

# PASSING OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL



THE FONDA, OR EXCHANGE HOTEL, TERMINUS OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL.

Just when the patriotic endeavors of the Daughters of the American Revolution to prevent the Santa Fe trail from fading to a mere tradition, by marking its route by suitable monuments and tablets, are beginning to show substantial results, it seems a little unfortunate that the most notable landmark of that historic highway of commerce that still remains should be in imminent danger of being sacrificed to the insatiable Moloch, Business. This is the Fonda—the old adobe hotel that stands at the southeastern corner of the Plaza, in Santa Fe; and that, from the very beginning until the end of the Santa Fe trade was the terminus of the trail. The one-story hotel and its great corral, with adobe walls almost as high as those of the hostelry, was the destination of the great

caravans of Conestoga wagons, drawn by oxen, that freighted the goods for the Southwest across the plains in the 50 years from 1822 to 1872. It was the rendezvous of the scouts, pioneers and plainmen from the date of Pike's expedition in 1806 until the building of the transcontinental railroads inaugurated the new era. Its gaming tables were the attraction that lured the prospectors, soldiers, cow punchers and settlers for hundreds of miles around, to the City of the Holy Faith; and its liquid cheer soon gave to the tenderfoot sojourner all the courage, dash and dare-devil spirit of the true son of the desert.

**Exchange Hotel Now Deserted.**  
When locomotives and freight trains took the place of "bull teams" and Conestoga wagons as a means of transportation across the "Great

American Desert," the Fonda (later known as the Exchange Hotel) quickly fell upon evil days. Its patronage declined to so low a point that the attempt to maintain it as a hotel had

never by land ever before undertaken by the American people; and in danger and hardship it was without previous parallel in our national career. The traffic across 800 miles of wilderness to the inland capital of a Mexican province, at the start was exclusively by pack train. In 1824 a caravan, owned by 80 traders and consisting in part of 25 wagons drawn by horses, accompanied by a long train of pack mules, made the trip. Great surprise was expressed at the time that no serious obstacles to the passage of wheeled vehicles were encountered. That fact shows how true it was that the Santa Fe Trail was a natural highway. Oxen were employed instead of horses for the first time in 1829, and soon became the preferred draft animals. From the very beginning of the Southwestern trade, the difficulties and discouragements that beset it were due mainly to the hostility of the Indians, although the long distances that had to be traversed over waterless deserts, the heat of the treeless plains, and sandstorms and tempests that sometimes overtook caravans, added greatly to its dangers. In later years, as the traffic with the Southwest grew in importance the dangers and difficulties were lessened by the establishment of military posts at intervals along the trail, but these could not afford perfect security. It was not until the Indians were placed upon reservations, about 1870, that travel became reasonably safe; and even after that occasional war parties left the reservations and returned for a time to their old trade of murder and plunder.

### How Trains Were Formed For Mutual Protection.

It was the custom of traders to outfit at Independence, Missouri. From there the wagons traveled singly to Council Grove, on the Cottonwood, where they waited for others to form a train or caravan of sufficient strength to be able to defend themselves against attack. Often 200 men or more were thus banded together for the journey. Each wagon was drawn by eight mules, or by six or eight oxen or horses. For better protection against the Indians, it was customary for four wagons to travel abreast. In addition to the drivers, a number of horsemen always accompanied the trains, their duties being to kill buffalo, antelope and other game, to supply fresh meat to the company, and to keep a sharp lookout for Indians. Before the start was made, a captain was chosen, and the long journey was made under his orders, under something like military organization. Camping places were selected in advance by the scouts, with a view to securing plenty of water and good pasturage for the stock. At night, the wagons were arranged in circular form, to serve as a fort in case of attack. Watches and guards were posted and relieved at regular intervals. Cooks, herders, hunters and scouts were employed, and everything possible was done to obviate danger and to expedite progress. In spite of all precautions, attacks from the Indians were common and every mile of the Santa Fe Trail was marked by many graves.

Most famous of all the scouts that helped guard the trail was Kit Carson. Associated with him were many others, no less resourceful and daring (even if less renowned) than he. Of this bold brotherhood but few now remain alive. Of the survivors, the best known are Captain Smith H. Simpson and Aloysius Scheurich, both of whom still live at Taos, where they have made their homes for half a century, and where Kit Carson had his home and headquarters and where his bones are buried. Simpson long acted as Carson's secretary, and Scheurich finally tired of scouting and became a freighter on the Santa Fe

to be abandoned. The corner apartments were metamorphosed into a meat market, while the rest were rented out to "roomers." Then the walls began to show signs of weakening, and had to be propped up with heavy timbers. Naturally the "roomers" sought other quarters, so that the historic Fonda is now almost deserted. The other day an enterprising business man purchased the property, and the old hotel that has withstood the vicissitudes of more than a hundred years, and witnessed the mutations from Spanish to Mexican, and from Mexican to American sovereignty in the Southwest, will doubtless soon be razed, to make way for a modern business block.

### Dreaded Stretch of Trail.

Across the region called the Grand Prairie by the Spaniards, and named the Cimarron Desert by the Americans, was a dreaded stretch of sand, 60 miles across, devoid of either trees or water. This is now comprised in southwestern Kansas, between Richfield and Hugoton. Even at this day, settlers are few and far between in this desolate region; and here, straight as the flight of a crow, stretches the Santa Fe Trail, still plainly visible although no wheels have traversed it for the lifetime of a generation. Four wagon tracks, showing the deep-worn ruts left by the wheels, the paths trodden by the feet of the mules and oxen, and the little ridges between, run parallel as far as the eye can follow them, from the northeastern to the southwestern horizon.

Trade routes, like trade centers, are determined by nature, rather than by the arbitrary caprices of men. The physical features of a country are the main factors that control the upbuilding of great cities, and that decide the direction and the character of its commerce.

### A Natural Highway.

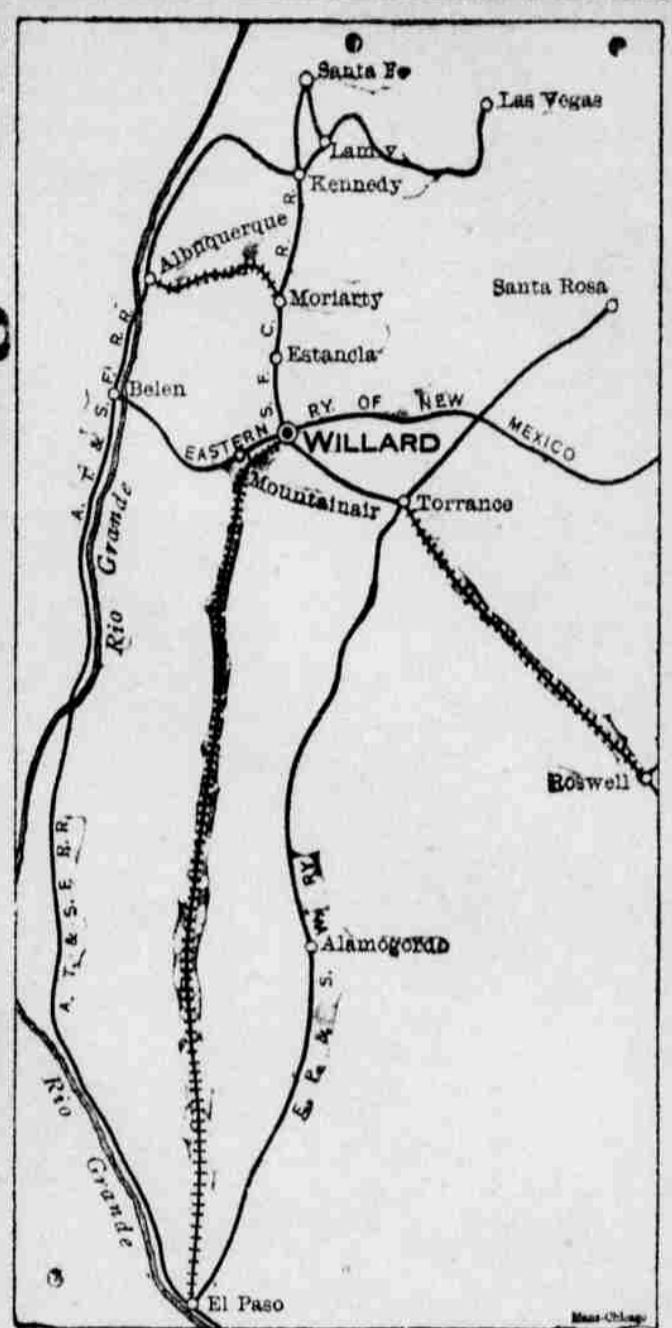
A little knowledge of geography, therefore, is sufficient to make it plain why the Santa Fe Trail played a part so important for the development of the West and Southwest. It lay along the line of least resistance to trade and travel between the Great Plains and the Great Central Plateau. Today it is followed by one of the world's most important railroad systems. A generation ago, it was traversed by vast caravans of clumsy wagons, drawn by oxen, mules and horses, conveying a commerce valued at \$5,000,000 annually. More than three centuries ago, it was the route taken by the Spanish conquerors in their journeys of exploration and colonization in the savage wilderness that they believed it was their destiny to conquer and to convert. If we could lift the veil that hides the past history of aboriginal America, we would behold the march and counter-march of armies of plumed and painted warriors, and of hordes of nomads of the plain and desert moving on to conquest or fleeing in wild retreat over this hoary highway of the ages.

The first recorded commercial expedition from the East to the West over this route was that outfitted by William Morrison, of Kaskaskia, Illinois, in 1804. He was followed two years later by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, whose report first revealed to Americans the opportunities for profitable trade that existed in northern Mexico; led to the establishment of the great and remunerative traffic over the Santa Fe Trail; and resulted ultimately in the war of conquest against the southern republic and the annexation of the Empire of the Southwest to the United States. Before Pike's expedition, little was known of distances, directions, obstacles and opportunities in the indefinite region called "Kansas." Pike mapped the way from the Great Bend of the Arkansas to the mountains, and from the mountains to Santa Fe and Chihuahua, blazing the trail for the retarded progress of the American pioneers.

### Those Who Followed Lieutenant Pike.

If Pike thus cleared the road, William Becknell was the first to make a conspicuous financial success of following it. He started in 1822, with a numerous company, many of whom perished of thirst, starvation and the wounds inflicted by savage Indians. Nevertheless, the expedition proved immensely profitable, and Becknell's account of the rich prizes that awaited the trader inflamed many others to imitate his example, after his return by way of the Santa Fe Trail. The journey was small in comparison with some of the trade routes established by the Spaniards in South America, but it was at least three times as long as any commercial jour-

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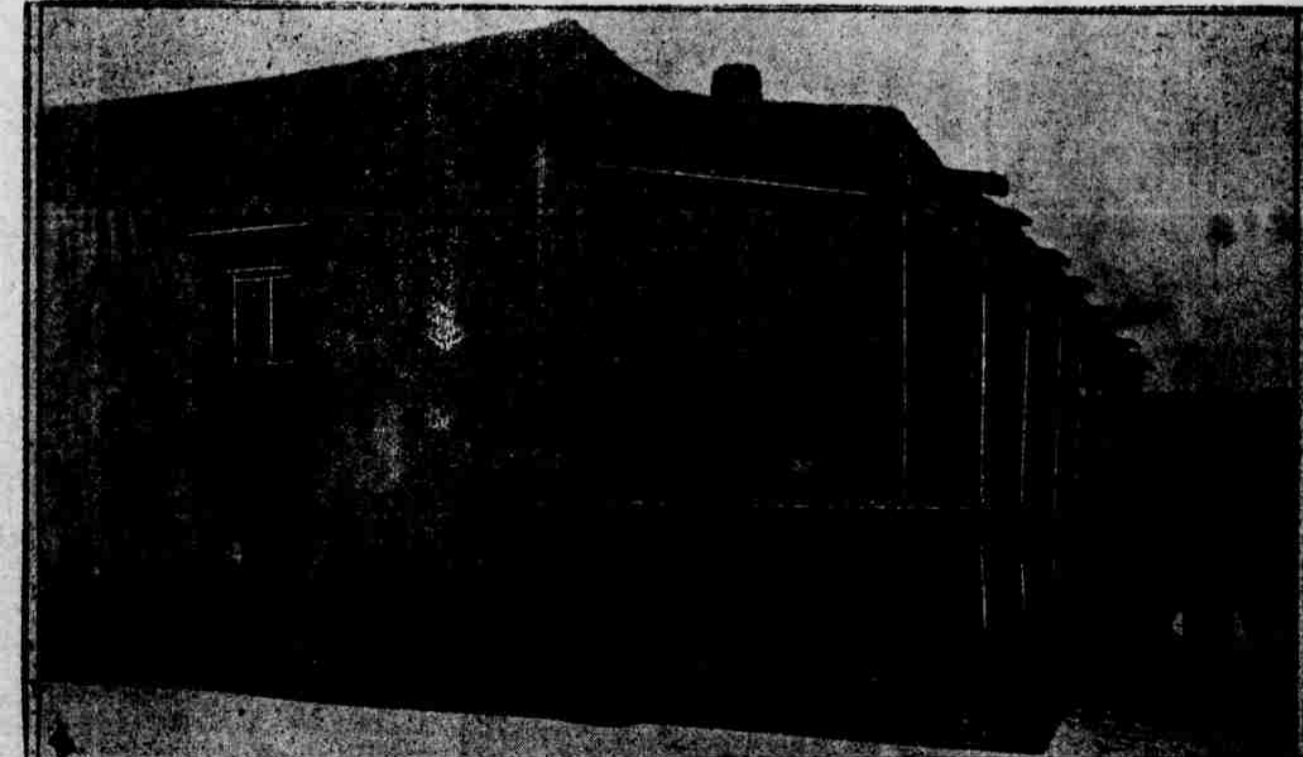
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THE OLD ALCALDE STAGE STATION NEAR ESPANOLA.

Denver, Taos and other growing settlements.

As travel increased, numerous stage stations were established along the Santa Fe trail and its branches. Of these, but few now remain. One may be seen from the car windows of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, near the summit of Raton Pass—a survivor of Butterfield's Southern Overland Stage Route. On the branch of the Santa Fe trail that ran from Santa Fe to Taos, the old stage station and corral at Alcalde, a few miles from Espanola, on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, is still in a perfect state of preservation. On the Central Overland Route that ran

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