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Freighting on the Santa Fé Trail, 1843-1866

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FREIGHTING ON THE SANTA FÉ TRAIL, 1843-1866.

WALKER D. WYMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Department
of History, in the Graduate College
of the State University of Iowa.

June, 1931

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CHAPTER I.

The Opening of the Trail.

The Santa Fé Trail, long a commercial link between the Missouri river and the Rio Grande settlements, had its humble origins in the middle of the eighteenth century. In the early part of that century an adobe hut first graced the sandy soil where Santa Fé was to be. The huts multiplied, as the priests, caballeros, cowboys, and gold and silver seekers came to gain fortunes or save souls. Vera Cruz was the only seaport in Mexico to which vessels could come with goods from the outside world. The pack-mule and the wagon were the means of transporting these goods up the mountain trails to the northern provinces. Two thousand miles were a great distance to be from the source of comforts and luxuries—Vera Cruz was one-half year away. This made the cost of the merchandise prohibitive. To the French of the Illinois country, these Spanish settlements probably appeared latent with the possibilities of trade. There is reason to believe, says Professor Isaac Cox, that a "group of French merchants actually reached their goal, but without thereby securing permanent advantage for themselves or for their government."¹ During the remainder of the century an occasional Frenchman "found his toilsome way to Santa Fé, where his presence...was still unwelcome." In 1805 Kentucky traders made their first commercial contact with the Spanish Americans.

Other traders with goods loaded on packmules traced the Trail faintly in the next few years. The exploits of Zebulon Pike, who made a Government expedition to the Southwest in 1806 and 1807 undoubtedly inspired others. The hostile attitude of the Spanish officials discouraged all attempts at trade. Some of the early adventurers were cast into prison. However, when Mexico declared herself independent in 1821, political prisoners were released, and the longest natural highway in the world was open for commerce. This brought the pack horse era to a close, while the wagon became the carrier of merchandise.

To Captain William Becknell is given the honor for organizing the first caravan of wagons to make the long 800 mile trek across prairies and desert to Santa Fé.² He proposed, through a newspaper, to form a joint stock company for the purpose of trading with the Mexicans and Indians, and perhaps to hunt wild horses. The newspaper notice ran thus: "Every man will fit himself...with a horse, a good rifle...ammunition..., sufficient clothing...Every man will furnish his equal part of the fitting out our trade and receive an equal part of the product." James A. Hitt remembered, some years later, that Spring in 1822 when thirty-five "stout, healthy athletic young men" started the first train.³ The wagons were loaded with calicoes. This bright colored cloth sold for \$2 per yard in Santa Fé. Another caravan made its way to this new mart from a trading post in Arkansas. In the

following years more merchants became interested in the trade. Old Franklin, Missouri, settled down for a period of prosperity. Specie, mules, and furs were exchanged for red calico and a few trinkets. Even the Government kindly recognized this new current in the economic life of the frontier. Senator Thomas Hart Benton presented a petition for national protection in 1824. Congress appropriated \$30,000 for a road survey and for cessions of Indian lands.

The surveying expedition left Franklin on July 4, 1845 "amidst the shooting and shouting appropriate to that day in a frontier community." The road was duly surveyed as far as Chouteau's Island on the Arkansas, and in the next year, the survey was carried southward to Taos.⁴ In August of 1825, treaties were made and the pipe of peace smoked with the Osage and Kansas Indians. The white man gained the right of unmolested passage in return for money and merchandise.

Further evidence of the interest of the Government was shown in the appointment of United States Consuls to Santa Fé and Chihuahua. In 1828 St. Louis was made a port of entry. Goods could now come up the Mississippi or down the Ohio to be exported directly to Santa Fé.

The roving bands of Indians harassed nearly every mile of the Trail beyond Council Grove. This trading post on the forest-covered banks of the Neosho river, one hundred thirty-five miles from Independence, became a rendezvous for all

wagons enroute to New Mexico.⁵ Slowly they congregated until the last had arrived. A captain was chosen to lead them through the Indian country. Like a small army, the teamsters, usually accompanied by the owners of the few wagons, parried blows with the Pawnee, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Kiowa. Beyond the Arkansas the Apache were the most dreaded of the Indian bands. Troops escorted the caravans in 1829, 1834, and 1843, but "such protection seems to have been the exception rather than the rule."

Other difficulties were met by the traders upon arrival at the end of the long journey. Import duties were high, and, as a rule, quite arbitrary. Some goods were denied admission as early as 1828. As the trade grew in proportions, customs-collecting became a lucrative source of income for Mexican officials. In 1839 the Governor of New Mexico exempted all "nijos de pais" (Mexican citizens) from taxation on real estate. The whole burden of taxation was placed on the ever-increasing overland trade which in that year was one hundred thirty wagons. All plain "woolen cottons" paid twelve and one-half cents duty per vara, or thirty-three inches. For some time a flat rate of \$500 per wagons was levied. This led to the use of larger wagons pulled by more oxen or mules. Some traders removed the contents of one wagon and temporarily overloaded another upon the approach to the customs house. False axle trees were attached to conceal specie upon return. The bribing of officials was a

common practice—and an expected one.⁶

Thirteen years later 230 wagons oreaked to Mexico from Independence, Missouri, with \$450,000 worth of merchandise. The trade fell into the hands of fewer merchants, while the number of men employed increased. Mexican traders, as represented by the Chavez brothers and the Armijo brothers, had a considerable share of the trade. Stationary trading posts, instead of the temporary store, were opened in Santa Fé, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Taos, and other towns. Dr. Connelly, Dr. Ward, J. B. Doyle, Col. McCarty, White, Giddings, Bent, Seitz, Jackson, the Sublettes, and the St. Vrain were the first American merchants to set up permanent trading establishments. Several of these became Mexican citizens.⁸

The ports of entry were closed to Missouri traders in 1844. This marks the end of the first period of Santa Fé freighting. Spain had lost Mexico in 1821, and one contributing factor had been the economic self-sufficiency of that province. The Americanization of New Mexico, which increased the demand for American goods, widened the roadbed of the Santa Fé Trail and prepared the way for a peaceful entry of the Army of the West in 1846. Great wagons, the descendants of the Conestogas that has lumbered along the Cumberland Road a few years before, became the trail-makers of the forties, fifties, and sixties. These prairie schooners, pulled by oxen or mules, driven by a professional bullshacker or teamster, made the bridge over which the army marched to New Mexico.

The covered wagon became an integral part of the economic urge of a young and boisterous nation, an implement of national expansion, and a means of quiet conquest.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I.

- 1 Isaac J. Cox, "Opening the Santa Fe Trail", Missouri Historical Review, XXV, p. 30. This is a valuable article.
- 2 F. F. Stephens, "Missouri and the Santa Fe Trade", Missouri Historical Review, X, p. 292. This is an excellent study, and has been referred to often in this chapter.
- 3 Kansas City Times, February 11, 1900, given in Trail Clippings (Compiled by Kansas State Historical Society), Vol. I.
- 4 H. M. Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, (F. P. Harper, New York, 1912), Vol. II, p. 533.
- 5 See Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, (H. S. Langley, New York, 1844).
- 6 F. F. Stevens, op cit. ; St. Louis Republican, quoted in Topeka State Record, October 13, 1860.
- 7 St. Louis Republican, quoted in Topeka State Record, October 13, 1860.

CHAPTER II.

"The Great Revival", 1843-1849.

The hey-day of the Santa Fé Trail was yet to come when Josiah Gregg published his Commerce of the Prairies. Between 1842 and 1843 the annual number of wagons from Missouri to Mexico had increased from 90 to 230. Every indication seemed to point to an era of considerable caravan business. However, it devolved upon the President of Mexico, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, to dampen this new commercial spirit by closing the ports of entry. This may have been a temporary move to frighten Americans from sympathizing with Texas, since the spirit of annexation was high at the time. This embargo was lifted on March 11, 1844. The lucrative source of income from entry fees could not be sacrificed. There was a general belief among traders that any impost duty was illegal. Augustus Storrs, at one time a merchant of Independence, Missouri, once said that well informed citizens of Mexico were not aware of any legal restriction on international trade. According to the Missouri Republican, traders believed the only object of the officials of Mexico, from the governor down to the alcalde, in holding office was for personal enrichment. "The customs being arbitrarily arranged by Governors, they soon make a most effective means of filling their own coffers as well as those of their subordinates. The most

exorbitant duties were levied in order to compel the foreign traders to resort to bribery to avoid their payment.* 1

In 1844 the traders of Missouri must have doubted or feared Santa Anna. In a History of Jackson County, Missouri, the writer believed that "not over ninety wagons, with not over two hundred men and \$200,000 worth of goods crossed the plains to Santa Fe...." 2 This decrease in trade was a severe blow to Independence, but next year trade again resumed considerable proportions. A correspondent of the St. Louis Reveille summarized the trade (with the exception of two companies which were detained at Bent's Fort): 145 wagons, 21 carriages, 1,078 oxen, 716 mules, 39 horses, and 203 men. The cost of the goods was \$342,530; the value of the outfits used was estimated at \$87,790; and the cost of the freighting to the exporters was \$67,680. 3

After March 3, 1845, American traders assured reeates on merchandise shipped to the ports in Arkansas and Missouri, provided these goods were to be reshipped into Mexico. Independence had an "occasional inspector", Joseph H. Reynolds, with an annual salary of \$240. 4

Wagons that arrived before the inauguration of General Manuel Armijo as governor of New Mexico in the latter part of the year of 1845, paid \$750 each. This, of course, was not collected from citizens of that country, or from men who had married Mexican women. On November 7, General

Armijo read a message at the Governor's palace in Santa Fé, ordering an increase in the import duties. The last loaded wagons of the year, reported the Reveille, paid an entry fee of \$1000. Perhaps this included the \$150 paid by some for a translation of the "Manifesto" of November 7. Regulations confiscating cotton goods as contraband were enforced. Several wagons were confiscated, while a few loads sold for less than duty. 5

In spite of the strained relations between the United States and Mexico, buyers from Santa Fé began to arrive in Independence in January, enroute east to buy goods. Wagon trains followed, and camped in the vicinity of Independence waiting for the arrival of the goods. Hostilities between the two nations officially began on May 12, 1846. General Armijo, perhaps because he had a financial interest in the trade, issued a proclamation in which he stated that the existing hostilities need not interrupt the trade, and that it should be conducted just as if the war did not exist. A general policy was adopted by Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, who was in charge of the troops (Army of the West) which were to march overland from Ft. Leavenworth to New Mexico and California, to prevent the departure of any wagon trains before the army left. The purpose of this, he said, was to prevent the merchandise from falling into the hands of the enemy, and to control effectively the shipping of ammunition. This made the acceptance of the forced military protection

a patriotic deed. But it also caused fear on the part of some Mexican traders when they visioned the high tariff they would have to pay after New Mexico fell before the Army of the West. At least three wagon trains gave evidence of being in a hurry to get to Santa Fé. Speyers, a Mexican trader and probably a commercial accomplice of General Armijo, departed from Independence in such haste that he aroused suspicion. It was rumored that he had a train of ammunition. Kearny sent a detachment of soldiers after him, but they failed to detain him until the army left. A sympathetic newspaper explained that Speyers was in a hurry so that he "might obtain a certificate from the customs house in Santa Fé before the United States troops took possession!"⁶

To one newspaper reporter, Independence looked like a "crowded city" in early May--there were immigrants to Oregon and California. A month later this reporter wrote that a great crowd of Mexicans and traders filled the streets. He believed that there were at least "300 Mexicans in town and vicinity...These various companies have brought in an immense quantity of specie, amounting to about \$ 50,000...About 40 wagons have left...this week (June 6), and others are preparing to leave shortly...It is believed by many, that the trade will greatly increase in consequence of the ports of the Gulf and Pacific closed by our vessels and leaving this the only point through which they can safely receive

goods."⁷ Some of the traders had purchased goods directly from England. The St. Louis Republican said that more than \$100,000 worth of goods had entered her port under the benefit of the "original package" law. This act permitted traders to send their goods from an eastern port to St. Louis or Independence (or from any port to another) without paying new duties, provided the goods are retained in the original package. The outbreak of hostilities between Mexico and the United States caused the customs house of New York to refuse clearance of \$50,000 worth of Mexican goods upon which duties had been paid.⁸

Leaving in small detachments the Army of the West left Ft. Leavenworth in June. Before Kearny left on June 26, he asked American and Mexican traders to come up to Ft. Leavenworth. He assured them that the Government "had no intentions of warring against individuals---and they would be allowed to proceed with their merchandise, provided ammunition or arms made no part of their stores."⁹ The advance troops held the tide of wagon trains until the entire army rendezvoused at Pawnee Fork. Then following in the rear, most of the way, the traders enjoyed the protection of the army to Bent's Fort,^{Santa Fé,} and some to Chihuahua, Mexico.

The statistics for the number of wagons which followed Kearny vary somewhat. The St. Louis Republican said that

there were 413 wagons; John T. Hughes, a member of the army, remarked that there were 414; the Kansas City Journal-Post (Sept. 6, 1846) gives 414 wagons and \$1,753,350 worth of merchandise. These figures are widely accepted. R. E. Twitchell quotes Dr. Waldo to the effect that the annual caravan was made up of 375 wagons, 1700 mules, 2,000 oxen, 500 men, and \$937,500 worth of goods. If the 414 wagons did follow the army, then the trains which departed before that date would increase the total. However, Josiah Gregg, in a letter to the editor of the Booneslick Times (Missouri), says that 316 wagons had left Independence in detached parties by June 30. He estimated that 150 wagons and 50 carriages would leave during the summer. These vehicles, he said, "are accompanied by...traders and wagoners, hangers-on and connoisseur travelers, loafers, and loungers, amounting to one thousand men." If Gregg's summary is correct, and he insists it is, then 414 wagons did follow the army, but not "enmasse" as declared by some.¹⁰

Kearny's military government was established in Santa Fé on August 18, 1846. He immediately ordered all Mexican citizens to close their stores and shops. Grodery stores, dry goods stores, and taverns were permitted to open upon paying a license fee of \$1, \$2, and \$5 respectively. Wagons from the States and Chihuahua paid an entry fee of \$4 each. An additional 25 cents was charged for entering the public plaza.¹¹ There is reason to believe that at the time when

these duties went into effect, August 23, or a few months after, import duties of six per cent and export duties of two and one-half per cent were levied in spite of protest from the merchants.¹³

In June 1847, the Reveille wrote that "the landing (at Independence) is in an excessively crowded condition--Produce is pouring in every hour; the amount of tonnage in port is quite inadequate to the wants of shippers, and drays can scarcely be obtained at any price." Santa Fé was thriving in the spring of that year. Buildings were being constructed, hotels opened, and a newspaper was being printed. One writer believed that a majority of Americans there were of the "worst character, who finding they could no longer stay in the states, have come out here for the purpose of squinting and stealing the hard-earned wages of the private soldiers." As the caravans rolled in, the market became glutted. Many of the troops had gone south. A letter from Santa Fé disclosed that there were "enough goods (there) to supply three thousand men." Some estimated the quantity of duty-paying goods consumed annually to be not over \$100,000. The long wagons, one said, were not for Santa Fé but for "Chihuahua, Durango, and other departments." The military duty upon goods levied by Kearny was continued. On March 31, 1847, the President of the United States had issued an order lifting the blockade of Mexican ports, but justifying the collection of port duties by right of conquest. Gold and


silver exports were to pay from three to seven per cent duty. The Secretary of the Treasury on December 6, 1847, said that the President had directed contributions to be levied on Mexico for army supplies, duties on imports, Mexican duties on exports, and the seizure of all internal revenue except transit duties. The admission of formerly prohibited goods at reasonable rates would increase the trade, since the United States was in control of the roads to New Mexico.

Trade in 1848 commenced with great vigor. Steamers carried some goods as far as the bend of the Missouri, instead of Independence, where traders loaded them for New Mexico. The Revue believed that the merchants had purchased more goods in St. Louis than formerly. The Indian frontier was comparatively quiet, for the first time in several years, because of the presence of troops stationed on the Arkansas. Colonel William Gilpin, who was in charge of Ft. Mann on the Arkansas, counted 3,000 wagons, 13,000 people, and 50,000 head of livestock that season. However, Gilpin did not discriminate between government and private wagon trains. Two years before, agricultural implements had been taken overland for the first time. The Independence Expositor prophesied that the freighter who made this venture "would be the instrument of changing the modes and habits of the untutored Mexican." But the cargo of some of the wagons caused greater excitement. "Another 7 days wonder..."

enthusiastically wrote one New Mexican, "is the appearance, for the first time in our markets, of the potato, which has caused a perfect mania that might be compared to the tulip mania of Holland. Nothing is now heard among the elite, but of Potato Suppers..."¹³ Business was good but there was much dissatisfaction over the continued duties levied on imports and exports. A letter from Santa Fé gave the objections in no uncertain terms: "(It is the) D---l to pay... a six per cent ad valorem duty...merchants think, so does their lawyer, that now New Mexico is an integral portion of the United States, and therefore the land of their birth, that Military Order No. 10...can hardly give authority in the territory of the United States for the collection of a duty..."¹⁴ The merchants gave vent to their feeling in a meeting in which they resolved to pay the import duties no longer. In December Major Benjamin Beall issued an order suspending a duty of six per cent ad valorem on all merchandise. This was to hold until he received further instructions from the United States government.¹⁵

Thus, just as goods had prepared the way for guns in the conquest of Mexico, so did guns introduce a new era in overland freighting. The spread of American forts throughout New Mexico, the increase of Americans in the territory, and the growing Americanization of the Mexican ushered in the Golden Age of freighting. In the 50's and early 60's freighting became an industry which required a vast outlay

of capital. A few firms monopolized the business. Freighting for the government and for merchants became the principal field of investment. Stockgrowing practically changed from an avocation to a vocation, and bullwhacking, or ox driving, became a profession. The Trail developed into a famous highway along which sprang up trading posts and villages at strategic watering places. The blacksmith shop and the grocery store—saloon were the precursors of the oil station and the hot dog stand. The dust thickened as the ruts grew deeper and the roadbed widened. That was the golden Age of the 50's.



FOOTNOTES

Chapter II.

1 Topeka State Record, October 16, 1860, as quoted from the Missouri Republican. (St. Louis).

2 History of Jackson County, Missouri (St. Louis, 1881), p. 400.

3 St. Louis Reveille, March 23, 1846.

4 House Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. II, Document no. 4, p. 657, Serial no. 568.

5 Senate Executive Documents, 29th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. VIII, Document no. 438, p. 23, Serial 477; Reveille, January 5 and March 23, 1846.

6 Missouri Republican, quoted in Miles' Register, August 29, 1846; Lexington Express, (Missouri), June 23, quoted by the Reveille, June 26, 1846; also the Reveille for August 31, 1846.

7 This account is given in the Missouri Republican, June 6, 1846.

8 The St. Louis Union and the Missouri Republican are quoted in the Niles' Register of July 4, 1846.

9 Reveille, June 23, 1846.

10 These statistics are given in Niles' Register, August 1 and September 26, 1846; also R. E. Twitchell, Leading Facts of New Mexican History, Vol. II, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1912), p. 137.

11 House Executive Documents, 29th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Document no. 19, p. 24, Serial no. 499.

12 These duties may have been levied by the Secretary of the Treasury on March 30, or December 6, 1847. In 1852 the duties were repealed. They were not consistently enforced. See Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, p. 566, Serial no. 567; also ibid., Vol. I, Document no. 6, pp. 1-35, Serial no. 514.

13 This letter is given in the Missouri Republican, February 29, 1849.

14 Reveille, September 24, 1848.

15 Ibid., October 15, 1848.

CHAPTER III

Pork and Flour for the Army of the West.

The Mexican War brought a great and rapid change in the traffic on the Santa Fé Trail. Over this highway moved troops, traders, expresses, and hundreds of wagons belonging to the Quartermaster's Department. The northern province of Mexico, having been economically a part of the United States for several years, fell before this avalanche of guns and goods which was a part of the Army of the West.

Official hostilities between the United States and Mexico began May 12, 1846. Stephen W. Kearny's Army of the West was enroute to Santa Fé in detachments by the end of June. Col. Sterling Price's regiment and the Mormon Battalion followed later in the summer.

The problem of supplying the army was of no small import. Reports from New Mexico indicated a grain shortage in that country. Reliance upon that area for a food supply was impossible. The alternative was to send all subsistence overland, in wagons pulled by mules or oxen. Grave doubts were expressed concerning the food supply for approximately 6,000 Americans who would be in New Mexico. The Santa Fé Trail ran through a land of hostile tribes. Santa Fé was 873 miles from the Government depot at Ft. Leavenworth. Kearny realized the precarious position in which his army would be placed, and demanded supplies for twelve months.

This was a demand impossible to meet. One spectator said that 250 wagons accompanied Kearny, and another said that sufficient provisions for six months were to leave with the army.

Captain Turney of Col. Kearny's staff arrived in St. Louis from Ft. Leavenworth on June 13 with instructions "to furnish necessary provisions, baggage, trains, etc., etc.," for the contemplated trip to New Mexico. It was estimated that 900 wagons, 1000 teamsters, and about 10,000 oxen and mules would be required. Government agents operated actively in St. Louis and vicinity buying mules, horses, wagons, and provisions, and in contracting for the manufacture of wagons, knapsacks, and various other articles necessary for the army. Thousands of barrels of pork at \$10 per barrel and thousands of pounds of "clear bacon-sides" at five cents per pound were purchased in St. Louis and sent by way of steamer to Ft. Leavenworth. Agents of the Commissary Department penetrated Missouri and near-by states for mules, paying \$100 apiece for all they could get. An incomplete report of the Quartermaster General shows that 459 horses, 3,658 mules, 14,904 oxen, 1556 wagons, and 518 pack saddles were used by the Government in the fiscal year of 1846-1847.¹

All the supplies were shipped to Ft. Leavenworth. Provisions came faster than wagons, accumulating on the banks of the river. By June 30, just six days before the last of Kearny's army left the fort, a provision train was on the

Trail and "others are being loaded and started every day." Provisions for 1300 men to last three months were in the wagons going across the plains. Soldiers not yet dispatched performed what they called "fatigue duty" in loading wagons, and they did it with "utmost cheerfulness" someone observed. When a steamer brought a deck load of wagons, they were immediately loaded and sent off in groups of seven or eight, and instructed to wait for Kearny at the crossing of the Arkansas river. Even faraway Pittsburgh supplied wagons. Steamers seemed to be afflicted with a wagon epidemic or eczema, being literally covered with them. The St. Louis New Era skeptically advised the Government to send a few wheel^wrights and blacksmiths ahead of these wagons "to secure their arrival at the place of destination."

The wagons accompanying the army were poorly distributed. Tents and utensils were not always with the proper company. The instances of intense hunger on the part of some companies were not rare. Undisciplined volunteers assaulted one train and used the contents regardless of the objections of the drivers who said it was a "through" train, not to be opened until its arrival. Even Kearny had to call a wagon train back upon one occasion.

All provision trains which did not accompany the army to New Mexico were sent by mistake to Bent's Fort.³ The effects of this surprising blunder were both immediate

and far-reaching. Even Kearny's Army suffered enroute. At Bent's Fort the Army was placed on half rations. Before their arrival in Santa Fé, part of them were existing on one-third rations. From August 1 until the last of September they had no sugar or coffee and but one-half ration of flour. The march of the day before they reached Santa Fé, was made "without a morsel of food." Even the cooking utensils had not yet arrived. Dough was wound around a stick and baked over an open fire. The first night that American sentries paraded the public plaza in Santa Fé, hungry soldiers went from door to door trying to buy food. These conditions were not remedied for some time—as late as November 14 a soldier wrote that he had beef and bread for breakfast, bread, beef, and coffee for dinner, and for dessert twice each week rice soup was served. This beef, he said, was boiled six hours from "not-being-able-to-walk-any-longer disease" (sic) cattle. A Frenchman, Gosselin, was under contract to deliver beef in Santa Fé. This beef, if one is to believe the above testimony, was of questionable value as an article of nourishment. Native flour was purchased, being "a miserable stuff—exceedingly coarse, and operates on the bowels of many persons." However, in spite of these murmurings on the part of soldiers, the Commissary General reported on November 17, 1846, that there had been "no official complaint of either quality or quantity of subsistence furnished to the Armies...."

To remedy the precarious condition of the troops in Santa Fé and vicinity, soldiers were sent to Bent's Fort to aid in forwarding supplies. In early November one soldier wrote that the ten wagons of provisions which he had the pleasure of bringing from Bent's Fort were pretty well exhausted; there had been no other arrivals "nor do we know when we shall have..." By the latter part of October wagons were being forwarded from Bent's Fort at the rate of thirty per week. Some commissary trains were going straight through, but even these went the long route by way of the fort. There were about one hundred forty tons of provisions stored at Bent's Fort on October 30, and only about a dozen wagons were enroute there from Ft. Leavenworth. The Quartermaster reported that no wagons were to leave the states after September 8, but there is reason to believe that some were dispatched at a later date. Many wagons, mules, and oxen were kept in Santa Fé to accompany troops to the south and to the Indian country. Upon the arrival of wagons in Santa Fé, the Quartermaster had the tires reset, and immediately sent them on their return trip.

The Mexican war may have been planned sometime before the shedding of blood on American soil, but the method of supplying its Army shows lack of deliberation. Wagon trains were dispatched without guard in a country through which few could hope to pass without attack by roving bands of mounted

Indians. Inexperienced drivers were employed. As high as fifteen cents per mile per pound was paid by sutlers. Goods were sent to a fort on the Arkansas river while an army was in need of food. The cost of all this was excessive. Pork was purchased in St. Louis for \$10₀ per barrèé. The cost of it transported from Ft. Leavenworth to Bent's Fort was more than \$33 per barrel. From there to Santa Fé the cost was \$18 per barrel. By adding the original price to the cost of transportation, a barrel of pork cost \$50₀ in Santa Fé.³ As the St. Louis New Era commented, "the dear people pay."

The new and quite abnormal traffic in the bustling days of 1846 demanded scores of teamsters and wagons. Wagons came from Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and were also purchased from anybody who had one to sell. Many young men who had rushed to the frontier for the purpose of enlisting in the Army of the West found that source of enlistment closed, hence they joined the ranks of the army teamsters.⁴ This type of service paid from \$25 to \$30 per month including subsistence, while ordinary soldiers received but \$7 for the same period of service on regular duty. Often-times soldiers were given "extra duty" at the salary of \$14.90 per month. These teamsters became foot soldiers of a wagons train subject to dangers for more perilous than those faced by many of the regular soldiers. These men were not accustomed to handling several yoke of oxen or teams of mules over a desolate plain, contesting of right of way with Comanche or Pawnee.

Neither did they know how to care for the animals. Lieut. J. W. Abert complained that teamsters mistreated cattle and wagons. The road from Ft. Leavenworth to Santa Fé was strewn with "about \$5,000,000 worth of U. S. Government supplies; the bones of cattle, and in many places the drivers, lie side by side—a melancholy result, brought about alone by inexperience." Innumerable wagons lay amidst a "grievous waste of provisions." Near Santa Fé in December, 1846, Lieut. Abert saw many carcasses of oxen. "Some were half-demoured by the wolves and ravens, others had not been dead long, for the birds of prey had only torn out their eyes."

The supply trains, as a rule, were dispatched without military guard but were given ammunition with which to protect themselves from the Indians. A writer from Bent's Fort complained that only two rounds of ammunition were given to some of the trains. The St. Louis Republican remarked that unless Col. Price, who left Ft. Leavenworth in latter July, did not "give the Indians a drubbing, all provisions wagons are in danger of being cut off, and the army left to starve. There is gross neglect in failing to send military guard."

Further distress was expected because of lack of grass for animals. The season had been dry and there was great scarcity of water. Fires had destroyed much of the grass. The Troops had driven the buffalo far from the trail. Private traders, anticipating a lack of provisions, took an additional

supply with them. A returned soldier reported on October 30, 1846, that the grass was "very indifferent and very scarce... and extremely dry weather (had caused)...much suffering from want of water for the teams."

In the winter of 1846-47 the Trail was covered with snow. Overland freighting was hazardous. Two hundred miles of the Trail were covered with two feet of snow. The ravines were impassible. A few Government trains tried to go through. Mr. Coons, a private trader who made the trip from Santa Fé in December and January, saw a Government train which had left Santa Fé on December 8. The teamsters were in "a very destitute condition, twenty of them having subsisted for ten days on the meat of a government mule."⁵ Eight teamsters were seen one hundred miles from Bent's Fort in January, 1847. They were all afoot and nearly out of provisions. Some of them had frozen hands and feet. Captain Clary found two dead men at the foot of a tree, the bark of which had been eaten all around. By the middle of March it was supposed that approximately fifty Government employees had perished on the Trail. Lieut. Abert, while returning to the States in the first part of the year, had his mules stolen by the Indians. His men pulled one of the wagons for a while. A thirty-six hour storm covered them with five feet of snow at Turkey Creek, Kansas, and in that snow they left their bedding, provisions, guns, and utensils. A twenty-seven mile walk brought them to Cotton-

wood Fork where they met a wagon master with plenty of provisions.⁶

During 1847 commissary trains and troops continued to ply back and forth between New Mexico and Ft. Leavenworth. The volunteers had enlisted for a year. The romance of the war being over, most of them refused to serve again. In small groups, usually with wagon trains, many of them returned to Missouri. More troops rode across the plains to fill the fast depleting ranks. Someone in Santa Fé who remembered the drunken brawls and the flagrant violation of civil rights which existed when General Price was in command, wrote that "we almost dreaded the arrival of new troops fearful, lest the scenes of last year were about to be enacted again."

Commissary wagons made their way across the plains, but none arrived in Santa Fé before July 5. The Commissary Department had experienced some anxious weeks, for private trains had been arriving since June. John Dougherty contracted to take 550 head of cattle across to Santa Fé at the rate of \$2.50 per hundred pounds. The cattle and a large train of Government wagons and private traders were protected, in a sense, by Lieut. Love and a company of dragoons. In the meantime prices were high in Santa Fé. Crushed wheat could be purchased only in limited quantities. Sheep weighing thirty pounds sold from \$1.50 to \$2. Mules reputed to be worth \$35 sold for \$60 each; oxen "worth \$30 in Missouri" brought \$70; and corn to feed them was offered at

\$3.50 per bushel. Some one on the commissary staff remarked that "we have freely paid them, rather than levy forced contributions." Only specie would talk to the native of New Mexico.

According to the Reveille (June 3, 1848), the Indians attacked almost every train that crossed the plains in 1846 and 1847. A man from Bent's Fort wrote that the "Pawnees are playing the deuce with the provision wagons... (they have) killed men, burned several wagons..., and I am glad of this because now, perhaps, Uncle Sam, the old fool, will punish these Indians who have so long committed outrages upon the traders with impunity." The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in his annual report of 1847 exonerated the Indians north of the Arkansas by saying that, with the exception of the Pawnee, no plains Indians had attacked any wagon trains. However, property, "which was, no doubt plundered from trains, has been found in the possession of two or three tribes (of the plains)...but they alleged having received it in trade... They all cheerfully gave it up...except the Pawnees, who were compelled to do so."⁷

The chief depredations were committed between the Cimarron river and Pawnee Fork at the bend of the Arkansas. The Comanche told that they were advanced large droves of horses and mules as well as considerable money by the Mexicans. In return they were to kill Americans and destroy all their

property.⁸ The penetration of the Indian territory by the various trails and the rapidly diminishing buffalo upon which the Indian relied to supply physical wants, may explain the attitude of the Indian more sympathetically, perhaps more scientifically. Facing their approaching doom, and having once tasted the plunder of the caravans, the Plains Indians gathered at the Arkansas crossing each year to harass the passing wagon trains. Mounted on horses, armed with bows and arrows, spears, and guns, no traveller was free from their attack or their night prowlings. Cattle were speared and the tails invariably cut off close for trophies. Scalps were lifted from many heads. As Col. Alton Easton's regiment filed across the prairies in June and July, 1847, great herds of buffalo were driven in close to the Trail by the Indians, for the purpose of decoying troops away from the main body. Great piles of fuel at various points on the south side of the Arkansas succeeded in luring men away upon one occasion. Eight men paid for this venture with their lives.⁹

One Government train was surrounded by a horde of Indians. Three hundred sacks of flour were out open, so the story goes, and scattered "to the four winds of Heaven. The prairie for miles around...is said to have been as white...as snow. The villainous rascals, immediately upon getting possession of the wagons, set to work powdering themselves and the color of their yellow skins was soon changed to one of snow whiteness.

The sport of snowballing each other with hands full of flour they enjoyed to a great degree;..they bedecked themselves out in the sacks, and in this garb several were seen by the men who returned to Ft. Leavenworth...2 or 3 days after the robbery. One fellow had modeled his sack into a turban, and the brank U. S. was immediately in front. The letters were quite unintelligible to them, but they seemed to prize them quite highly, as in all the breech clothes made of them the U. S. was...in front." These Indians, according to the story, besides having their fun, did the conventional thing of carrying away the arms, clothing, and fifty head of mules.¹⁰

A Delaware Indian came in from the plains in June, 1847, and told of the assault of 1000 Indians upon 30 Government wagons. The teamsters were driven from the saddle and massacred. The wagons, stores, and mules were taken.

These incidents are not rare. Col. William Gilpin estimated the total losses from Indians in 1847 to have been 47 Americans killed, 330 wagons destroyed, and 6,500 head of stock plundered.¹¹ The greater amount of these losses was sustained by Government trains, Gilpin believed, since "no resting places, depots, or points of security exist between Council Grove and Vegas, a bleak stretch of 800 miles." These losses evidently caused the Government to heed the demand for military protection. On November 30, 1846, an Indian agent had been appointed for the Indians between the

Platte and the Arkansas.¹² Small forts on the Arkansas had been temporarily used by soldiers. Wagon trains had banded together as many as 180 at a time. The troops which went across in 1847 carefully sheltered accompanying wagon trains. In September, 1847, Gilpin was placed in command of a battalion to be used in guarding the Santa Fé Trail.¹³ These troops were organized at Independence and St. Louis and outfitted at Ft. Leavenworth. Including the teamsters there were 519 in this battalion; 70 wagons carried provisions for 100 days; 856 horses, mules, and cattle completed the force. The last of this detachment left on October 6, the whole force concentrating at Ft. Mann on the Arkansas. Gilpin left three companies to rebuild the fort, and he proceeded up the river to winter among the Cheyenne and Arapahoe. Supplies were drawn from Santa Fé and Taos. Horses lived on dead grass. After an expedition to the south the Indians retreated from the Arkansas for the first time in several years. He then concentrated his troops on the eastern part of the Trail. In early 1848 troops were divided, Capt. Pelzer was in command at Ft. Mann, and Gilpin at Bent's Fort. It was reported that the troops were in a "disgraceful state of insubordination, officers doing as they pleased."

In 1848 wagons loaded with pork and flour continued to creak along on the Santa Fé Trail. The plains Indians did not wreak their vengeance on the oxen and their drivers in

that season. Some trains and a herd of beef cattle were escorted by troops enroute to New Mexico. Gilpin and his little band of soldiers stayed at their posts on the Arkansas. Thomas Fitzpatrick, a confirmed cynic in the matter of a peaceable relationship existing between white man and the Indian, tersely stated that Gilpin had acted only in the defensive. He did not succeed in that, he said, "as the Indians took by force many of their horses." However, he did admit that Indian attacks were less frequent, but this may be attributed to the fact that the marauders had "secured so much booty... and have been luxuriating in and enjoying the spoils."

The peace treaty with Mexico was confirmed by the Senate in May. Eight hundred seventy-five troops were retained in the seven posts of New Mexico. Santa Fé continued to be the army depot to which Government wagons came with supplies. According to a gentleman who arrived in the latter part of August, four hundred public wagons were on the Trail in August. Gilpin estimated that 3,000 wagons, 12,000 people, and 50,000 head of livestock passed over the Trail in the last year of this period of conquest. The first army contractor, James Browne, of Independence, made several agreements in May and June to deliver Government stores to Ft. Union, New Mexico. In one of his contracts he agreed to buy a number of wagons, ox yokes, and chains from the Quartermaster's Department. This indicated that the Government

was slowly withdrawing from the freighting business.¹³

The conquest of northern Mexico had been made. The orgy of war-time transportation was over. The dust on the Santa Fé Trail settled for a few years. Occasional companies of mounted soldiers made their toilsome way to the new frontier posts in the land of the Apache and Navajo. New forts were erected near the fastnesses of the hostile Indians. In the next fifteen years soldiers' campfires had left ashes at many places in "Navaho-land". To these lonely places wound wagons trains with food supplies from far away Missouri. As the Government's mule-drawn wagons withdrew from the Trail, the ascendancy of the lowly ox had started. The day of the Government contractor and extended private freighting was dawning.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter III.

¹ This report was given November 24, 1847, in Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, p. 545, Serial no. 545.

² The teamsters refused to drive their oxen beyond Bent's Fort, maintaining that their articles of agreement did not require them to go farther. See Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. IV, Document no. 23, p. 4, Serial no. 506.

³ Niles' Register, August 8, 1846, quoting the Missouri Republican.

⁴ Senate Reports of Committees, 30th Congress, 2d Session, no. 291, Serial no. 535.

⁵ The experiences of Mr. Coons' are given in the St. Louis Reveille, February 26, 1846, and quoted in the New York Tribune, March 10, 1847.

⁶ Abert's account is a classic. It is given in the St. Louis Union, March 9, quoted in the New York Tribune, March 19, 1847; also given in Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. IV, Document no. 23, p. 4, Serial no. 506.

7 Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, pp. 742-743, Serial no. 503.

8 This explanation was given in the St. Louis Reveille, August 30, 1847.

9 Ibid., August 7, 1847.

10 This tale is given in the St. Louis Era, quoted in the New York Tribune, December 4, 1847. The incident is typical in general nature, if not in detail.

11 House Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, p. 137, Serial no. 537.

12 Leroy R. Hafen, "Thomas Fitzpatrick and the First Indian Agency of the Upper Platte and the Arkansas," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, IV, pp. 374-84.

13 These contracts are given in Senate Executive Document, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. VI, Document no. 26, p. 12, Serial no. 554; House Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. VII, Document no. 38, Serial no. 576.

CHAPTER IV.

Freighting Wagons to the Adobe Forts.

The uncompromising nature of the Apache in New Mexico indirectly caused much of the freighting on the Santa Fé Trail between 1849 and 1866. These hostile bands of Indians made necessary the establishment of military posts and forts. Troops occupied, although not at one time, as many as twenty-one posts. The barren nature of the country made reliance upon local food supplies somewhat precarious at all times and undesirable most of the time. Missouri became the principal source of supply and the Santa Fé Trail the route over which oxen pulled great wagons loaded with three tons of provisions. The "contract system", or the employment by the Government of certain freighting firms to transport the goods for a fixed sum per mile, was the principal means of supplying the army of the Ninth Military District. The Government did some of its own freighting but it was of no importance as compared to the contractors?

The military posts in New Mexico were scattered throughout the territory. In 1849 there were 987 soldiers occupying seven posts. Ten years later sixteen posts accommodated over 3,000 troops.¹ However, the presence of soldiers did not subjugate the Indian. In the years, 1846-50, the people suffered the loss, according to reports, of 150,231 sheep,

893 horses, 758 mules and asses, and 1234 cows.² Treaties were made only to be broken. Implements, rugs, and calicoes were brought from California and Missouri to bribe them.³ Troops marched and counter marched. The Indian agent of the territory complained that such conditions were a result of a combination of circumstances—the wild, desert, and mountainous country and the "savage and untamed habits of most of the Indians who roam over it." More troops were demanded by citizens in Santa Fé. Thomas Fitzpatrick, in reply, accused the traders who "live and thrive on the expenditures of the troops" of being the loudest in asking for protection. They care less about protection than they do about augmenting and increasing the expenses of the general government...⁴ Even Mexico advised the United States to remember her treaty obligations, and stop depredations on the boundary. The Government slowly acquiesced and troops marched down the Old Trail to protect a bulging frontier.

Thus the Indian gave rise to the necessity of feeding troops located several hundred miles from the military frontier of the Mississippi Valley. The Missouri Republican pointed out that one-seventh of the army was in New Mexico trying to protect one-twentieth of our frontier.⁵ Santa Fé was the headquarters of the army, and the depot for supplies until 1851. In that year Ft. Union, located some 100 miles northeast of Santa Fé, became the military depot. Freighters transported goods to this place for distribution, or

freighted the goods directly to the scattered posts in that district. Forage and fuel were purchased in the territory, as a rule. In the latter part of the decade the expenses of overland freighting were decreased by purchasing beans and vinegar from merchants of Santa Fé or nearby towns.

During the Mexican war the Quartermaster's Department transported most of the supplies for the troops in New Mexico. Perhaps it was the waste and inefficiency of this war-time experience which caused the Government to make greater use of the contract system for overland transportation. In 1848, James Browne of Independence, Missouri, agreed to transport 200,000 pounds of goods and other "such government stores as may be delivered to him" at \$11.75 per hundred. To aid the Government in converting its freighting equipment into capital he offered to buy the surplus wagons, ox yokes, "etc., etc."⁶

In 1849 the era of Government freighting properly began. The freighters, James Browne and William H. Russell, contracted to transport such stores as could be delivered to them at \$9.88 per hundred.⁷

Between July 8 and October 2, 1850, 278 wagons left Ft. Leavenworth for Santa Fé and El Paso. The contractors were Joseph Clymer, David Waldo, James Browne, "Brown, Russell, and Company", and Jones and Russell. Brown, Russell, and Company were the principal freighters with 135 wagons. Rates ranged from \$7.87½ to \$14.33 1/3, depending on the destination and the time of the year. The average rates were \$8.87½ to

Santa Fé and \$13.47½ to El Paso. There were no contracts to the other posts.⁸ In the spring of 1850 Ft. Leavenworth was literally flooded with barrels which had been shipped up the river from St. Louis. Since there was no warehouse, the nine pin alley, company quarters, and two "leaky block-houses" served as temporary places of deposit until the freighters loaded them for the plains. Later in the year a public warehouse was built out of the proceeds from the sale of unserviceable horses and wagons, the "whole of which might have been given away with advantage."

George McCall, Inspector General of the War Department, gave a few helpful suggestions for freighting bacon and hardbread. Since the bacon sides were cut in squares, when packed in the round whiskey barrels, they left large "interstices." In addition to that, the round barrel left much unused space in the wagons. He recommended square boxes for both bacon and bread. Freighting a barrel which weighed one half as much as the contents seemed a costly procedure, so he asked why a baker could not be sent. However, his suggestions were not followed—soldiers of the adobe forts continued to eat hard bread while contractors prospered.⁹

In 1851, contractors made long pilgrimages to Santa Fé, El Paso, Alberquerque, Doña, Taos, Las Vegas, Ft. Union, and Rayado. Jones and Russell sent 131 wagons from Ft. Leavenworth in May. Clymer, who seems to have been the

only other contractor, sent one train of thirty wagons. Freight rates were lower than in the previous year, the highest being \$12.84.¹⁰

It is fair to assume that some of the goods, upon delivery, were in a deplorable condition. The long drive of 800 or 1000 miles, during the summer months, had unfavorable effects on meat, in particular, as well as on other food products. At the post of El Paso from October 1, 1849, to July 31, 1851, these goods were condemned: 3 barrels and 68 pounds of pork; 58,561 pounds of bacon; 7,088½ hams; 36 barrels and 172 pounds of flour; 394 pounds of hard bread; 3 bushels and 7 quarts of beans; 517 pounds of rice; 98 pounds of coffee; 183 pounds of sugar; 12 pounds of candles; 4 quarts of salt; and 114 gallons of pickles.¹¹ However, not all of these goods had come from Missouri.

In 1851 an experiment was tried in supplying the troops in the southern part of the district from San Antonio.¹² The total cost of \$23 per hundred made it prohibitive as a regular source of supply. The Quartermaster decided that the Santa Fé Trail was the cheaper route. The continued use of whiskey barrels in shipping bacon and hard bread was the cause of the Commissary General's report that flour would be more convenient to pack and "generally preferred by the men." A trial had been made in the use of the "meat biscuit" in the hope that it could form a part of the soldiers' rations. But the Commissary General thought the reports gave "reason

to believe that it cannot be used as a substitute for the bulkier parts of the rations.¹³

Alexander Majors and J. B. Yager were the principal contractors in 1853.¹⁴ Rates had increased to \$16. In that year, the Commissary Department, perhaps moved by the humanitarian spirit as much as by the scientific, experimented on salt cures for pork. The possibility of spoiled meat was somewhat lessened when J. C. Irwin drove 2,000 cattle down the Trail to New Mexico to be used as a source of fresh meat.¹⁵ This probably did much to solve the meat problem.

Supplies were freighted to El Paso, Ft. Billmore, Albuquerque, and Ft. Union, directly from Ft. Leavenworth in 1854. The cost of transportation had decreased; but the system of contracting for the goods to be delivered at Ft. Leavenworth began to cause some trouble. The contracts were given to the lowest bidder and were "let" nine months before delivery. In 1850 some had been defaulted because of the rise in prices. In 1856 Commissary General George Gibson complained that the provisions were not of a good quality and "consequently the decay is greater. The contractors as a general rule are not dealers in articles, but speculators, without the same inducements to produce good articles as a regular dealer." He concluded that in his thirty-eight years of experience, he had failed to find a single benefit to the Government in the contract system, "whilst its evils have increased...."¹⁶ In 1857 no bids to

supplied by the troops were accepted. Supplies were purchased outright as needed.

In the freighting season of 1857 Majors and Russell contracted to transport 5,000,000 pounds of supplies from Ft. Leavenworth or Ft. Riley to Ft. Union, intermediate points, or New Mexican posts.¹⁷ Other contracts were made during the year. They virtually had a monopoly, and were well on their way toward becoming towering figures among the freighters of the West and Southwest.

On January 16, 1858, Russell, Majors, and Waddell agreed to receive all supplies turned over to them in 1858 and 1859, and to deliver these goods to posts in Kansas, New Mexico, and the Gadsden Purchase. The aggregate each year was to be from 50,000 to 10,000,000 pounds. Freight charges varied from \$1.25 to \$4.50 per hundred pounds per hundred miles with an additional ten per cent for hard bread, bacon, pine lumber, and shingles.¹⁸ This firm was the principal contractor in 1860 and 1861, being engaged at both ends of the terminals, Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Union, in forwarding supplies.¹⁹

The Quartermaster General in 1865 reported that his department had no statistics to show the extent of overland freighting in the number of wagons engaged. The total cost of transporting stores to Ft. Union and posts in New Mexico and along the Trail was \$1,439,538. While the policy had been long adopted of having the troops as self sufficient as possible, the cost of grain transported to New Mexico in

that year was \$697,101.69. A bushel of corn purchased at Ft. Leavenworth and delivered at Ft. Union cost \$9.44.²⁰

Two forces were at work in the first half of the decade of the sixties—the railway and the farmer. By 1865 the lines of survey crossed the Trail at all angles. Farmers began to fence in their "160's", according to "the unyielding lines of his rectangular boundaries."³ The Homestead Act of 1862 made the Santa Fé Trail a meandering line, not following the ridges as of old, but often leading through wet, low land to avoid some farmer's corn field or shocks of wheat.³¹

The railroad put an end to the Government contractor. The Kansas Pacific pushed westward. A Government inspector advised against shipping from the terminal of the railroad in 1866, since there were no warehouses at the end of the line.²² In 1867 the railroad transported goods to Ft. Harker, thus saving the contractor 315 miles. From that point John E. Reeside agreed to transport the stores to forts in Kansas, Colorado, and ^{to} Ft. Union. Mitchell and Craig freighted from Ft. Union. Military posts in Arizona required one-fourth of the total supplies consumed in the Ninth Military District.²³ However, some of the public trains came overland from California.

When the shrill whistle of the Kansas Pacific was heard in Denver, the death knell of the Old Trail was sounded. The branch south from Bent's Fort was all that was left of the most famous trail in the Southwest. The great business

of Government freighting was never again to be of great importance to the man with ox teams. Many of the cattle were fattened and shipped back over the road in a box car to serve as an article of food in the Mississippi Valley. The Trail, the unbroken prairieⁱ, the roving Indian became a memory. In a few years the soldier moved to the border, while the Indian took up agriculture. The Old West had gone.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV

¹ A complete survey of all the forts and posts occupied, the time of the construction and evacuation is given in House Executive Documents, 35th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. IX, Document no. 93, pp. 21-22, Serial no. 1008. The distribution of the troops for various years is given in Senate Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 2d Session, Vol. 1, Part 2, Document no. 1, p. 110, Serial no. 587; ibid., 32d Congress, 2d Session, Vol. II, Document no. 1, p. 56, Serial no. 659; ibid., 33d Congress, 2d Session, Vol. II, Document no. 2, p. 6, Serial no. 747; ibid., 34th Congress, 3d Session, Vol. III, pp. 244-245, Serial no. 876; ibid., 36th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. II, Part 2, Document no. 2, pp. 606-607, Serial no. 1034; House Executive Documents, 40th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. II, Part 1, Document no. 1, p. 40, Serial no. 1324.

² Senate Executive Documents, 32d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Document no. 1, p. 271, Serial no. 613.

³ Senate Executive Documents, 36th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Part 1, Document no. 2, p. 173, Serial no. 1023.

⁴ House Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 2d Session,

Vol. I, Document no. 1, p. 53, Serial no. 595.

5 Missouri Republican, September 6, 1859.

6 This contract is given in Senate Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. VI, Document no. 26, p. 12, Serial no. 554.

7 House Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. VII, Document no. 38, Serial no. 576.

8 An elaborate report of freighting for the years 1850 and 1851, including the dates of departure of the wagons, the number of wagons, the number of pounds, the exact destination, and the rate for each contract is given in a report by Assistant Quartermaster E. A. Ogden of Ft. Leavenworth, (October 4, 1851). See Senate Executive Documents, 32d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, Serial no. 611.

9 This full report is given in Senate Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 2d Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, Part 2, Serial no. 587.

10 Ibid., 32d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, Serial no. 611, (See note no 8).

11 Ibid., p. 252.

12 See a detailed report of the Quartermaster General of November 23, 1851, given in Senate Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 1, Document no. 1, pp. 219 et seq., Serial no. 611.

13 Ibid., p. 336.

14 House Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 63, p. 33, Serial no. 721.

15 Wichita Beacon, March 11, 1838, as given in Trails Clippings, (compiled by the State Historical Society of Kansas, Topeka), Vol. II, p. 198.

16 House Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Part 2, Document no. 1, p. 141, Serial no. 711.

17 House Executive Documents, 35th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. IX, Document no. 57, p. 8, Serial no. 955.

18 Ibid., 35th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. VII, Document no. 50, pp. 4, 5, Serial no. 1006.

19 Ibid., 36th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. VIII, Document

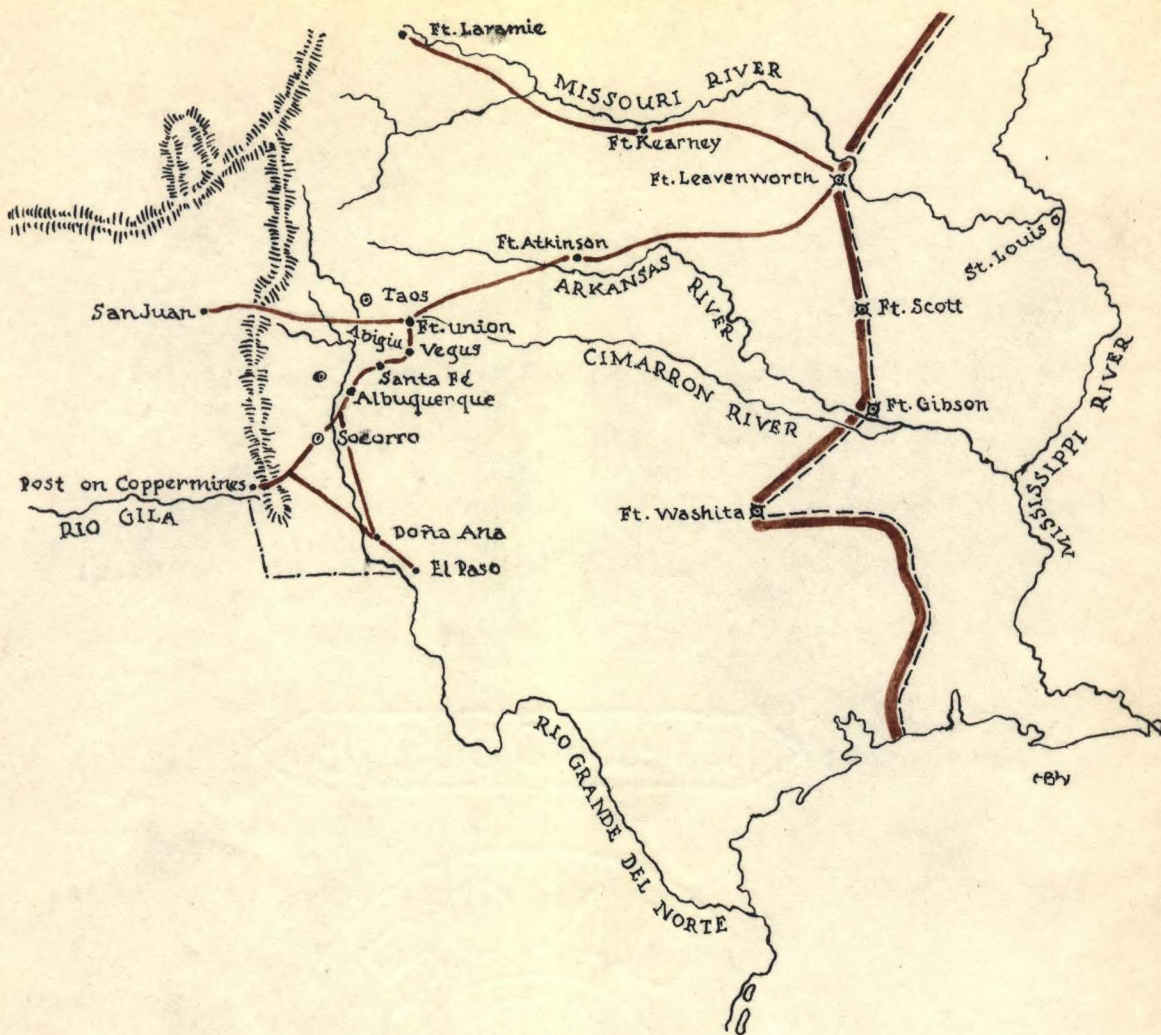
no. 47, pp. 8-10, Serial no. 1099.

20 Ibid., 39th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Part 1, Document no. 1, pp. 112-114, Serial number 1249; also ibid., p. 750. Corn was sent to New Mexico in 1863, 1864, and 1865 because of a drought in some places, devastation from insects throughout the territory, and because of a flood on the Rio Grande which destroyed the crops.

31 Ibid., p. 113.

22 Report of Brig. Gen. James F. Rusling in House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. VII, Document no. 45, pp. 8-16, Serial no. 1289.

23 Senate Executive Documents, 40th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. II, Document no. 74, p. 2, Serial no. 1317.



GOVERNMENT FREIGHTING ROUTES
FROM FT LEAVENWORTH -- 1851

- Old Frontier Stations Still Occupied
- New Frontier Stations
- New Posts Recently Abandoned
- Extreme Limit of Line of Frontier Stations, in 1845
- Lines of Land Transportation

Reference for Map : SENATE EXECUTIVE DOCUMENT, 32d Congress, 1st SESSION, Vol. I, Document No. 1, p. 304; given in report of E. A. Ogden, Assistant Quartermaster at Ft. Leavenworth, Indian Territory, submitted October 4, 1851.

CHAPTER V.

The Rise of a Big Business.

"Kearney's baggage train started a new era in plains freighting.... It became a matter of business, running smoothly along familiar channels.... Between the Mexican and the Civil Wars was its new period of life... ." It was in the fifties that overland freighting became a great business, employing a vast outlay of capital and great numbers of men and animals. Like a tide it rose through that decade, reaching its flood in the sixties. Then came the Kansas Pacific railroad, thrusting its steel tentacles westward from Kansas City. Overland freighting with oxt teams receded as the railroad advanced. With this ebb tide went the big business of freighting.

During the last half of the decade of the forties, Independence, Missouri, became the best market for cattle, mules, and wagons, west of St. Louis. Overland freighting gradually fell into fewer hands. St. Louis, Philadelphia, and other eastern cities continued to be purchasing places for goods. As the years of the fifties came, steamers ascended the Missouri beyond Independence to Westport, Kansas City, Ft. Leavenworth, and Atkinson with goods destined for the New Mexican trade. From these towns caravans of t prairie schooners pulled by ox and mule teams, made the

monotonous journey across the plains on a trail which became a wide, hard-beaten road.

3 Before the fifties cargoes of calico, groceries, and leather goods were exchanged for specie, furs, and mules. Much of the goods went to Chihuahua, Mexico, some 500 miles south of Santa Fé. A high ad valorem tax on goods entering Mexico as well as the flourishing market in the Territory of New Mexico in which no duties were charged after 1852, discouraged the Chihuahua trade. The development of gold fields in Arizona and New Mexico, the flow of Americans to these areas, and the rapid Americanization of the natives created demands for a diversified supply of goods. There was an "uncommonly large demand" for calicoes, bleached domestics, and small white hosiery. "The diminutive character of their (the Mexican women's) pedal extremities renders a prevalence of small sizes necessary." Dealers of shoes also had to meet this requirements. Flour, whiskey, hardware, and ammunition—packed in boxes, and sacks, and barrels—formed the bulk of the freight, however. By 1860, the Republican reported, a greater part of the specie had been drained from New Mexico by the demands of commerce. Mules had ceased to be of any importance as an article of exchange long before. After about 1858 enormous quantities of wool began to flow to Missouri in wagon trains which had heretofore returned empty. Goat and sheep skins were additional articles of import. In the year of 1859, nearly

30,000 skins were imported into Missouri, selling at twenty-five cents each. Dry hides, some tallow, and a few furs continued to come. Total imports in 1859 were valued at \$500,000.¹

Until 1850, Independence was the principal outfitting place. In the first few months in 1849 traders were arriving from New Mexico. The frozen snow and jagged ice along the Trail lacerated the feet of some of the mules. One train had been snowbound for three days. For five days the men had existed on nothing but "an ear or two of corn." These instances were rare merely because the overland trains were few until June. At that time an observer said that there was a Mexican invasion. "These swarthy teamsters..." he said, "were having a great life in breaking 'mulos'." Many who had never seen a mule professed to understand 'all about them'—, and it is quite amusing to see these gentlemen undertake the taming of these animals." Good mules were scarce after May, and cholera was bad. Traders hurried out of town. Adjutant Hart, with the purpose of settling in Chihuahua, took machinery with him. Carriages for Mexican senators, probably of Chihuahua, were dragged through the streets along with the caravans. The Expositor mused: "How they (the carriages) will delight the belles of Mexico."³

The extent of trade in 1849 is difficult to explain. Many merchants were reported to have failed in Santa Fé

during the winter of 1848. The whole country, according to one merchant, was completely glutted and every town overstocked with goods. He believed there were sufficient supplies for several years to come. This same condition was in existence after the arrival of the caravan in the summer of that year. William Messervy, a merchant of Santa Fé, warned "Introducers of new goods" that they were bound to lose money. Calico sold in New Mexico for the cost price in St. Louis. The high duties levied on goods imported into Chihuahua, ranging from sixty per cent to thirty-three and one-third percent made freighting for that market hazardous as a profit-making enterprise. It was alleged that merchants lost approximately eight cents on every yard of cloth imported from Missouri.³

During the summer the plains Indians caused no great trouble. A band of them camped on the Arkansas during most of the freighting season. The Government gave them \$1000 worth of presents which, perhaps, kept them in a friendly mood. Hard weather conditions were the most distracting elements with which freighters had to contend. James Browne, enroute to Santa Fé in the fall, experienced a three day snowstorm in the middle of November. "The weather was so intensely cold as to freeze all the oxen attached to the train, leaving the wagons standing in the jornada... (the Cimarron desert south of the Arkansas in the present state of Kansas)." A few men went for aid

while ten or fifteen stayed with the goods all winter. In March, 1850, they were seen by a passing trader. Two wagons had been burned for fuel in that struggle for life during the winter.⁴

The greatest tragedy of the year was the murder of J. M. White, his family, and a few of his employes. In the latter part of the freighting season he started to Santa Fé with thirteen wagons. Various reports say that when some of his mules became exhausted, he cached a part of his goods, and pushed ahead. About 150 miles from Santa Fé, in the area where the Apache and Comanche had attacked many trains and were to attack many more, the bodies, with the exception of Mrs. White and her youngest child, were found in a mutilated condition. Merchants of Santa Fé were sufficiently aroused to offer \$1000 reward for the recovery of Mrs White. The troops later found her but not before her life had been taken.⁵

The following year, 1850, passed without great change. Trade was brisk, without doubt. A fatal disease, "dry murrain", caused from drinking unwholesome water, left many oxen along the Trail to die. The Missouri Republican (September 28, 1850), believed that about all trains had lost animals. The dry season threw many wagons out of service. It may have been local pride that caused the Republican to remark that "of all the wagons taken to and from Santa Fé This year, those only that were manufactured in this city

(St. Louis), by Mr. J. Murphy, have withstood all the injurious effects of the heat." The Arkansas river was believed to have been the lowest it had ever been in that particular season. The Indians south of the Arkansas were extremely hostile. One train of Browne's was attacked and ten teamsters killed. Others were robbed and pillaged. A correspondent of the Republican spoke of the "imbecility of our government (which) excites the pity of our own people and the contempt of our poor Indians." Ft. Mann and an encampment on the upper Arkansas gave some protection to the Trail north of the Arkansas.

The removal of the army depot in 1851, from Santa Fé to Fort Union, caused the report that business was dull in Santa Fé. When one hundred twenty-nine arrived it was believed that there were enough goods to last two years. A few traders went on south to Chihuahua. The postmaster of Santa Fé, Mr. McKnight, said that five hundred forty-nine wagons constituted the total trade for the year. These wagons were in trains ranging from seven to forty.⁶

Since the days of the Kearny military government, merchants of Santa Fé had paid a license for transacting business. Much of the time an ad valorem tax on imports had been paid in spite of great protest. In 1852 the latter restriction was removed, thereby permitting free trade for practically the first time since overland commerce began in 1822.⁷ Trade with Mexico decreased because of

the high duties levied at Paso del Norte (El Paso). The failure of crops along the Rio Grande prostrated trade in that region until 1854.

Independence continued to share the overland trade with Westport in the early 50's, but according to the Missouri Republican a greater amount continued to leave Independence. Farmers devoted themselves to stock raising and "enriched themselves by their respective avocations." Beck and Giddings, ranchers of New Mexico took 1,100 sheep to their ranch on the Pecos river to make the first attempt to improve the sheep of the territory.

The treaty of Atchison was signed with the Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Apache in 1853. The great chief "Setanta", riding in his little rickety covered wagon drawn by long tailed, long maned Spanish mules, pledged to exchange good behavior and the inviolability of the plains traffic for "strips of red calico, red blankets, red beads, copper kettles, butcher knives, and hatchets (but no guns)." But "Irresponsible Indians and evil whitemen soon violated every pledge made."⁸

Small pox and Indians made freighting hazardous in 1854. Insolent Indians accosted many trains begging for "whish, shug, and back". They were inveterate thieves, and this often led to casualties. Some traders formed bands so as to oppose them effectively. In some cases the Indians were quite eager to trade. One old freighter

believed that bright silks attracted them as strongly as scalps.

The year of 1855 was one of the wettest seasons in the memory of the oldest inhabitants. Business was poor, and money was scarce. Kansas was in a state of turmoil. In 1856 the passion aroused over the state of Kansas played havoc with the Santa Fé freighting. Trade on the Missouri river was reported to be dead. Some of the steamers went elsewhere since "passengers were few...and freights (were) comparatively unknown." Westport merchants complained that they had no business. There was no demand for horses, cattle, or wagons. By the latter part of April only Mexican trains had departed for Santa Fé. A special correspondent of the New York Tribune wrote that the warehouse of Russell, Majors, and Waddell in Leavenworth, was a reselling shop for rifles, stores, and agricultural implements which had been stolen from Free State emigrants.⁹ Abolitionists attacked trains starting from Kansas City or Westport, the two cities presumed to be proslavery in sentiment. Col. S. L. McKinney lost about 60 cattle and 10 wagons, including the contents, to a band under Captain Cutter. According to the Evening News, the men were well treated and upon release were given a wagon and six oxen.¹⁰

A dry season and begging Indians caused difficulties of a nature slightly less dangerous than the Abolitionists. Many wagons had to turn off the Trail for miles in order

that grass could be found for the oxen. The Republican believed that "scarcely a train crosses the plains...but which...has to pay tribute for the sake of passing through (the Indian country) without..being killed." This paper stated that each train had been compelled to give \$200 or \$300 worth of goods as bribes to the Indians.

The Kansas Weekly Herald (Leavenworth, Kansas), proudly stated on August 8, 1857, that the Santa Fé trade was not "pining" away, but instead the Trail was one great bustle for nearly 800 miles, "almost lined with wagons, stock, and horsemen." Indians above the Arkansas were harassing beggars, demanding "ox", "snug", and "tobac" as frequently as ever before. Some traders, to show a complete lack of suspicion, did not arm their trains. Kansas troops were recalled from the frontier posts. When a great number of Indians surrounded J. C. Hall and his train, demanding "ox", he pointed to Ft. Larned in the distance. They showed their insolence, according to Hall, by replying "fort! Dam! 40 men." One of them stayed for a meal with the train, and was a guest of eight different messes without serious injury to himself.

The character of the trade changed in 1857.¹¹ Machinery for gold mines, such as crushing machines, was sent from the States. Wooden pegs continued to take the place of nails in the many new buildings in the territory. But in that year the first American caravan loaded with wool arrived in Missouri. The previous year Mexicans had tried that business

bustled with business. The Westport Border Star proudly wrote that the "Mexican trains and traders are arriving daily with gold, silver, furs, pelts, wool. At Bernard & Co's we see a pile of silver rocks...At the same place... a piece of pure gold (from Mexican mines, not from Pikes Peak) as large as an apple dumpling..." The streets were crowded with wagon trains. "Sometime it was difficult to tread one's way across the streets on account of the blockade of wagons, mules, cattle, bales, boxes, etc." wrote a correspondent of the Republican. Among the exports he noticed a "patent reaper, and mower, a steam engine and boiler, together with all the machinery necessary for a new flouring mill at Albuquerque." By July 15, the streets were again quiet, "the merchant trains having all departed, and the last hunter, peddler, and greaser have left..."

The trade in 1859 was believed by one contemporary writer to be \$10,000,000 annually. Between March 1 and July 31, the Missouri Republican, perhaps quoting S. M. Hays^e and Company, reported that 3,300 men, 1,970 wagons, 840 horses, 4,000 mules, 15,000 oxen, 73 carriages, and over 1,900 tons of freight left for New Mexico. These figures were exclusive of gold seekers who "were too numerous to count." 16

The Civil War affected the trade to some extent. Trade from Kansas City and Westport practically ceased, according to

on a limited scale. Wool was a resource that had been undiscovered until this year. In 1850 New Mexico had 377,000 sheep. Great herds had been driven to Chihuahua, and some to California, to be marketed for the carcasses. Now this source of wealth could be utilized, and empty wagons could be filled in returning from New Mexico.

Santa Fé merchants suffered much from early storms as they came to the states in the early Spring of 1858. Col. St. Vrain had thirty animals frozen in one night. Other freighters suffered similar losses. The importation of wool rose to unparalleled heights. Sheep, in being driven from the mountain valleys to the haciendas of the proprietors in the Spring, lost much wool on the prickly bushes and branches through which they passed. The Kansas City Journal believed that one large herd often lost from 1000 to 2000 pounds in a single drive. Shearing was unknown, but peons, eagers to earn an extra penny, armed themselves with a sack, picked the wool as if it were cotton, and sold it for a trifling sum to freighters. Some of the proprietors welcomed freighters to the fleeces if they would shear the sheep. The Journal estimated that fleeces could be sheared for two cents per pound, freighted to Kansas City for three or four cents per pound, and shipped to St. Louis for less than one cent. Thus it argued that the wool business gave indication of a profitable future.

S. M. Hayes and Company, located on the Trail at

Council Grove, Kansas, kept a registry of those engaged in the Santa Fé trade. In 1858 they recorded 2440 men, 1827 wagons, 429 horses, 15,714 oxen, 5318 mules, 67 carriages, and 9,608 tons of goods. They estimated the total capital invested to be \$2,627,300. If wagons were included the astounding sum of \$3,500,000 was spent in this trade in that year; or enough, they said, to build 350 miles of railroad at \$10,000 per mile. The cash register of this firm showed receipts in gold and silver for \$1,600 in one day of that busy season. Proud citizens believed that "C. G." has a future that no other town off the Missouri river can ever hope to have in Kansas.¹³

An old pioneer remembered some years later that on a certain day in May, 1858, the entire quarter section of land at Lone Elm, Kansas, was covered with wagons. The wagons commenced to pull out at twelve o'clock at night and the last train did not pass him before four o'clock in the afternoon.¹⁴ These wagons distributed goods in New Mexico, Chihuahua, Arizona, and Colorado.¹⁵ The legislature of New Mexico raised the license fee required for merchants, which was the only source of revenue, hoping to liquidate a debt of nearly \$10,000 in a year or so! But this did not materially discourage traffic in the Trail, nor did the abolitionists who, so the Republican believed, surrounded trains because of hunger.

Before the grass in 1858 was at any height, Westport

to W. R. Bernard, a merchant of Westport. Cities farther north on the river became safer starting places. The suspecting slavery sentiment of Kansas City brought upon wagon trains starting from there the wrath of Kansas abolitionists. Wallace Law, a contemporary, said that trains starting from Ft. Leavenworth were never molested.¹⁷ The State Record (Topeka) reported the largest return train of the season: 37 wagons extending for over a mile, bringing 50,000 pounds of wool from New Mexico. S. M. Hayes and Company gave the total of the season: 2984 men, 2170 wagons, 464 horses, 5,933 mules, 17,836 oxen, 76 carriages, and 80,000 tons of freight.¹⁸

The wool crop of 1860 was unprecedented. One firm in Teocolati had contracted for 150,000 fleeces. Shearing sheep had become quite common. Provisions were scarce in Santa Fé—flour sold for \$14 per hundred pounds, and other articles sold in proportion. Indian hostilities continued in spite of the great hordes of men and beasts which poured across the continent. The race of Governor William Gilpin of Colorado, with a force of infantry and cavalry, aided in driving the Confederates out of northern New Mexico before the arrival of the annual caravan. H. L. Duffus says that the Cimarron route, or the short cut across the headwaters of the Cimarron river was abandoned entirely during the war because of the fear of Confederates and the ever

present Apache.¹⁹ S. M. Hayes and Company reported that business was paralyzed during the last of the year, but the Mexican teamsters going eastward in the Spring had been "thick as locusts."

In 1863 the Council Grove Press reported that more than 3,000 wagons, 618 horses, 20,812 oxen, 6,406 mules, 96 carriages, and 3,730 men made their way over the old Trail to the Southwest. The business had grown to amazing proportions, for now over 10,000 tons of freight valued at \$40,000,000 constituted the cargo.²⁰

It was "flush times" in Council Grove in 1864. H. M. Simcox of that village gave the following register of the traffic: 3,000 wagons, 618 horses, 20,812 oxen, 8,046 mules, 98 carriages, 3,012 men and 15,000 tons of merchandise.²¹

The Kansas Tribune (Lawrence), complained of a great amount of pillaging and robbery on the Trail in that year. "Bushwhackers and Thieves have joined themselves in trains in disguise," it said, "palming themselves off as belonging to these trains, for the purpose of spying out a good show for stealing. Then they saunter back in small squads and commit their depredations." Col. Milton Moore, who was a Santa Fé freighter in his youth, said that after the commencement of the Indian war on the upper Arkansas in 1864, caravans were not permitted to proceed west of Ft. Larned unless they

were in groups of 100 men or more.³²

The Arkansas Indians were on the warpath in 1865. H. W. Jones says that they attacked every train that crossed the plains. His train proceeded through the Indian country in two columns side by side. At Ft. Larned they were stopped for a few days. When they started from that fort, 1,000 wagons made up the enormous train. An escort of troops accompanied them from Ft. Dodge to Bents' Fort, but did not prevent Indian attacks. C. H. Whittington wrote to the Emporia News that the following had crossed the Osage bridge at 142 creek between May 12 and July 12, 1865: 2,188 wagons, 2,892 men, 736 horses, 2,904 mules, 15,855 oxen, 56 carriages, and 10,489,200 pounds of freight.³³

On February 28, 1866, Ft. Riley and Ft. Larned were designated as the rendezvous for trains for New Mexico. Trains were compelled to organize for defense, arm themselves properly, and submit to the regulations laid down by the captain of the train, before they would be permitted to enter the Indian country. No train consisting of less than twenty wagons and thirty armed men was allowed to leave the forts.³⁴

Col. J. F. Meline toured the plains with a troop of cavalry in 1866. His journal records that he passed great numbers of ox teams. For the season he estimated that between 5,000 and 6,000 would pass over the Trail. "The trains are remarkable," he wrote, "each wagon team consisting of

ten yokes of fine oxen, selected and arranged not only for drawing but for pictorial effect, in sets of twenty, either all black, all white, all spotted or otherwise marked uniformly."

In that eventful year the Kansas Pacific pushed westward. Where oxteams were once counted by the thousands, regretfully said the Junction City Union (August, 1867), "the shriek of the iron horse has silenced the lowing of the panting ox and the old trail looks desolate." Hordes of cattle began to pour from the ranges of Texas to be shipped eastward over the Kansas Pacific. As the traffic grew the railroad extended farther. Trails continued from the end of the rails. In 1873 Las Animas, Colorado, was the "Kansas City" of a decade before. The old and the new were in a death conflict. Destiny settled down on the Old Trail. The ox team made way for the iron horse, and with the ox team went a big business. In the decade of 1860-1870, the number of oxen decreased 41% in the United States. This industry of supplying the traders with cattle had enriched the country adjacent to the Missouri. Before the Mexican War, and hence before the rise of the big business of freighting, the people of New Mexico could buy but a few things. Sugar and coffee to them were practically unknown. Calico had sold for fifty cents per yard, which was more than most women could earn in a week. A cloth of hairy wool was

used out "even this could not conceal the grace that had survived the wreck of so many noble gifts." Indians gave way to white men as had the Mexicans. The Commissioner of Indian affairs said that it was of no regret that so much of the United States had been wrested from the original inhabitants and "made the happy abode of an enlightened and Christian people."

The Trail had been slightly traced by the pack mules of several traders and adventurers between 1805 and 1823. The Spanish discouraged trade by imprisonment. One year after the Mexican revolution in 1821, Captain William Becknell led the first wagon train across the plains to Santa Fé. The caravans increased in size in the next decade. The ruts were deepened and the road widened by Army of the West in 1846. The trains of the Government contractor and the forwarding merchant ran the road incessantly in the fifties and early sixties, until the ~~plains~~ Kansas Pacific nosed its way across the plains. Two conflicts tore the Old Trail, but a spasmodic Indian war, driving snow storms, the intense heat, insects, thirst, and loneliness ravaged the army of traders. The soldiers of the caravans were as irreat^{is}ible as a glacier, almost as slow, and perhaps as important in the affairs of man. They were the workers at a "vast roaring loom on which was woven the fabric of modern America."

FOOTNOTES

Chapter V.

- 1 Kansas City Star, April 5, 1908, found in a volume of Trails Clippings, p. 187, in the Kansas State Historical Society. An excellent article on the trade in general, "The Great Overland Trade with New Mexico", appeared in the Topeka State Record, October 18, 1860, which is quoted from the St. Louis Republican.
- 2 Missouri Republican, June 3; St. Louis Reveille, June 22, 1849.
- 3 Missouri Republican, February 16, August 25, and September, 8, 1849.
- 4 Missouri Commonwealth, quoted in Reveille, January 21 and April 24, 1850.
- 5 For various reports see the Reveille, December 9, 1849, February 11 and May 8, 1850.
- 6 For this account and reports which seem to vary somewhat see the Missouri Republican, September 8, August 18, September 28, and July 8, 1850.
- 7 H. H. Bancroft, Arizona and New Mexico, (San Francisco, 1890),

p. 644; Senate Documents, 34th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. XIII, part 4, p. 536, Serial number 831.

⁸ Wichita Beacon, March 11, 1928, quoted in Trails Clippings, Vol. 3, p. 198.

⁹ New York Tribune, July 17, 1856.

¹⁰ Kansas Weekly Herald, September 13, 1858; New York Tribune, September 16, 1856, quoting the Evening News; also History of Jackson County, Missouri, (St. Louis, 1881).

¹¹ That statement is based upon information from the Kansas Tribune, April 6, 1857; Missouri Republican, March 28, 1857; History of Jackson County, Missouri, (St. Louis, 1881), p. 434; and Charles P. Deatherage, Early History of Greater Kansas City, (Kansas City, 1927), Vol. 1, p. 468.

¹² A full account of the new wool business is given in the Kansas City Journal, quoted in the Missouri Republican, December 17, 1858.

¹³ These statistics are pasted in the copy of John Maloy's, History of Morris County, Kansas, 1820 to 1880, which is in the Kansas State Historical Society.

- 14 Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society, Vol. XI, p. 457, "The Santa Fé Trail in Johnson County, Kansas." Mr. Ainsworth gave an address at the dedication of the Trail marker at Lone Elm, Kansas, November 9, 1906. This statement is one of his reminiscences as given in his speech.
- 15 A correspondent of the Missouri Republican, (October 21, 1858) made this statement in a letter from Santa Fé, September 22, 1858.
- 16 Missouri Republican, August 15, 1857.
- 17 Kansas City Journal, March 10, 1905, given in Trails Clippings, p. 61.
- 18 Topeka State Record, September 29, 1860.
- 19 Robert L. Duffus, The Santa Fé Trail, (London, New York, and Toronto, 1930), p. 247.
- 20 Council Grove Press, June 15, 1863.
- 21 These figures are given by John Maloy in his History of Morris County, Kansas, 1820 to 1880.
- 22 Kansas Tribune, (Lawrence), March 24, 1864; Kansas City

Journal Post, September 6, 1925.

23 John Maloy, Op. Cit.

24 Raymond Welty gives this military order in full in his Western Army Frontier, 1860-1870, (Doctor's thesis, University of Iowa, 1924), Appendix IV, pp. 392-397.

CHAPTER VI

Wharves, Warehouses, and Freighters.

The sprawling river town of Booneville, Missouri, was the eastern terminal of the Santa Fé Trail when overland freighting was in its infancy. In the early forties Independence, just a few miles up the river, became the intermediary of steamboat and wagon traffic. It enjoyed this position until 1850 without close rivals. Then Westport and Kansas City, Missouri, and Ft. Leavenworth and Atchison, Kansas, had their turn or shared the trade. As the Kansas Pacific railroad extended westward through Kansas, the Trail shrank. River towns were superseded by Topeka, Junction City, and Hayes City. Kit Carson and Las Animas, Colorado, were the last of the prairie settlements from which wagons pulled for New Mexico. The wharf and the warehouse ceased to be.

By 1837 and 1838 many of the Santa Fé traders (there were 100 wagons in 1838) had their goods shipped to Blue Mills Landing, a good dock about six miles below Independence.¹ This new metropolis, angling for a landing place closer to the townsite which was four miles south of the Missouri, paved the river front at Wayne City, or Independence Landing. This was closer to Independence by two miles, but bullwhackers disregarded the distance, and continued to use Blue Mills.²

Francis Parkman came up the river on the steamer "Rodnor" in 1846. "In her cabin were Santa Fé traders, gamblers,

spectators...On the muddy shore (at Independence Landing) stood some 30 or 40 dark slavish-looking Spaniards...³

Various freighters had stores in Independence which served as outfitting places for the New Mexican trade and for the emigrants who swarmed the streets. The St. Louis Reveille wrote that the streets were thronged with emigrants, "and they all appear to be in fine spirits, (and frequently fine spirits in them)..." Gambling was a business and several houses stood as evidence of this rising profession. The bullwhacker, as he jostled along in the crowd, frequented these places, "...the music of jingling coin attracts his ear and inclines him...to venture in. To make the thing more attractive and seducing, at each table will be found some honest looking "better" who wins heavily...and daily and hourly you can hear reports...of such an one (sic) beating the bank out of six hundred or one thousand dollars. This heavy winner," explains the Republican, "is a 'quiet partner', and his success is a bait to others....(there is) no secrecy about this show—it is boldly opened to all." Brawls often resulted, but this writer believed that "a great majority often result in 'gassing'."⁴ In spite of this an old pioneer was led to remark that times "were so honest...that the sacks (of specie from New Mexico) were left on the sidewalk until morning came. (There was) no account of the disturbance of a single sack."

In 1850 Independence had thirty-five or forty grocery, hardware, and dry goods stores, three saddlery establishments, two bakeries, two gunsmiths, two tinshops, several wagon and carriage manufacturers keeping forty or fifty forges in operation, three hotels, and many nastily erected boarding houses; these made Independence appear as a metropolis.⁵ A ferry brought customers from across the river. Carts and wagons met the steamers at the land^{ing} and freighted the goods to the merchants' warehouses within the city. The old blacksmith shop, a low, squat, brick building at the corner of Liberty and Kansas streets, became a battlescarred institution. Robert Wesson, the "imperturbable," who stayed at his anvil during the fever of gold and freighting, pounded out shoes for oxen, and built wagons. In 1852 his extensive business made another building necessary. A writer for the Reveille did not have faith in the Independence wagons. They were of unseasoned wood and of inferior quality, he believed, for "more than once have I seen wagons lying with one wheel crushed...on the road between my lodgings and town." Colonel Henry Inman said that Hiram Young, a colored smithy, made all the ox yokes for the traffic as well as some of the wagons.

Cholera appeared in Independence in 1849, and "streets and business houses, which have been all animation and bustle, now present a desolate appearance..." "It is awful times" became common parlance when fifty-four people died in one week in May. This fatal disease appeared again in 1851 and 1852.⁶

However, trade continued from Independence until about 1854. By 1853 a railroad extending from the river had dispensed with the draymen; some streets were macadamized, and general improvements had been made. But the heyday was over. It had been proud of its prominence. When the town was incorporated, the seal devised was the prairie schooner "proudly starting... across the plains."⁷ It resigned its fate to Westport.

At the bend of the Missouri river, east of the mouth of the Kansas or Kaw river sprang up two settlements destined to be the gems of the prairies—Kansas City and Westport. Between the river and the prairies is a narrow belt of land. There in some cottonwoods, nine miles from Independence, and four miles from the mouth of the Kansas, arose the village of Westport. Goods had been landed there for the plains or New Mexico since 1832. In 1844 one merchant tried to start a jobbing trade there. Steamboats began to land with goods for traders. In the spring of 1846, Westport "was full of Indians, whose little shaggy ponies were tied by dozens along the houses and fences. Sacs and Foxes, with shaved heads and painted faces, Shawnees and Delawares, fluttering in calico frocks and turbans, Wyandots dressed like white, and a few wretched Kansas wrapped in old blankets, were strolling about the streets, or lounging in and out of the shops and houses."⁸ Boone and Bernard located their general store there in 1848. Harness, saddle, and wagon shops sprang up like mushrooms. Two or more firms engaged solely in making ox yokes and bows.

Westport Avenue became filled with outfitting houses. Drove of horses, mules, and oxen were herded through the streets to be disposed of to the highest bidder. Independence had paid the price by the early fifties, and was being relegated to second or third place as an outfitting town for private freighters. Cholera desolated Westport as it did other settlements in 1849, 1851, 1852. The cholera epidemic in Independence cannot have been a cause for the shift further west in 1850, as has been alleged. Old freighters give several reasons for the change. The Big Blue river, flowing into the Missouri between Westport and Independence, frequently caused delays because of high water. The Big Blue hill was difficult for an ox team to ascend when pulling a loaded wagon. The economy of time and distance, since Independence was nine miles west of Westport, was another reason. Some believed that the rich prairies near the bend of the Missouri afforded superior accommodations for the care of the cattle while freighters awaited the arrival of the goods.⁹ Many wagons still loaded at Independence in the first few years of the fifties, but Westport had the bulk of the trade by 1854. Kansas City had begun its commercial growth by the middle of the decade. In the spring of 1859 Mexican trains were reported to be arriving daily, and were "beyond any calculation". Agricultural implements, tools, and domestic utensils were manufactured there and shipped to a growing market. By July 15, about 144 trains of 1728 wagons

had left for New Mexico.¹⁰

But Kansas City and Ft. Leavenworth were terminals of many freighters. The former had started as a trading post where a little "truck and dicker trade" was carried on with the Indians, and where "little bad whiskey" was sold. In 1844, one year after the closing of the Mexican ports by President Santa Anna, Col. William Chick built a warehouse south of the Kansas river. Boone and Hamilton, merchants, boosted the new town in the Republican on March 13, 1849. The advertisement said "...you are within one-half mile of prairie where, in the summer, the range is inexhaustible, water and wood convenient, produce as cheap and plenty as any other part you can name, with a good hotel, and fare cheap. We have warehouses, one kept by P. M. Chouteau, and the other by Mr. Chick, and good hacks running daily and hourly from the landing places."¹¹ Emigrants and bullwhackers gave the town a distinct tang. The old Gillis House on the levee, erected in 1849, was well supplied with balconies, and bore an air of thrift which made it famous in the West. Here Santa Fé traders caught a hasty glimpse of civilization while outfitting for their arduous 800 miles across the plains. The meals served in this House caused Colonel Foster to remark sorrowfully that he may have eaten a worse meal, but since he had a poor memory he could not remember where it was. When he landed on the levee, a hotel runner ran with his baggage, and "if one wanted it, (one) had to follow."

There was no police system as late as 1858, only a city marshal. Since, according to Foster, "never a boat came in that there wasn't a fight...", this marshal had plenty to do.¹²

Kansas City owed the prominence which it had gained by 1855 to its natural levee. A great bluff covered with trees overlooked the Missouri near the mouth of the Kansas. Between the bluff and the river was a narrow ledge, or a landing place. Along this natural levee the first business houses were built. A deep ravine made a good road down to the river. The river was the center of attraction. Steamboats were constantly arriving and departing in the warm summer months. About sixty steamers plied regularly between Kansas City and St. Louis, and some thirty or forty made frequent trips. In 1859 729 boats landed cargoes on the narrow ledge. Every boat was known by its whistle to those who frequented the river. Trim captains were often supped by business men. The courtesy of free transit was extended in return. Dances were a nightly occurrence. Quaint melodies floated through the sultry night air of the Missouri river bottom, played by an orchestra composed of negro waiters, barbers, and deck hands.¹³

The wharf-master was one of the most important officials of Kansas City. A city ordinance defined his duties: "To direct landing and stationing of all water craft...and the... removal...of cargo...; to superintend arrangement of merchandise and materials for repair on the river bank...; to keep wharf and river free from...obstruction; to keep in repair

the ring bolts and posts provided for fastening boats and vessels (sic); to regulate and control all vehicles traversing the wharf.....; to register date of arrival and departure of water craft,...all boats shall pay \$5 wharfage...wharf-master shall have power...to make arrests for any breach of the ordinances ...and...shall receive the same fee as the city marshall(sic).¹⁴

This picturesque Kansas City of the 50's, with a row of business houses along the levee and a few houses which "stood trembling on the verge of high hills," sent hundreds of wagons to the plains and to New Mexico. Six hundred left for the West in 1850. Ten years later 3,033 filed out of the ravine leading from the levee.¹⁵ One man saw twenty oxen straining to get a loaded wagon up the hill. Wharf life was a busy life in those days. Goods from hundreds of steamers were transferred to the warehouse, only to be moved again as a lumbering schooner creaked up to the loading place. The wharf-master must have blustered, and bawled more vociferously, the levee hands echoed more loudly, "On me," "On you," as the heavy bags were swung from arm to shoulder.

Ft. Leavenworth, on the west side of the Missouri about thirty miles above the Kansas river, was just another fort until the Mexican war. During the war all wagon trains with provisions for the Army of the West were loaded here. As the forts multiplied in the 50's, the government contractor

with his many animals and employees made the fort and the settlement of Leavenworth assume the characteristics of frontier cities. Before 1850 there was no landing or warehouse at the fort. The loss of Government property through exposure to the weather and "depredations of soldiers" resulted in the construction of a three story warehouse. Wagons were loaded from the upper story on the side opposite the river, while the steamers unloaded to the lower story on the other side. Another warehouse, a wagon shed, and two corn cribs were erected in the same year.¹⁶

Russell, Majors, and Waddell, towering figures in the transportation of Government stores to the West, made their headquarters in Leavenworth City in 1855.¹⁷ Shops and stores were erected. One year before, the Leavenworth Herald had been pleading for a "Saddler, Shoemaker, Tailor", and other artisans. The wharf was vying with "busy cities of the West, and piles of merchandise have landed here that would astonish the beholder of towns grown gray with years." The Herald proudly exclaimed in 1855: "Here where eight months ago was a scene of wild and unimproved land, stands Leavenworth... 600 or 800 souls...Our streets are thronged with wagons and men...levee business is not second to that of any town in Missouri." In 1857 four boats were arriving daily at the levee with goods for emigrants and freighters.¹⁸ It is not to be inferred that Leavenworth City was made by Santa Fé freighting.

Private freighters saw no advantages in taking the branch of the Trail which extended northward from various points on the Kansas river. The road was rough, and the distance was greater. However, the Government freighters had to do it of necessity, with the exception of one or two years when Kansas City was used as a Government depot for goods bound for New Mexico.¹⁹

Fort Leavenworth thrived as it enjoyed the monopoly of public warehousing. One resident, with civic pride, wrote that the neighboring inhabitants should be thankful for the favor conferred upon them by the Government—"specie is put in circulation, and a corresponding activity produced in all branches of industry on account of fitting out the big trains... (In July, 1858)...eager crowds, some bringing in horses and mules for sale, some seeking employment, some settling accounts, all awaiting their turn to enter within the clerk's building" thronged the streets of Ft. Leavenworth. "Teamsters, wagon-masters, master mechanics, contractors, stock dealers, and laborers, are all thrown into one promiscuous jumble, and the office presents a motley, yet, busy and interesting appearance. All this excitement is heightened by the constant arrival and departure of mule expresses...the jaded mule of the express rider is soon surrounded by a curious crowd." Thus did the Republican picture the fort in 1858.²⁰

Brigadier General James F. Rusling gave a detailed report of the fort in 1866. The farm had grown to 6,840 acres.

located at the north end of the tract were quarters and barracks for nearly three full regiments, stables for 1200 animals, besides corrals, storage houses, and forage sheds. A force of 621 men and several hundred mules gave assistance in landing of the provisions at the levee and in loading for the plains.³¹

Up the river a few miles Atchison City, Kansas, struggled for her share of the trade to New Mexico as she had for the Great Plains trade. The Weekly Champion of that City (June 2, 1860), reported that heavily-loaded wool trains from New Mexico had recently arrived, and that much outfitting was being done for the same territory. This paper said that Topeka, Kansas, being located on the Kansas river and in direct line of travel to New Mexico, offered the best facilities for crossing the Kansas of any place on the river. One year later it was reported that trains were leaving daily for New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah.³²

Topeka tried to get the New Mexico trade after 1859. The State Record (Topeka), pointed out the vast unoccupied Indian reservation capable of pasturing four times as many animals as were employed in the freighting business.³³ The next year several Santa Fé freighters expressed willingness to start from there as soon as they could be supplied with goods. But the Kansas Press (Council Grove), chided them that there were not enough goods in Topeka to "half load one of these wagons...Get more goods, gentlemen, then advertise them if you want trade."³⁴

As the warehouses and wharves gave character to these river towns, great freighting firms and merchants became known far and wide. In 1860 Bernard and Company, Street and Baker, George D. Vogelsong, Thomas H. Rosser, and Child, Hayes, and company were doing a great wholesale business in Westport. The New Mexico trade in Kansas City was controlled by J. S. Chick and Company, wholesale dealers in provisions, J. and P. Shannon and Company, wholesale dealers in dry goods, William A. Chick and Company, commission, storage, and forwarding merchants, McCarty and Barkley, commission, storage and forwarding merchants, and C. E. Karney (late of Bernard and Company of Westport), wholesale grocer and commission merchant. The St. Louis firms of R. Campbell and Company, Voorhees, Hellmers, and Company, Wise, Jinger and Company, and Crow, McGrery, and Company, supplied most of the dry goods. The hardware business was practically monopolized by Messrs. Childs, Pratt, and Company. Glasgow and Brother, and Erfort and Petring enjoyed the profits of a flourishing liquor and grocery business. Clothing was supplied by the firms of Martin Brothers and Young Brothers. Wolff and Hoppe sold notions to New Mexico freighters.³⁵

Many of the merchants had their own trains, but a number employed the freighting firms. The teams of both usually wintered in New Mexico where the posturage was as good as in summer. The names of Russell, Majors, and Waddell,

Irwin Jackson and Company, Moore and Company, Parker and Company, Stuart Sleemons and Company, Don Jose Chavez, Don Miguel Otero, Col. St. Vrain, Armijo Brothers, and a number of smaller freighters make an imposing rollcall of the freighters engaged on the Santa Fé Trail. The greatest of them all was the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. In 1848 Alexander Majors had begun freighting on the Trail with six teams. Seven years later he formed a partnership with William H. Russell. The next year the firm's name was changed to Russell, Majors and Waddell. Government freighting to New Mexico forts and military posts of the Great Plains was their specialty. Thus they became immortal in the annals of western transportation.

At the other end of this long Trail lay the sleepy little village of Santa Fé, nestling in the valley between two mountains in central New Mexico. Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico, were the end to many freighters. Taos, Albuquerque, Ft. Union, and nearly two dozen forts and military posts were terminals to hundreds of wagons. But Santa Fé remained the symbolic end of the Trail, and perhaps the most important city in New Mexico to which wagons came. The Matamoras Flag called Santa Fé a small and inconsiderate village in 1846. A military man said it appeared as a collection of brick kilns, at a distance. The old public plaza was the center of activity—stores and shops faced this square, while the

Governor's palace, just another adobe structure, complacently slouched on the north side. Snow could be seen on the mountains the year around, but a summer day was "not enough to melt an African negro while the nights were cold enough to freeze a Laplander." The streets looked like ditches in a New England meadow to E. N. Hough in 1847. The women struck him as tolerably fair, with handsome form, ugly features, and filthy, but void of "all decency and morality", even if they wore an immense quantity of undergarments. He epitomized Santa Fé as a hell on earth. But to J. Hughes the city looked different. From the distance the church soared above buildings which looked like mole hills even if grass did grow on the roof. Dark skinned children chased each other from housetop to housetop. To him the women were neither fat nor handsome, yet their eyes were dark and penetrating.²⁶

Stores, boarding houses, a theatre, the "Santa Fé Academy", hotels, ale-houses or coffee shops, and Government buildings sprang up in the fifties. Fandangos were democratic social functions at which the rich and the poor mingled. A soldier compared the dance hall to a low groggery "with sand strewed over with quids of tobacco". Two or three hundred dark-eyed, dark-skinned maidens, "each with a cigaritá between the lips, a glass of wine...", "pretty ball dresses with a bustle in front instead of in the back—this was the night life of Santa Fé."²⁷ Madame Tules, whose real name was Doña Gertrudes Barcido, was the presiding goddess at the monte tables in one

of the taverns. She was expert in two professions, it was alleged, and monte dealing was one of them. "Of pure and humble origin" in Sonora, Mexico, and totally illiterate, she rose through "sprightliness of intellect and force of character" to be the center of attraction in the gambling world of Santa Fé.²⁸ Every man went armed during the time of Madame Tules. If he went to a ball or "into the house of God" he wore an arsenal of revolvers and bowie knives. An old resident believed that the people suffered more from whiskey, however, than they did from any other cause. Perhaps twenty per cent met violent deaths because of whiskey, he said, but in spite of that a majority of them "lived long and enjoyed life anyway." Trains of burros kept the city in Taos whiskey, fodder, melons, grapes, and a dozen other articles. A contemporary ventured to state that the Mexicans of Santa Fé did not care who ruled over them—James K. Polk or the Great Mogul—provided they could sell their red peppers, corn, and grapes in peace.

In the More Valley, 110 miles north-east of Santa Fé, Ft. Union arose in 1851 as the Government depot of the territory. Merchants of Santa Fé, who resented the transfer of the depot from their city, contemptuously referred to it as a "hole in the prairie". A few scattered buildings around a court formed a rendezvous for a "gang of thieves, whiskey-sellers, and abandoned women," as well as for prairie schooners. Albuquerque remained a "primitive Mexican town, built of adobes, "long

after being a depot for troops in that quarter of New Mexico.

Warehouses, wharves, and freighters had their day. The steamboat and the prairie schooner had moulded their character and determined their years of existence. When the great trade succumbed in the sixties, these towns lived blindly for awhile—until the railroad gave them a new stamp, a new life, and a new hope. The rawness wore off these vibrating communities as cold, metallic civilization crept on them, like paralysis—deadly and inevitable.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VI

- 1 History of Jackson County, Missouri (St. Louis, 1881), p. 396.
- 2 C. D. Deatherage, Early History of Greater Kansas City. (Kansas City, 1931), Vol. I, p. 347.
- 3 Francis Parkman, The Oregon Trail (Boston, 1909), pp. 3-5.
- 4 Missouri Republican, May 1, 1849.
- 5 Missouri Republican, March 27, 1850.
- 6 Missouri Republican, August 11, 1851.
- 7 W. L. Webb in Kansas City Journal, February 20, 1905. This is given in Trails Clippings (Kansas State Historical Society compilation), p. 30.
- 8 These fragmentary descriptions are given in Francis Parkman's, The Oregon Trail, p. 7, and in Kansas City Journal, May 22, 1905, quoting Annals of the City of Kansas and the Great Plains.
- 9 C. D. Deatherage, *op. cit.*, pp. 348, 362-3; William R. Bernard, "Westport and the Santa Fé Trade", Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, (1905-1906), Vol. IX, p. 553; Kansas City Journal Post, May 21, 1905, given in

Trails Clippings, Vol. I.

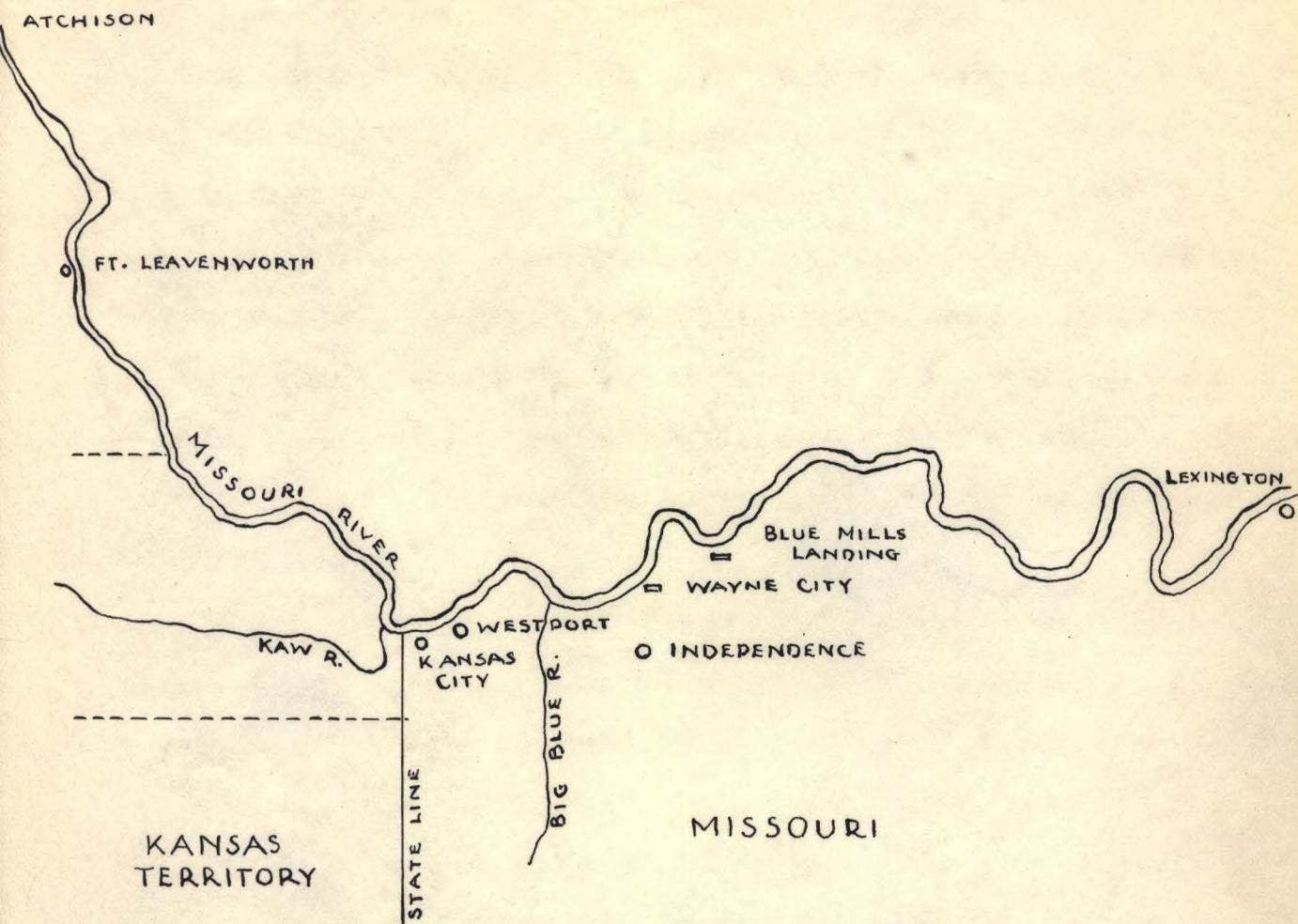
- 10 Missouri Republican, June 8 and July 18, 1859.
- 11 Missouri Republican, March 13, 1849.
- 12 Kansas City Star, February 26, 1905, given in Trails Clippings; S. W. Eldridge, "Recollections of Early Days in Kansas", Transactions of Kansas State Historical Society, Vol. II (1920), pp. 11-28; Missouri Republican, October 7, 1857; and D. D. Deatherage, op. cit., pp. 371, 385.
- 13 C. W. Whitney, Kansas City, Its History and Its People 1808-1908 (Chicago, 1908), Vol. I, p. 128; also Kansas City Journal Post, September 6, 1925.
- 14 C. W. Whitney, op. cit., p. 141.
- 15 Kansas State Record, (Topeka), June 2, 1860; C. D. Deatherage, op. cit., p. 468; History of Jackson County, Missouri, p. 432; L. P. Powell, Historic Towns of Western States, (New York, 1901), p. 386.
- 16 Senate Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, Document no. 1, p. 289, Serial no. 611.

- 17 Kansas Weekly Herald (Leavenworth City), September 15, 1855.
- 18 Rocky Mountain News, November 3, 1859.
- 19 An old pioneer said, in 1908, that the Government permitted stores to be unloaded in Kansas City, if bound for New Mexico, in the year of 1860. Russell, Majors, and Waddell built a warehouse there. Perhaps the Civil War caused the discontinuance of the use of this city as a Government depot.
- 20 This letter was written from Ft. Leavenworth, July 4, 1858, and printed in the Missouri Republican, July 20, 1858.
- 21 Senate Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. VII, Document no. 45, pp. 8-16, Serial no. 1289.
- 22 Tri-Weekly Bulletin (Atchison, Kansas), June 20, 1861.
- 23 State Record, January 28, 1860.
- 24 Kansas Press, March 26, 1860.
- 25 Topeka State Record, October 13, 1860, quoting the Missouri Republican.

26 For this discription see E. N. Hough, (a pamphlet),
Santa Fé as it appeared in 1847; St. Louis Reveille, September
29, 1846.

27 Reveille, October 5, 1846.

28 Reveille, November 3, 1846; June 7, 1847; Missouri
Republican, March 4, 1852.



MAP OF EASTERN TERMINALS
OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

CHAPTER VII

Bullwhacking

Overland freighting from Missouri to New Mexico may have been a prosaic thing, but as the years went by, it acquired a glamour. The ox wagon, otherwise known as the prairie schooner or the "ox telegraph" was of plebeian origin. Murphy and Espenshied, and other minor firms of St. Louis; Studebaker of South Bend, Indiana; firms in far away Pittsburgh; as well as some of the border towns, constructed a special wagon for the freighting business. The approximate cost of these wagons was \$200 each.

The prairie schooner of the Santa Fé Trail was a direct descendant of the Conestoga which ran the Old National Road a generation or more before. It weighed 4,000 pounds and had a tongue thirteen feet long. The hind wheel weighed 300 pounds and was 64 inches in diameter. The tire was four inches through while the hub was twelve inches through and eighteen inches deep. The Freeman's Champion (Prairie City, Kansas) compared the spokes to a middle sized bed post.¹ A great portion of the wagons had a wooden axle but no skein, the wheels being held in place by lynch pins. Rosin and tallow served to lessen friction on the axles, but the creaking of a heavily loaded wagon or of a caravan gave ample testimony of the need of a can of Black Beauty axle grease. The wagon box was three feet ten inches wide, twelve feet long at the bottom and sixteen feet long at the top. This made the bed resemble a boat. The blue coat of

paint made it a very picturesque structure. Wooden bows formed the frame work for the top. After two sheets of Osnaburg canvas were stretched tightly over them to keep out the rain and dust, a man of ordinary height could stand without bending.²

The Government wagons differed slightly from the regular freighter's wagon. The blue body was panelled while an iron axle made them aristocratic for creek beds could be crossed without great danger. The ends of the wagon bed were straight, making the structure resemble a box. But canvas covered the bows of both, and neither had a brake or a lock. The animals nearest the wagon served as a slow moving hindrance as wagons went down hill. However, a chain was kept on the side of the box. It "went around the fellow and fastened with a toggle. When you wanted to lock the wagon, (you) had to stop to put chain in place, and the same when you wanted to unlock it."

The ox yoke, bows and rings, chains which extended from the wagon and fastened to the center of the yokes, and water kegs completed the outfit of a freighter at the additional cost of \$25. Six, eight, or ten oxen—more in difficult places—valued at approximately \$50 per yoke, furnished the horsepower for the prairie schooner. The Government usually employed mules. Horses were seldom, if ever, used. The oxen were believed by some to have greater stamina than the mule. They could recover more quickly after a trip across the plains,

and could feed with relish on nearly all kinds of weed or grass. Wet weather and sand did great injury to the hoof of the oxen; but shoes without calks, and pads for the broken spots, often made from a hat brim, enabled the oxen to keep going.³ Extra animals usually followed the train, serving as a supply of fresh oxen but also as bait for thieving Indians.

The driver of an ox team was the bullwhacker. He was in charge of one wagon, and walked on the left side of the animals. These men were usually recruited from the population in the outfitting states at either end of the Trail. This offered a life of adventure and freedom from social restraint. Young men, according to one old freighter, considered their education incomplete unless they had spent a season on the plains. He believed that habits learned while bullwhacking produced the frontier bully and the border ruffian during the Kansas conflict.⁴ However, just as the river traffic of the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri produced a distinct character, so did the overland freighting. This character wore a "ragged flannel shirt, pair of buckskin 'jeans', or store pants, with pockets made or breaking out almost anywhere, pair of brogans, an old hat and whip."⁵

The bullwhacker's whip was an institution in itself. It weighed five and one-half pounds. The short stock of tough ash or pecan sapling had a lash of undressed rawhide nearly two inches in diameter and about ten feet long, ending

in a thong of buckskin. "To wield this required all the strength of a man's groins." The driver seldom flayed the oxen with it, but cracked it "with a heavy flourish and a smart jerk. You would hear a sound like a pistol shot, and see a mist of hair and blood start wherethe cruel thong had out like a bullet" into the hide of some recalcitrant oxen.⁶ The driver was proud of his whip and of his ability to use it. It was a sign of membership in the bullwhacker's fraternity. It gave the democratic prairie man an opportunity to be aristocratic and excel those of lesser training and ability in his group.

Mexican traders employed native Mexicans as teamsters, as did some American freighters. These drivers covered their swarthy skins with the distinctive dirty buckskin and flannel, and perhaps to people in Kansas City resembled very much the deck hands on the many steamers which landed goods at the levee.

During the Mexican war the Government used volunteers, who arrived too late to be mustered into the Army of the West, as teamsters.⁷ Regular soldiers were employed in that capacity in case of emergency of which there were many. In 1850 the Secretary of War complained that such a system of employing teamsters gave rise to intolerable conditions, for besides "not being subject to the restraints of military discipline, they are sometimes very turbulent and ungovernable."⁸ One year later the Secretary said that teamsters were employed

at "enormous wages." It would be better, he said, if the Government would increase the number of privates in a company to one hundred, increase the salaries, and detail them as teamsters when needed.⁹ The Quartermaster General kindly advised that soldiers employed as teamsters be allowed thirty cents extra per day instead of the fifteen cents and "commutation for whiskey ration" as before.¹⁰ As late as 1860, the Secretary of War made the charge against the teamsters of exacting exorbitant wages when possible. But the powers of Government seem to have never heard his call.¹¹

In 1860 bullwhackers on American freighters were paid from \$25 to \$30 per month. This included board. Their Mexican colleagues valued their services at \$15 for the same period of time. Wagon masters who held the responsibility of taking a train over the Trail, had the salary of a capitalist in comparison to the lowly bullwhacker, for he often drew as much as \$100 per month.¹²

Food was a matter of prime importance on a wagon train long before the miracle of refrigeration was dreamed of. Each train carried a supply to last during the trip across the plains, which was added to by occasional hunting forays. Each man was allowed 50 pounds of bacon, 10 pounds of coffee, 50 pounds of flour, 20 pounds of sugar, and some salt for the drive which lasted about a month. Long strings of jerked buffalo meat usually graced the sides of the wagons while

carcasses of buffalo along the Trail gave evidence that some bullwhacker had had fresh tongue for supper. In the later days of freighting, cows were sometimes driven along for the milk and fresh meat.¹³ Trading posts sprang up on the Trail which kept a goodly supply of liquor to replenish the keg which was included in most wagons.

The Mexicans subsisted on unbolted flour and dried buffalo meat. When a herd of buffaloes crossed their path often camp was made and the larder filled. The meat was cut in strips and suspended on ropes from the corral of wagons. The sun did the magic. However, one freighter upon reflecting some years later, believed the meat to be sour and disagreeable to anyone not used to it.¹⁴ But the Mexicans stewed it with extravagant helpings of red pepper and ate it without "fear or trembling". The Mexican trains always had hunters which perhaps would have been welcome in an American train for according to some old bullwhackers, "sow belly" three times a day for a month sometimes became questionable as an article of food.

All Mexican and many American freighters pastured their oxen in New Mexico during the winter. Early in the Spring the owners preceded the teams in light wagons or carriages and went East, that is, to St. Louis, Philadelphia, or elsewhere, to buy goods. While awaiting the arrival of the steamer with the goods, the trains camped on the outskirts of Westport, Kansas City, or from wherever they outfitted.

"Solid squares of wagons, covering whole acres, are found", said the Republican. "Thousands of draft animals are scattered over a 'thousand hills'...The streets resound with barbarous vociferations and loud cracks of heavy whips... The rumbling noise made by the clumsy, lumbering 'prairie schooners', while propelled along by patient oxen is heard incessantly."¹⁵ Bullwhackers frequented grog shops and loafed in the streets, leisurely spending the wages which had been paid upon arrival at the Missouri.

One by one the wagons pulled from the ware house down by the river, each loaded with sacks, barrels, or boxes weighing about 6,000 pounds. The wagons assembled at the camping ground until all had arrived. "At last, the 'order of march' is given. A scene then ensues that baffles description. Carriages, men, horses, mules, and oxen appear in chaotic confusion. Human cursing, distressing mullish outcries and bovine lowing, form an all but harmonious concert, above the dissonances of which the commanding tone of the wagon master's voice only is heard. The teamsters make a merciless use of their whips, fists and feet; the horses rear; the mules kick; the oxen balk. But gradually, order is made to prevail and each of the conflicting elements to assume its proper place. The commander finally gives the sign of readiness by mounting his mule, and soon the caravan is pursuing its slow way along the road."¹⁶

There was no regular schedule followed during the trip

across the plains. Usually two or three stops were made during the day. Sundays were, as a rule, disregarded but half-days of rest came often for the benefit of the oxen. The wagon-master selected the camping spots. When the afternoon was growing old he stopped his mule at some desirable location, preferably near some stream which afforded water and where wood could be found. As the wagons came up to him the head wagon circled to the right, the following team to the left, following the lines of an arc until they met. The next two wagons did likewise, bringing their left fore wheels close to the right hind wheels of the wagon ahead. As the balance of the train piled up this way, a semi-circular corral was made. At the rear a space of twenty feet was left open. A wagon on the inside or a chain served as a gate. The oxen were then turned loose. A mounted herder, called a "cavvie" in the day time if he drove the loose cattle or "cavayard" along with the train, cared for them during the night. Riding slowly around and around them, always guarding against a stampede, singing to them if they seemed restless, the herder spent a lonesome night until the oxen lay down and began to chew on their cuds.

The drivers divided into messes of six or eight. Two with sacks started for wood or buffalo chips. Another went for water. Another dug a fire trench. Soon bread, bacon, and steaming black coffee were served to each man who had his tin plate, quart cup, knife, fork, and spoon. After the

mess, preparation was made for breakfast. Then came the "fun and frivolity" of camp life. A deck of thumb marked euchre cards afforded amusement to some. As the stars began to appear in the western sky, stories of "hair breadth Indian encounters or 'unheard of buffalo shooting' were told." A good smoke and a song ended the hard day as the flickering shadows of the campfire played on tired faces. The soul of the west was often laid bare when the quavering call of a wolf echoed to the raucous voices of the camp. Blankets were spread beneath the wagons. The bullwhacker laid his head on an ox yoke, rolled the blankets about him, and probably had an untroubled sleep until the "Roll out, Roll out" call of the night herder came much too soon at daybreak.

Breakfast over, the cattle were driven into the corral again. At the cry of "catch up" from the wagon master every driver started among the milling cattle with a yoke on his left shoulder. It was "first come, first served" for the first day only; after that the only exchange that could be made was from the herd of extra animals. A yoke of heavy, well-broken oxen were used as "wheelers"; a second best came next. The two pairs in the swing could be made up of partly broken cattle, with a good pair for leaders. Long-legged, long horned Texas steers, when broken, made the best leaders. They held their heads high, were quick on the feet, and could run quite as fast as a horse when alarmed. With this in mind

the bullwhacker made his way among the swaying cattle which piled up on each other in the wagon corral. When the sturdy "off-wheeler" was found the yoke was fastened to him with one end left on the ground while the bullwhacker went in search of the mate. When yoked together they were hitched to the wagon. The others were yoked in order. When the long call "pull out" sounded throughout the camp the teamster was in his glory. About twenty-six long whips tipped with buckskin poppers were swung above the heads of the drivers at the same time, the "reports sounding like fire from a picket line of soldiers." But only the "deadhead" was struck as the caravan writhed away for another day of ten weary miles.¹⁷

The bullwhackers had a reputation for being a "reckless, hard working set of men, many of whom indulge in great excesses when starting out, or coming in....".¹⁸ A correspondent of the Missouri Republican said that the "most intolerable nuisances about some of the trains is the atrocious profanity that is kept up like a raging fire by many of the hands."¹⁹ The tender Susan Magoffin, who rounded out a honeymoon on the old Trail in 1846, was much shocked at the conduct of the men at "catching up" time. She said the "whooping and hollowing of the men was a novel sight rather. It was disagreeable to hear so much swearing.... [of course, "catching up"] worries the patience of their drivers, but I scarcely believe they need to be so profane."²⁰ The freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell prohibited the use of profanity and liquor, forbade

traveling on the Sabbath, and demanded that the animals be treated kindly. A code of behavior was posted in the back of each wagon to serve those who easily forgot. When applying to Alexander Majors for a job, perhaps it was his connections with the Methodist Church as pastor, that caused him to ask the applicant if he could drive across the plains and back without swearing. J. A. Little tells that an Irishman, who had ambitions to be a teamster replied to that question: "Yis, I can drive a team to hell and back without swearing." He was not employed.²¹ However, there is little reason to believe that Majors' elevating influence was felt beyond the employment office. To his teamsters on the Oregon Trail he once preached a sermon. One listener said that he "talked to them like a Dutch Uncle." William Johnson, an old bullwhacker, said that a wagon master seldom knew when Sunday came after being out awhile.²² R. F. Burton says that he "scarcely ever saw a sober driver; as far as profanity, the western equivalent for hard swearing—they would make the blush of shame crimson the cheek of the old Isis barge."²³

Swearing was not unheard of on the Government trains even if mules instead of oxen were used. The teamster rode one of the mules near the wagon and made brave attempts to keep the four leaders moving. He held a line in his hand which extended to one of the lead mules. A jockey stick "not unlike a rake handle" separated the "pilot" from his mate. When the driver gave the heavy strap one pull the old veteran

in the lead turned to the left, pulling his mate. Two jerks caused him to turn to the right, and his companion was pushed accordingly. And, to quote Mrs. E. Custer, "in this simple manner the ponderous vehicle and all the six animals are guided..." The most spirited mules were selected as leaders. Being out of reach of the whip their pace was determined by the persuasive effect of the driver's vocabulary or the tone of his voice. Mrs. Custer testified that she saw the driver of the team which she accompanied to Ft. Riley from Ft. Leavenworth, who desiring not to be profane in her presence, "shake his head and move his jaws in an ominous manner, when the provoking leaders took a skittish leap on one side of the trail, or turned around and faced him with a protest against further progress.... It was in vain that he called out, "You Bet, there!" "What are you about, Sal?" She heard further remarks which caused her to believe that some of the mules were christened after the sweetheart of the "apparently prosaic teamster." This teamster perhaps lavished as much of his affections upon his mules as he did his sweetheart. "Fox or small coyote tails were fastened to bridles and the vagaries in the clipping of the poor beast's tails, would set the fashion to a Paris hair-dresser. They are shaved a certain distance, and then a tuft is left, making a bushy ring... The coats of the beasts.. shine like the fur of a fine horse." Thus Mrs. Custer observed from the front seat of a Government wagon while going across the plains on a road often used by Government wagons

enroute to Santa Fe."

The dull monotony of the day or the stillness of the night were upon many occasions interrupted by the war whoops of mounted Indians armed with spears, guns, or bows and arrows. When sighted, if while the caravan was moving, the corral was hastily formed, the oxen were placed within the circle, while the teamsters took a position of vantage behind the wagons. One old freighter tells a story of such an attack on the old Trail, and there are many such stories, when a Government escort was along. Upon this occasion in 1864, First Lieutenant Ulysses Simpson Grant and 60 troops had accompanied the train from Ft. Larned. When the Indians were sighted and the corral made, the soldiers took a position at one end, while the bullwhackers stood at the other. Shots were exchanged with the Indians as they rode around and around. When eight dead Indians lay on the ground, they flew a flag of truce, picked up their dead and went away. Lieutenant Grant, who had calmly strolled about during the fight with a black corn-cob pipe in his mouth, treated the men with a drink of whiskey from the wagons, and gave a receipt to the wagon master showing delivery to the army.²⁵

Stampedes were full of excitement while they lasted. Occasionally the spare cattle in the rear would become frightened. As they ran past the wagons the signal was given for a change of pace of the wagon train. The yoked oxen would begin to bawl and, to quote one teamster, set off at an

astounding speed for miles, frequently overturning wagons. When their strength was exhausted they would settle down again. In 1862 Robert Wright was driving the loose cattle behind one of ^{the} Russell, Majors, and Waddell wagons. In the hot afternoon he took off his heavy linsey woolsey coat, the body of which was lined with yellow and the sleeves with red. In taking it off the coat was turned inside out. Then he tossed it over the long horns of "Old Dan", a gentle ox that was lagging behind. "Old Dan" had fallen some distance behind during this process so the herder prodded him along. "No sooner did Old Dan make his appearance among the cattle than a young steer bawled out in steer language, as plain as English, "says Wright, "Great Scott, what monstrosity is this coming to destroy us?" Then "with one long, loud beseeching bawl, (he) put all possible distance between himself and the terror behind him." Immediately all the cattle but "Old Dan" stampeded. When the wagon master inquired of the cause of this which had strewn wagons, broken three steers' legs, and scattered loose cattle for fifteen miles, one driver meekly said he thought it was a wolf.²⁶

The wind, if in the right direction heralded the approach of the caravan to Santa Fé. The creak of the wagons, the "gee-ho" and the "ho-haw" of the drivers, and the crack of the whip announced the arrival in a manner not to be mistaken. "From the shining white of the covers and the hull like appearance of the bodies of the wagons, truly (they) look like a fleet sailing with canvas all spread, over a seeming sea."

Perhaps the cattle resembled so many insects crawling along on a surface, sometimes hidden from the eye by a shifting cloud of dust. The wagon master was the first to arrive in town. The few "gantoters", used for guards by some trains, accompanied him down the crooked streets of Santa Fé to bask in the sunshine of popularity. Looking back they could have seen the caravan moving from the horizon as if it were a part of nature. Finally dust covered vehicles, escorted by a swarm of flies which were attracted by the dried meat on the sides of the wagons, and pulled by sweaty, dirty oxen, crawled to the end of the journey.²⁷ The soft voices of the dark-eyed señoritas mingled with the clatter of roulette wheels and the ring of Mexican dollars carried ^{them} far away from the life of bawling cattle. Perhaps excesses were indulged in "without stint or remorse"—but what of it, they must have reasoned, within a few days or weeks the business of living would call them back to the Old Trail again, seven hundred seventy-five "Gol durned" miles. If with empty wagons, it meant twenty miles each blessed day instead of ten. Then what lay at the end of the Trail—pay day, liquor, and women.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VII

- 1 Freeman's Champion (Prairie City, Kansas), June 24, 1858.

- 2 Ibid., June 24, 1858; Trails Clippings, Vol. I, p. 101
(found in library of Kansas State Historical Society);
Missouri Republican (St. Louis) August 5, 1857 and March 2,
1855.

- 3 E. Blair, History of Johnston County, Kansas (Lawrence,
1915),^{p. 67,} quoting William Johnson, a bullwhacker.

- 4 Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society,
Vol. XI, pp. 456-463, "The Santa Fé Trail in Johnson County,
Kansas," (various speeches or remarks are given which were
made at the dedication of the Santa Fé Trail marker at Lone
Elm, November 9, 1906.)

- 5 Freeman's Champion, June 24, 1858.

- 6 J. Evarts Greene, The Santa Fe Trade, Its Route and
Character (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1893), p. 15, 16.

- 7 See Chapter "Pork and Flour for the Army of the West."

- 8 Senate Documents, 31st Congress, 2d Session, Vol. I, part 2,

No. 1, p. 8, Serial no. 587.

⁹ Senate Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 112, Serial no. 611.

¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. II, No. 1, p. 73, Serial no. 659.

¹¹ Ibid., 36th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. II, part 2, no. 2, p. 6, Serial no. 1034.

¹² State Record (Topeka, Kansas), October 13, 1860, quoting the Missouri Republican.

¹³ New York Voice, September 19, 1895, given in Kansas Biography Scrapbook, Vol. 4 (Kansas State Historical Library, Topeka).

¹⁴ W. B. Napton, On the Santa Fé Trail in 1857 (Kansas City, 1905).

¹⁵ State Record, October 13, 1860.

¹⁶ State Record, October 13, 1860.

¹⁷ R. Rolfe, Trails Clippings, Vol. I, p. 391; Tucker and

Vernon, Along the Old Trail, pp. 31-33; J. A. Little, What I saw on the Old Santa Fé Trail (Plainfield, Indiana, 1904), p. 25; Harper's Magazine, Vol. XXV, (an undated clipping found in Kansas State Historical Society); Dodge City Globe, May 22, 1915, in Trails Clippings, Vol. II, p. 48.

18 Missouri Republican, August 11, 1858.

19 Missouri Republican, September 13, 1851.

20 Stella Drumm, (ed.), Down the Santa Fé Trail, (New Haven, 1936), p. 2-3.

21 J. A. Little, op. cit., p. 24.

22 Ed. Blair, op. Cit., p. 68.

23 Sir Richard Francis Burton, The City of Saints, and Across the Rocky Mountains to California; (New York, 1862), p. 14.

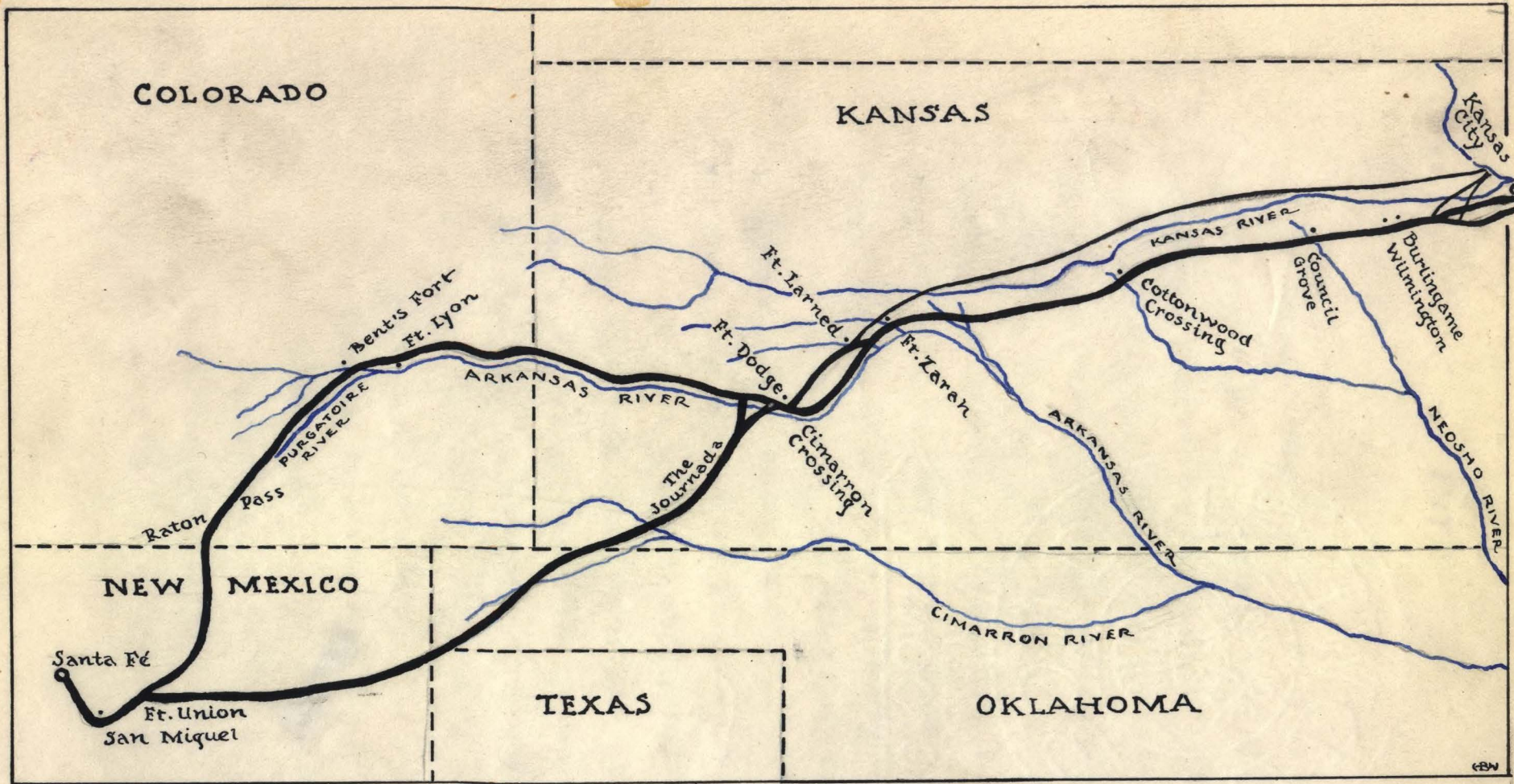
24 Mrs. E. Custer, Tenting on the Plains or With General Custer in Kansas and Texas. (New York, 1893), p. 222-229.

25 Kansas City Star, quoted in Trails Clippings, Vol. I, p. 396.


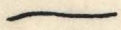

26 See Tucker and Vernon, Along the Old Trail, p. 31. Robert

M. Wright is quoted by them at length.

27 In Santa Fé Trail and other Pamphlets, Vol. I, (a collection made by the Kansas Historical Society), Johnathon Millikan says that great swarms of flies always followed the wagons trains.



THE SANTA FÉ TRAIL

-  The Main Trail
-  Auxiliary Military Roads
-  Rivers and Creeks

CHAPTER VIII.

Along the Trail.

If the Mississippi river had piled its sediment into San Francisco harbor, the Santa Fé Trail would probably have been a tow path along a southern tributary where flat-boats loaded with sacks and barrels made their laborious way against the current. But the Trail ran southwest from Kansas City, located at the bend of the Missouri, to the Arkansas. At Cimarron crossing, a convenient ford beyond Dodge City, Kansas, the Trail divided—one branch following the Arkansas to Bent's Fort where it turned directly southward to Santa Fé, the other leading through the Cimarron desert. Several branches, or "feeders", joined the Trail from Atchison and Ft. Leavenworth at various points, but the main road wound its way through verdant prairies inhabited by friendly Indians; there were barren deserts and hostile Apache, and mountain paths crossed by cool, rushing water. These diverse sections, timbered and treeless, streams and dry beds, level stretches and cramped trails, were on the Santa Fé.

The caravans followed the shortest line between Missouri and New Mexico that gave sufficient water for existence. Camping places, located some ten miles apart, as a rule, had become as fixed as the Trail itself by 1850. The names of some of the camping places, given quite

early in the history of the Trail, indicate the importance of water: 110 Mile Creek, Diamond Springs, Cottonwood Creek, Ash Creek, Rabbit Ear Creek, Rio Moro, and Rio Gallina. There was not a bridge over the streams for many years. Low banks and shallow water afforded safe crossings except in rainy seasons. In its latter days the Trail through Kansas became "a hard, smooth thoroughfare from 60 to 100 feet wide....In token that it had come to stay, the broad-faced sunflower sprang up on either side where the wheels had broken the sod."

Starting from the levees in Kansas City the Trail led up a long ravine to the crest of the hill. This was a hard pull for oxen. One driver said that bringing a loaded wagon up the hill was "all one man could stand and no one language was enough." The Westport and Kansas City road joined the Independence Trail near the state line. There were two or more branches of the Trail for a few miles out of Westport. The Freeman's Champion (Prairie City, Kansas), June 25, 1857, mentions a new road located fifteen miles south of Lawrence.

Lieut. E. G. Beckwith, who accompanied Capt. J. W. Gunnison across the plains in 1853, recorded that the Trail followed the Kansas river for some distance before turning southwest.¹ A committee of the Kansas Historical Society, in making a correct map of the Trail through that

state reported that there were several branches in Johnson County, "but from whatever place the traffic started, these several roads all reached a common point in the northwestern part of" that county.²

During the Mexican War the military road from Ft. Leavenworth struck the Trail near Black Jack in Douglas County. In the fifties Leavenworth City opened a road to the Kansas river a few miles west of Kansas City. The merchants hoped that the bridge which they constructed would draw the trade to their city. In 1855 and 1866 a military road was opened between Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Riley. A branch extended southward from Ft. Riley to Ft. Larned on the Arkansas, joining the Trail there.³ This road was kept in repair by the Government, exclaimed the Kansas Weekly Herald (May 10, 1856), and placed Topeka in a position to capture the Santa Fé trade! This paper concluded: "Kansas City will kick..." During the latter days of the Trail there were branches running northward through Topeka, probably to Atchison, and through Lawrence, evidently to Ft. Leavenworth. The Topeka Tribune pleaded with the traders and emigrants in a high moral tone: "If you wish to do humanity and ox flesh a kindness," then advise everybody to leave the Trail at Wilmington and come to Topeka.

Bullwhackers swore as they moved their trains through "government's lane", a black loam slough lying near Ft.

Leavenworth. Often stock from one-half of ^{the} train would be used to drag one wagon to high ground. The mud and water were so deep in some places that wagon beds slid over and through. The first camp was usually made within two miles of the fort.⁴ That was a good day's work. From the slough to the Kansas river much rough country impeded the progress of freighters. The river was crossed on a ferry. In 1849 two ferries located fifteen miles apart carried wagons over for \$1 each.⁵

The Santa Fé Trail as far as Council Grove, about one hundred thirty five miles from Kansas City, was not unpleasant to follow. Lieut. E. G. Beckwith saw as "beautiful and fertile rolling prairies as the eyes ever rested upon." A correspondent of the Missouri Republican wrote volubly of the "rich prairies and creek bottoms pretty well wooded" which he saw as he went to Santa Fé in 1851.⁶ D. D. Mitchell made a survey of the plains tribes in 1851. He reported three general classes: "wild, lazy, dissipated, and untamed", a medium grade, and the balance of "good sober and industrious farmers (who)....estimate and appreciate the value of property, and understand the properties and value of the customs and habits of the whites."⁷ These diligent Kansas farmers had rude dwellings, a small plot of land, and some live stock, and perhaps had learned to wear blue

denim or buckskin as gracefully as had the white men who swarmed past their little ranches.

Beckwith, evidently following a popular branch of the Trail, advanced with his party along the Kansas river for several miles after leaving Westport. Cedar Creek had worn a small ravine in the limestone, and walnut and cedar trees tossed their heads in the Kansas breeze. "The marked feature of the country today," he wrote on June 24, "as heretofore, is the graceful grassy swells which extend as far as eyes can compass." The timber was less abundant on the next day. The dwellings and farms of a few "Christianized Indians" were seen near camp that evening. A few years later a traveler, upon entering Osage county, would have passed through the new and enterprising village of Overbrook. This famous crossing had a saloon, toll bridge, blacksmith shop, and stage station.⁸ On June 27 the prairies appeared unusually level to Beckwith, but grass and wood were hard to find. Camp at 110 mile Creek afforded the luxury of running water "with holes large enough for bathing." Two years later Burlingame would have been the next camping station. Here, so the story goes, thirteen men dug a well before building houses or shacks. During the guerilla days the people built a stone fort around it to keep guerillas from poisoning the water. This great structure, eight-five feet in circumference and eight feet high, had twenty-five port holes in the thirty-four inch walls. A log cabin store, the "Bratton House", and

Hoover's blacksmith shop did thriving business when freighting was at its height.⁹

Upon entering Wilmington, a few miles West of Burlingame, the freighter was welcomed by a rickety sign: "Dow's Wilmington House." This two-story hotel, a blacksmith and wagon-maker's shop, and several dwellings, some of which were concrete, made up this new settlement.¹⁰ Prairie Chicken Creek, Elm Creek, 142 Mile Creek, Bluff Creek, and Big Rock Creek afforded good camping places before the arrival at Council Grove. Here the Trail forded the Neosho river. Before freighting became a big business, caravans congregated here and organized under a wagonmaster prior to proceeding across the plains. In 1847 a cluster of timber fringing the river shaded a store and dwelling, some twenty or thirty Indian wigwams, and a Government blacksmith shop. The Indians, as did others along the Trail, carried certificates of character given them by white men.¹¹ By 1859 there were no more than six houses there, but it had become a stopping place for bullwhackers to buy "nick-nacks" before committing themselves to the great wilderness beyond. While the boys were shouting off what they called their last drink one night in the summer of 1857, J. C. Hall wrote in his journal: "Council Grove—famous as being the extreme end of civilization...built on lowlands, on banks of the Neosho river...a small stream...only an insignificant place. Grog shops and drinking saloons having the custom."¹² A

familiar scene after 1856 was the Strieby blacksmith shop. Here harness and wagons were repaired while the drivers enjoyed a brief celebration. After 1863 wagons crossed the river on a bridge which also served as a scaffold on special occasions. The river crossing had long been a source of entertainment to residents. One said it was "amusing to watch the tongues of the greasers wag in double quick time as they vociferate to the cattle. All kinds of noises, from a squeak of a rat to the roar of a buffalo, are employed to urge teams up the ascent."¹³ In 1860 "prices were good and buyers plenty," but after the Spring of 1866 business men complained of hard times. One newspaper tauntingly remarked that Junction City's streets afforded better grazing for the teams.

The correspondent of the Republican who went over the Trail in 1851 noticed that all beauty disappeared beyond Council Grove. "A dry level of sterile earth, a stretching out interminably, wearisome by its monotony, and forbidding the hope that it can be put to useful purpose" welcomed him as he went westward. There was not much to interest a traveler until the Trail struck the Arkansas at Great Bend. One bullwhacker said that every day life had little variety. The monotonous prairies "were not influencing anybody's destiny," wrote one driver. "They bore the marks of no man and were as pathless as the sea. Every day was as another, and we were

soon at loss to know what day it was...not a tree to relieve the dull monotony of the boundless prairie."¹⁴ J. A. Little said that thousands of gray wolves, as large as St. Bernard dogs, roamed the prairies. He had seen them bring down a buffalo by cutting its hamstrings. Lieut. A. Coert noted that "there are times when the wolf's howl sounds pleasantly and again there are times when the spirits of desolation seemed to be conjured up by it." In the Spring and Fall when the buffaloes were migrating, "millions in a herd (?)...trampling down everything before them," wagon trains were often stopped until the herd had crossed the Trail. Their deep grunts blended into a roaring symphony as thousands of them darkened the prairie. To keep their teams from stampeding, one old freighter advised drivers to chain the front yoke of oxen to the rear wheel of the wagon, "then get out in front and shoot, shoot, shoot." They were as tame as domestic cattle, and to real plainsmen, buffalo hunting was too simple for a premier sport. Hundreds of dead animals along the road, in a good state of preservation on account of the dry atmosphere, gave mute evidence to the fact that many bullwhackers improved their marksmanship by use of a moving target.¹⁵ Ponds and water holes were favorite wallowing places for these great animals during the heat of the day. Here they added "their own excrement to the already putrescent waters. This compound, warmed by weeks in a blazing sun and alive with animalcules

makes a drink palatable to one suffering from intense thirst.¹⁶

Occasional bands of wild horses caught the eyes of tired bullwhackers, while hundreds of lizards sunning themselves in the ruts afforded marks for their whips. Rattlesnakes often struck the oxen of the leading wagons before the crack of a six-shooter made them writhe in the dust.

At the junction of Walnut Creek and the Arkansas the trading post of Booth and Allison was erected in 1855. Besides furnishing some provisions to the Indians and travelers, according to the Republican, pleasure-seeking parties were offered a rare chance to kill a buffalo.¹⁷ Booth and Allison were probably the first dude ranchers. After 1864 a rude structure, Ft. Zarah, offered protection to traders.

Pawnee Rock, twenty-five miles up the Arkansas from Walnut Creek, was a landmark and a stopping place for travelers. Here many conflicts with lurking Indians occurred. The rock was one hundred feet high, and it covered nearly four acres until settlers quarried rock from its sides for fences. The Indians called it a gift of the Great Spirit, but to traders it was just another camping ground and a bronzed limestone slate on which their names could be added to those of Kit Carson and others.

The Santa Fé Trail divided five miles east of Pawnee Fork. The "Long Route" followed the Arkansas to Ft. Dodge while the "Dry Route" left the river a few miles to the southwest, joining with the other about a hundred miles up the river.

Ft. Larned, built of "logs set endwise in the ground and roofed with dirt", was a source of comfort to freighters after 1856. Escorts often accompanied the trains as they plodded along on one of the two branches of the Trail. Short buffalo grass grew everywhere along the "Dry Route." A few scattered weeds and flowers caused Beckwith to note: "nature has here lost all her freshness and sweetness, and at this season (July 14, 1853) only wears a gray, sterile and unforbidding aspect...arid buffalo fields wearing the same uninteresting aspect as yesterday, unrelieved by a single tree... water collected in pools is barely drinkable.." The two branches merged near the location of what became Ft. Dodge in 1864, only to divide again at Cimarron Crossing. One branch ascended the Arkansas to Bent's Fort, while the other crossed the river at two or more places and ran southwest across the Cimarron to More. At that place the Bent's Fort or Raton branch joined it.

Between the Cimarron Crossing and Bent's Fort was nothing but monotony. Beckwith wrote that "Nothing can exceed the dull monotony of a journey along the Arkansas." Bent's Fort, located near the mouth of the Purgatoire river, had long served as a trading post. In 1852, so the story goes, Bent loaded sixteen wagons with goods, fired the fort, and drove away as the powder within the building exploded and laid waste to the walls. In 1854 the Government located a

military post above the old fort. Ten years later Ft. Lyon was erected on the Arkansas a few miles east of the Purgatoire river. The Trail crossed the Arkansas west of the mouth of the Purgatoire and then followed this river to the Raton mountains. J. C. Hall, a freighter who went over the route in 1857, testified that the water was more scarce and the sand deeper than on the Cimarron road. In 1846 Lieut. Albert noticed the sterility of the country. The sand was covered with cactus and yucca, while under their feet "hundreds of horned frogs (*agama cornuta*) were crawling about..."¹⁸ The Trail followed the Purgatoire (often corrupted into "Picketwire", "Picquet Ware", "Purgatorie", "Rio Purgatorio", and other descriptive forms), crossing the stream many times before winding up the Raton mountains. The Indians had called these mountains "Chuquifrique" because of the abundance of rodents. The Spanish had applied the term "Raton", meaning mouse, to them. To the teamsters, however, this meant an extended period of swearing and whip cracking, urging the weary beasts up the long and rugged Trail. As the road grew narrower and narrower wagons could hardly pass. Axle trees, hounds, and abandoned oxen marked the rock strewn trail of unfortunate freighters. At "The Devils Gate", the most dangerous point in Raton Pass, overhanging rock forced the great wagons to the edge of a precipice.¹⁹ It was a route of struggle, of danger. But many took it in preference to the Cimarron. It was used extensively in the War of 1846.

There has been much controversy over the amount of traffic which this route received in comparison to the Cimarron. In a report of the Quartermaster General of New Mexico, the statement is made that the Cimarron was "generally travelled by merchants' trains (in 1865), and now that rebel raids... are not to be feared, (it) should be the route travelled by government contractors..."²⁰ However, as a winter route the Raton was preferable at all times. In the early sixties Dick Wootton obtained charters from Colorado and New Mexico and built "twenty-seven witting miles of toll road." Here he sat with his partner, George C. McBride, and collected \$1.50 for every prairie schooner that passed, \$1. for a lighter vehicle, twenty-five cents for every horse, and five cents each for all other stock. Meals were served in their hotel for seventy-five cents, while the use of a bed for a night cost but one half dollar.²¹

The wagons which crossed the Arkansas at the fords either seventeen or twenty-five miles above Ft. Dodge, or at Bent's Fort, often experienced great difficulty. The swift stream swept the bottom as level as a floor at one time, while the next minute the shifting sand assumed the proportions of huge boulders. One freighter probably voiced the sentiments of many when he called it a "contemptuous stream" sprawled out in the middle of the plains. The bed of the river was about one-half mile wide at Cimarron Crossing. The stream of

muddy water was subdivided into many rivulets by small sand-bars tufted with willows. To allow a loaded wagon to stand still in this shallow stream, which one teamster said he could wade anywhere if he had a pair of boots, was to see the sand swallow it up. Oxen were doubled up, perhaps ten or fifteen yoke with a bullwhacker on each side swearing and whipping, kept the oxen constantly moving, until the shallow bank was reached.³²

Beyond the crossing was about sixty-five or seventy miles of treeless, waterless desert. This was the "Jornada del Muerto", (Journey of the Dead) which was corrupted into "Horn Alley" by prosaic teamsters because of the presence of so many bleaching skeletons of oxen that had died of thirst. Heavily loaded trains usually started at dusk. By traveling all night and the next day, with one or two "dry camps" the Cimarron river was reached by midnight. Nearing the Cimarron, the soil changed to a sandy loam. Blue stem grass, brown grass, buffalo grass, two varieties of heatn, and several kinds of weeds were observed by a surveyor for the railroad in 1872.³³ J. A. Little says that antelopes jumped up near his train in 1857. Jack rabbits made good soup for hungry teamsters, and tree cactus took the place of buffalo chips. Horned frogs were novelties to vary the monotony of the day. The stagnant pools of water served as a source of drink only when used in hot coffee. Little says that some Mexicans

showed him a natural sandstone cistern in the center of a table rock a few miles off the regular route. Here was cool, clear water in an abundant quantity. This supply seems not to have been found by other freighters.

The Cimarron river was oftentimes regarded as a work of magic. At one place there was a stream ten feet wide and nine or ten inches deep. Within a few miles the stream disappeared, only to run underground for some distance. The reappearance of this stream at places on the Trail earned the titles of Wagon Bed Springs, Upper Springs, and Middle Springs. Here the weary cattle stood for hours in the cool evening after having been wild for water. Bullwhackers had great sport fishing in the stagnant pools. The process was simple: wade in, stir up sediment, when the fish come to the surface to breathe, scoop them out.

As the approach to Santa Fe was made, the French Buttes were seen first. To the correspondent of the Republican they looked like a "huge, perpendicular wall scaling the heavens." At Moro Creek, where the Raton branch joins the Cimarron, grew the village of Moro. Ft. Union, often referred to by people in Santa Fé as the "Hole in the Prairie", was built in 1851. This fort with its barracks, guard house, blacksmith shop, and other buildings was the depot for Government supplies, hence the end of the Trail to many wagons.²⁴ Twenty-five miles further two or three hundred adobe houses,

a church, and a graveyard surrounded with high walls stood at the side of the Trail. From this village, San Miguel, to Santa Fé the road wound through "valleys, basins, cañons, and beds of torrents." Evergreens, some vegetation, sandstone and granite mountains greeted the eye of the freighter. Someone wrote that the "scenery is beautiful, the road awful, the people lying, thieving, filthy and lousy."

There was agitation in the fifties for making the Santa Fé Trail a military road. E. A. Ogden, assistant Quartermaster at Ft. Leavenworth, reported that the road from the fort to Santa Fé was circuitous and "objectionable in every respect," but could be made a good road with little expense. A House Committee on Military Affairs reported adversely on such a bill in 1857.²⁵ The next year the Committee approved a bill for the improvement of military roads connecting the various forts of New Mexico.²⁶ The Old Trail became a state highway through Kansas in 1855. In the sixties the Trail was surveyed by two corps of engineers, one for the Government, the other for a Government freighter. The Government contended that the distance was 735 miles, while the contractors wanted to collect for transporting goods 780 miles.²⁷ On February 9, 1880, the first train of the Santa Fé Railroad entered Santa Fé. Oxtams had served as a connecting link between the railroad and the New Mexico towns until the last. When the locomotive steamed down the streets of Santa Fé, the day of the ox team was over. Only tottering old

men remember the Trail today, and their days are numbered. Patriotic societies and old settlers have endeavored to perpetuate its memory. The Daughters of the American Revolution of Kansas and Colorado have placed monuments where campfires burned and daisies grew. The picturesque aspects have encouraged a fanciful interpretation. Poets have neglected it as an economic factor in the settlement of the Southwest, and have sung of its colorful past. Glowing stories have been woven about Indian battles so that the average American believes that only a few who ventured over it lived to tell the story. The motion picture has made famous other dramatic episodes. It had become a romanticized road in the annals of western literature. However, its greatness lay in the sordid and dreary business of freighting—giving employment to men, a market for cattle, and a field for investment. The key-note to the whole song of the Trail was economic. Then, too, it was just another trail.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VIII

¹ The journal of Lieut. E. G. Beckwith, a day by day entry of his experiences in 1853, is given in House Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Part 2, Vol. XVIII, Document no. 129, pp. 1-98, Serial no. 737. Throughout this chapter this journal has been frequently used.

² This report is given in pamphlet form, Santa Fé Trail. Brief Summary of the Santa Fé Trail through Kansas with a Report of the Committee Appointed to Prepare a Correct Map, being reprinted from the Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Historical Society. A detailed map is given.

³ Quartermaster McFarrand of New Mexico gives a good summary of the Trail, its branches and out-offs, and the preferable routes in 1865, in House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Part 1, Document no. 1, p. 744 et seq., Serial no. 1249.

⁴ Kansas City Star, April 5, 1908; Missouri Republican, June 3, 1849.

⁵ This statement is made in a letter written from Westport, May 26, 1849, and printed in the Missouri Republican, June 3, 1849.

- 6 The account of this overland journey to Santa Fé in 1851 is given in the Missouri Republican, September 15, 1851. This journalist wrote a full account of his observations. It is referred to several times in this chapter.
- 7 Missouri Republican, February 6, 1851.
- 8 Topeka Capital (Kansas), March 18, 1906, quoted in Trails Clippings (compiled by Kansas State Historical Society), Vol. I, p. 99.
- 9 Topeka Capital, 1905, given in Trails Clippings, Vol. I, p. 28.
- 10 This description is given by Thomas Burns in the Topeka Capital, as given in Trails Clippings, Vol. I.
- 11 Missouri Republican, July 31, 1847.
- 12 Kansas Magazine, Vol. V, p. 49; Missouri Republican, September 6, 1859.
- 13 Council Grove Press (Kansas), June 1, 1861.
- 14 Kansas Magazine, Vol. V, p. 53.

- 15 J. A. Little, What I saw on the Old Santa Fé Trail (Plainfield, Indiana, 1904), p. 35. This is a book of reminiscences of a trip made in 1854.
- 16 Theodore Talbot, Talbot Ms., Library of Congress, quoted by Allan Nevins, Fremont, Vol. I, p. 149, in a footnote.
- 17 Missouri Republican, August 31, 1855.
- 18 Senate Executive Documents, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. IV, Document no. 23, p. 17, Serial no. 506. This "Report of Lieut. J. W. Abert, of his Examination of New Mexico, in the years 1846-'47" (p. 3-132), is a diary kept day by day by a competent observer.
- 19 Bess McKinnan, "The Toll Road over Raton Pass," New Mexican Historical Review, Vol. 2, p. 83 et seq.
- 20 House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Part 1, Document no. 1, p. 744 et seq., Serial no. 1249.
- 21 Bess McKinnan, Op. Cit.; H. L. Duffus, The Santa Fe Trail (London, New York, and Toronto, (1930), pp. 252-253.
- 22 J. A. Little, Op. Cit., p. 39; Kansas Magazine, Vol. V, p.54.

- 23 This diary of a surveyor of the Santa Fé Railroad contains daily entries of such observations interesting to a surveyor. It is in possession of Kathleen Rogan Aston of the Capper's Publications, Topeka, Kansas (unpublished September, 1930).
- 24 Senate Executive Documents, 32d Congress, 2d Session, Vol. II, Document no. 1, p. 75, Serial no. 659.
- 25 House Reports of Committees, 34th Congress, 3d Session, Vol. I, Report no. 172, Serial no. 912.
- 26 Ibid., 35th Congress, 1 Session, Vol. III, Report no. 372, Serial no. 966.
- 27 Great Bend Register, as given in Kansas State Historical Society Collections, Vol. XVIII, p. 866. The Government contractors sued for \$2,000,000 due them for contracts in 1863, 1864, and 1865.

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