crossing at Cow Creek for their ranch. The Leavenworth Herald told of conditions there.

The Messrs Beach have built three houses, and have a good corral for taking care of stock, and are now raising corn, potatoes, beans, and other vegetables. They herd a good many stock for those who travel the road. They also do a considerable business in the grocery and provision line. . . . There is immense travel on this road.

These gentlemen are engaged in the buffalo trade. They are killing and putting up large quantities of buffalo meat, and will during the coming season . . . have ready for market about one hundred tons. They have hunters who do nothing but kill buffalo. . . . The meat is sugar cured and well smoked.⁵

William Mathewson--the original "Buffalo Bill"--worked at the Cow Creek ranch, also known as Beach Valley, from its beginning to 1862. He bought the ranch in 1864 and lived there with his wife, Elizabeth, until they moved away in 1866. William Byers of the Rocky Mountain News noted:

He keeps a store, a stock ranch, general trading post, and is rapidly getting rich.⁶

Jack Costello's place at Lost Spring carried provisions for travelers on the trail but became better known for catering to gamblers and toughs. At least eleven men were killed at the Spring. Nine of them were buried nearby and two were thrown in the well.⁷

Ranchers along the Santa Fe Trail experienced varying degrees of success. Trade with travelers and Indians formed a major portion of their business. The Indians, however,

resented the white settlers' encroaching on their hunting grounds and forced several ranchers to abandon their places.

The era of the Santa Fe Trail ranches continued until the Santa Fe railroad was built through Kansas in 1872. No towns were built on the exact sites of the ranches, no buildings remain.

Frontier historian Ray Allen Billington could have been thinking of these ranchers when he wrote:

In every pioneer, there was a touch of the gambler.⁸

Although these gamblers left no trace on the trail, they live in the written fact and folklore of Kansas.

Notes

¹Council Grove Press, June 1, 1861.

²Council Grove Press, May 26, 1861.

³Occidental Messenger, July 1855; Louise Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek Crossing," Kansas Historical Quarterly 37 (Summer 1971): 121.

⁴Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek," p. 128.

⁵Louise Barry, "The Ranch at Cow Creek Crossing," Kansas Historical Quarterly 38 (Winter 1972): 416-419.

⁶Barry, "The Ranch at Cow Creek," p. 442.

⁷Sondra Van Meter, Marion County, Kansas (Hillsboro: Board of Directors of the Marion County Historical Society, 1973), p. 226.

⁸Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 28.

9. George Catlin's Journey into a New World

In the early 1800s, the dignity of a group of Indians on the streets of Philadelphia crystalized George Catlin's dislike for civilized life. To Catlin the Indians represented "man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by the disguises of art."

Catlin was an artist who had given up life as a country lawyer to be a portrait painter. But he was searching for something--a grand passion--to which he could devote his life. The Indians became the objects of his commitment.

The history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country and of becoming their historian.¹

Finding little support for his grand passion from others, Catlin explained:

[I] broke from them all,--from my wife and my aged parents,--myself my only adviser and protector.²

Catlin began his journey into Indian territory at St. Louis, then the westernmost outpost of the country. He was initiated into the life of Indians in the fall of 1830 at Fort Leavenworth. In what became Kansas, Catlin began his attempts at:

[S]natching from a hasty oblivion what could be saved for the benefit of posterity, and perpetuating it, as a fair and just monument, to the memory of a truly lofty and noble race.³

Although the tribes he found in the area were reduced by smallpox and contaminated by the influence of whiskey sellers, these people were both hospitable hosts and colorful subjects. He painted an Ioway chief's son.

[He] was tastefully dressed with a buffalo robe, wrapped around him, with a necklace of grizzly bear's claws on his neck; with shield, bow, and quiver on, and a profusion of wampum strings on his neck.⁴

Catlin's experiences on the plains changed his goal from preserving images of Indians and wilderness to preserving the people and the land themselves.

Catlin continued his journey by steamboat up the Missouri to the mouth of the Yellowstone River. The lands through which he passed had seldom been visited by whites and had never before been painted by them. The deeper he went into the new lands, the more he understood of the native world and the plains. He came to see his world in reverse. He saw the native as the civilized person and his own people as the savages who had moved willfully away from God's creation. In the Indian he saw a salvation--of sorts--for his world.

While searching for the meaning of this journey, Catlin settled in a solitary place and received a vision.

I was lifted up upon an imaginary pair of wings, which easily raised and held me floating in the open air, from whence I could behold beneath me . . . the whole of the world.⁵

Only in America could he see the great wilds and myriad herds of buffalo.

And when I turned again to the wilds of my native land, I beheld them all in motion! For the distance of several hundreds of miles from North to South, they were wheeling about in vast columns and herds--some were scattered, and ran with furious wildness--some lay dead, and others were pacing the earth for a hiding place--some were sinking down and dying, gushing out their life's blood in deep-drawn sighs.⁶

In his vision Catlin foresaw the extinction of both the buffalo and the Indian.

Hundreds and thousands were strewed upon the plains--they were flayed, and then reddened carcasses left; and about them bands of wolves, and dogs, and buzzards were seen devouring them. Contiguous, and in sight, were the distant and feeble smokes of wigwams and villages, where the skins were dragged, and dressed for white man's luxury! where they were all sold for whiskey, and the poor Indians laid drunk, and were crying.⁷

Catlin also had a great insight. A national park should be created for the Indians and buffalo.

[A place where they could be] preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, and the fleeting

herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world.⁸

Catlin went to the West to preserve the history and images of Indians. He returned with a greater vision--a plan to preserve the wilderness and the Indians' way of life and to enhance the lives of all who would learn about them in the future. Later environmentalists built on his vision to create wilderness preserves, and his paintings have perpetuated accurate images of plains Indians and the prairie.

Notes

¹George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), p. 2.

²Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 3.

³Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 3.

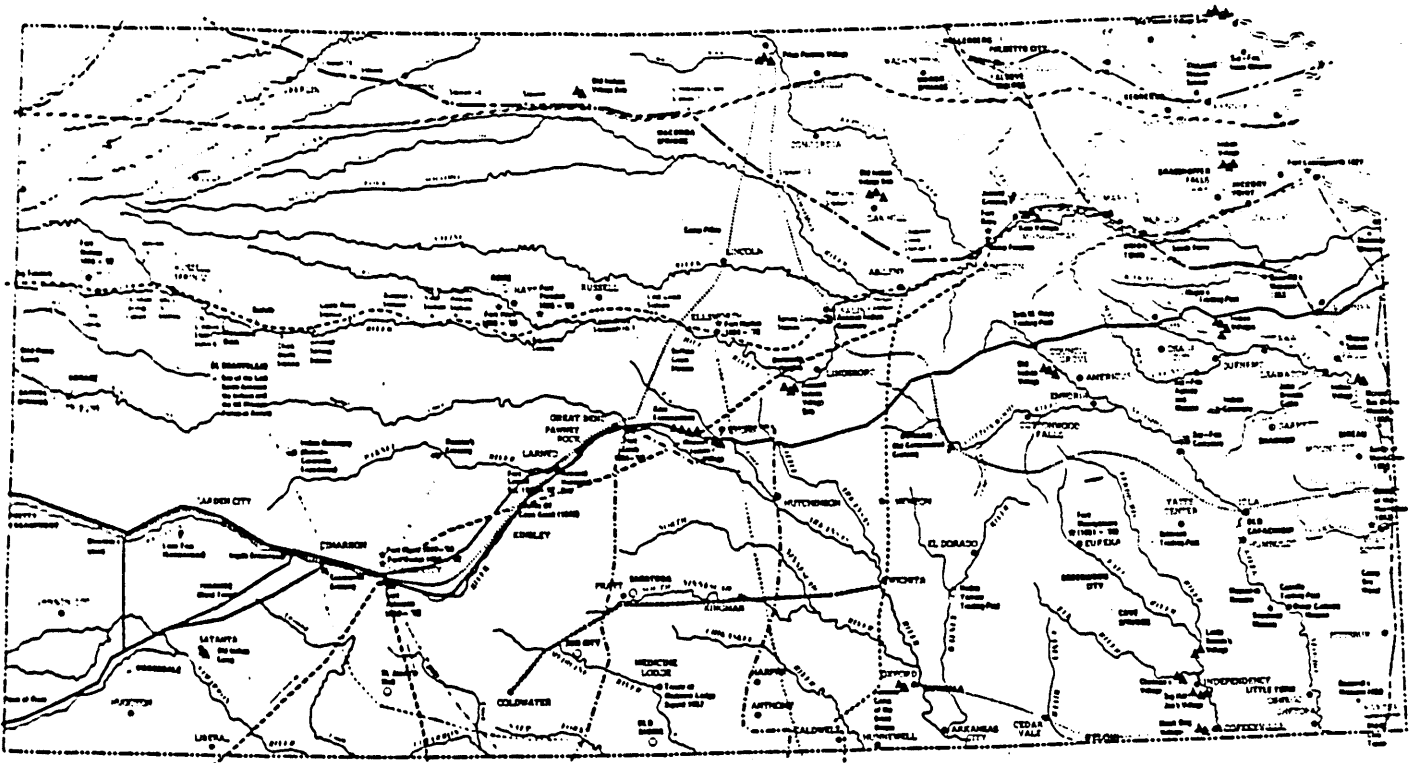
⁴Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 2, p. 22.

⁵Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 258.

⁶Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 259.

⁷Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 259.

⁸Catlin, Letters and Notes, vol. 1, p. 261.



Early Trails of Kansas

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —•—•—•—•— Santa Fe Trail 1821-1872 —•—•—•—•— Ll. Zebulon Pike's Route 1806 —•—•—•—•— Oregon Trail 1830-1870 —•—•—•—•— Smoky Hill or Butterfield Overland Dispatch 1858-1870 —•—•—•—•— Fort Leavenworth-Fort Scott Military Road 1836-1855 —•—•—•—•— Coronado's Route 1541 —•—•—•—•— Parallel Road 1858-C. 1888 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —•—•—•—•— Nathaniel Boone's Route 1843 —•—•—•—•— Chisholm Cattle Trail to Abilene 1867-1871 —•—•—•—•— Ellsworth Cattle Trail 1872-1874 —•—•—•—•— Cattle Trail to Dodge City 1875-1885 —•—•—•—•— Last Indian Raid Through Kansas 1878 —•—•—•—•— St. Joseph, Mo. to California Route 1842-1870 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —•—•—•—•— Fort Dodge to Fort Hays Route 1867-C. 1880 —•—•—•—•— Pony Express Trail 1860-1861 —•—•—•—•— Leavenworth-Pike's Peak Express 1859-1860 —•—•—•—•— Cannon Ball State Coach Road 1878-C. 1889 —•—•—•—•— Black Dog's Hunting Route —•—•—•—•— Fort Riley-Fort Kearney Cavalry Route 1853-1871 |
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10. Go West: On the Overland Trail

Between 1841 and 1867, 350,000 emigrants traveled the Overland Route to California and Oregon. It seemed as if the nation was intent on moving west. This pattern of movement differed from earlier times when moves were to the adjoining frontier. Now emigrants would travel two thousand miles to the Far West--to a land imagined and publicized as vast and fertile.

John Hawkins Clark of Cincinnati was typical of those who went west. Clark sold his business and boarded a riverboat for St. Louis.

I for the last time walked out upon the deck to take a last fond lingering look at home, the place of my boyhood, . . . I was leaving all that was near and dear to me for a 'wild goose chase' overland to the shores of the great Pacific.¹

Each April and May emigrants jostled for space on the ferries crossing the Missouri at St. Joseph, Independence, and Council Bluffs. Lodisia Frizzell, a farmer's wife from Illinois, described the scene at St. Jo.

Teams crossing the river all the while, but there is not half ferry boats enough here, great delay is the consequence, besides the pushing and crowding to see who shall get across first. There is every description of teams and waggons; from a hand cart and wheelbarrow, to a fine six horse carriage and buggy; but more than two thirds are oxen and waggons similar to our own; and by the looks of their load they do not intend to starve.²

As emigrants left "civilization" at the Missouri River and crossed into Indian territory, they discovered the beauty of the plains. They also experienced several days of chaos. Undisciplined stock, wagon breakdowns, greenhorn drivers, and unfamiliar tasks made travel difficult.

James David wrote of the first night's encampment.

All confusion, women scolding, men swearing, children crying, dogs barking; cattle bellowing; wolves howling;

fiddles in almost every camp; boys eying and ogling the girls cooking; some laughing; some praying; some crying; coyotes yipping; guns cracking.³

A few days into the journey emigrants began to see dead oxen and mules and graves of fellow travelers who had died of smallpox or cholera. Some parties made the decision to turn back; others split into smaller groups or traveled alone.

Leathery mountain men, returning laden with furs, advised early emigrants of the best paths. The mountain men in turn had learned of good routes from knowledgeable Indians or painful experience. Later emigrants would follow maps based on findings of the Fremont expedition.

Despite prairie storms, the threat of disease or disaster, and the occasional excitement of meeting others on the trail, boredom prevailed. Maria Belshaw described the monotony.

No change in the looks of the land. Considerable wild sage. Passed 15 graves. No wood nearer than three miles. Very cold and cloudy. Traveled 20 miles.⁴

Deepening friendships and a spirit of cooperation raised the spirits of the emigrants. Assistance was provided by physicians, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and barbers, most of whom were located in the government's trailside forts. Strangers from other parties might help search for strayed stock, swap equipment or animals, bury the dead, or simply exchange information.

Through most of this quarter century of overland travel, positive relations with Indians were the rule, although rumor and the newspapers concentrated on the massacres, scalplings, and theft of stock. Indians were an important source of trade and help, although they frequently demanded tribute from the passing emigrants, explaining that the overlanders were depleting their game, water and timber supplies, and overgrazing prairie grasses.

The government negotiated treaties, distributed presents, established reservations, and dispatched military expeditions, patrols, and escorts to control the Indian threat. The government also sent expeditions to explore and survey the territory and to improve trails.

Private entrepreneurs complemented federal assistance to emigrants. Most were former mountain men who established trading posts and anticipated the needs of the overland travelers.

By the 1860s the Overland Trail had been transformed into a crowded thoroughfare, on which emigrants encountered competing ferry and bridge operators, trailside stores, stage-coach stations, grog shops, gambling houses, and hotels.

Tribulations like those of this 1852 emigrant belonged to the distant past.

To enjoy such a trip . . . a man must be able to endure heat like a Salamander, mud and water like a muskrat, dust like a toad, and labor like a jackass. . . . He must cease to think, except as to where he may find grass and water and a good camping place. It is a hardship without glory, to be sick without a home, to die and be buried like a dog.⁵

Notes

¹Louise Barry, ed. "Overland to the Gold Fields of California in 1852: The Journal of John Hawkins Clark, Expanded and Revised from Notes Made during the Journey," Kansas Historical Quarterly 11, no. 3 (August 1942): 229.

²Herbert Eaton, The Overland Trail to California in 1852 (New York: Capricorn, 1974), p. 23.

³Eaton, The Overland Trail, p. 32.

⁴Sandra L. Myres, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915. (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), p. 27.

⁵Quoted in John D. Unruh, Jr., The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 350.

11. Hard Traveling: Families on the Overland Journey

Emigrant families dominated on the Overland Trail to Oregon and California except in the gold rush of 1849 to 1851. These families sought the fertile lands of the Far West to better their fortunes. Though separated from community and kin, they strove to maintain the values and roles of the society left behind as they journeyed across the wilderness of the plains.

Seeking new land and opportunity, the men usually made the decision to go west. Although many women were more dependent on home ties and social life than men, they, too, were excited and hopeful about the journey. But the decision to leave was not easily made. A popular trail song describes the emigrant's dilemma:

Farewell's a word that breaks my heart
And fills my soul with woe
But the fertile fields of Oregon
Encourage me to go.¹

Despite guidebooks' advice, women and men alike were generally ignorant of the perils and prospects that lay ahead. Proper preparation was crucial. Reminiscing about her family's journey to Oregon in 1845, Sarah Cummins wrote:

Wagon loads of people and goods had left Missouri river the year previous . . . but none of them had ever returned to tell us of their adventures. . . . We were surely taking a wild and inconsiderate step.²

Although warned to take only the bare necessities of life, most, like Sarah Cummins, insisted on taking treasures of sentimental value. Chests, chairs, and calicoes--symbols of home--were transported from the known world into the wilderness.

On the Overland Trail the responsibilities and roles of men and women were separate but complementary. On a typical day, men rose at four or five, cut their oxen from the herd, and checked the wagons. After breakfast the oxen were hitched and the men walked alongside them.

Heat, dust, and exhaustion filled each day's fourteen- or fifteen-mile stretch. Rivers to cross meant paying ferry tolls

or even building ferries or bridges. In addition, travelers could expect wagons to break down and oxen to bolt.

Evening brought an opportunity to socialize by the fire, eat, and prepare for the next day. Later, the men divided the night guard duty.

The women's day had a different rhythm. The wives rose early to stoke the buffalo-chip fire and begin breakfast. After breakfast they washed up, stowed the cooking equipment, and packed the wagon. During the days the women rode in the wagon with the young children or walked alongside with their husbands. At midday they served a cold lunch packed the night before.

When the wagon train stopped in late afternoon, the women's intense work began: collecting fuel for the fire and preparing the next day's breakfast and lunch. After dinner, the women made beds, cleaned wagons, and mended clothes.

The women were also responsible for the children. Although older children fended for themselves and minded their younger siblings, the very young were kept in the wagon during the day. Diaries of the journey mention children falling out of wagons and breaking bones, sometimes miraculously avoiding fatal accidents. Older children helped herd livestock, gather fuel, drive the wagons, and prepare meals. For teenagers the journey offered new freedoms and friendships, responsibilities and insights.

The roles of men and women on the journey were usually clear, but sometimes these roles changed. One woman, whose husband lost his health, took care of their three sons, the wagon and the team, and performed all of her husband's duties--as well as her own--for several months. When men took over women's tasks, they were usually doing a favor, but women did men's jobs of necessity.

Humorous scenes could result from this separation of chores. In The Way West, novelist A.B. Guthrie describes how emigrants resolved a "dung dilemma."

[T]he men had drawn off so's to be able to take up the subject of . . . manure. [W]ith the wood getting scarce was it right and proper for the women to cook over a fire made of buffalo chips? The husbands would decide and go back to their wives, serious and wise, and tell them what was right.³

Three broad themes, "practical matters, health and safety, and natural beauty," were repeated in the diaries of both sexes. Yet women were more concerned with family, with the happiness and health of their children, and with friendship. Men were more concerned with protecting their wagon and family and with hunting to supply food.⁴

The future and the reestablishment of their former world occupied both men and women, especially near the journey's end. The woman who took down her rocker from the covered wagon each evening to rock gently into the night no longer faced east toward home and civilization, but west toward home in a new land.

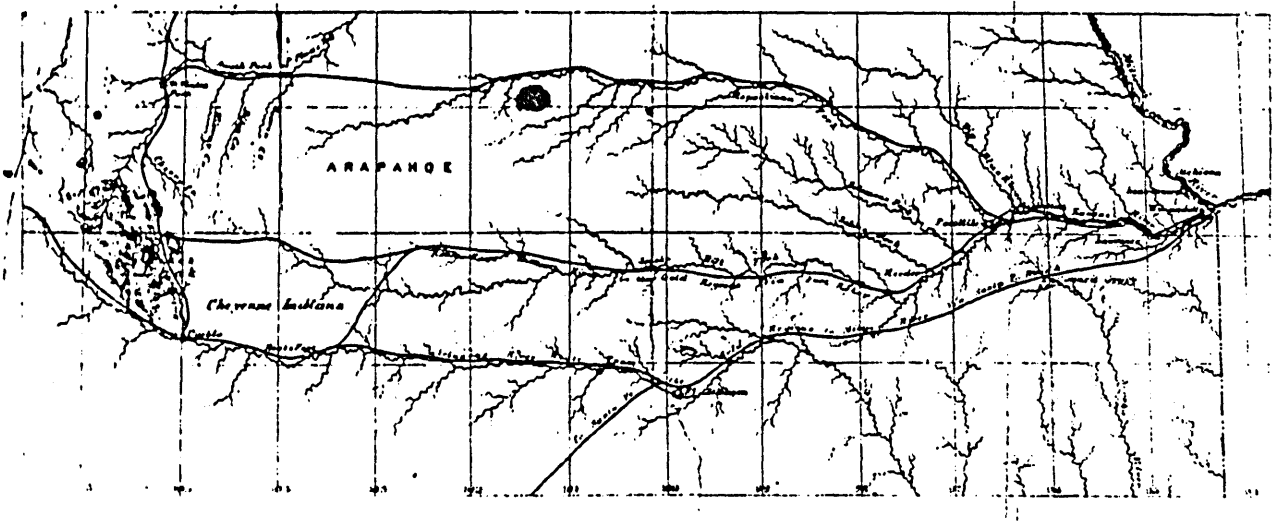
Notes

¹Quoted in Sandra L. Myres, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915 (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), p. 101.

²Quoted in Annette Kolodny, The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 236.

³A.B. Guthrie, The Way West (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1949) p. 88.

⁴John Mack Faragher. Women and Men on the Overland Trail. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 14.



Routes to the gold fields of Western Kansas. 1859(?).

12. Gold Seekers Cross Kansas

Exaggerated hopes and bitter disappointments characterized the Kansas goldfields in 1858 and 1859. Were gold seekers about to find the "New Eldorado" or a "giant humbug"?

The image of the West as a place of riches had persisted for centuries. Coronado had blazed a new trail to the plains in search of gold in 1541. Excited by stories of gold discoveries, travelers broke new trails or used established routes to cross Kansas in the 1850s.

In 1858 reports of gold in far western Kansas Territory--which stretched to the Rocky Mountains--hit the newspapers. Newspapers in the new eastern Kansas towns of Atchison, Leavenworth, Topeka, and Lawrence publicized the gold prospects. The Kansas City Journal of Commerce proclaimed that "The New Eldorado!" had been found.

Oh Gold! the Gold! - they say
'Tis brighter than the day,
And now 'tis time, I'm bound to shine
And drive dull cares away.

Financial panic in 1857 had spurred many people to seek new opportunities. Exaggerated claims by writers, some of whom had never been to Kansas Territory, attracted many adventurous individuals to the West. One writer, D.C. Oakes, promised:

Gold is found everywhere you stick your shovel.²

By April 1859, 100,000 prospectors had set out for the new goldfields, traveling overland in every conveyance from wagons to handcarts. Most outfitted in Missouri River towns.

Guidebooks advised prospectors to travel in groups. Allen's Guide Book listed the stock of food for five men for one year.

2000 pounds of flour, 850 pounds sugar, 200 pounds of coffee, 15 pounds tea, 75 pounds rice, 1500 pounds tartaric acid, 100 pounds dried apples or peaches, 75 pounds salt, 5 pounds ungrounded pepper, 2 bushels beans, 10 gallons molasses, 1 box pickles.³

Most guidebooks suggested three routes to the goldfields: the Santa Fe Trail, the Smoky Hill route, and the Northern or Platte route. Advocates for the Smoky Hill route boasted that it was the shortest and most direct way. The Junction City Sentinel also promoted this route.

Let Hercules do what he may.
The Smokey Hill route MUST have its day.⁴

Many travelers in the spring of 1859 regretted their choice of this largely unexplored trail and turned back. The trail was littered with cast-off cooking vessels and camping equipment. Death and an instance of cannibalism shocked even hardened miners.

Discouraging news from the mines also slowed the migration. Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune reported:

A true picture of gold seekers setting out from home trim and jolly, for Pike's Peak, and of those gold-seekers, sober as judges, and slow-moving as their own weary oxen, dropping into Denver would convey a salutary lesson.⁵

Leavenworth and other eastern Kansas towns worked to improve the Smoky Hill route. The Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express began daily passenger and mail service by Concord coach early in 1859. Following a route north of the Smoky Hill Trail, this daily service tied Kansas to the new city of Denver. The freighters brought gold back to Kansas and rekindled the gold fever.

Only the approaching Civil War diverted attention from the journey west for gold. When Kansas entered the Union in 1861, the new Kansas boundaries excluded the gold region.

After the gold fever subsided, stage travel to the Pike's Peak region and the new city of Denver demonstrated the feasibility of the central route from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. In time the transcontinental railroad and telegraph followed this route.

Years later Ed Blair of Spring Hill reminisced about the Kansas goldfields:

On the wagon covers, 'Pike's Peak or Bust,'
Yes, the fever was high for the yellow dust,
Just a lot of grit and their luck to trust,
For those who won were few.⁶

Notes

¹Lawrence Republican, September 2, 1858, in Leroy Hafen, Colorado Gold Rush, Contemporary Letters and Reports (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1941), p. 39.

²Allen's Guide Book and Map to the Gold Fields of Kansas and Nebraska, (Washington: E.A. Waters, 1859), p. 5.

³Allen's Guide Book, p. 5.

⁴Freedom's Champion, March 25, 1859, in Wayne C. Lee and Howard C. Raynesford, Trails of the Smokey Hill, (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1980), p. 35.

⁵Overland Journey to California In 1859 (New York: C.M. Saxton, Bacher & Co., 1860), p. 114.

⁶"The Santa Fe Trail in Johnson County, Kansas. Proceedings at the Dedication of the Santa Fe Trail Marker at Lone Elm, November 9, 1906," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 11 (1909-10): 456.

13. Trail to the Top

Gold! The word spread like a prairie fire.

The Kansas Republican reported:

A company of gentlemen propose to leave this vicinity for the Rocky Mountains next Monday, prospecting for gold near what is known as Pike's Peak.¹

Newlyweds Julia and James Holmes heard the news on their farm on the Neosho River. Julia Holmes wrote:

We hastily laid a supply of provisions in the covered wagon, and two days afterwards were on the road. . . . The next morning we reached the great Santa Fe Road and passed the last frontier Post Office, Council Grove.²

The discovery of gold provided Julia Holmes an opportunity for self-discovery and personal assertion. With her husband and brother she traveled eleven hundred miles in an ox wagon in the summer of 1858. In the Rocky Mountains she climbed Pike's Peak, the first woman known to have done so.

By the time of the Pike's Peak gold rush, the Santa Fe Trail from the Missouri River to New Mexico was heavily traveled. Military companies took this route to the frontier. Many of the gold seekers in 1849 also took the Santa Fe, though most followed the northern route to California. In the summer and autumn of 1858 three parties left eastern Kansas, in advance of many Kansans en route to the Pike's Peak gold regions.

The Holmes party traveled with some comforts of home. When the wagon train paused for a day of rest, Julia Holmes brought her large stove with its tall smoke pipe out of the wagon and set it up on the prairie.

The primary focus of attention, however, was not the stove but the costume worn by the cook.

[A] calico dress, reaching a little below the knee, pants of the same, Indian moccasins . . . on my feet, and on my head a hat. . . . I found it gave me freedom to roam at pleasure in search of flowers and other

curiosities, while the cattle continued their slow and measured pace.³

The journey released Julia Holmes from social restraints. It freed her to don revolutionary dress, develop her endurance, and climb a mountain.

Her bloomers gave her comfort and freedom of movement, but they were a source of curiosity for the men of the company. The bloomers also served to further separate her from the one other woman in the party. Mrs. Robert Middleton advised the twenty-year-old bride.

If you have a long dress with you, do put it on for the rest of the trip, the men talk so much about you.⁵

But Mrs. Holmes, whose feminist mother supported dress reform and whose father had come west to help insure a free-state policy for Kansas, resisted. She was determined to walk part of the trail.

At first I could not walk over three or four miles without feeling quite weary, but by persevering and walking as far as I could every day, my capacity gradually increased. . . . [I]n the course of a few weeks I could walk ten miles in the most sultry weather without being exhausted.⁵

As she walked she observed the spring beauty of the trail.

After reaching the Great Bend of the Arkansas River, we camped on Walnut Creek, where we found many new varieties of flowers, some of them of exceeding beauty.⁶

After following the Arkansas River for three hundred miles, the travelers crossed the river. When the party had passed Bent's Fort, they looked west for a glimpse of the mountains. On July 4th, they spotted the snow-covered summits.

The Holmes party camped at the base of the mountains and prospected unsuccessfully for two weeks before beginning the ascent of Pike's Peak. Carrying heavy packs, Julia and James Holmes struggled uphill for three days. On August 5th, 1858, they reached the summit.

Mrs. Holmes wrote to her mother:

I have accomplished the task, which I marked out for myself, and now I feel amply repaid for all my toil and fatigue. . . . I would not have missed this glorious sight for anything at all.⁷

Finding no gold, James and Julia Holmes journeyed on to Santa Fe. James secured appointment as Secretary of New Mexico

Territory. Julia wrote for a New York newspaper.

After the Civil War the Holmes settled in Washington, D.C., where Julia Holmes became known as a speaker and writer for women's suffrage. Later they divorced.

James and Julia Holmes both kept their Kansas ties long after their adventure on the Santa Fe Trail. Julia retained legal residence in Douglas County and James returned to reside in Topeka and later Emporia. Though they found no gold, their experiences on the trail provided opportunity for self-expression, achievement, and adventure.

Notes

¹George A. Root and Russell K. Hickman, "Pikes Peak Express Companies," Kansas Historical Quarterly, 13, no. 3 (Aug. 1944): 63.

²Agnes W. Spring, ed., A Bloomer Girl On Pike's Peak, 1858 (Denver: Denver Public Library Western History Department, 1949) p. 14.

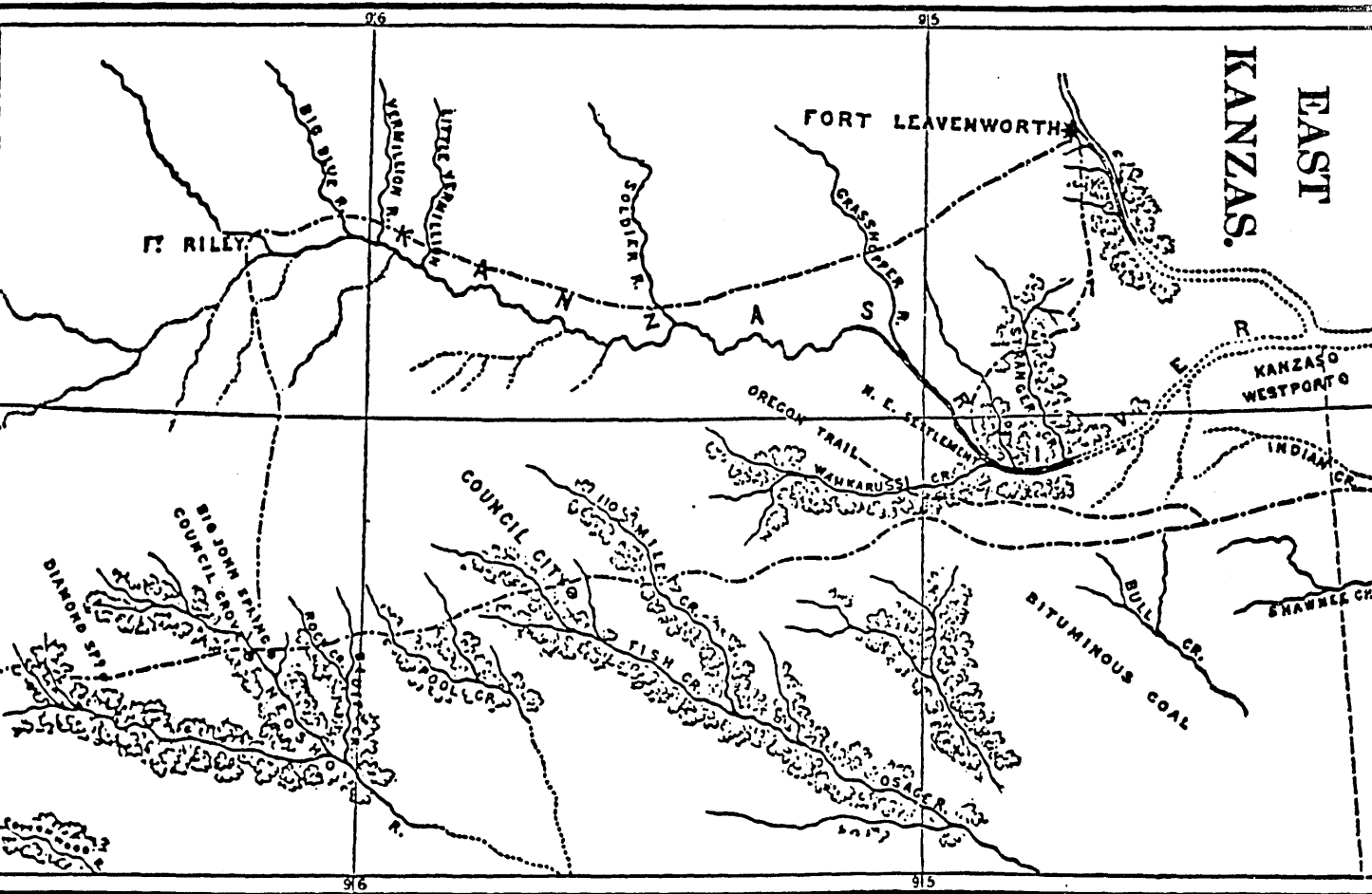
³Spring, Bloomer Girl, p. 16.

⁴Spring, Bloomer Girl, p. 16.

⁵Spring, Bloomer Girl, p. 20.

⁶Spring, Bloomer Girl, p. 21.

⁷Spring, Bloomer Girl, p. 38.



Map promoting settlement in "East Kansas." 1856.

14. Emigrant Trails into Kansas

In the 1850s emigrants coming to Kansas followed existing trails and broke new ones. These trails offered new opportunities and experiences, but they also led travelers away from the comfort and security of a known world.

The last link connecting some emigrants to the East, the Missouri River, was a rugged trail itself. Miriam Colt noted in her journal:

April 28th.--The steamer struck a "snag" last night; gave us a terrible jar; tore off part of the kitchen; ladies much frightened.¹

Trail life strengthened the feeling of separation and loss. Julia Lovejoy reflected on what the separation from kinfolk meant for women on the steamboat Kate Swinney as it neared the Kansas border.

[A]s I gaze on those groups of wives and mothers, who have torn themselves away from dear New England homes to follow the fortunes of that loved husband to become a light in his mud-walled cabin, . . . to brave hardships of no ordinary character, I ask "Who shall wipe the dew of death, . . . what soft hand will smoothe her pillow in death, or shed the sympathetic tear with bereaved loved ones, as her "remains" shall be laid away in the dark, damp tomb? . . ." A mournful echo, borne from the wilds of Kansas, answers "Who?"²

The sense of being cut-off from the past and from one's friends, neighbors, and relations jarred the Watson Stewarts as they reached their trail's end and began to build home and farm on the vegetarian-colony site in southeast Kansas.

Here, we were on the frontier of civilization--indeed, just over the borderland; far away from a post office, and over 100 miles from any town of importance. There was neither church nor school, and [we were] surrounded by . . . an uncongenial company of spirits.³

Like others on the frontier, Stewart seized the opportunity

to buy land cheap and form a colony of kindred souls. Here people found abundant cultural and physical space.

Travelers making their way into Kansas sometimes found rut-filled roads and impassable streams. Julia Lovejoy saw humor and adventure in the situation as her party set out from Kansas City to found the new town of Manhattan.

The company, some of whom were clergymen, presented a very unique and ludicrous appearance when fully equipped for their journey. Some [wore] oil-cloth hats and overcoats, and long boots drawn over their pants, to protect them from the mud. [Each was] armed with his rifle or revolver, for game, not for fear of the Indians or Missourians.⁴

Trails and roads preceded the intensive settlement of Kansas, but emigrants still found they must strike out across roadless prairie to reach their destinations. One settler, Watson Stewart, wrote:

Our next day's travel was over a beautiful country, with here and there a settler along the streams. [There was] little in the way of a road other than an Indian trail. . . . The next day we followed the course of [the creek], there being no wagon road.⁵

The earliest emigrants on Kansas trails gratefully took advantage of accommodations offered in rough homes, Indian lodgings, or new settlers' cabins along the way. Miriam Colt described her stay in one such home.

Here we are, all huddled into this little house 12 by 16 [feet]--cook supper over the fire with the help of "pot hooks and trammels"--fill the one bed lengthwise and crosswise. [T]he family of the house take to the trundle-bed, while the floor is covered "two or three times over" with many women and children rolled in Indian blankets like silk worms in cocoons.⁶

The board was as rough as the bed. The usual meal for travelers was fat pork, corn bread, and strong coffee. Albert Richardson described an instance of Indian hospitality:

We dined at a log-house on Wolf Creek, kept by a "civilized" Delaware family. In our presence the squaw thrust her hand into the broiler upon the stove, and with stout bony fingers took out the corn beef which was to serve for our repast. It was a trying spectacle but no worse than one may sometime see when led by fatal curiosity into the kitchen of a first-class hotel, where the fingers of perspiring cooks intrude officiously in the places where forks ought to go. In real as in mimic life, he who would enjoy the play must not peep behind the curtain.⁷

For some individuals the trails that led into the newly opened territory of Kansas expanded their vision of the future. Cyrus K. Holliday, a major builder of the Santa Fe railroad, wrote to his wife, Mary:

A more lovely country I certainly never saw. . . . [I]n a few years . . . civilization by its magic influence shall [transform] this glorious country from what it now is to the brilliant destiny awaiting it.

I am much gratified by the [opportunity to] try my hand among a new people and under different influences and [to] pursue a different course of action.⁸

At the end of the trail, however, some emigrants found discouragement, not satisfaction. Miriam Colt wrote of the first of numerous disappointments.

No escort is seen! [N]o salute is heard! We move slowly and drippingly into town just at nightfall. . . . The ladies tell us they are sorry to see us come to this place; which plainly shows that all is not right.⁹

Others, however, found Kansas to be a new land of promise. Watson Stewart described it as a place to

build up a strong colony of intelligent, temperate, liberal-minded, right-living people, who would . . . secure schools, churches, mills, post office[s], and see the slow process usual in the settling of a new country.¹⁰

Notes

¹Miriam Davis Colt, Went to Kansas (Watertown, 1862), p. 31.

²Julia Lovejoy, "Letters from Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly 11 (1942): 33.

³Watson Stewart, "Reminiscences," typescript in possession of Rita Napier, p. 21.

⁴Lovejoy, pp. 34-35.

⁵Stewart, p. 19.

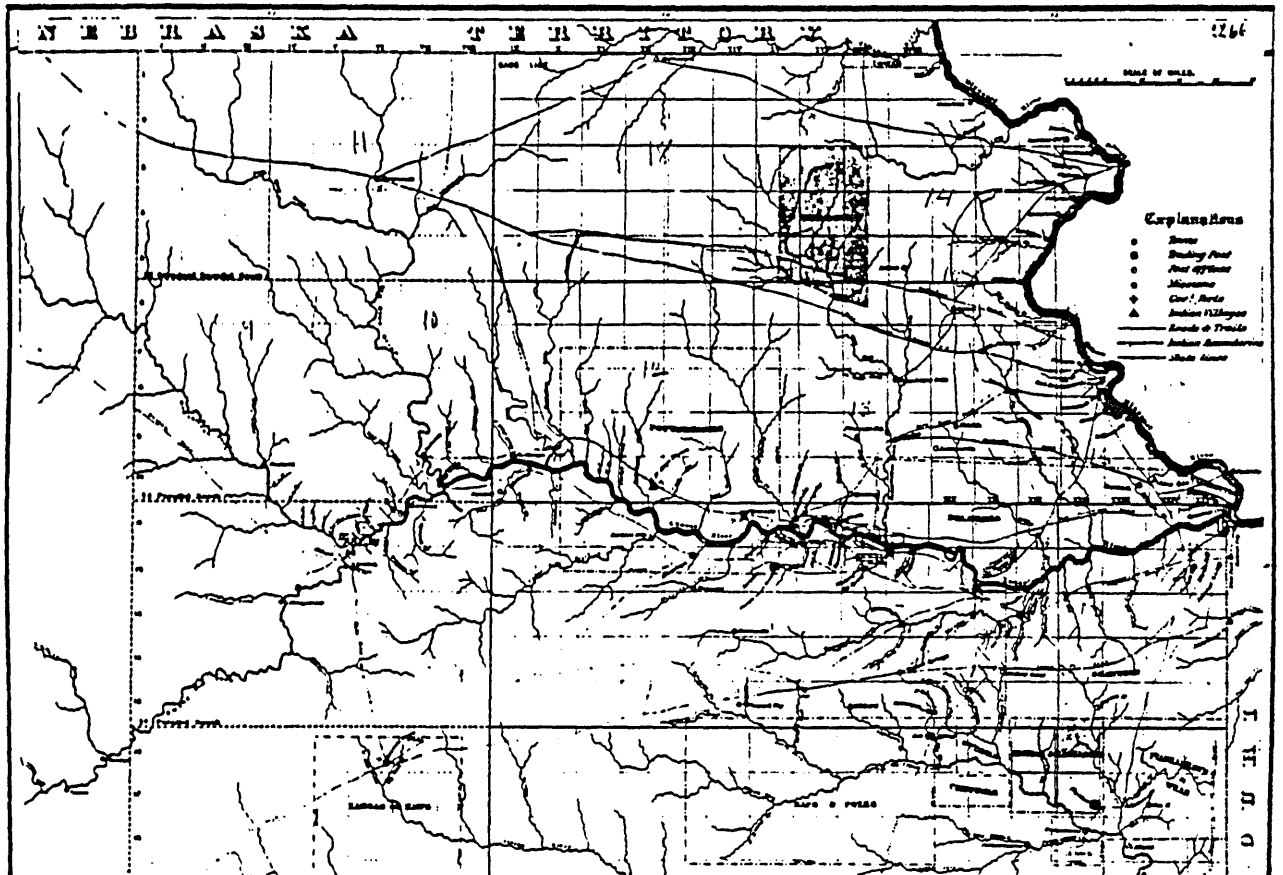
⁶Colt, p. 36.

⁷Albert Deane Richardson, Beyond the Mississippi (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1869), p. 34.

⁸Cyrus K. Holliday to Mary Holliday, December 10, 1854. Topeka, Kans.: Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁹Colt, p. 44.

¹⁰Stewart, p. 21.



The Kansas River.

15. The Kaw: A River Highway

The Kansas River . . . was at first believed navigable from its mouth to Lawrence through the year, and to Fort Riley during the winter months. But it proved adapted only to that traditional steamer which could run wherever there was a heavy dew.¹

Albert Deane Richardson,
Beyond the Mississippi

Boosters promoted the Kansas River as navigable for steamboats carrying freight and travelers. Skeptics like Senator John James Ingalls laughed at the notion.

These streams [like the Kansas] may be properly described as amphibious, or composed equally of land and water. They constitute an anomaly in nature, being too shallow for navigation, too dense for a constant beverage, and too fluid for culture. If catfish were permanently expelled and proper attention given to subsoil plowing and irrigation in dry seasons, they would eventually become the garden spots of the world.²

Yet the river was a pathway for exploration, commerce, and travel. This river guided travelers into the West. J. R. Mead, early buffalo hunter and Indian trader, believed that an ancient Indian trail ran along the north side. In 1724 the French explorer Etienne Bourgmont moved along its south bank on his trip to make peace and establish trade with the Kansa and Comanche.

American explorers used both banks as they sought knowledge of the West and new paths to rich beaver country and to Oregon and California. Jedediah Smith followed the path along the north bank and up the Republican. This trail later became a major route for overland travel. And the famous 1842 expedition of John Charles Fremont outfitted at Kawsmouth and followed the Kansas until it struck north, as expedition members surveyed the Oregon Trail.

The Kaw was a river road for the early fur traders. Frederick Chouteau remembered using pirogues, canoe-like boats sixty to seventy feet long, and keelboats on the Kaw in the early nineteenth century. Keelboats were smaller and more stable than

pirogues, and they could be rowed or sailed up river.

Going up the Kaw river we pulled all the way; about fifteen miles a day. Going down it sometimes took a good many days, as it did going up, on account of low water. I have taken a month to go down from my trading-house at American Chief [Mission] creek. . . . [O]ther times [I have gone] down in a day.³

Indians or people of French-Indian descent often operated ferries. A traveler, John Treat Irving, described one crossing point on the Kaw in the 1830s.

Upon reaching its brink, we found attached to a tree, a large scow which was used as a ferry boat. Its owner, a tall thin Delaware, was quietly seated in one corner, pouring out a flood of smoke from a small pipe which garnished the corner of his mouth. . . .

[H]e quietly rose from his seat, and stepping to the shore made signs for us to lead our horses into the scow. . . . When everything was in readiness, he loosed the fastening, and seizing a long pole, thrust it into the sandy bottom, and whirled the ticklish vessel far out into the rushing current of the river. The water, at this spot, was not very deep; and by means of his pole, he soon ran the scow upon the sand of the opposite shore. He then secured it to a tree, and having received his pay, pocketed it, and strolled off, leaving the party to land, or stay on board, as they might think fit.⁴

As more people moved west, the Kaw became a major pathway for gold seekers, freighters, mail carriers, and stage lines. Settlers sought the wooded shores of the river for their farms and sites for cities like Lawrence and Topeka.

The Kansas River provided timber for building and transportation for the settlers' produce. As early as 1859 boats were returning to Kansas City with corn and wheat. The railroads, however, became the chief carriers of produce in the 1860s.

Though the Kaw later ceased to be a major transportation route, it gained fame as the home of the "Catfish Aristocracy." When anti-slavery advocates won the fight to make Kansas free, they also won control of folklore.

Shang, the Grand Duke of the Catfish Aristocracy, was a stereotype of a proslave settler created by Senator Ingalls.

He builds no school house, He erects no Church. To his morals the Sabbath is unknown. To his intellect the alphabet is superfluous. His premises have neither barn, nor cellar, nor well. His crop of corn stands

ungathered in the field, He "packs" water half a mile from the nearest branch or spring. His perennial diet is hog, smoked and potted in the summer, and fresh at "killing time."⁵

The Kaw was much more than the home of the Catfish Aristocracy. It served as a main path of travel for hundreds of years. Today it waters an agricultural heartland. Iron rails and cement trails follow its pathway.

Notes

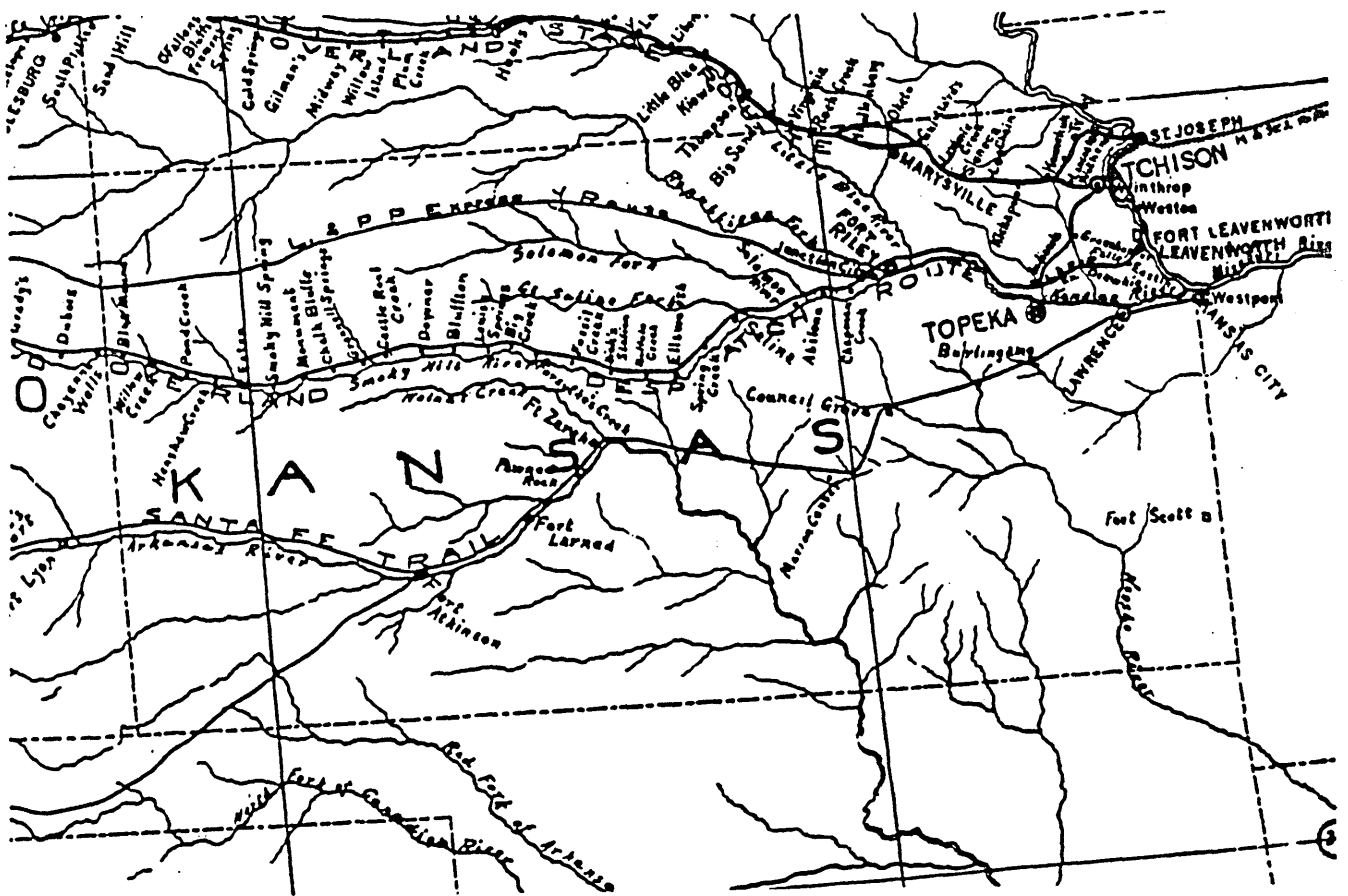
¹Albert Deane Richardson, Beyond the Mississippi (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1869), pp. 115-16.

²A Collection of the Writings of John James Ingalls (Kansas City, Mo.: Hudson-Kimberly, 1902), p. 117.

³Franklin G. Adams, "Reminiscences of Frederick Chouteau," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 8 (1902-1904): 428.

⁴John Treat Irving, Indian Sketches (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1835), pp. 31-33.

⁵A Collection of the Writings of John James Ingalls, p. 123.



Overland stage and despatch routes.

16. Wagons West: Overland Freight and Stage-Coach Lines

In the 1860s the growing need for supplies and provisions in the mining towns and military installations in the West encouraged the growth of overland freighting and stage-coach lines. Discovery of gold in western Kansas Territory and a need to tie the Far West to the Union by more than telegraph lines also promoted freighting and stage coaching.¹

During the Civil War freighting and stage coaching on the Overland Trail peaked. Several companies ran freight, mail, and later stage coaches in the West. Ben Holladay, David Butterfield, and Wells, Fargo competed for trade between the Missouri River and Denver.

Ben Holladay's Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express originated in Leavenworth, followed the Little Blue River, and then went through Fort Kearney and the Platte Valley on its way to Denver. Holladay's lines advertised safe, fast, and comfortable transportation.

Holladay's main competitor, David Butterfield, looked to the Smoky Hill Trail for a shorter route to Denver. On August 7, 1865, Isaac E. Eaton, head of Butterfield's surveying expedition, wrote from Denver.

Expedition a perfect success. Best road from the Missouri River to the mountains. Living water every five miles . . . grass and wood abundant the whole route. Distance from Leavenworth to Denver, 585 miles.²

Butterfield chose Atchison as his eastern terminal. Frank Root, the government's postal employee in charge of overseeing the mail transportation over the plains and mountains to California, explained:

Atchison was . . . a superior outfitting point for [parties] crossing the plains. It . . . had one of the best steamboat landings on the Missouri River; but more especially . . . it was at least twelve miles farther west than any other landing in Kansas. . . . Besides, it had telegraphic connection with the East.³

The Butterfield Overland Despatch route ran through

Grasshopper Falls, Indianola [Valley Falls], St. Marys, Manhattan, and Junction City and then on to Denver. Home stations were forty miles apart and swing stations were twelve to fifteen miles apart.

Alexander Majors, a freighter himself, commented:

Station sites were sometimes nothing more than earth or a few rocks piled up as a marker. Often these mounds of earth were trampled down . . . by herds of buffalo before the next day, but evidence was left that showed others the place.⁴

In addition to surveying the route and building stations, Butterfield also had a large investment in wagons and oxen.

[A] full-fledged train for crossing the plains consisted of from twenty-five to twenty-six large wagons. The number of cattle necessary to draw each wagon was twelve. . . . The entire train of cattle, including extras, generally numbered from 320 to 330 head and usually from four to five mules for riding and herding.⁵

As freighting reached its peak, new technology, especially the invention of shock absorbers, made it possible to transport passengers long distances in relative comfort. The Butterfield Overland Despatch soon started a stage line to complement its freighting business.

An English traveler, William Tallack, wrote of his journey in a nine-passenger Concord coach.

Over smooth and level prairie lands we sometimes dashed on at twelve miles an hour, whilst, on rugged or sandy ground, our advance was only two or three miles in the same time, and that often on foot.⁶

Theodore H. Davis, a travel correspondent and artist for Harpers, described his journey over the Smoky Hill Trail.

The first night on a stage is undoubtedly the most uncomfortable. As soon as night falls passengers evince a desire to make a noise. Conversation quickly gives place to song. This night our songs were of home, and our wandering thoughts annihilated the long miles between our rumbling coach and the bright firesides of the Atlantic coast.⁷

Later Davis described his first encounter with Indians.

[W]e glanced back to the country over which we had passed, and discovered, within sixty yards of the coach, a band of nearly a hundred mounted Indians, charging directly toward us. The sight, fearful as it

was, seemed grand. "Here they come!" and the crack of a rifle was responded to by a yell, followed by the singing whiz of arrows and the whistle of revolver bullets. The first shot dropped an Indian. The driver crouched low as arrows passed over him, and drove his mules steadily on toward the station. The deadly fire [that] poured from the coach windows kept a majority of the Indians behind the coach. Some, however, braver than the rest, rushed past on their horses, sending a perfect stream of arrows into the coach as they sped along.⁸

David Butterfield's line suffered large losses at the hands of raiding Indians.⁹ After eighteen months in business, he sold out to Ben Holladay, who abandoned the Smoky Hill route.

In 1866 Holladay foresaw the effects of the coming of the railroad and sold his coach lines to Wells, Fargo, which continued service to Kansas areas beyond the reach of railroads.¹⁰

The freight and stage-coach lines had helped bring civilization to the prairie. Yet they fell victim to new forms of transportation. The dust of the empire on wheels settled under the relentless advance of the iron horse.

Notes

¹Ralph Moody, The Old Trails West (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1963), p. 301.

²Frank Root and William Connelley, The Overland Stage to California (Topeka, Kans.: Frank Root and William Connelley, 1901), pp. 395-96.

³Root and Connelley, Overland Stage, p. 301.

⁴Alexander Majors, Seventy Years on the Frontier (Chicago, Ill.: Rand, McNally, 1893), p. 102.

⁵Majors, Seventy Years, p. 102.

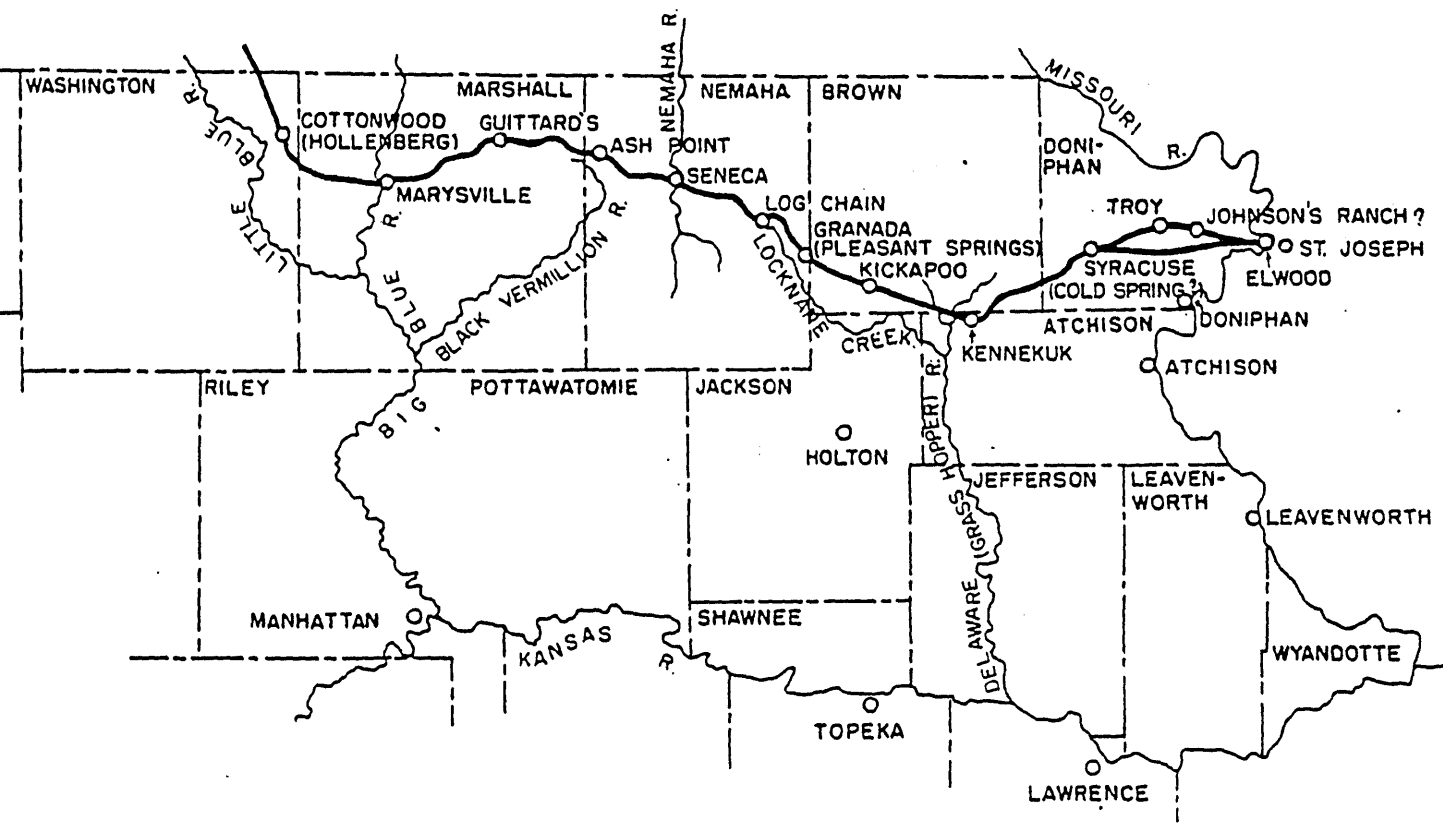
⁶Edward Hungerford, Wells Fargo: Advancing the American Frontier (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 57.

⁷Margaret Long, The Smoky Hill Trail (Denver, Colo.: W.H. Kistler Stationery Company, 1943), p. 54.

⁸Long, Smoky Hill Trail, p. 59.

⁹Root and Connelley, Overland Stage, p. 401; Long, Smoky Hill Trail, p. 405.

¹⁰Root and Connelley, Overland Stage, pp. 406-07.



Map of the Kansas portion of the Missouri-California Pony Express route (April, 1860).

17. The Pony Comes Through: The Short-lived Saga of the Pony Express

As emigrants flocked to Oregon and California in the mid-nineteenth century, demand for railroad and telegraph service to the Pacific Coast increased.

In 1859 the telegraph reached to Kansas from the East Coast. California Senator William Gwin suggested that a fast pony service would complement the existing telegraph until lines were strung across the rest of the nation. But Congress, torn by sectionalist interests, could not agree on a route and therefore did not subsidize the Pony Express.

However, the Leavenworth freighting firm Russell, Majors & Waddell--hoping for a lucrative mail contract--reorganized as the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company and hurried to establish the Pony Express in the spring of 1860.

The idea of a pony express was not new. Genghis Kahn had used a similar system of communication in the twelfth century in China, and express riders had ridden a circuit of California mining camps in the 1850s.

The Leavenworth Times emphasized the importance of the new venture in an account on Feb. 13, 1860.

This enterprise is one of a mammoth character, and will play a great part in the rapid development of the vast region lying between the Missouri and the Pacific. . . . [W]e believe we are not predicting too much when we aver that the establishment of this Express Route will mark the line of the Pacific Railroad.¹

Russell, Majors & Waddell wasted no time. Immediately they advertised for:

two hundred grey mares, from four to seven years old, not to exceed fifteen hands high, well broke to the saddle, and warranted sound, with black hoofs, and suitable for running the "Overland Poney Express."²

Both speed and stamina were required of these horses. Many of the horses came from Ft. Leavenworth cavalry stock, others

were California mustangs.

Other tasks included determining the best route, establishing way stations, and hiring riders. The stations were located 20-25 miles apart so that the ponies could travel to the next station and return once a week. Hay and grain were delivered by ox-teams supplied by Russell, Majors & Waddell.

By April 3, 119 way stations were established. The 120 riders who were hired were adventurous young men weighing no more than 125 pounds.

The goal was to provide weekly service in each direction. The St Joseph Weekly West described the first leg of the westward run.

Horse and rider started off amid the loud and continuous cheers. . . . [B]efore this paragraph meets the eyes of our readers, the various dispatches contained in the saddlebags . . . will have reached the town of Marysville on the Big Blue, . . . an enterprise never before accomplished even in this proverbially fast portion of a fast country.³

Yet, even as the new mail service was inaugurated, Alexander Majors predicted its demise.

This is but the precursor of another, a more important, and a greater enterprise . . . the construction of the road upon which the tireless iron horse will start on his long overland journey.⁴

While it ran, the Pony Express performed an immense service for the West Coast. The San Francisco Bulletin reported the celebration on the arrival of the first Pony Express mail.

The crowds cheered until their throats were sore; the Band played as if they would crack their cheeks . . . the boys stirred up their bonfires and the speech makers studied their points. The procession reformed, opened right and left, and the pony, a bright bay . . . paced gaily up to his stand.⁵

The Pony Express quickly developed a reputation for delivering the mail under difficult circumstances. The route covered some of the wildest parts of the continent. There were only four military posts along the way. Traveling over plains, across desert, mountains, and Indian territory, in storms, streams, and night, the mail went through.

At each station along the route the rider exchanged mounts, transferring the mochila, a leather covering thrown over the saddle, from pony to pony. On each mochila were four cantinas, small boxes of hard leather that were locked en route. Only the station masters at either end and designated way stations could

unlock the boxes.

Riders were instructed to "think first of the mail--next of your mount--and last of your own skin." All of the riders were armed but most depended on speed for safety. In Roughing It Mark Twain described an encounter with a Pony Express rider when he traveled overland by stage.

Here he comes! . . . So suddenly is it all, and so like a flash of unreal fancy, that but for a flake of white foam on a mail sack after the vision had flashed by and disappeared, we might have doubted whether we had seen any actual horse and man at all.⁶

In the short life of the Pony Express, records for endurance and speed were almost commonplace. In one remarkable ride, "Pony Bob" Haslam covered 380 miles. He stayed in the saddle for thirty-six hours, traveling through hostile Pah-Ute country.

When mail service was increased to semiweekly, the strain on horse and rider grew. Few of the eighty riders who started the Pony Express lasted a year. Some left to fight in the Civil War.

The Pony Express was not a financial success. During its sixteen-month existence expenses were estimated at \$700,000, while income probably reached only \$500,000.

The Butterfield stage had crossed the West in 25 days, the Pony Express in eight days and the telegraph in 100 minutes. The Atchison Freedom's Champion commented on this change.

It was thought last year . . . that the Pony had accomplished wonders when he had given us a communication with the Pacific coast in from six to seven days. But now the Pony has become a thing of the past--his last race is run. Without sound of trumpets, celebrations, or other noisy demonstrations, the slender wire has been stretched from ocean to ocean.⁷

In its short life the Pony Express brought the Atlantic and Pacific ten days nearer each other at a time when the great national crisis, the Civil War, made rapid communication important. It also helped to keep California in the Union.

Notes

¹Leavenworth Daily Times, February 13, 1860, p. 2.

²Leavenworth Daily Times, February 10, 1860, p. 2.

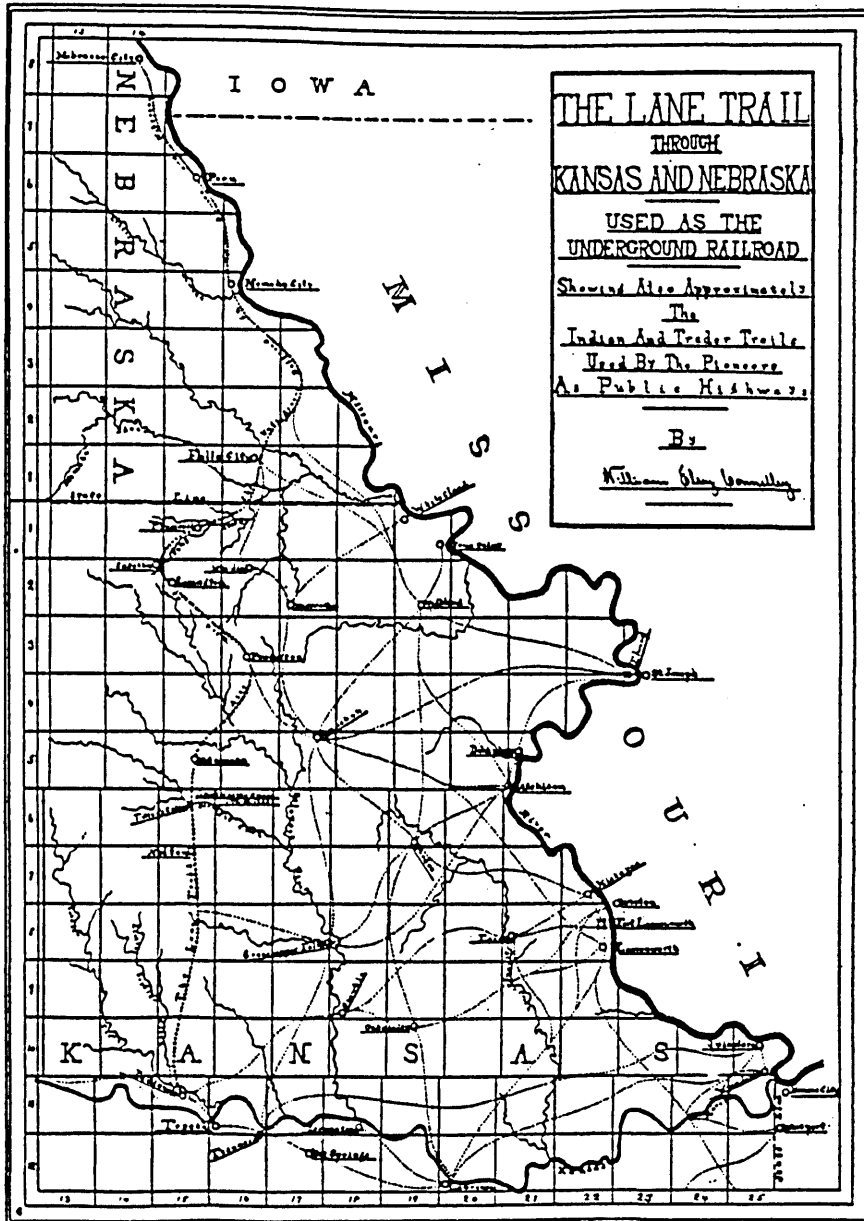
³St. Joseph Weekly West, April 7, 1860, p. 2.

⁴St. Joseph Weekly West, April 7, 1860, p. 2.

⁵Arthur Chapman, The Pony Express: The Record of a Romantic Adventure in Business (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), pp. 144-48.

⁶Samuel Langhorne Clemens [Mark Twain], Roughing It (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 83-84.

⁷Atchison Freedom's Champion, November 2, 1861, p. 1.



The Lane Trail.

18. Freedom's Route: The Underground Railroad in Kansas

Dawn was barely visible in the east on January 28, 1859, when a pounding on his door awakened Daniel Sheridan of Topeka.

"Who is there?"

"Friends. Are you ready to receive visitors?"¹

The man who awakened Sheridan was George B. Gill, the escort for John Brown and twelve slaves. When the prairie schooner carrying Brown and the fugitive slaves arrived, Sheridan was waiting for them. They climbed out and hurried into Sheridan's home.²

Brown's group of slaves was only one of hundreds coming from the slave state of Missouri to the slave territory of Kansas by the "underground railroad." This was a trail over which slaves journeyed from bondage to freedom. It was a secretly marked ever-changing trail that called for imagination and courage from those who would travel on it.

On their own or with help, runaway slaves walked and ran in ravines and along tree-covered river banks at night to keep out of sight. Friendly "conductors" hid them in false wagon beds or under hay. During the day runaways slept in barns, cellars, lofts, or attics belonging to "stationmasters." Secrecy always prevailed in host households.

Men and women caught aiding escaping slaves were jailed and fined. John Brown had a price of \$3,000 on his head by 1859. Slave hunters could get \$200 for each slave they returned.³

When Kansas opened to settlement in spring 1854, hundreds of proslave and free-state people rushed in. Initially, proslave forces controlled the territorial government and wrote a slave code for Kansas. Anti-slavery settlers fought to rid the territory of proslavery laws and officials. They also sought to create a state constitution that abolished slavery. These settlers aided fugitive slaves escaping through Kansas to freedom in the North.

The underground railroad had been operating nationally for more than fifty years before it became active in the Kansas

Territory in 1855. Before then, militant black and white abolitionists helped thousands of fugitive slaves escape from southern slave states to freedom in the North. The abolitionists, along with free blacks and ex-slaves, helped increase the traffic from the 1830s through the 1850s.

Violent conflict over slavery kept Kansas in turmoil from 1854 to 1857. National attention focused on Kansas when J. Bowles wrote about the murders, massacres, and town burnings in his hometown in "Bleeding Kansas."

Lawrence has been . . . known and cursed by all slave holders in and out of Mo. for being an abolition town. . . . I have learned from [N]egroes who were emigrating from Mo. that they never would have known anything about a land of freedom or that they had a friend in the world only from their master's continual abuse of Lawrence [abolitionists].⁴

Escape through Lawrence by underground railroad was considered as good as freedom.

Many Kansans aided escaping slaves from nearby Missouri. Eastern branch routes of the underground railroad came from Quindaro and Lawrence. Another route from Mound City and Osawatomie came up from the south. These trails joined the Lane Trail at Topeka and Holton.

The Lane Trail had its origins in Missouri's closing of emigrant routes to Kansas. As of 1856, emigrants with free state or abolitionist sentiments went through Iowa and Nebraska to Kansas. James H. Lane was a free-stater who led a small army of emigrants to Kansas in 1856. Later travelers marked his route with stone piles on hilltops. Lane's Trail, as it came to be called, ran north from Topeka through Holton, Netawaka, Sabetha and Peru to Nebraska City and Iowa.⁵

Supporting the underground railroad taxed the Kansas pioneers who had more courage to spare than goods or cash. John Brown and others sometimes covered the costs of liberating slaves by robbing their masters of travel supplies. Otherwise, fugitive slaves in need of clothing, food, and cash depended on contributions from people along the route.

Probably fewer than one thousand slaves used the underground railroad in Kansas. The threat of fines and imprisonment for harboring fugitives discouraged record keeping. Most fugitive slaves left Kansas, wanting to get far away from Missouri slave hunters.

Until the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, the underground railroad operated in flagrant violation of the federal fugitive slave laws. Historian John Hope Franklin wrote:

It was the most eloquent defiance of slaveholders the abolitionists could make.⁶

But it was the slaves, wanting desperately to be free, who took the greatest risk. The underground railroad gave them a chance for freedom.

Notes

¹L.L. Kiene, "The Battle of the Spurs and John Brown's Exit from Kansas," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 8 (1903-1904): 444.

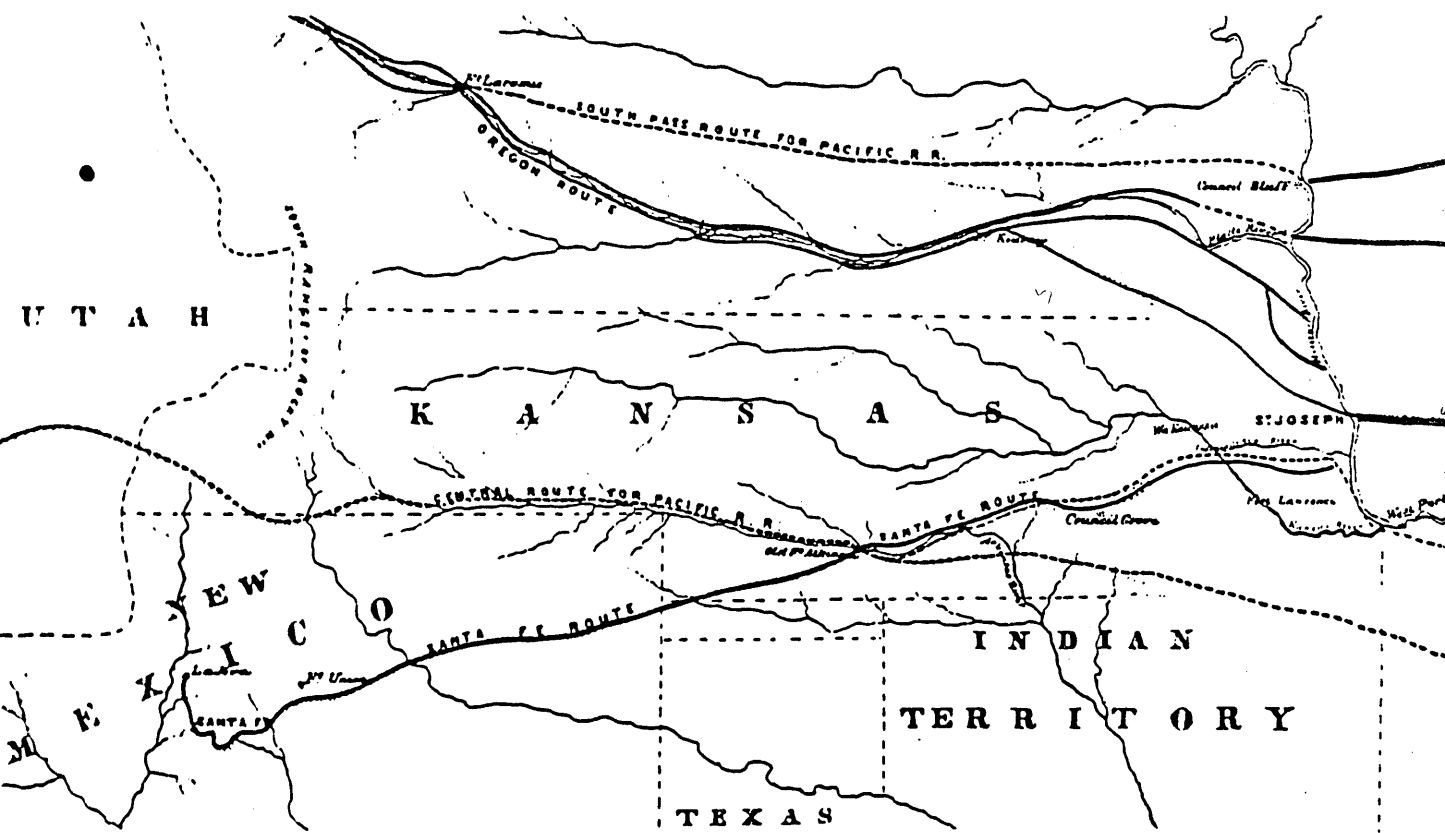
²Kiene, "Battle of the Spurs," p. 444.

³Topeka Capital, October 29, 1939 in Kansas State Historical Society, Negro clippings 7, pp. 142-43.

⁴Wilbur H. Siebert, The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Macmillan, 1898), p. 347.

⁵William E. Connelley, "The Lane Trail," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 8 (1913-1914): 268-79.

⁶John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 255.



George Walter's conception of the "great central route" for the Pacific railroad. 1854.

19. From Trail to Rail: The Steel Serpent Comes to Kansas

In 1865 less than one tenth of the 35,000 miles of railroad in the United States lay west of the Mississippi River. The Kansas legislature had chartered fifty-one railroad companies in 1861, but the Civil War postponed construction. The progress of the iron horse was inevitable, however; within twenty years railroads would transform the frontier.

The early history of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe reflects the struggles and successes of many railroads. Lawrence Waters described its origins.

The roots of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe lay deep in the slavery controversy; gold rushes to California and Colorado; national clamor for a transcontinental railroad; struggles in Kansas for statehood; commerce over the Santa Fe Trail; rivalry of the United States with Mexico; subjugation of warring Indians; and the omnipotent desire to develop the resources of the country.¹

In 1864 the government granted the Santa Fe three million acres, on the condition that it build a railway to the western boundary of Kansas within ten years. The railroad also got permission to buy land from the Potawatomi tribe, land that could be resold to support construction of the line. Its route would follow the old Santa Fe Trail and benefit from the large-scale government-supported reconnaissance and exploration of the 1840s and '50s.

The Kansas legislature supported railroad expansion to attract settlers to the state. In turn, the railroad needed the trade and travel of the state's growing population to survive. This relationship had mixed results. The railroad carried American society to the prairie. It also carried the potential for destruction. Many communities that failed to attract a rail line died. No longer was the fate of individuals and communities in local hands.

The Santa Fe, like other companies, had to struggle to survive. One contemporary writer, Milton W. Reynolds, commented:

The Kansas [rail]roads will have a hard time to keep

out of bankruptcy for the next few years . . . for we have built roads far in advance of the needs of the people.²

Railroads pressured towns and counties to raise stocks and bonds to support their expansion and sought donations of town lots for depots and shops. If a town dragged its feet, the planned routes might be revised to miss it. But meeting the railroad's terms might leave a community with a staggering public debt. Kansans paid dearly to hear the train's whistle.

The adventurous flocked to these new towns--entrepreneurs, cattle buyers and drovers, lawyers and physicians, speculators, gamblers, and prostitutes. But the real action was in the laying of the track.

The work crews were a motley lot. On the Santa Fe pigtailed Chinese worked alongside border ruffians, Eastern Europeans, bushwhackers, former prisoners, desperadoes, Mexicans, and Indians. Jerry-built towns served the needs of the crew--food, clothing, liquor, women, and gambling.

Once the line had been laid, travel by train was relatively luxurious, at least for those who could pay. Pullman cars, private sitting rooms, sugar-cured ham, and fine French wines enticed the well-to-do.

For the less affluent the coach was a "home on wheels." Dining-car service, track-side restaurants, and wood-burning stoves made coach travel much less rigorous than travel by stage.

The emigrant cars were the bottom of the line. Attached to the end of the train, they were devoid of comfort. Backless benches, a wood-burning stove, and straw ticks were the sole accommodations. The English author Robert Louis Stevenson commented on his journey across the plains in an emigrant train.

Those [cars] destined for emigrants on the Union Pacific are only remarkable for their extreme plainness, nothing but wood entering in any part into their construction, and for the usual inefficiency of the lamps, which often went out and shed but a dying glimmer even while they burned. Equality, though conceived very largely in America, does not extend so low down as to an emigrant.³

But even the emigrant was grateful for his transportation. From his dirty rail-car window he could view wagon trains still plodding across the plains in the late nineteenth century.

By the 1880s, according to historian Paul W. Gates:

the railroads everywhere had fallen from their high position into public disgrace. No economic institution had earlier been so pampered. . . . The tide had turned

against them in the West when their grab for land, their unwillingness to pay taxes, their efforts to extract every possible dollar from their holdings, brought them into conflict with the homesteader and with small-town business interests.⁴

The railroads were instrumental in promoting the West, in facilitating emigration, and in transforming the Great Plains into settled communities. Kansas Senator John J. Ingalls described this transformation.

[We established] in solitude the germs of those institutions which in this brief interval have grown and expanded into a civilization that is one of the great wonders and marvels of the world. . . . [R]ailroads have been builded, and cities . . . have been strung like pearls along their iron cords.⁵

Notes

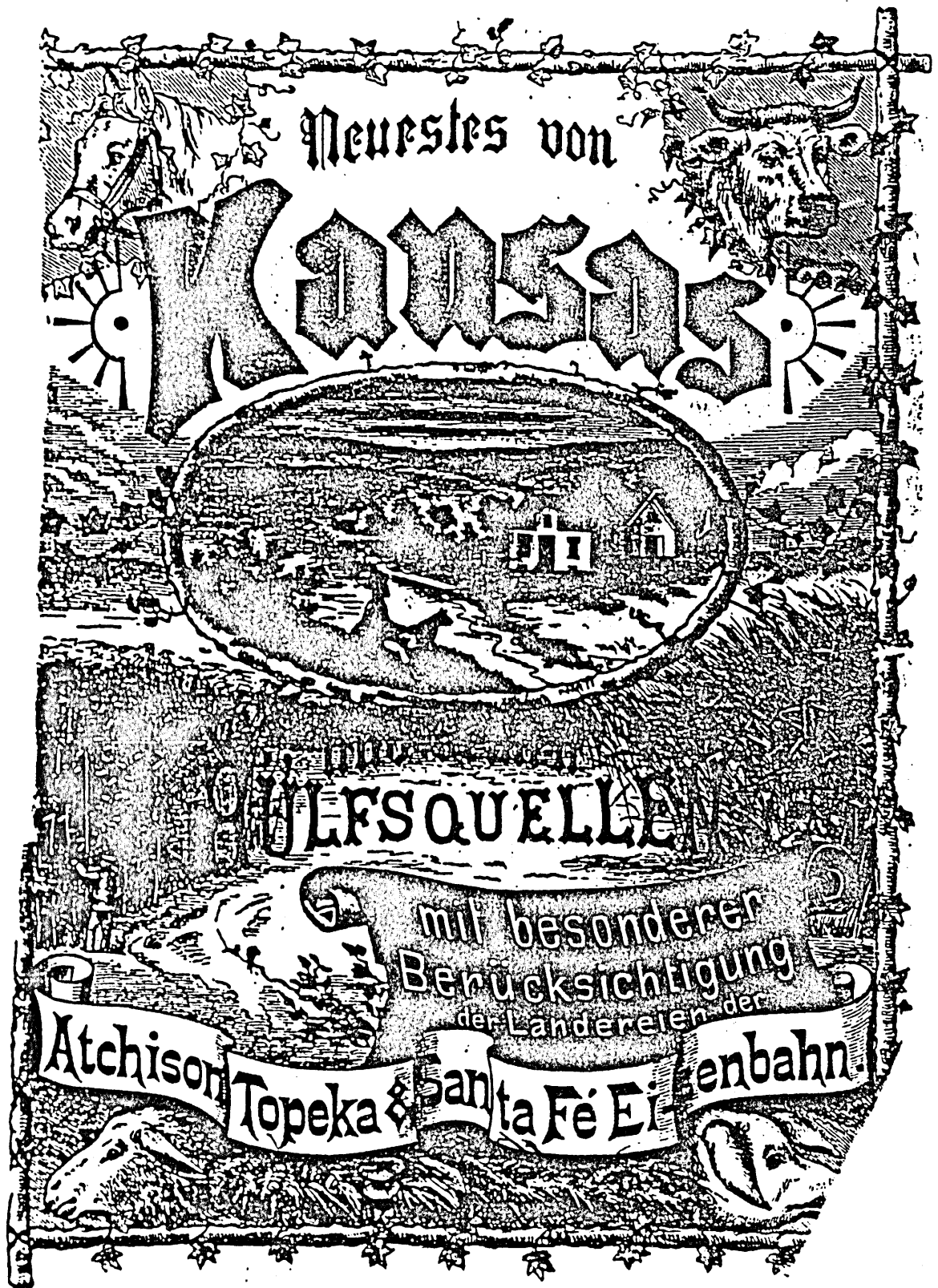
¹Lawrence L. Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1950), p. 9.

²Richard L. Douglas, "A History of Manufacturing in the Kansas District," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 11 (1910): 106.

³Robert Louis Stevenson, Across the Plains (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), pp. 27, 35.

⁴Paul W. Gates, Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890 (New York: Atherton Press, 1966), p. 293.

⁵John J. Ingalls, Speech of June 11, 1873, Lawrence, Kansas. Excerpted in Carol Shankel and Barbara Watkins, Old Fraser (Lawrence, Kans.: Historic Mount Oread Fund, 1984), p. 20.



Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad. German recruitment booklet.

20. Railroads and Rainfall: Promoting Paradise on the Plains

Peopling the plains did not come easy. Early travelers such as Zebulon Pike and Josiah Gregg doubted whether this "Great American Desert" might support populations other than "wandering savages" or isolated villages.

Gregg commented in Commerce of the Prairies:

The high plains seem too dry and lifeless to produce timber; yet might not the vicissitudes of nature operate a change likewise upon the seasons? Why may we not suppose that the genial influences of civilization--that extensive cultivation of the earth--might contribute to the multiplication of showers, as it certainly does of fountains? Or that shady groves, as they advance upon the prairies, may have some effect upon the seasons? . . . Then may we not hope that these sterile regions might yet be thus revived and fertilized, and their surface covered one day by flourishing settlements to the Rocky Mountains?¹

Following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, free staters committed their energies to settling the Kansas Territory. But if "free soil" was thought to be desert soil, there would be few settlers attracted to the state. As railroad magnate J.J. Hill commented,

You might put a railroad in the Garden of Eden and if there were nobody there but Adam and Eve, it would be a failure.²

Thus, the railroads that had been awarded large grants of land in Kansas sought to transform the Eastern public's perception of the prairie as a desert to that of a garden. The job of railroad promoters was to convince prospective emigrants to settle on the prairie.

The Kansas Pacific Railroad led the campaign to change the desert image. Foremost among its promotional agents was Richard Smith Elliott of St. Louis. Elliott used the theory of increasing rainfall to convince prospective emigrants that western Kansas could profitably support agriculture. Elliott drew on the work of scientists whose observations

substantiated the notion that:

[N]ot only is the climate changing, but . . . a great change is to be expected.³

Elliott, with the financial support of the Kansas Pacific, established three agricultural-experiment stations in western Kansas. There he planted native trees--cottonwood, osage orange, and honey locust, among others--to test his theory of increasing rainfall.⁴

Elliott had no doubts about his work. The railroads would attract the people; the people would cultivate the land and plant trees; the trees would, in turn, bring rain and increase the land's yield. More people would be attracted to the state and the railroads--and everybody else--would benefit.

Elliott enlisted the support of scientists, federal government officials, and Congress in his promotional ventures. Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian Institute and Ferdinand Hayden, director of the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, both supported Elliott's rainfall theories. Hayden, the "businessman's geologist," was a self-made scientist who shared Elliott's goals.

It is my earnest wish at all times to report that which will be most pleasing to the people of the West.⁵

He was apparently oblivious to the potential conflict between this goal and scientific objectivity--and to the misery of misled settlers.

The confirmation of the rainfall theory came from Congress. The passage of the Timber Culture Act of 1872 ensured that those who would plant and nurture trees on their property would be awarded more land. The railroads, scientists, and the federal government had all got into the business of making it rain--and of promoting settlement on the plains.

Efforts to attract settlers to the plains extended beyond the halls of Congress to the steppes of Russia. There C.B. Schmidt, commissioner of immigration for the Santa Fe railroad, recruited emigrants in the Mennonite colonies. Schmidt was an "officer" in the railroad's "army of land agents."

Each agent was supplied with attractive literature, descriptive of the country tributary to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad, its agricultural and pastoral resources, its commercial and industrial opportunities.⁶

Perhaps the easiest part of Schmidt's mission was convincing the Mennonites to settle in Kansas.

Large crowds of men, women and children greeted me . . . and the most intense interest was shown in all I had to say about conditions in Kansas. . . . My desire to transplant to Kansas as many of these people as possible increased as I traveled through these thrifty and handsome villages.⁷

Schmidt's work bore rapid results.

The first arrival of Mennonites in Kansas [in 1874] consisted of 400 families, 1900 people who brought with them two and a quarter million dollars in gold, and purchased 60,000 acres of land in the counties of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, and Reno. They arrived simultaneously with the grasshoppers, but outstayed them.⁸

The Mennonites joined in the efforts to transform the desert. Their hardy "turkey red" wheat brought Kansas fame as the "wheat state." According to Schmidt, they made their section of Kansas a "garden of affluence and contentment."⁹

Elliott and his rainfall theory did not fare as well. His forestation project languished, the Kansas Pacific floundered in the drought and panic of 1873, and Elliott lost his job. The rainfall theory persisted until the 1890s, when its premises began to be questioned. As an old man who had not been to Kansas for fifteen years, Elliott asked, "are there still trees out there?"¹⁰

Notes

¹Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, Max L. Moorhead, ed. (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 362.

²Quoted in David M. Emmons, Garden in the Grasslands: Boomer Literature of the Central Great Plains (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 37.

³David M. Emmons, "Richard Smith Elliott, Kansas Promoter," Kansas Historical Quarterly 36, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 393.

⁴R.S. Elliott, "Forest Trees in Kansas," Kansas Magazine (May 1873), pp. 404-05; Edwin W. Mills, "The Tree Apostle of Kansas," The Kansas Magazine, 1947, p. 76.

⁵Quoted in Emmons, "Richard Elliott Smith," p. 396.

⁶C.B. Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work for Kansas," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society 9 (1905-1906): 487.

⁷Schmidt, p. 492.

⁸Schmidt, p. 495.

⁹Schmidt, p. 496.

¹⁰Quoted in Emmons, "Richard Smith Elliott," p. 401.

21. The Camera Tells the Truth: The Early Western Photographers

The camera brought new accuracy to the depiction of the West. In the past artists had created romantic views--towering mountains, sublime sunsets, summer storms, and Indian regalia. Photography focused on the sublime too, but it offered a more realistic view of the terrain. It documented both potential problems for settlers and remnants of Indian ways of life.

In the 1860s and '70s photographers frequently accompanied government expeditions exploring the West. Railroads hired photographers to document their expansion and capture images of the vast fertile land that would attract settlers.

Alexander Gardner went west to photograph along the Union Pacific line. On September 21, 1867, the Lawrence Daily Tribune announced:

Mr. Gardner, a photographic artist from Washington City [has] come to Kansas for the purpose of taking photographic views of remarkable and noted places in our state.¹

A native Scot, Gardner had worked with Mathew Brady, the famed Civil War photographer of the Army of the Potomac. Gardner was well known for both his war photography and his portraits of President Abraham Lincoln. He was not the first to photograph in Kansas, but his work provides a comprehensive survey of early Kansas landscape and settlement.

When Gardner visited Kansas, the Union Pacific Eastern Division was under construction and much of the state's population lived along the line. He visited every town on the line and made several side trips. Gardner's 150 photographs from this trip include whole towns, principal streets, federal and state institutions, and interesting geographical and geological landmarks.²

Gardner, an Easterner, was impressed with the panoramic vistas of the prairie. One of his stereographs is entitled "View embracing twelve miles of prairie," another "The extreme distance is twelve miles off."³ In an early view of the University of Kansas, the single University structure, North College, is perched tenaciously on the prairied brow of Mt. Oread.

Using wet-glass plates and long exposures, Gardner recorded bridge building, camp sites, ferries, Indians, emigrant trains, military posts, and prairie dogs.⁴ One of his photographs shows several black soldiers on top of the stage coach from Hays, another integrated Indian and white students at St. Mary's Mission School.

Immediately before the Civil War, photography had been used in some of the explorations of the West to document and map important geological features. This information was helpful in locating--and relocating--the best routes for trails, wagon roads, and railroads. After the war, efforts were made to document the geography, geology, and Indians' way of life.⁵

The photographers who worked after the Civil War were more successful than those on earlier expeditions. Photographers such as Gardner, A.J. Russell, John Carbutt, and T.H. O'Sullivan benefitted from both mastery of the wet process and the experience of expedition photography in the war years.

The stereographs of these early photographers aroused widespread interest in the West.⁶ According to photohistorian Robert Taft:

The stereoscope and basket of stereoscopic views were almost as familiar a sight in the American home of yesterday as was the family album. Through the lenses of the stereoscope, an expanding world was revealed to many.⁷

On April 27, 1875, an article appeared in the New York Times about the Hayden Survey along the old Oregon Trail.

While only a select few can appreciate the discoveries of the geologists or the exact measurements of the topographers, everyone can understand a picture.⁸

Shooting these photographs was not easy. Photographers had to transport a ton of equipment--often by mule, at best by buggy or train. A tent frequently served as darkroom. Glass plates and chemicals required careful handling and packing. Photographers needed patience, endurance and strength--as well as technical skills--to work in the field.

The photographic process itself was difficult. The photographer coated the glass plate with collodion (the medium for binding the emulsion, the light-sensitive solution, to the piece of glass), then plunged the plate into a solution of silver nitrate.

The wet plate was put into a light-tight holder and then was immediately exposed in the camera, which was already focused on the scene on its tripod. The photographer then hurried back to the dark tent to develop the image.⁹ Heat and the difficulty of

getting clear water frequently complicated the process.

Perhaps the best measure of the influence of these early photographers was the effort of Congress to establish the first national park in 1872. Only after seeing W.H. Jackson's photographs of the Yellowstone region and its natural curiosities were the senators swayed. The bill to establish Yellowstone National Park passed without dissent.

Western historian H.M. Chittenden emphasized the photographers' value.

Description might exaggerate, but the camera told the truth; and in this case the truth was more remarkable than exaggeration. . . . They did a work which no other agency could do and doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the region where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the public forever."¹⁰

Gardner, Jackson, and other early photographers had ventured into the wilderness to record the unknown land and its native inhabitants for posterity. These photographers knew the plundered forests, polluted rivers, and smoke of the industrial East. They were determined that a pristine image of the West would endure.

Notes

¹Lawrence Daily Tribune, September 21, 1867, p. 3, col. 1.

²Robert Taft, Photography and the American Scene; A Social History, 1839-1889 (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 278.

³Taft, pp. 278-79.

⁴Robert Richmond, "Kansas through a Camera in 1867," The American West 2, no. 3 (Summer 1965): 57.

⁵Taft, pp. 282-83.

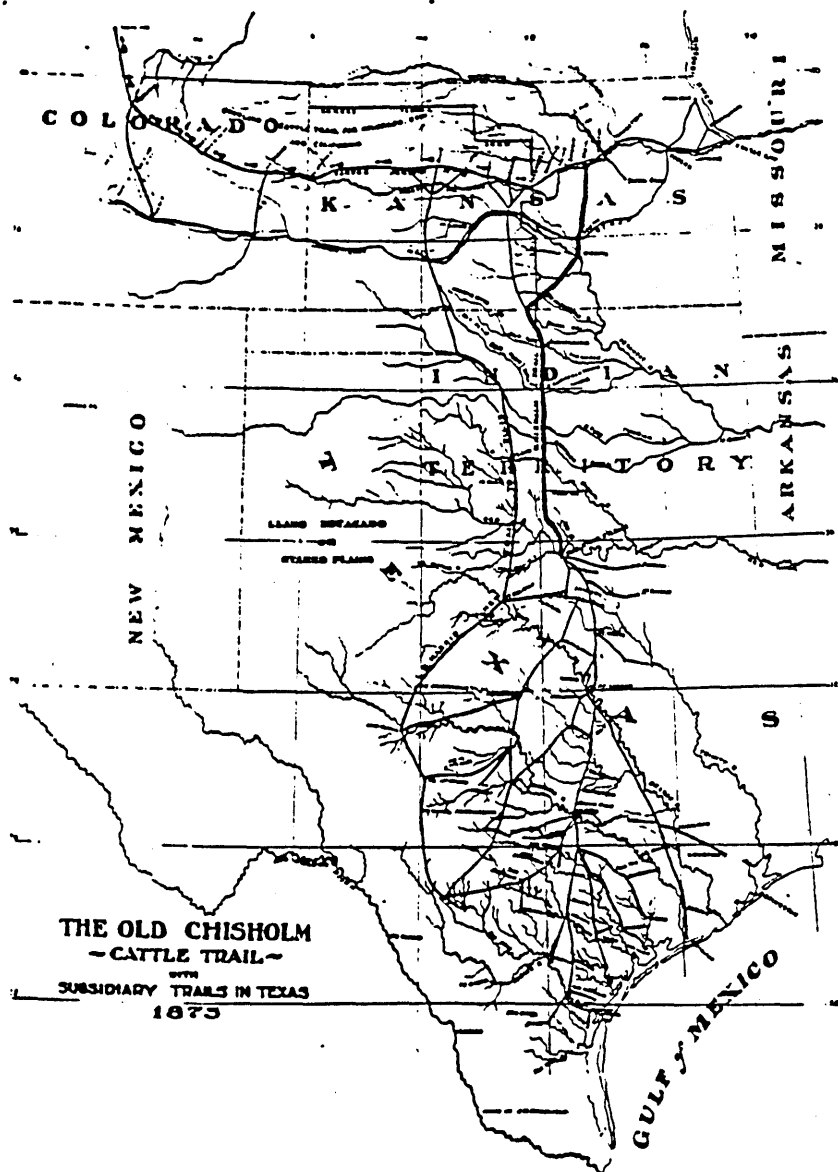
⁶William H. Goetzmann, Exploration & Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the West (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 500.

⁷Robert Taft, "Seeing Kansas in the Sixties," The Kansas Magazine (1938), p. 47.

⁸Quoted in Beaumont Newhall and Diana E. Edkins, William H. Jackson (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1974), p. 13.

⁹Newhall, p. 14.

¹⁰Taft, Photography and the American Scene, p. 302.



The Chisholm Trail. 1873.

22. The Chisholm Trail

For a brief time after the Civil War, cattle trails linked the cattle kingdom to the railroads and eastern markets. Eastern factories, commerce, and cities generated a higher demand for beef that brought herds of Texas cattle north to the railhead cattle towns in Kansas.

On a map the Chisholm Trail formed a gigantic tree stretching north across the continent from south Texas to Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas. Its roots were in the lush grasslands between the Pecos and Rio Grande rivers. The roots were a thousand feeder lines, trails made by cattle and vaqueros.

The heavy trunk sketched a line that began at the Rio Grande and headed straight through Indian country for Kansas. Branch trails diverged to different markets, railroads, and new ranges. The Chisholm Trail's secondary branches reached to Abilene, Wichita, Newton, and Caldwell, Kansas.¹ Cattle-industry historian D.E. McArthur described the trail:

[The Chisholm Trail] became a very notable course. From 200 to 400 yards wide, beaten into the bare earth, it reached over hill and through valley for over 600 miles . . . , a chocolate band amid the green prairies, uniting the North and the South. As the marching hooves wore it down and the wind blew and the waters washed the earth away, it became lower than the surrounding country and was flanked by little banks of sand drifted by the wind.²

From 1867 to 1877, drovers made the Chisholm Trail their main path to profits. As Joseph McCoy put it:

It has more prairie, less timber, more small streams and fewer large ones, altogether better grass and fewer flies--no civilized Indian tax or wild Indian disturbances--than any other route driven over.³

The cowboys left a different portrait of the Chisholm Trail. Troubles--bucking horses, downpours, and stampedes--are depicted in song:

Come along, boys, and listen to my tale.

I'll tell you of my troubles
on the old Chisholm Trail.

The worst of the troubles was the dry drive. Many might perish if the drive didn't reach water soon enough. Andy Adams, cowboy novelist, summarized the danger for those who traveled the trail.

The bones of men and animals that lie bleaching along the trails abundantly testify that . . . the plains had baffled the determination of man.⁴

Another great hazard was the stampede. Stampedes occurred most often at night. A small noise might panic a whole herd. When cattle could feel a storm brewing, the cowboys feared a stampede.

John Young, a Texas vaquero, found the weather on the Kansas portion of the Chisholm Trail to Abilene to be particularly rugged.

They started just as a flash of lightning made the whole world a blinding blue-white. It came from right over our heads and by the time the clap of thunder reached us the cattle were gone, the roar of their running mixed with the roar of the sky.

Then the herd began to mill, running in a circle, the cattle in the center of the circle climbing over each other. Balls of fire were playing on the tips of the long horns and . . . snakes of fire ran over the backs of the cattle. . . . With every fresh clap of thunder every animal not too tightly wedged in the mass seemed to jump straight up, and the impact that followed jarred the ground. I knew that we were not going to quiet those cattle down that night.⁵

The trail crew accompanying a herd of three thousand cattle averaged from twelve to fifteen hands. Typically crews had both black and Mexican hands. Black cowboys served as cooks, wranglers, hands, and cowboys; often they did the worst and hardest jobs.

Some, like Nat Love, Emanuel Oregon, and Mathew "Bones" Hooks, became famous for their skills, many of which were learned in slavery. Bulldogging from a running horse was introduced by the legendary black cowboy Bill Pickett. Among the most skilled cowboys were Mexican vaqueros.⁶

Women occasionally roughed it with the men. In the spring of 1874, for example, D.M. Barton and his wife started a herd of 500 longhorns north. They took their young baby along. The cook watched the baby while Mrs. Barton helped drive the herd on her cowpony.

Margaret Borland and Lizzie Johnson Williams took their own herds to Kansas and negotiated their sale. Minta Holmsby took her husband's herd up the trail and sold it for him.⁷

The cowboys looked forward to celebrating at the end of the drive. They would indulge in a good bath, a haircut, and a new set of clothes. The cowboys also would take advantage of the services cattle-town businesses provided: gambling, dancing, drinking, and prostitution.

The drovers turned over the cattle to their bosses. Professional trail drivers bargained for themselves with the buyers from the Eastern meat-packing plants or with ranchers looking for stock.

These towns all existed for the benefit of buyers and sellers in the cattle business. Their dry-goods stores, boot shops, saloons, dance halls, and houses of prostitution all sought the cowboy's business. Morals aside, violence and lawlessness were allowed but were kept at a controllable level. Gamblers and prostitutes, though operating illegally, were taxed to pay for city governance.

The real significance of the cattle towns, however, lay in their role as great markets where the cattle kingdom and the industrial East met and were bound together by cattle trails and the iron horse.⁸

Notes

¹Wayne Gard, The Chisholm Trail (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 76.

²Quoted in Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1931), p. 261.

³Quoted in Gard, p. 71.

⁴Andy Adams, Log of a Cowboy (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), pp. 63-64.

⁵J. Frank Dobie, A Vaquero of the Brush Country (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 97.

⁶Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, The Adventures of the Negro Cowboys (New York: Bantam Books, 1969).

⁷David Dary, Cowboy Culture (New York: Avon Books, 1981), pp. 261, 272; Sandra Myres, Westering Women (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), pp. 259-63.

⁸Robert R. Dykstra, The Cattle Towns (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).

23. The Cowboy's Daily Routine on the Chisholm Trail

The cook's call, the beginning of a routine day on the Chisholm Trail, brought the cowboys, fully dressed, out of their bedrolls at the break of dawn.

Bacon in the pan
Coffee in the pot!
Get up and get it. . . .
Get it while it's hot!

The cowboys washed in cold water and helped themselves to coffee and food. The coffee was hot and strong--cowboy coffee that would float a pistol.

The crew ate breakfast in shifts. First to eat were the hands who were to relieve the night guards and the point men who led the herd.

At first light the trail driver responsible for getting the longhorns to market was up and scouting out the trail ahead, looking for the best grass, good stream crossings, and adequate watering holes. He laid out a trail that avoided hills and timber that would make the longhorns skittish or offer a refuge for runaways.

The nature and needs of the motley-colored longhorns dictated the daily routine. Only the cowboys who knew the habits and character of the longhorns, those who knew how to cajole and control them, made the trip to Kansas.

By the time the last cowboys had finished their bacon, biscuits, and dried fruit, the cook had the gear stowed and the boss was ready to move the herd. The crew spread the herd out to graze a wide swath of grassy trail. At first they took it easy and then they pushed the herd into a long wedge-shaped line with the lead steer at the head.

The durable longhorn could travel twenty-five to thirty miles a day. Most averaged ten to twelve. Charles Goodnight, a rancher and trail driver for whom the Goodnight-Loving Trail from El Paso to Denver was named, praised the longhorn's endurance and durability.

As trail cattle their equal never has been known. Their hooves are superior to those of any other cattle. In stampedes, they hold together better, are easier circled in a run, and rarely split off. . . . They can go farther without water and endure more suffering than others.¹

The herd would plod along the trail grazing. The key was to control the herd subtly. As cowboy J.L. Hill told it:

Till Driscoll, our boss, knew the nature of cattle down to their hooves. He would never force a herd off the bed grounds. He let them get up in the morning just as they pleased, stretch, and then graze out in the direction we were headed.²

Singing was a primary method of herd control. Some drovers wouldn't hire a cowboy unless he could croon to the cattle. Some, like Big-Mouth Henry, a Negro cowboy, could really charm the longhorns.

When eleven o'clock rolled around, the crew allowed the herd to graze. The men used the break to grab some dinner. If the cattle were unruly, canned tomatoes might be all. But on an eventless drive, there would be cold leftovers from breakfast or something fresh rustled up by the cook.

In the afternoon the herd cut a narrow trail. Now thirst moved the cattle. The crew's main task was to reach the campground chosen by the boss before sundown. They needed time to water the cattle and to let them graze again.

While the cattle grazed, the punchers hustled to the chuck wagon for the main meal of the day. Supper was a huge meal-- maybe son-of-a-gun stew, fried steaks or roasts, beans with salt pork, mixed pickles, and stewed fruit.

When the cattle began to chew their cud and yawn, the cowboys drove the herd off the trail and pushed them into a circle on bedding ground. Crooning to the herd was important to soothe it and drown out the night sounds that might stampede the cattle.

O say, little dogies, when you goin' to lay down.
And quit this forever shiftin' around?
My limbs are weary, my seat is sore,
O lay down, dogies, like you laid before,
Lay down, little dogies, lay down.³

These were the essentials of a successful drive of those "mighty antlered, wild-eyed . . . steers."

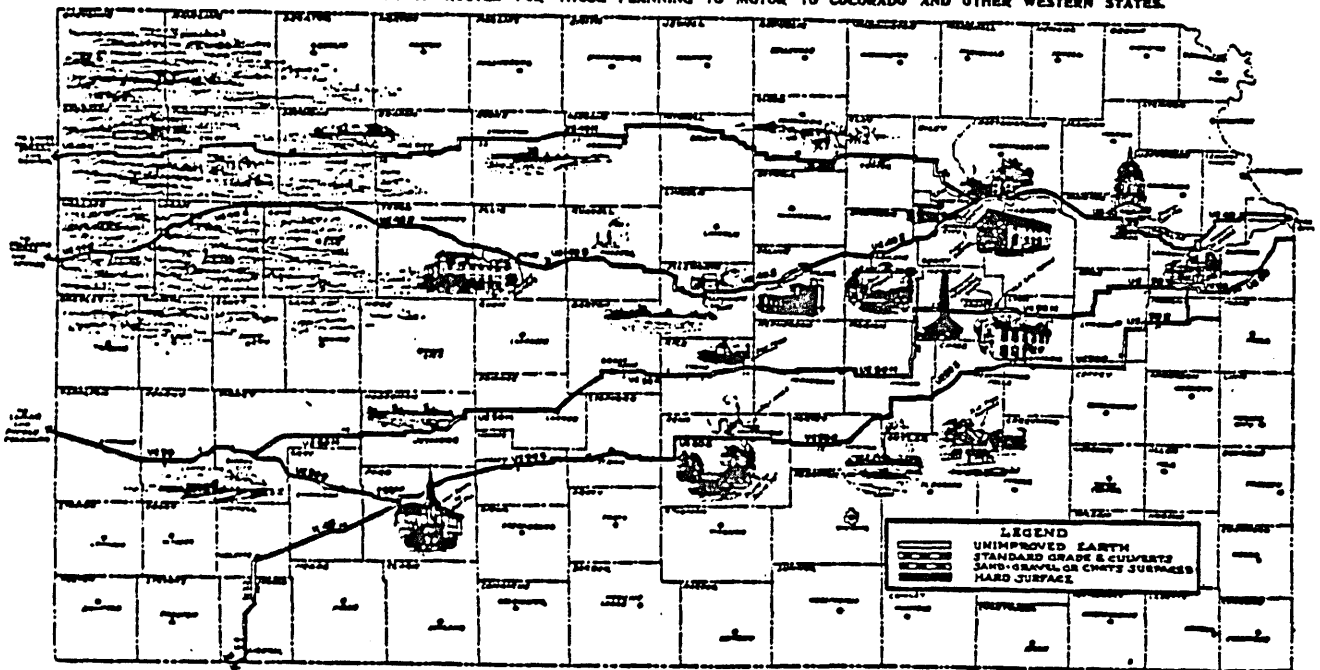
Notes

¹Quoted in Wayne Gard, The Chisholm Trail (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 109.

²J. Frank Dobie, The Longhorns (New York: Bramhall House, 1941), p. 74.

³Alan Lomax, The Folk Songs of North America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 376.

KANSAS OFFERS A CHOICE OF ROUTES FOR THOSE PLANNING TO MOTOR TO COLORADO AND OTHER WESTERN STATES.



Early automobile routes across Kansas. 1929.

24. Good Roads, Good Business

By the 1870s many Americans recognized that good roads were a route to civilization. Yet in Kansas, as elsewhere, disorganized, ineffective road-building programs continued.

In the mid-nineteenth century roads were intended for military and cross-country traffic rather than for local needs. Steamboats and railroads were the primary means of transporting farm produce to market.

Farmers, who controlled local tax funds, were unwilling to commit their time or resources to road improvement. Yet better roads were necessary to decrease farm-to-market costs, encourage more intensive farming and new crops, and facilitate traveling in and out of towns. Improved roads would lead to more centralized schools served by regular transportation, rural free mail delivery, and reduced isolation of country life.

In Kansas roads were controlled by the counties. There were no trained engineers, few regulations, and little planning. Removing the short, rotting stumps in the roadways constituted road improvement. By the early twentieth century the growing number of automobiles and their effect on roads prompted organized planning.

Travelers to the West were uncomplimentary about the roads they traversed.

If the road makers had gone to work with the intention of throwing obstructions into them they could have hardly succeeded better. Loose stones, from 100 lbs. downward, lie thickly scattered over their surface. Our roads are either a canal filled with mud and water, more fit for a boat than for wagons, or else are an almost impassable quagmire.

Promoters of good roads and avid users, such as bicyclists and some farmers, began to lobby for the improvement and expansion of the Kansas road system. Their goal was to establish permanent all-weather "365-day" roads.

The primary obstacles facing good-roads advocates were intersectional rivalry and the selfish interests of both

individuals and communities. The guiding principle of the movement was promoting the greatest good for the most people.

In 1914 Kansas had 111,000 miles of roads. Only 1,140 miles were surfaced. In 1916 the federal government designated money for the states to use in road improvement, but during World War I construction halted. Neither labor nor materials for construction were available.

Following World War I inflationary costs aroused opposition to highway building. Additional conflict focused on the appropriate roles of the federal and state governments in financing, constructing, and maintaining highways. After several years of debate, the Kansas legislature passed a road bill in 1929 that provided \$15,000,000 to complete the state highway system and assured a well-financed highway department staffed by professional engineers. Kansas voters approved a proposal to use taxes on motor vehicles and fuels to support road building.

New machinery and road-engineering techniques improved construction and maintenance of highways. Drainage systems, surfacing materials, and bridge design were key issues. New inventions--blasting powder, rock crushers, dump wagons, stump extractors, and power rollers, along with the manufacture of Portland cement--began to transform frontier trails into reputable roads.

Still, a lack of road signs, right-angled turns, and high road centers conspired against the traveler. The resourceful driver carried a crank, jack, tire irons, and pump and patching materials. To serve the less capable, garages multiplied like roadside prairie flowers.

As the number of automobiles increased, so did the number of tourists. Arrival of the tourist hordes signaled a growing reverence for Western antiquity. One Coloradan observed:

The customs and costumes of the Indian tribes grow more interesting as our acquaintance with them becomes less familiar. . . . [W]hat ceases to be common begins to be valued.

Most tourists, whether traveling by train or car sought the spectacular. Some, like Walt Whitman, found their poetic vistas elsewhere.

[While the] standard claim is that Yosemite, Niagara falls, the upper Yellowstone and the like, afford the greatest natural shows, I am not so sure but the Prairies and the Plains, while less stunning at first sight, last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest, and make North America's characteristic landscape.

Initially, the automobile was the toy of the wealthy tourist

rather than serious transportation for the masses. Railroads supported the good-roads movement and encouraged Easteners to transport their cars by train to the West. Soon the popularity of the automobile became a threat to the railroad empire of Pullman cars and resort hotels.

Kansas communities quickly recognized the importance of tourists to their economies. Tent camping, housetrailer, autocamps, and motor courts flourished as travel became democratized and average Americans became tourists.

In 1925 the Kansas City Good Roads Association reported:

After an extensive survey, it is estimated . . . that the auto tourists will spend \$2,500,000 during the 1925 touring season. . . . Treat the tourist kindly. Offer him a good road and he will come your way. His good will is worth having. He may like your community and decide to stay. If only to make a visit, he will leave some cash.

As car designs became more sophisticated and driving speeds increased, wilderness areas and big cities became more accessible. Kansas became a day to endure on the way to somewhere else. Many tourists assessed the high plains by measuring the distance between gas stations. But those who took the time for more leisurely exploration were rewarded--by insights into the subtle beauty of nature and the people of the plains.

Notes

¹Oscar Osburn Winther, The Transportation Frontier: Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-1890 (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), p. 148.

²Winther, p. 149.

³Mary Rowland, "Kansas and the Highways, 1917-1930," Kansas History 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982): p. 34.

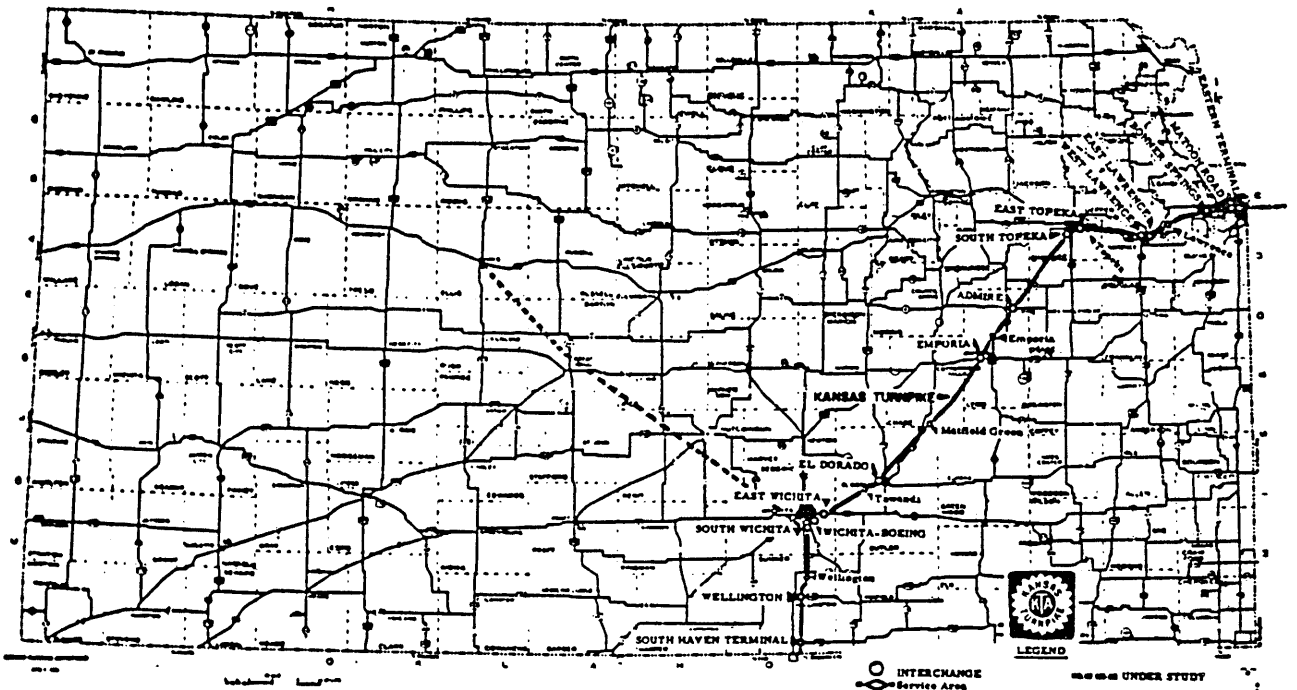
⁴L.W. Page, "Need of Centralization in Highway Control," Kansas Highways 1, no. 1 (October 1917): p. 5; M.W. Watson, "Kansas Highways Yesterday, To-day and To-morrow," Kansas Highways 3, no. 2 (July 1920): p. 5.

⁵Winther, pp. 157-58.

⁶Earl Pomeroy, In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 37.

⁷Pomeroy, pp. 104-05.

8 Good Roads Association of Greater Kansas City Touring
Bureau, "Tourists' Road Guide of Kansas" (1925). n.p.



The Kansas Turnpike. 1956.

25. Turnpike, Traffic, and Tourists

In October 1956 the Kansas turnpike opened. This 236-mile limited-access toll expressway connected population centers between Kansas City in the northeast and Wichita in the south. Part of its route followed the Santa Fe Trail.

The Kansas turnpike was one of the first state-operated toll roads in a transcontinental superhighway system designed to reduce congested city traffic and incorporate modern safety features. Only at interchanges was it possible to leave the turnpike. No traffic crossed the road enroute. An elaborate system of bridges and grade crossings rerouted established roads above the turnpike.

Turnpike travel also promoted a more homogenous culture. Chain hotels, motels, and restaurants offered the same bed and board across the nation. This sanitized service was far removed from the early Kansas accommodations of stage-coach stations and wayside homes.

Driving on the Kansas turnpike was also a far cry from turn-of-the-century travel. In 1913 Highway 36, for example, was:

[A] disconnected series of township roads, dirt all the way. Nobody had ever traveled the full length, mapped the roads or measured the mileage.¹

The speed, safety, and sophistication of modern travel have their negative sides, too. The complex transportation problems that face Kansas communities include inadequate roads and bridges, and abandoned rail and air service.² Limited access to superhighways and their limited number, combined with other transportation and economic problems, have prompted the decline of some Kansas communities.

A key ingredient in the economic well-being of an area is accessibility. Reduced accessibility by rail, particularly in western Kansas, has increased truck traffic. But the state has not created higher-capacity roads to keep up with this increase. One suggested solution to transportation problems is revitalization of Kansas airports, which would aid the state in linking industrial development and air transportation to regional economic development. The substantial costs of both highway and

airport renewal require broad-based planning rather than focusing on the needs of specific cities.

Transportation is fundamental to the future of Kansas's economic development. Generating income from tourism in a state lacking a "big attraction" is also important. For most out-of-state tourists nothing in Kansas (other than visiting relatives) seems to warrant a prolonged stopover.

Despite the lack of major attractions, out-of state-travelers have brought substantial income to the state. In 1952 out-of-state motorists spent \$81,000,000 in Kansas, in 1974 the figure rose to \$526,000,000, and the projection for 1990 is \$967,000,000.³ In the meantime, Kansans search for attractions and an identity to entice others.

The traveler speeding across the turnpike illustrates Kansas's difficulties in attracting tourists. The beauty of the Flint Hills, for example, goes unnoticed by the turnpike traveler. Only those who wander off the beaten path may find:

[T]he beauty not only of the purple distance where the hills roll off to meet the clouds, distances that cradle a setting sun on a horizon of gold, but near at hand. At the feet is the beauty of countless wild flowers that decorate Kansas in the spring and summer and long into the deep, rich fall.⁴

Kansans, a people with strong ties to the land, are sometimes too hurried to appreciate the rhythm of the seasons or are unaware themselves of some of the state's most interesting attractions. The Cheyenne Bottoms, for example, is the most important marshland in the Midwest and is a stopping place for millions of migrating birds.

Other underpublicized areas include Monument Park, the Smoky Hills, and the Konza Prairie. The Eisenhower Center, the University of Kansas natural history, art, and anthropology museums, local historical society exhibits, art centers and galleries, and ethnic festivals offer diverse and rewarding experiences. Kansans need to become familiar with their own history and resources in order to share them with others.

To Kansans who know the state well, nothing is more beautiful than the prairie and nothing is more interesting than traveling "on Kansas trails." As early explorers and emigrants have taught us, there is much to learn from Kansas.

Notes

¹C.L. Stroup, "Kansas Turnpike," Kansas, 2nd issue, 1968, p. 12.

²Thomas E. Mulinazzi, "The Impact of Transportation on the Economic Recovery of Rural Kansas Today and Beyond," Kansas Communities: Changes, Challenges, Choices (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Division of Continuing Education, 1986), p. 41.

³Horace W. Harding, The Kansas Tourist Survey, 1952 (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Bureau of Business Research, October 1953), p. 30; Kansas Department of Economic Development, Kansas' Economic Progress: The Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism (August 1978), p. 3.

⁴Cecil Howes, "Rolling Hills of Kansas Blue Stem Call for Park or Scenic Highway," Kansas City Times, Jan. 28, 1950 in Kansas State Historical Society, "Good Roads" clippings 3 (1944-56), p. 52.

26. Learning from Kansas

For the past several months we have traveled Kansas trails with buffalo, Indians, explorers, scientists, artists, and settlers.

To Indians, the land over which they traveled held little fear even though there might be danger. They knew the land intimately. The Wichita and Pawnee and their predecessors occupied and explored the land for centuries.

These people saw themselves as a part of the universe. As they traveled the Pawnee Trail to hunt buffalo, raid enemies, or visit their relatives, they traveled in a sacred manner that united them with the world around them. There could be no wilderness for them because the idea of nature as separate from them was foreign.

To Europeans and Americans the distinction between "civilization" and "wilderness" was significant. Wilderness was that area where the laws of civilization ceased to operate, an alien culture held sway, and the threat of reversion to savagery lurked. Historian Rita Napier comments:

People surrounded by wilderness on the trails found themselves outside the society of the farms and cities they had abandoned, but not yet part of the new society they would create in settlements.

Some responded to this sense of freedom by shrinking from it. Many women on the overland trails clung to remnants of the life they had left. When their garments proved inappropriate to outdoor life--open campfires, high prairie grass--most refused to change to more appropriate dress.

Because opportunity to change was frightening, most clung to the roles they played on the farms and towns they had left. Some found the sense of isolation almost unbearable and longed for the comfort and security of home and the ties to family and friends.

Other women responded to the anarchy of the wilderness with positive appreciation. Miriam Colt learned to wear bloomers and ride astride, confront Indians, and take charge of major family decisions. Julia Holmes hiked through Kansas to Colorado, sought

gold, and climbed Pike's Peak.

To many people the absence of "civilization" in the "wilderness" represented opportunity. They could be the first to recreate American institutions and the first to profit from new communities.

Freighters like William Russell, Ben Holladay, David Butterfield, and Alex Majors made their money creating ties between the old and new, between civilization and wilderness, as they carried news, goods, and mail from east to west. Young entrepreneurs like Cyrus K. Holliday who created new trails--iron rails--across Kansas made fortunes. To be first in the new land was to profit.

The scientists who traveled Kansas trails differed from other travelers in that they saw the wilderness as a laboratory where they could learn about the origins of the modern world. Thomas Say, John Charles Fremont, and others compiled data on the flora, fauna, and rocks of the West. They made this region more familiar and understandable.

The artists and photographers who accompanied these explorers created permanent images enabling those at home to comprehend the new region. Ironically, the scientists and artists' work contributed to its destruction by attracting increasingly large numbers of tourists and settlers.

Travelers' documents and diaries have told us the story of their journeys. We have seen that travelers were often families moving together across the land, not just single men. A major task en route was the care of young children. Older children did their share to support the household. New information on travel indicates that most contacts with Indians were friendly rather than hostile.

Rita Napier describes the permanent influence of the trails:

These trails became deeply cut into the face of Kansas. Travelers over the centuries used the same trails. Like the rock strata that tells geological time, each set of travelers has left a new layer of debris that marked its passing. Explorers and cattlemen followed buffalo trails. Overland travelers sought the same pathways. Eventually, railroads and superhighways covered the same ground and motels replaced hospitable Indian houses, hotels, and boardinghouses.

The journeys of historic travelers on Kansas trails challenge us to see travel from a new perspective. Leaving settled places can open up new vistas for self-development and growth, despite the pain of separation.

Like George Catlin we can seek in new places and other people solutions for the problems of our own culture and society

and learn from their errors. We can appreciate buffalo and sand hills and alternative cultures--even grow and learn from them--rather than destroy them. We can become more conscious of the impact of our action and choices on the people we meet and the land we inhabit.

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