

Kansas, and The Santa Fe Trail.

Less than a century ago, Kansas was included in what was then known as the Great American Desert, and, as such, was inhabited only by the wild forms of animal life, and was ruled over and roamed over by the Indians.

What explorations had been made, had been by a few, hardy hunters, who were tempted by the buffalo, the deer, and the antelope, men who had a love of adventure implanted in their hearts, and liked it all the better if there was danger connected with it. These men followed no beaten track but went when and where they pleased, and left no trace of their wanderings.

The fertile valleys of California, and Oregon, however, were attracting many settlers, and to reach the country they had but two routes;—one by water around by way of Cape Horn, or by the Cape of Good Hope, a long, tedious, dangerous journey. The other across the continent, the "desert route". Through Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, around the mountains by the south and

on to the promised land.

Many preferred this road, caring rather to make a toilsome march across the sands than to risk themselves for so long a time upon the sea, believing, as did the Irishman, that it was better to be on dry land if it was mud up to his knees.

Recognizing, then, the need of a good road across the continent, Congress, in 1824, took steps in that direction, and authorized the survey of such a highway. This was the beginning of what we now know as The Old Santa Fe Trail.

Having, at first, its origin at Independence, Missouri, this road stretched for many long weary miles across the Prairie, and without a bridge from one end to the other. The trail is not wholly obliterated in Kansas yet, remaining in many places over the state, a memorial to the work and courage and perseverance of the last generation.

Let us take a look at the course of the trail, as it passed through our own state, crossing the line at

Westport, it followed along the south bank of the Kansas River to Topeka, thence southwest through the counties of Maubusse, Morris, Marion, McPherson, ^{and} Rice, striking the Arkansas River a short distance east of Great Bend. It followed the river to where the city now stands, and then west along the line now followed by the Santa Fe Rail Road.

Here, the two roads lie, so far, parallel, that people say, no survey was made. The stakes for the railroad being simply driven along the side of the wagon road.

The road leading west, passed Pawnee Rock, a place where so many Indian attacks had been made, that the travellers were fearful of passing it, through the trading posts of Aubrey, Lakin, and on into Colorado. The Arkansas River was crossed at Rocky Ford, the first place where a solid bottom could be found in that sandy river.

The road now turned south into New Mexico, and on to Santa Fe. A branch kept on west, and crossed the river further up in the mountains.

Among the numerous, prominent landmarks

remaining today, to remind us of those times, are the old lighthouse in Johnson County, the trading post at Council Grove, where an old bell hung, ready to warn the settlers of the approach of danger, Diamond Springs, Lost Springs, Pawnee Rock, and a dozen other places each one with a history of its own.

The travel over this road was made in trains of from fifty to one hundred wagons, prairie schooners, each. The object of thus going in so large a company, was, of course protection from Indians and any other danger that might overcome one family by itself.

Each man was well armed, but this did not always save them from attack, for the wily Indians would steal down upon them in the night, stampede the horses and cattle before the sleepy sentinel was awake, and be out of reach before the camp knew danger was near.

A train was all under command of one man, designated as "captain", whose duty it was to have a general oversight

of the whole train; select suitable camping places; regulate the length of the days drive; act as judge in the frequent disputes that arose between the men; and in case of attack to take command of the defence. He was assisted by a number of "lieutenants", who had a closer supervision of twenty to thirty dragons.

At night, or whenever a considerable halt was to be made, the dragons were arranged in the form of a hollow square, surrounding water if possible. This served both as a corral for a part of the stock, and also as a kind of fortification in case they were attacked. Within the tents, if there were any were pitched, the fires made, the food prepared, and in the evening long stories told until bed-time, when all would soon be shrouded in slumber, except the picket, who was always posted on the outside, to watch over the others while they slept.

The men who made up these trains had different objects in view. Some were freight

ers, and cared only to reach their destination as soon as possible, in order to return for another load. Some sought wealth in the gold fields; some sought a home on the plains. The conductor was generally a man who made his business his profession, and did nothing else but direct these trains across the country. They often attained great skill in their work, for it was no child's-play, even though it might seem to be.

The beautiful and fertile plains and valleys through which they passed attracted many men from these trains, and we find them building the sod shanty, and "breaking out" the farm, until the trail is lined with them. These settlers have dared brave the dangers, and in so doing, have not only made for themselves a home, but have rendered the trail safer for future travellers.

Need of increased facilities in travel, and the additional security of the journey, brings the "regular stage" to work

a great improvement over the slow-moving freight wagon, although it was, itself a heavy, cumbersome affair, drawn by four or six horses, and carrying passengers, baggage, mail, express and in fact everything that could be tied on or stowed away about the vehicle.

This was a glorious opportunity for the festive "road-agent" to get in his work. "Holding up the stage" was a daily pastime with him, and engaged in, as a regular occupation. These men, a half a dozen or more in number would hide in some convenient place, and suddenly spring out around the stage, stop it, cause the passengers to dismount, and, while one would compel them to "hold up their hands," at the point of a pistol or rifle, the others would "go through" them. The express box would be rifled of its contents, and the mail bag searched for valuables, or carried away, bodily. The passengers were often robbed of all their money, and jewels, and even of their clothing.

To save their property, many queer means

were used. Hiding the money in one's boots, was indulged in, but frequently both boots and money were taken. Putting it in a belt next the body was a favorite way of securing it, but sad to say, the robbers were generally as sharp as the travellers, and this did not always work successfully.

The robbers did not always meet with such submission, however, for sometimes the invitation to "get down from there" did not meet with the reception they expected, but with a salute of "small arms", and a fight would ensue, in which probably both sides lost. Officers were almost constantly upon their track, and when they were captured they were dealt with, summarily.

All this, however, is now past, and the old trail remains only as a part of the past. If it could speak, it would tell of the great men who have followed its beaten track, filled with thoughts of fame and fortune, wealth and honor.

It would tell of fights, bloody, deadly

conflicts between the "pale-face" and the "devil of the Plains", in which innocent women and children were cruelly butchered, and strong men tortured, burned at the stake, before the eyes of fathers, brothers, or sons, who were soon to suffer likewise.

It would tell of trouble arising in the camps, among the men, requiring constant watchfulness on the part of the leaders to prevent murder; it would tell of sickness, of death, of blasted hopes and fortunes, of perseverance and accomplishment, of all the terrors and bright spots attendant upon the settling a new country.

It would tell of the steady growth of "our State" from the time of the first sod shaft, to the present moment; it would tell of the advent of the railroad, how it has crept in and crowded the "old trail" out, and has helped bind Kansas to the rest of the world, has brought her in touch with her neighbors, and made her neighbor to the most distant land.

It would tell, last but not least,
how Kansas has grown from a
territory, torn with civil strife, to
a state, the grandest in the Union,
the "Pride of the West".

Interesting, indeed, would be the
story of life, could it be told by the
Old Santa Fe Trail.

George Wildman Smith.