

## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

This item, titled "Opening of the Santa Fe Trail," was written by Charles Cecil Howes in the 1940s. Howes explains that "the commissioners of the United States completed [1825], at Council Grove, the treaty under which the Osage Indians agreed to let the traffic through their lands without molestation and without price." Howes also explains that the Santa Fe Trail had long been in use, and began with "the movement of the nomadic tribes of the Indians in the prairie area. Then the Indians walked and carried their housing and whatever goods they owned upon their backs."

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### OPENING OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

THE HIGHWAY IN ALL AMERICA which has produced the most romance, blood, sweat and tears is the Santa Fe Trail. The congress of the United States officially designated this "road from Missouri to New Mexico," March 3, 1925, and directed that the route be surveyed and marked for the benefit of the tourist and commercial traffic which it might bear. A few months later the commissioners of the United States completed, at Council Grove, the treaty under which the Osage Indians agreed to let the traffic through their lands without molestation and without price.

Actually this was not the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail. For much of the routing had been established long before by the Indians who followed it from the Missouri and the east on their annual treks to the buffalo hunting grounds on the high prairies and in the tribal visits groups made long before a white man set foot upon territory of the United States.

It is probable that no other highway, trail or path has seen so many modes of travel on it as has the Santa Fe Trail. It began with the movement of the nomadic tribes of the Indians in the prairie area. Then the Indians walked and carried their housing and whatever goods they owned upon their backs. Then came a bit more "plutocratic" group who made travois from sticks and hung the ends over the backs of dogs and on these hauled their housing, bedding and extra clothes - if any.



## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

2

With the coming of the Spaniards, horses appeared for the first time on the Trail. When the Trail became a real artery of commercial and tourist traffic to the land of enchantment there came the ox and mule and horse teams and the Conestoga wagons. Then came the steam engine and the railroad, followed by the motor car and now the airplane wings its way over the old route of the Indians and the pioneers.

Aerial photographs made in the mapping operations during the recent war were exceptionally revealing. The wagon tracks of the old trail may be seen in the aerial maps along the route, even though the land has been under cultivation for fifty years and has been plowed every year. The wagon tracks often cannot be seen in walking over the route and are not noted in plowing the land. But the aerial photographs reveal the old wheel marks of more than a hundred years ago. The only spots where the great ruts made by the wagons of the Trail days may be seen now are between Dodge City and Cimarron, where the Trail came down out of the hills to what was known as the Cimarron Crossing of the Arkansas River. The wagon tracks have been obliterated by cultivation, the wind and the weather in the eighty years since the Trail was extensively used.

The first wagon train to be taken over the Trail was that of Baptiste La Lande in 1804. It was some twenty years later that the real traffic on the Trail began and continued until 1872 when the building of the railroads into the west brought about the abandonment of the old route. The Trail reached its peak in traffic about 1847 when the road carried 9,884 wagons, using 98,840 mules, oxen and horses and carried 59,304,000 pounds of freight on the trek of 775 miles from Independence, Mo., to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

3

The eastern terminus of the old trail was at Franklin, Mo., for a few years, that being as far up the Missouri River as the regular steamers operated. Then came the settlement of outposts up the river, first at Fort Osage, now Sibley, Mo., then Independence and later Westport Landing, now Kansas City, each in turn becoming the eastern end of the Trail. The western terminus was always old Santa Fe, long the northern metropolis and one of the chief trading centers of Mexico in the days of Spanish control and after the formation of the Mexican Republic.

In its heyday the Old Trail carried the colossal traffic of manufactured goods from the east, calico, beads and other articles of barter to the southwest where the traders exchanged these goods for leather, silver, gold, copper and other materials of the Indian and Spanish manufacture.

The eight hundred miles of the old trail is a monument to hardship, hunger, thirst, Indian attacks, stampedes, burned wagons, murdered men and captured women. Until the railroad came the freighters obtained their meat from the great herds of buffalo, antelope and prairie chickens which were found in great numbers all along the old trail.

The first important point on the old trail, after it crossed what became the Kansas-Missouri line, was Shawnee Mission. Next was Black Jack, where, in territorial days, John Brown and his followers made their first assault upon the pro-slavery ruffians. The next important point on the old trail is Council Grove, where the tree still stands under which the original treaty with the Osage Indians was written. At Council Grove may also be seen the present-day statue in memory of the Pioneer Women. There also is the original mission to the Kaw Indians, from which the late Charles Curtis, long a colorful figure in Kansas, and vice-president of the United States, made his



## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

4

journey to Topeka to tell of the threatened attack of the Cheyennes upon the Kaws. Also at Council Grove may be seen the monument to Father Padilla, the first Christian martyr in the United States. Father Padilla was a member of Coronado's Conquistadors who returned to Quivera to continue his religious work among the Indians and was destroyed by a hostile tribe.

Pawnee Rock, one of the famous camping places along the old Trail still sticks up into the sky. It has a marker on it and a shelter house, put there by historically minded folks many years ago. The state owns the grounds of the Rock and some surrounding grounds and has made it into a state park.

Fort Larned and Fort Dodge were built as headquarters of the government troops who were sent out to protect the wagon trains along the old trail. Fort Hays and Fort Riley were established to protect the trail from marauding tribes from the north. Fort Riley was the earliest post to be established in Kansas after Fort Leavenworth, and was intended to prevent the Indians from conducting raids into Kansas territory. But other posts had to be established to furnish headquarters for mobile units who would go out on sudden forays when the Indians appeared.

The next point of importance west of Fort Dodge was the Cimarron crossing. During the winter months, when the snow was in the mountains, and following the trail over Raton Pass, was a dangerous and hazardous trip, the wagon trains crossed the Arkansas River west of what is now Cimarron, and struck off to the southwest, and joined the original trail near Fort Union, which is not far from Wagon Mound, New Mexico. Following along up the Arkansas River there was Bent's Fort, and up near where La Junta now stands the old trail turned to the south, and went over Raton Pass and thence to Fort Union.

## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

5

In 1850, four years before Kansas was organized as a territory, there was such lively commerce on the old Santa Fe Trail that a monthly stage coach route was put into operation. A few of the old hotels and stage coach depots still may be found along the trail. In that year it was calculated that the volume of trade on the old trail exceeded five million dollars a year, and that nine thousand men were engaged in conducting the traffic.

There are very few of the old landmarks of the Trail still standing along the routes. A mile or so west of the junction of U. S. 50-N and U. S. 75 there is the old 110-Mile Creek Tavern still standing. It is used as a barn and is in a dilapidated condition. It was in this old barn that the first census taker, after Kansas Territory was formed, experienced the padding of the census rolls. He had started from Junction City, went to Council Grove and then over the old Trail to the 110-Mile Creek Tavern where he stayed all night. In the evening he took the rolls of the permanent residents of the tavern. But when he left the next morning he found that the tavern register for twenty years had been copied into the book for him by someone in the tavern.

At least two streams, 110-Mile and 142-Mile Creeks, were named by the travelers over the old Trail and the names were accepted by the early settlers and then by the surveyors who marked the boundaries of every section of land and every congressional township in the state. Elm Creek and 142-Mile Creek join south of the old trail and form the Marais des Cygnes River, another historical stream in Kansas.

The Daughters of the American Revolution conducted a campaign early in this century to raise money from the school children of Kansas to mark the old Trail. Then the legislature made a small appropriation to finish the job



## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

6

and 96 granite markers with suitable inscriptions have been placed along the highways at points where the present highways cross or follow the routing of the Santa Fe Trail.

The route of the old trail varied a great deal. It was only a few rods wide in spots up to more than a quarter of a mile wide at other points. The winds and rains often cut the wagon tracks deep into the soil and the old tracks could not be used by the oxen and mules and the heavy wagons. There was no graded highway and no settlements so the teamsters just moved over a few feet and cut another track across the prairies. There were no bridges along the route, every stream had to be forded and most of the actual work of the highway was in cutting paths down to these fords. There are many stories told of how it frequently became necessary to hitch thirty and sometimes forty oxen to a single wagon to drag it up over the banks at these fords. While there were many streams along the route, there are few notes of travelers that they were held up very long because of high water.

The first highway patrol in Kansas was the patrol established along the old Trail. It was sixty dragoons from Pennsylvania who first acted as the patrol for the protection of the wagon trains following the trail. Later these were replaced by regular army details stationed at the numerous posts erected at strategic points along the route.

It should be noted that the Osage Indians, who made the treaty with the government for the use of the route of the old Trail, kept the terms of that treaty religiously. There is no record of any Osage ever violating a single letter or even the spirit of the agreement. But that did not apply to other Indians, the plains tribes, which frequently conducted forays against the wagon trains, killing the crews and pillaging the wagons of their wares.

## Opening of the Santa Fe Trail

7

Also the trail was somewhat infested by thieves and robbers who sought the great quantities of gold and silver ornaments which the traders were taking back to be sold to the easterners.

About 500 of the 775 miles of the Santa Fe Trail are in Kansas. There were comparatively few miles in Missouri and the next largest mileage is in Colorado and New Mexico. A government party of engineers took three years to survey the route of the trail from Independence to Santa Fe. It wasn't a real highway survey as at present practiced but was chiefly an attempt at finding the easiest grades for the wagon trains. As the survey was carried out it was found that generally the Indians, without a transit, level or compass, had actually picked the easiest grades across the country.

In 1911 the Kansas Historical Society named a committee to firmly establish the route of the old Trail across Kansas. The committee worked many months examining all the old records, diaries and other documents and the field notes of the surveying party. The field notes of Joseph C. Brown, one of the engineers which surveyed the route, are in the possession of the Society. As the result of the work of the committee the Society published a brochure fixing the routing of the trail across Kansas and it was this route which the D. A. R. followed in placing the markers along the old Trail route.