WAGON TRACKS
Quarterly Publication of the Santa Fe Trail Association
volume 34 ♦ number 4 ♦ August 2020

New Mexico and the Cholera Epidemic of 1831-1833
Page 12

Career and Legacy of Manuel Armijo
Page 14

Montgomery Bell: Businessman of NM
Page 22

Hell on Wheels: Ellsworth, Kansas
Page 26
On the Cover: The Plainsman

by Ron Kil

The Plainsman was the direct descendant of the frontiersman of the eastern forests, the fabled long hunter, who hunted and trapped animals, and who fought Indians from the Eastern Seaboard to the Mississippi River. But changes were needed when the long hunter beheld the verdant prairies that rolled into the Great Plains and up against the Rockies.

To cover those vast open spaces, he became a horseman. To knock down grizzlies and buffalo, and for an edge against war parties, he traded his old Kentucky rifle for a plains rifle of .50 or .54 caliber. He learned to trap beaver, and hunted buffalo for the meat and hides. Later he guided emigrants, traded with the Indians he sometimes fought, and piloted freight wagons in long caravans over trails he helped blaze.

Correction: Ron Kil’s painting, All Trails Lead To Santa Fe, featured on the May 2020 Wagon Tracks cover, was funded by the SFTA Last Chance Store, which has prints available. See more at www.lastchancestore.org.
Contents

2  On the Cover: The Plainsman  
   by Ron Kil
4  Insights from your President
5  Joanne’s Jottings

Trail News
6-7  Rendezvous 2020, 2021 Symposium
8  Education, Jr. Wagon Master
9  In Memoriam: Ron Fox, Tony Juarez
10  Point of Rocks Closed to Public
11  SFTA/DAR Task Force Intro
21  Speakers Bureau
29  Membership Form
29-31  Chapter Reports
32  Town of Westport

12-13  New Mexico and the Cholera Epidemic of 1831-1833  
       by Robert J. Tórrez
14-21  Career and Legacy of Manuel Armijo  
       by Matthew Saionz
22-25  Montgomery Bell: Businessman of New Mexico  
       by Doyle Daves
26-28  Hell on Wheels: Ellsworth, Kansas  
       by Dr. Michael L. Olsen

Insights from your President by Larry D. Short, President of SFTA

We are surviving! With all of the cancellation of meetings and events due to the COVID 19 we still are moving forward with our goals at the Santa Fe Trail Association. Plans continue to expand in new areas as we approach 2021 and the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. Many hours of telephone and Zoom conferences have been held to ensure that next year will be a great one for not only our members but the nation.

Our committees take their tasks seriously to ensure that the entire organization is running smoothly as we work our way through this pandemic that has engulfed the world.

I want to point out the tireless efforts of our Publications Co-chairs Christine St. Vrain-Fischahs and Mark Brooks, and the fantastic job they have done with SFTA's social media campaigns. Christine developed the new santafetrail200.org web site, and Mark coordinated with Rod Podszus to ensure that our eblasts remain an effective tool for SFTA. Rod has worked tirelessly for the past several years developing eblasts as a major conveyor of meetings, news, and events to members of SFTA and many other interested parties across the nation. Thank you, Christine and Mark, on a job well done. Remember to “Share” the posts on Facebook with all of your friends. It is amazing what the outreach of a simple one-time post on Facebook can be. Deb Goodrich amazes me with the strong effort she puts forth to make our 200th commemoration a memorable year.

The new Santa Fe Trail crossing signs for Union County (Clayton), New Mexico, have been ordered by the National Park Service, and the 22 signs will be installed within the next month or so. Our thanks to the New Mexico Highway Department and the Commissioners of Union County in supporting this project by providing the posts, hardware, and the installation along their respective rights-of-way.

On a sad note, the Point of Rocks Historic District appears to no longer be available for public access due to the recent sale of the ranch. We are endeavoring to reach out to the new owner to determine if a satisfactory resolution can be agreed upon so that one of the most iconic sites along the entire length of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail can remain accessible to the citizens who visit the Trail daily.

We are endeavoring to hold our SFTA board meeting and workshop on September 25 and 26, 2020, at Larned, Kansas. While Rendezvous has been cancelled, we have important business to conduct at our board meeting, as required by our bylaws. The meeting will be held in the Haas Building, which will allow for appropriate social distancing for the safety and comfort of all our attendees. The hotel costs for our board members and chapter presidents will be paid by SFTA for two nights from the NPS funds that were originally allocated for the Dodge City meetings in April. Of course, anything can change between this report and the actual event in September, and we will make the proper adjustments. Stay tuned!

As always, I want to keep an open line of communications with our members and encourage you to contact me with any questions, comments, or suggestions. Remember this is YOUR SFTA.

Stay safe and healthy, and hope to see all of you in September. +

Thank you, Rod Podszus

Rod initiated the SFTA weekly eblasts and volunteered for over eight years to keep members and the public informed via this social media tool. The eblasts have an “open rate” of 44% vs. an industry average of 24%. Rod kept the news coming despite moving to a state far away from the Santa Fe Trail. Thank you for your willingness to dig deep to stay in touch and find all the news, and thank you for your love of the Trail.
Mark Brooks, SFTA Board member and Publications Committee co-chair, has taken over as the editor of the SFTA eblast. SFTA chapters and members should send information on events or items of interest related to the Santa Fe Trail to Mark at eblast@santafetrail.org.

A dedicated Facebook page for the year can be found by searching for “Santa Fe Trail 200th”. This page’s success will depend on how many people share the information and “like” the page.

Deb Goodrich, Chair of Santa Fe Trail 200th, has been in contact with Bob Boze Bell at True West Magazine about the Santa Fe Trail 200th and special articles. The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, will be having a special Santa Fe Trail exhibit in 2021. The specially appointed DAR 200th Task Force has exciting plans for the Santa Fe Trail 200th and those will be shared as they develop. The Task Force is being chaired by Patricia Traffas, SFTA Board Member. See her article on page 11.

The NPS National Trails Office, Santa Fe, has received funding for a fellowship specific to 2021 planning/coordination. Ashley Wheeler’s welcoming article is on the following pages. She is developing a “Core List of Facts” to aid people who may be trying to write articles/news announcements and to supply to people who inquire about the Santa Fe Trail 200th. Together, we are developing a contact list for all updates and announcements about the 200th.

Under the leadership of Christine St. Vrain, SFTA Board member and Publications Committee co-chair, the SFTA has launched a website specifically for the Santa Fe Trail 200th. Information is still being added, and it can be viewed at www.santafetrail200.org.

Although many meetings, committee work, and chapter events have been canceled or postponed due to COVID-19, the Santa Fe Trail Association remains very active and busier than ever with routine activities. People are visiting our Geocaches on the Santa Fe National Historic Trail GeoTour, committees are continuing work on their respective projects, and through phone calls, email, or Zoom meetings, planning is continuing for future meetings/events, including the Santa Fe Trail 200th.

The NPS National Trails Office, Santa Fe, has received funding for a fellowship specific to 2021 planning/coordination. Ashley Wheeler’s welcoming article is on the following pages. She is developing a “Core List of Facts” to aid people who may be trying to write articles/news announcements and to supply to people who inquire about the Santa Fe Trail 200th. Together, we are developing a contact list for all updates and announcements about the 200th.

Under the leadership of Christine St. Vrain, SFTA Board member and Publications Committee co-chair, the SFTA has launched a website specifically for the Santa Fe Trail 200th. Information is still being added, and it can be viewed at www.santafetrail200.org.
### Joanne, continued from page 5

stories of the American West. Deb will have an opportunity to hand out information and make contacts.

Outreach from Social Media remains very active, with correspondence daily through our various platforms. On the University of New Mexico Digital Repository we have 147 papers (issues of *Wagon Tracks*). In June 2020, there were 360 new downloads, bringing the total number of downloads of issues of *Wagon Tracks* to 6,615.

### A Taste of History update


"A Taste of History" began its eleventh season with the first episode airing on WHYY, Philadelphia's PBS station, on July 4, 2020. The Santa Fe Trail will be featured in episode five of season 11, which will air on PBS stations (you have to check with your local PBS station to determine if they carry it and when it airs) and will be available on Amazon Prime in September. Information about ordering Season 11 on DVD will be forthcoming, and will possibly be "on-demand" so if you are interested, let me know at manager@santafetrail.org. Seasons 1-10 are available on DVD for $29.95 and can be found at https://giftshop.citytavern.com/dvd/

Information on the episodes airing during season 11 can be found at www.atasteofhistory.org/season-eleven/

### Kansas Humanities Quick Grant Received for the “Santa Fe Trail Lives On!” Podcast

SFTA has been awarded a $1,000 Quick Grant from Kansas Humanities for the creation of a podcast titled "The Santa Fe Trail Lives On!" which will feature the many stories related to the history of the Santa Fe Trail. The project manager for this project is Deb Goodrich, Publicity/SFT 200th Chair, who will record stories and facts related to the historic Santa Fe Trail. These Quick Grants were made possible through funding from Humanities Kansas and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Initially, the podcast will be aired by our new media sponsor, Truckers Radio USA, a web radio station operating 24/7. The "Santa Fe Trail Lives On" podcast will air in 5-7 minute segments. You can listen to the station at https://usliveradio.com/truckers-radio-usa-115266/. Future plans could lead to longer segments, possibly on additional platforms. A link will be created between our SFTA website and the podcast.

### October 10 is the submission deadline for the November issue of *Wagon Tracks*.

### Rendezvous 2020 in Larned CANCELLED

The Rendezvous Planning Committee has announced that Rendezvous 2020 has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee consists of members from the three sponsoring organizations: the Santa Fe Trail Center, Fort Larned National Historic Site, and the Santa Fe Trail Association. “Youth on the Santa Fe Trail” was going to be a great topic. The current plan is to present this program at Rendezvous 2022. Hope to see you in two years!

### Awards and Hall of Fame Nominations

The SFTA Awards/Hall of Fame Committee announces that nominations for 2020 have been received, and the results will be announced at the Association’s fall Board of Directors meeting and via our media platforms. Formal award presentations and certificates of induction will be presented at the SFTA 2021 Symposium Awards Banquet.

### Deb Goodrich Offers Online Course on the Santa Fe Trail

Deb Goodrich will be teaching an online course focusing on the Santa Fe Trail for Osher Lifelong Learning Institute this fall.

Deb has taught classes for Osher through the University of Kansas for several years. Now that the classes are being taught online, these classes are available to a broader audience.

She will teach an "Overview of the Santa Fe Trail" on Tuesdays, October 20, 27, and November 3 from 1p.m. - 2:30 p.m. CDT. She will offer "The Plains Indian Wars" on Wednesdays, October 21, 28, and November 4 at the same time. November times are Central Standard Time.

Designed to inform and enlighten, there are no tests and no credit offered. Visit the website for fee schedule and more information: https://kupce.ku.edu/opher-home.
Fandango Planned for 2021 SFTA Symposium in La Junta, Colorado September 22-26

by Dorothy J. “Dotti” Russell

A fandango, as defined by Meriam-Webster, means “a lively Spanish or Spanish-American dance in triple time that is usually performed by a man and a woman to the accompaniment of guitar and castanets.” Originating in Spain in the early 1700s, by the 1800s in New Mexico fandangos had become known as events where people gathered to enjoy dancing.

Santa Fe Trail travelers and residents in Santa Fe and Taos, and throughout New Mexico, attended fandangos held in residences and business establishments. Josiah Gregg observed in his book, Commerce of the Prairies, first published in 1844, that fandangos “are very frequent; for nothing is more general, throughout the country, and with all classes than dancing. From the gravest priest to the buffoon—from the richest nabob to the beggar—from the governor to the ranchero—from the soberest matron to the flippant belle—from the grandest senora to the cocinera—all partake of this exhilarating amusement.”

In 1863 Joseph Pratt Allen wrote of the fandango in Santa Fe, “[t]hese entertainments take place nightly in some part of the town….They are usually open to everybody—a bright light on the roof or in front of the portalles [doorway] indicating that one is going on.” He tells that some places will also have billiards and gaming rooms along with a separate sala [room] where the “dancing takes place.” A typical room will have chairs along the sides with space open in the middle for dancing.

And dance they did to the music of “the fiddle and bandalin, or guitarra, accompanied in some villages by the tombe, or little Indian drum.” Led by a bastonero who served as master of ceremonies, the men and women waltzed, slow waltzed, and danced the cuna, or cradle dance.

Happily, at the 2021 Santa Fe Trails Association (SFTA) Symposium the chance to relive the fandango is not lost. At the Saturday night banquet, a fandango is planned that will bring back the tunes and dances from the 1800s. All too soon it will be time to head down the Trail, but hopefully with the music of the fandango still sounding in one’s memory.

To learn more about the SFTA 2021 Symposium, September 22-26 in La Junta, Colorado, commemorating 200 years of the Santa Fe Trail, go to www.2021sfts.com.

1 Meriam-Webster online dictionary at www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fandango
2 “Fandango,” from Spanish Arts website at www.spanish-art.org/spanish-dance-fandango.html
3 Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 170. Another term used for fandangos was baile (or ball), which Gregg noted was “generally applied to those of a higher grade.”
4 David K. Strate, ed., West by Southwest, Letters of Joseph Pratt Allyn, a Traveler Along the Santa Fe Trail, 1863 (Dodge City, Kansas: Kansas Heritage Center), 128-29.
5 Gregg, 170.

Ashley Wheeler Joins National Trails Office as American Conservation Experience Fellow

I am thrilled to join all of you for the 200th Anniversary of the Santa Fe Trail. I’m Ashley Wheeler and I recently joined the National Trails office as an American Conservation Experience Fellow. Part of my role is to help coordinate events between sites along the trail, create a shared calendar of events, develop bicentennial content, and assist with engaging younger, more diverse audiences at events. I know all of you have been working for years in preparation for the Bicentennial and I am grateful to join you.

As I grew up in the Texas Panhandle, the Santa Fe Trail was always nearby. I have fond memories of travelling to Trail sites on family vacations and stopping at historic markers to learn more about sites. During this fellowship, I hope to get others excited about taking their own trips to Trail sites.

I am passionate about historic places and their stories, which is why I earned master’s degrees in both architecture (Texas A&M University) and communication (Abilene Christian University). Furthering my love for old places, I am currently a Ph.D. candidate at Arizona State University. My dissertation research explores possibilities for critically engaged heritage practice through an analysis of the National Historic Preservation Act, the aesthetic discourse of the National Register of Historic Places, and the everyday practice of a local heritage organization.

You can reach me by email at Ashley_Wheeler@partner.nps.gov or phone 505-470-0015.
Education Committee Updates
Bibliography for SFTA Website

by Janet Armstead

The Education Committee got started with a bang. Shortly after the St. Louis Symposium, work commenced on the SFTA website education bibliographies. Under the education tab, the adult bibliography was edited, added to, and revised. The children's bibliography, which had been two lists, previously submitted but not used, were combined and revised. Both newly revamped lists were submitted and are now posted. This will be an ongoing project, so if you know of some good books which may not be on our list, please let me know.

Connected to the above activity, several changes were made to the website. Again, under the education tab, the adult bibliography is now labeled as “adult/educators.” The children's bibliography is labeled “children/youth.”

Chris Day, Marcia Fox, and I represented the SFTA at the Kansas State Capitol in Topeka, on January 30th, 2020, Kansas Trails Appreciation Day. The day was highlighted with a speech by Kansas Governor Laura Kelly thanking all of the trail volunteers for their hours of service to their various trails. My observations were this: SFTA was the only national trail represented. We were thanked by many of the other trail people for attending, and it became obvious that the smaller, shorter trails started thinking about how they could “hook-in” to our trail or collaborate with our trail. This was the start of something. See the Junior Wagon Master notes.

The committee has also moved that for the next budget session, Junior Wagon Master printing should be added to the budget. It is time that the organization support its own program, one that is getting our trail and SFTA out into the public, especially with families of trail enthusiasts.
In Search of Nestor Armijo

In the May issue of Wagon Tracks, the image cited as Don Nestor Armijo on page 10 in the article “Nestor Armijo: The Capitalist from Las Cruces” is in fact Don Luis Terrazas of Chihuahua. Thank you, Andrew Gustafson of the Johnson County Museum in Overland Park, Kansas, for pointing that out, based on your research regarding Terrazas. Luis Terrazas (1829-1923) was a prominent Mexican merchant and governor of Chihuahua, who had extensive commercial relations with Nestor Armijo. Images in the New Mexico State University archives, which provided the photo, are neither digitized nor labeled. Author Susan Calafate Boyle humbly apologizes for the error and any confusion it has caused.

The image at right is from Findagrave.com/memorial/29142149/ Nestor-Armijo, posted on that site by Beverly Singleton. Ms. Singleton writes, “I was doing some research on the Armijo family at the time but cannot positively tell you how I came across having the photo. It has been 11 years since posting the photo to the findagrave web site. I recall speaking with one of his distant relatives at one point and I’m thinking the photo was given to me by him. Unfortunately, I do not remember his name, only he was living in California with many of the other members of the Armijo family. I remember him telling me the “California Armijo relatives” only visit the grave site about once every 10 years or so.”

Can anyone help with the provenance of this findagrave photo, or provide a verified photo of Nestor Armijo?

In Memoriam

Ron E. Fox, 75, husband of SFTA Secretary Marcia Fox, of Wamego, Kansas, died unexpectedly Wednesday, April 22, 2020, in Manhattan, Kansas. They were married nearly 42 years. Online condolences may be written at campanellafuneral.com and memorials may be made to the Ron Fox Memorial Fund in care of Campanella-Evans Mortuary in Wamego.

Anthony “Tony” D. Juarez, 74, died unexpectedly on April 21, 2020, in Pueblo, Colorado. Tony’s great-great–great grandfather was Antonio Chavez, a merchant from Santa Fe, who was murdered on the Santa Fe Trail in the mid-1800s. Tony made many presentations about his ancestor. Online condolences may be written at www.montgomerysteward.com, and memorials may be made to the Pueblo County Historical Society.
After decades, the Point of Rocks National Historic District is not currently available to public access. Faye Gaines sold the property and has moved to Texas to live with her granddaughter, and SFTA has not been able to gain permission for access from the new owner. So, at this time the geocache has been disabled, and an alternate site is being considered. The Point of Rocks National Historic District is a rocky-sloped mesa with a spring at its south base. It affords visitors unspoiled, serene views of the Great Plains, Santa Fe Trail ruts, the grave of Isaac Allen who died in 1848, teepee rings, and 11 unmarked graves. It was near the Point of Rocks landmark that the party of Santa Fe merchant James White was attacked and killed in October 1849 by Jicarillo Apaches and Utes, and his wife, daughter, and servant were taken captive. Ann White and her daughter were subsequently killed by the Indians during an Army rescue attempt. The fate of the servant is unknown.

This Certified Site of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail was a popular campsite for various Indian buffalo-hunting parties and Santa Fe Trail caravans, as it offered a reliable source of cool spring water that was critical to travels through this arid land.

Along with the loss of the geocache site, the public currently does not have access to the wayside exhibit, the shelter house built for visitors, or the newly placed DAR marker set for the Santa Fe Trail 200th. The Point of Rocks is also featured prominently on interpretive markers throughout the region.

Last Geocache Log from Point of Rocks (for now), dated July 7, 2020

“[From] the Point of Rocks Ranch that contains the Historic landmark of the “Point of Rocks,” as well as 10 miles of the historic Santa Fe National Historic Trail and had been occupied by the Stevens/Gaines family since 1898. It saddens me today to move this geocache location due to the landowner ownership change. The conception of this geocache location was on April 04, 2007, in which I am immensely proud of being a part of the actual setting of the container to the coordinates, with John Schumacher and Gary Gaines. The idea of a cache at the Point of Rocks was the brainchild of John Schumacher. John was the Mapping Marker Committee Chair for the Santa Fe Trail Association and had the foresight of “what better means to get people out on the trail, than visiting trail locations with the use of Geocaching.” This first geocache location was the birth of the Santa Fe Trail Association Geo Tour. The Point of Rocks has an estimated 300+ people a year average of visitation to the site, be it through geocaching or history seekers wishing to learn about our National history. Thank you to all who have visited, appreciated, and respected the historic site. It means so much! The geocache “Point of Rocks” has not come to an end, but will continue at a new location near the actual historic site. I should have it relocated in 4-5 days with updated coordinates. Again, thank you to all who have visited.

Trace Vanguard (geocache user, a.k.a. Jeff Trotman) – July 7, 2020’

For now, the bell is silent at the Point of Rocks Ranch, and the Santa Fe National Historic Trail geocache placed at this site has been disabled. The entry on geocaching.com concerning the disablement reads: “Sadly, the Point of Rocks Ranch has been sold, and currently SFTA does not have permission from the new landowner for access to the Point of Rocks National Historic District and/or the geocache location. For now, this cache has been disabled, and we are looking for a new location to place this site. We are reaching out to the new landowner, and, if permission is not granted for the location at the Point of Rocks National Historic District, an alternative site, near the Point will be chosen. For anyone traveling and needing the code word, just e-mail us and we will supply it. Let’s hope the new landowner will be as gracious and hospitable as the previous owner, Faye Gaines, who allowed public visitation for decades.”

Signed, the Santa Fe Trail Association Geocache Task Force, July 8, 2020.
Meet the Members of the SFTA/DAR Task Force

by Pat Traffas

Members of the SFTA/DAR task force are Anna Mallinson, Missouri; Charlotte Chesrow, Oklahoma; Merideth Hmura, New Mexico; Lynne Evans, Colorado; and Pat Traffas, Kansas.

Anne Mallinson is a semi-retired educator, an independent historian, and a charter member of SFTA. She has served on the board of several historical organizations and currently is president of the Missouri River Outfitters Chapter (SFTA). She is honorary regent of the Independence Pioneers Chapter of the DAR. In her free time she writes, presents programs to civic groups, and plays music with friends.

Charlotte Chesrow joined DAR in 2008 and was elected Regent of the Samuel King Chapter in Edmond, Oklahoma, in 2020. She was introduced to the Santa Fe Trail when she met the NMSODAR State Vice Regent, who described activities to honor the Santa Fe Trail and the marker being placed at Point of Rocks Ranch in New Mexico. Charlotte was named Commemorative Events chair for SFT and has attended SFTA events recently. “It is an honor to serve on the SFTA/DAR Task Force and I am looking forward to commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Santa Fe Trail.”

Lynne Evans is currently serving as the president of the Aurora Historical Society, as a Historic Preservation commissioner for the city of Aurora, Colorado, and sits on the board for the Aurora Museum Foundation. She loves DAR, and is a member of Toll Gate Creek Chapter. After serving as chapter regent, Lynne was the state VIS committee chair. She is currently serving as the Colorado State Historian, chair of the State Records Management Committee, and the National VIS vice chair webmaster. After teaching high school English for Aurora Public Schools for 36 years, she retired. Lynne and her husband Bill now spend time pursuing activities they enjoy.

Merideth Hmura has been a member of DAR for over 30 years. She was Regent of Zia Chapter twice and is currently Vice Regent. The Zia Chapter was about to close due to aging membership when she became active. With the help of many people in New Mexico, the chapter changed from probable closure into a very lively, active group of ladies. She is very proud to be a part of Zia Chapter. “The Santa Fe Trail is one of those pieces of history that I have always known about, but not known its deep history, especially in regard to DAR. Several years ago I discovered that my third great-grandfather (on my mother’s side) was a wagonmaster on the Santa Fe Trail. I have not done very much research, but he is mentioned in several books and listed in the 1870 Federal Census as a wagonmaster. When the New Mexico State DAR formed a Bicentennial Committee, I jumped at the chance to be a committee member. Our committee has accomplished many things in our short existence and have many more projects planned. Our best effort was to add a DAR marker to the Cimarron Cutoff. None had ever been placed on that important piece of the trail. I am looking forward to working with the Santa Fe Trail liaison committee, as it is a logical means to give both DAR and SFTA growth and exposure opportunities.”

Pat Traffas is a licensed Funeral Director and Embalmer in Kansas and Missouri. She serves on the Board of Directors for SFTA, chairs the SFTA/DAR Task Force, and serves as co-chair of the Scholarly Research Committee for SFTA. She and a son, Levi, are members of the SFTA MRO Chapter. Pat is an Honorary State Regent Kansas Society DAR and Past Vice President General NSDAR and has been a member of DAR since 1975. She is immediate Past President of the Oregon-California Trails Association and is Vice President of the Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association and a Board Member of the Missouri-Kansas River Bend Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.
New Mexico and the Cholera Epidemic of 1831 - 1833

By Robert J. Tórrez

The James N. Leiker article on the 1867 cholera epidemic along the Kansas frontier published in the May 2020 issue of Wagon Tracks prompted me to recall a number of references found in the Mexican Archives of New Mexico regarding the cholera epidemic of 1831-1833 that ravaged Mexico and Texas, and which may have made its way into New Mexico via commercial caravans along the Santa Fe Trail.

On 9 August 1833, Juan Felipe Ortiz, president of Santa Fe’s ayuntamiento (municipal council) reported to New Mexico Governor Francisco Sarracino of a meeting held to discuss whether there was a need to quarantine a caravan of North American merchants under command of Carlos (Charles) Bent in order to prevent or reduce the danger of contagion from cholera. Ortiz indicated the meeting could not achieve a consensus of what should be done, noting that some felt the caravan should be held for the length of time required by law (the law referred to is not stated) while others felt it should be delayed only a few days or not at all. Ortiz asked Sarracino for his opinion on the matter but the governor’s response has not come to light.

Although we do not know of Governor Sarracino’s response, it is likely the caravan was not kept under quarantine very long, if at all. A week before Ortiz reported the meeting, Charles Bent had communicated with comandante militar (commander of the presidio in Santa Fe) José M. Ronquillo reassuring Ronquillo that although some of the goods in his wagons may have come from a ship that had transported some sick soldiers from New Orleans, no one on the caravan arriving in New Mexico was ill with cholera. The reason Bent provided this reassurance to Ronquillo is not clear. No doubt Bent would have been anxious to avoid delays in getting his goods to market, although it is possible that since New Mexico had been well informed of the cholera epidemic, Ronquillo, personally or through orders issued to the commanding officer of the escort that had been sent to meet the caravan, broached the issue with Bent.

The advance of cholera along the New Mexican frontier had its origins as early as the fall of 1831, when a number of communications from authorities in Mexico warned that cholera had been reported aboard certain ships recently arrived from Hamburg and the Baltic. Mexican authorities had already quarantined ships arriving from the said ports and cautioned local officials to begin taking appropriate precautions. New Mexican officials noted receipt of these warnings in December of that year and advised their superiors in Mexico they were prepared to report any cases of cholera that showed up in New Mexico.

While there is no direct evidence cholera in epidemic proportions reached New Mexico at this time, it is clear that the contagion ravaged through parts of Mexico and spread northward through Coahuila and Texas by 1832, where according to a report by Stephen F. Austin, tens of thousands were infected and at least 18,000 Texans died.

There is no indication in any subsequent correspondence with officials in Mexico that cholera spread into New Mexico at this time. In a 28 February 1833 letter, Governor Santiago Abreu responded to officials in Mexico, confirming he had received notices of cholera in Chiapas and reported New Mexico was aware of the need to maintain standards of personal and domestic cleanliness and had in place sanitation standards for hospitals, jails, and public offices. In the same letter Abreu noted that he had suggested the alcalde should investigate the use of “la planta o medalla de cobre” that reportedly was effective in preventing the contagion.

It may be of special interest to students of nineteenth-century medical practices that correspondence of the period makes it clear officials remained vigilant for effective antidotes or medicines that would prevent or ameliorate cholera’s deadly ravages. New Mexico’s Territorial Diputación (legislative council), for example, developed a special interest in an herb they identified as “guaco” which was said to be very effective in the treatment or prevention of cholera. They asked the governor to send a sample of the herb to Mexico with delegate-elect Antonio Barriero when he traveled south to assume his seat in the Mexican congress so it could be determined if in fact it was as effective as rumored. In the same correspondence Governor Abreu indicated he had personally been using guaco as a remedy and would see that Barriero received a sample to take to Mexico. Later that year Governor Francisco Sarracino responded to the governor of the State of Chihuahua who had asked Sarracino if he had any knowledge of the herb “mariola” and whether it was used in New Mexico as a treatment or remedy during the cholera epidemic. Sarracino indicated he was not aware of its use locally and asked his counterpart in Chihuahua to send some samples with the next mail pouch so he could determine if the plant was found in New Mexico.

None of these communications mentions that New Mexico had been affected by the cholera epidemic that devastated Mexico and Texas. If New Mexico was in fact spared, it may have been due to the early warnings the territory had received and the various precautions local officials referred to in these earlier communications. The nature of these precautions may be reflected in the January 1833 Bando de Policía y buen gobierno prepared by the
Licenciado Antonio Barriero for the ayuntamiento of Santa Fe. These municipal regulations consist of several sections, including those regarding health and sanitation (Salubridad). These regulations stress the need to drain standing or stagnant pools of water, prohibit the fouling of rivers and irrigation ditches, require regular cleaning of public streets and plazas, proper disposal and burning of trash and rubbish, proper and prompt burial of cadavers, and the cleanliness and care of meats, grains, and flour prepared for human consumption.

The final section of health regulations requires the ayuntamiento to establish a junta de sanidad (health or sanitation bureau/committee), and in a late 1833 letter to his superiors in Mexico, Governor Francisco Sarracino acknowledged receipt of information regarding the cholera epidemic and indicated he had established juntas de sanidad as required by law in order to restrain the extranjeros (foreigners) who had a considerable impact on the spread of the disease. It may have been one of these sanitation committees that debated whether to quarantine Charles Bent’s caravan that summer of 1833, and although the extant Mexican-era archives have not revealed the quarantine of other caravans for this period, it is possible others were quarantined and kept New Mexico safe from the cholera epidemic of 1833.

End Notes

article Copyright 2020

1. Calendar of the Microfilm Edition of the Mexican Archives of New Mexico, 1821–1846 (Santa Fe: State of New Mexico Records Center, 1970). This underutilized documentary resource consists of 42 rolls of microfilm of the original Mexican-era records held at the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Hereafter cited as MANM.

2. Technically the position is usually referred to as gefe politico, the political chief or head of the civil government, but the term governor is utilized here for convenience. Military command of the troops that garrisoned the presidio in Santa Fe was a separate position held by an individual usually identified as the comandante general, comandante principal, or comandante militar. A few individuals, such as Manuel Armijo, held both positions simultaneously.

3. Juan Felipe Ortiz to Gefe Politico, 9 August 1833. MANM: 1833: Governor's Papers, Communications Received from Within New Mexico, microfilm roll 16, frame 311.

4. Carlos Bent to José M. Ronquillo, 1 August 1833. MANM: 1833 Comandante Principal Papers, Communications received by Comandante Principal from within New Mexico, microfilm roll 16, frame 487.

5. Comisario Subalterino (New Mexico) to Director General de Rentas (Mexico), 31 December 1831. MANM: 1831 Hacienda Records, Comisaría Substituta, letterbook, No. 20, Microfilm roll 14, frame 73.


7. Santiago Abreu to Ministerio de Relaciones Interiores y Exteriores, 28 February 1833. MANM: 1832 Governor’s Papers, Communications Sent by Governor, Governor’s Letterbook, No. 5 & 6, microfilm roll 14, frames 661, 662.

8. 5 March 1833 session, Journal of the Diputación Provincial, MANM: Legislative Records, 1828–1837, Microfilm roll 42, frame 551. The Diccionario de Mejicanismos (Francisco J. Santamaría, Editorial Porrua, Mexico 2005) indicates guaco is a plant that is “abundant in all of tropical America.” Its leaves are considered effective against the bites of poisonous animals, rheumatism, and cholera.

9. Gefe Politico (Sarracino) to Governor of the State of Chihuahua, 29 October 1833. MANM: 1833 Governor’s Papers, Miscellaneous communications sent by Governor to officials in Chihuahua, Microfilm roll 16, frame 411. The Diccionario de Mejicanismos identifies mariola as a generic name for a species of guayule, a plant that produces a resin but makes no mention of its medicinal use.

10. “Bando de policia y buen gobierno…,” 2 January 1833. MANM: 1833 Legislative, Ayuntamiento proceedings, jurisdiction of Santa Fe… Microfilm roll 16, frame 584. A translation of these regulations is found in Marc Simmons, “Antonio Barriero’s 1833 Proclamation on Santa Fe City Government,” El Palacio 76:3 (June 1970), pp. 24–30. Barriero had been appointed the previous year to the position of asesor (consulting or legal advisor) but was soon thereafter elected to and was serving as the Alcalde de Primer Voto (first constitutional alcalde) for Santa Fe’s municipal council when he prepared the Bando. He would later serve as New Mexico’s delegate to the Mexican Congress [1 March 1833 session, Journal of the Diputación Territorial, 1828–1837. MANM: Legislative Records, Microfilm roll 42, frame 551; Lic. Antonio Barriero to Gefe Politico (Abreu), 5 March 1833. MANM: 1833 Legislative, Diputación Territorial, miscellaneous communications received, microfilm roll 16, frame 543.] and is the author of Ojeda Sobre Nuevo-México, published in 1832 while he served as asesor for New Mexico. See H. Bailey Carroll & J. Villasana Haggard, Three New Mexico Chronicles (Albuquerque: The Quivira Society, 1942).

11. Gefe Politico (Sarracino) to Secretaría de Estado, 14 November 1833. MANM: 1833 Governor’s Papers, Communications sent by Governor. Governor’s Letterbook, communications sent to Secretaría de Estado, Microfilm roll 16, frame 377.

Robert J. Tórrez was born and raised in northern New Mexico. He received his undergraduate and graduate education at New Mexico Highlands and UNM and served as the New Mexico State Historian from 1987 until his retirement in December 2000. In addition to the more than one hundred columns he has published under his “Voices From the Past” byline in Round the Roundhouse, he is the author of dozens of scholarly and popular articles in regional and national publications and contributed to nearly two dozen anthologies, including a recent New Mexico history textbook for use in New Mexico schools. He has a special interest in the judicial systems of Spanish, Mexican, and Territorial-era New Mexico, Spanish-Indian relations, and land grant issues. He is an award-winning author of UFOs Over Galisteo; New Mexico in 1876–1877: A Newspaperman’s View; Rio Arriba, A New Mexico County (with co-author Robert Trapp); Myth of the Hanging Tree: Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico; and Voices From the Past: The Comanché Raid of 1776 and Other Tales of New Mexico History.
Governor, Trader, and Scapegoat for the American Conquest: The Career and Legacy of Manuel Armijo

By Matthew Saionz

New Mexico’s 25-year tenure as part of the young Mexican republic was tumultuous, to say the least. Rapid political turnover in Mexico City and threatening Indian groups like the Comanches surely left their mark on New Mexico. But the most important development was the establishment and growth of the overland commerce over the Santa Fe Trail between northern Mexico and the western United States, resulting in no less than the transformation of New Mexico, for better or for worse.

Easily the most well-known nuevo-mexicano during this period was Manuel Armijo. And for good reason. Armijo was born into a prominent family of the Albuquerque area and ascended the ranks of the political and economic elite. Thanks to the opportunities afforded by the Santa Fe trade, he emerged as a leading businessman, highlighted by his sizeable herds of sheep. He also served in several public roles, from alcalde of Albuquerque to treasurer. Most notably, he thrice served as governor of New Mexico, with his second and third terms comprising roughly eight of the final ten years of Mexican New Mexico. In such roles, he found himself at the center of the era’s most iconic and tense moments, none more so than the American invasion in 1846.

More than any other individual, Armijo was charged with navigating the often-conflicting interests of nuevomexicanos, Mexico City officials, and Americans—an unenviable, if not impossible, task. Many Americans, particularly after the ill-fated Texan Santa Fe Expedition of 1841, tended to cast Armijo as tyrannical, cunning, and cruel, among other things. For instance, Josiah Gregg, no doubt an acquaintance of Armijo, dubbed the governor “Santa-Anna-like” as he alleged that Armijo essentially set off the 1837 rebellion so he could emerge from the chaos in control of New Mexico. In his account of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, George Wilkins Kendall described Armijo as a “second Robespierre, only requiring a field of equal extent to make him equally an assassin, a murderer, and blood-thirsty tyrant. His power, I knew, had been purchased by blood—I saw that it was sustained by blood.” The accounts of Kendall and Gregg were published in 1844 and have been reprinted a number of times. Their books, along with reports of other American and European traders or adventurers, helped to construct a narrative of a villainous Armijo that was well consumed by American audiences by the outbreak of war in 1846. Americans were probably more familiar with Armijo than any other Mexican individual except Santa Anna himself.

This campaign against Armijo was so successful that many historians have uncritically absorbed it into their interpretations. The great western historian Ray Allan Billington, for one, outlined Armijo as a “mountainous man whose blue frock coat and flaming red sash compensated for a total lack of either principles or courage.” Lansing Bloom, in his classic history of Mexican New Mexico, insisted that Armijo’s decision to retreat in August 1846 had unfortunately earned him the “infamy accorded to a coward.”

Even Daniel Walker Howe, in his sweeping study of the cultural and economic changes of the antebellum United States (and therefore generally unconcerned with the western borderlands), mentioned that Armijo was accused of taking a bribe and, moreover, that the governor “did seem flush with money.” The trope of Armijo’s evil doings runs deep, and has been rolled into the conventional narratives of nineteenth-century U.S. expansion.

Some scholars have been much more lenient in attempting to assess the legacy of Armijo. Yet, they often pair otherwise interesting assessments with caveats about an alleged character flaw that counterweight any good stuff. Take for example Daniel Tyler, who struggled to grapple with Armijo in several of his works. After generally concluding that Armijo had a successful career, he felt compelled to justify his decision to flee New Mexico:

Armijo was no paragon of bravery, virtue, or honesty. But he never pretended to be so noble. His instinct for self-preservation was strong and uncompromising, and when the scenario called for retreat, he moved with celerity. He recognized the unfavorable odds at Santa Fe in 1846, and he retired. If he took some American coin with him, so be it. Undoubtedly he would have withdrawn anyway. Having done everything possible to
rally his meager force, the only feasible course of action was to follow his business interests south. One can only wonder if he deserves the censure which history has heaped upon him.6

Similarly, Andrés Reséndez smartly asserted that, whatever Armijo’s motives might have been in August 1846, it is important to understand that there was broad nuevomexicano support for resistance. Still, despite his clear-headed analysis, he couldn’t help but suggest, “Armijo’s considerable pecuniary interests undoubtedly played a part in his decision” to withdraw.7 Simply put, historians continue to fall into the trap of reducing their examinations of Armijo’s decisions—a few of them certainly perplexing—to whether he was a good guy or a bad guy. When we feel obligated to mention that he might have possibly been corrupted, we guarantee the perseverance of the “traitor” narrative.

With that said, I propose moving into more fruitful territory and toward an understanding of what lay behind particular moments or actions. What drove Americans like Gregg, Kendall, and others to besmirch Armijo’s reputation? Why did Armijo assert his authority with Americans in certain situations and not in others? If we can, for now, assume that Armijo didn’t take a bribe from Kearny or American agents in August 1846, then what motivated him to so suddenly ride south? More generally, how did Armijo, as a governor, trader, and río, work to promote peace and prosperity in a New Mexico jolted by U.S. commercial expansion? In my view, if we can begin to comprehend the many critical roles that New Mexican officials like Armijo had to fill during this turbulent period, some of their contradictory actions make a bit more sense. Armijo, having served during the most crucial years, found himself pulled in different directions by various interest groups.

In May 1827, Armijo received civil command of New Mexico from the outgoing governor, the decorated Col. Antonio Narbona.8 Having served as an officer in the militia and alcalde of Albuquerque, Armijo had the credentials for such a role. However, what Armijo was not prepared for were the series of pending disputes with American traders and trappers. During Narbona’s administration, Mexico City had finally begun to take steps to regulate commerce with the United States. Following a ban on issuing trapping licenses to foreigners in the summer of 1824, the federal government established the customs house and treasury of New Mexico in 1825 to monitor the entry and exit of goods, limiting those of “illicit commerce.”9 National authorities required each trader, whether Mexican or American, to obtain a guía, or customs passport, to conduct his business within Mexico, while all foreign merchants also needed to procure passports, validated cargo manifests, and even safe-conduct passes. New Mexican administrators also received more detailed instructions on the taxes they should levy on goods, which included various duties and additional levies on gunpowder, tobacco, and exported gold and silver, with rates changing from year to year, sometimes drastically.10

Into this new bureaucratic world stepped Manuel Armijo, and immediately a contraband case of his own materialized. Ewing Young and his party had returned from trapping on the Gila River in early May 1827 and, perhaps savvy to the recent crackdowns, cached some furs at the house of a local in Peña Blanca. There soldiers confronted Young and his friends, resulting in the death of don Luis María Cabeza de Baca.11 Armijo, just days after assuming office, issued a circular for Young’s arrest and, meanwhile, American Elisha Stanley began to badger treasurer Agustín Durán to provide the exact law that restricted the trapping of foreigners.12 By May 31, Armijo had evidently located the edict from the secretary of state, but Stanley’s request indicates broader confusion among trappers.13 Much of Armijo’s difficulties stemmed from the fact that conducting business in New Mexico had already become a largely illicit enterprise. This surge in contraband cases in the late 1820s was tied to pressure from federal officials to make sure foreigners paid their due and conducted themselves within the bounds of the law (which was constantly changing). That is not to say Armijo’s first term marked the end of contraband activity. If anything, it marked the height of tensions, which thereafter tapered off considerably as neither officials nor traders found such a climate conducive to business.

While the standoff with Young emerged as the highlight of his first administration, Armijo showed his flair for the dramatic elsewhere. Perhaps the most humorous moment involved a petty argument with Governor Narbona. After receiving his appointment, Armijo aimed to move into the Governor’s Palace. However, Narbona refused to vacate the building, citing that he would not be departing for his new position in Sonora for two months. Armijo several times solicited assistance from the treasurer without success in his effort to evict Narbona, leaving Armijo essentially homeless for a period while he served.14 He, moreover, found himself in the middle of a strange quarrel with Juan Bautista Vigil, the alcalde and member of the Santa Fe ayuntamiento.15 For reasons unclear, in June 1827 Vigil—a disgraced former treasurer and magnet for trouble—questioned the legitimacy of the territorial legislature and the integrity of several of its members for being related. Things became so heated that at one session Vigil had to be forcibly removed for talking out of line. Armijo steadfastly defended the body, while Vigil continued his campaign into the next year, when he filed a formal complaint with federal authorities over the election of a member to the legislature that...
fall. Whatever the factors, Armijo resigned from his position in March 1829. His resignation is remarkable, if only because governors typically had to be ordered to relinquish their authority. Armijo eagerly left that post for literally greener pastures around Albuquerque.

Over the next seven years, he again served as alcalde and even had a brief stint as acting treasurer in 1836. But Armijo, like many other nuevo-mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.

Armijo's second and longest term as governor was thrust upon him unexpectedly late in the summer of 1837. On August 7, Governor Albino Pérez marched north to Santa Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los imprudentes" who had announced Cruz de la Cañada to deal with "los Mexicanos, turned his attention to the trade with the United States. With other members of his family, he became active in re-exporting imported American manufactured goods into the interior of Mexico. Most importantly, he became a major player in the sheep industry with flocks only rivaled by the holdings of the Chávez or Otero families. In August 1835, he sent 4,400 sheep to Mexico City. Interestingly, in August 1837—also unrest swept across New Mexico—he dispatched another 4,800 sheep to the capital.

The changing commercial landscape provided Armijo ample business opportunities and over this interlude period he cemented himself among New Mexico's elite.
Armijo that the “treacherous North Americans” surely had “promoted the revolution in that department.”

More extreme still, Mexico City believed that American insurrectionists stood poised to undermine its authority throughout the northern borderlands. One June 13, President Anastasio Bustamante issued a decree mustering an army of 60,000 men to “defend the Nation against all foreign aggression.” But Armijo knew that American merchants had been vital to the provisioning of his army during the rebellion. Fearing for their lives, many Americans had fled to Missouri or southward to Paso del Norte when the rebellion began. Others, with too much invested in their stores, decided to ride it out. Even after they had contributed barrels of gunpowder and several hundred pesos to his army, Armijo politely requested that the foreign merchants continue to “subscribe voluntarily” for the “benefit of this Department.”

After 1837, therefore, the specter of Texas had cast a shadow over New Mexico. Yet trade resumed as usual in 1838, although an economic downturn appears to have slowed traffic. Meanwhile, Mirabeau Lamar had become president of the Republic of Texas in December 1838 and suddenly the visions of a great Texan conspiracy held by officials in Mexico City gained some legitimacy. Lamar was an ardent nationalist, insistent on finding a way to maintain Texan independence and enforce its territorial claims to the Río Grande, which meant roughly half of New Mexico. In his inaugural address, he further asserted that Texas stretched “from the Sabine to the Pacific and away to the South West as far as the obstinacy of the enemy may render it necessary for the sword to make the boundary.” Believing that Texas was likewise situated perfectly to facilitate the “commercial intercourse of nations,” Lamar sent an expedition of 320 men in June 1841 to seize Santa Fe and “secure to our citizens all of the benefits arising from the valuable trade with them.” The scheme was nothing short of a disaster. Disoriented and undersupplied, the party was easily captured in September by Armijo’s army. Rumors swirled that Americans in New Mexico colluded with the Texan invaders. American traders in New Mexico wrote complaining of the destruction of their property and, in particular, the sternness of Armijo: “after having vanquished these Texans he would return with his troops and destroy all us foreigners.” But praises and honors, including the Cross of Honor, were heaped upon Armijo for decisively fending off an invasion. Federal officials reiterated their support of him and, for a time, he was a hero.

The Texan Santa Fe Expedition, though thwarted, drove a wedge between the New Mexican officials and the American merchant community. Foreigners increasingly protested that customs officers were scandalous and Armijo was tyrannical while federal authorities suspected the swelling American populations in Taos, Bado, and Bent’s Fort. It is in the immediate aftermath of the expedition that we can trace the birth of the slander campaign against Armijo, focused primarily on the maltreatment that the Texan prisoners endured on their march toward Mexico City. The aforementioned Kendall depicted Armijo and his military officers as evil incarnate. According to Kendall, Armijo’s friends were:

toadies and sycophants whom he always has about him, and for whose adherence he pays a good round sum. He well knew that nine tenths of his people inly hated and despised him, and were also inclined for an immediate annexation to Texas; he knew, too, that they feared him, and that nothing but their extreme ignorance and timidity had prevented them, years before, from throwing off his yoke.

The character assassination not only hurt his reputation in the United States, but also actually had the effect of projecting his alleged malice backwards in time. Thus, the 1837 revolt was his brainchild and the earlier trouble with Young and trappers was rooted in his desire for absolute power. In such ways that could only befall him, Manuel Armijo’s clear-headed action and success in 1841 somehow managed to hurt him in the long view of history.

Armijo’s moment on top of the world was short-lived. In 1842, Santa Anna led a moderately successful campaign into Texas and, in response, Sam Houston hired Charles Warfield and Jacob Snively to organize mounted parties and harass Mexican caravans along the Santa Fe Trail. In April 1843, a company of the Warfield party murdered Antonio José Chávez, a well-respected New Mexican trader, in present-day Kansas and plundered his wagons. The Texan raiders continued along the trail and attacked the eastern settlements of New Mexico throughout the summer before finally disbanding. The citizens and governments of Mexico and the United States alike were outraged. Those responsible for the murder were tried in Missouri and hanged.

Mexico City closed the customs houses in New Mexico and Chihuahua and demanded further action by the United States. José María Bocanegra, the secretary of foreign affairs, angrily ranted to the Mexican envoy in Washington, arguing that merely disarming the marauders and sending them home to Texas was equal to “cohabitation with the enemies of Mexico.”

For his part, Armijo had suffered a couple of rather embarrassing defeats at the hands of the Texan raiders. Thanks to poor reconnaissance, he had not gone out to pursue the Texans because he had feared he was outnumbered. Americans, in particular, were quick to point out his failures, attributing them to sheer cowardice. Compounding these problems were a handful of enormous land grants he had awarded naturalized...
merchandise. Americans in New Mexico rejoiced upon hearing the news. The U.S. consul in New Mexico appreciatively told Secretary of State James Buchanan that these drawbacks will "largely increase the amount of our exports to that country and consequent introduction of the precious metals through Santa Fe and this place into the United States."

Armijo’s return thus actually symbolized what looked to be an era of good relations and renewed prosperity in New Mexico. Mexico City knew it had someone familiar and competent, nuevomexicanos had a venerated native son, and Americans at the very least knew they had someone better than Martínez. But, elsewhere, diplomacy between Mexico and the United States was quickly deteriorating.

When news reached New Mexico that the United States had annexed Texas, Armijo issued a stirring proclamation to his department in January 1846. He indicated that the "sensation" of troubles with the United States might require the citizens to do their duty for Mexico but that, in the meantime, productive and amicable relations should prevail. By and large, they did. But Armijo did have his share of problems to deal with. In the spring of 1846, Utes—who had abandoned peace following the incident with Martínez—and Navajos had intensified their raiding of western and northern communities. Reports of depredations came pouring into Santa Fe. The greatest volume of complaints came from an unofficial spokesperson of U.S. citizens in New Mexico, Charles Bent, who expected protection from the governor. Armijo likewise found himself embroiled in an ongoing dispute between Americans and well-known Padre Antonio José Martínez. Martínez had been waging a war for the hearts and minds of the nuevomexicanos of Taos since foreigners began to gather there in the 1820s. He singled out Bent, whom he took to represent the activities of Americans operating beyond the purview of officials at places like Bent’s Fort. Martínez charged that the Bents and their allies knowingly traded arms to neighboring Utes, Navajos, and Apaches and then encouraged them to raid New Mexican settlements.

Charles Bent, referring to Padre Martínez simply as the Priest, frequently ranted about Martínez’s accusations to Manuel Álvarez, who then forwarded the grievances onto his superiors. On one such occasion, Álvarez informed James Buchanan of a sermon Martínez had given to the people of Taos in which he “bitterly denounced the annexation of any part of this country to the U.S.” simply to encourage animosity toward Americans.

The governor needed to appease both parties and thus proposed a unifying solution: a campaign against Utes. While he awaited the go-ahead from Mexico City, he had to figure out how to fund this war, as federal resources were unreliable. A glimmer of relief came in March 1846, when a substantial change in the structure of military command freed Armijo of Chihuahua’s oversight and gave him total discretion in military actions and expenditures. On July 20, the Minister of War authorized his request for the Ute campaign. Chances are Armijo was swiftly riding to Chihuahua by the time the letter reached New Mexico.

The events of the summer of 1846 effectively negated whatever success Armijo had achieved prior. Excitement for the arrival of what might have been the largest trading caravan in the history of the Santa Fe trade quickly soured when the war between Mexico and the United States began. Then came the reports that a large American force was en route to seize the department. Armijo sprang into action. Given all the speculation, it’s worth briefly summarizing what we do know about the lead-up to August 16. We know that Armijo was expecting Mexican regulars to arrive from Chihuahua to deal with Indian troubles and invading Americans. We know that in June he issued a proclamation to state his intention to resist an invading force. We know in early July he called the loyal citizens of New Mexico to arms. We also know that Armijo convened a series of meetings involving both civil and military authorities during the weeks before August 16, and we can gather that a decent number were ready to fight (we don’t know the exact figures). We can further ascertain that Armijo attempted to settle debts in the United States (often pointed to as a bribe) and drew up a will. We know that Capt. Philip St. George Cooke arrived in Santa Fe on August 12 as Kearny’s emissary, and that, over the next couple of days, Armijo met with Cooke, Manuel Álvarez, Henry Connelly, and James Magoffin. We know that Armijo then sent his forces to Apache Canyon on August 14 to take defensive positions.
and two days later he and members of the department government joined them there. Armijo held one more meeting with his officers and, after apparently hearing several voices in favor of fighting, ordered his army to go home. At some point on the 16—it is not clear if this was before or after the order to withdraw—he wrote Kearny explaining that he simply could not relinquish New Mexico east of the Rio Grande to Texas. We know that Armijo then resigned his command for a third time, rode south into Chihuahua with a squadron of dragoons, and Kearny’s army marched into Santa Fe unopposed on August 18. Finally, thanks to Marc Simmonds, we know that while near Paso del Norte days later Armijo received an offer from Kearny to return to Santa Fe and govern under the United States. He flatly refused.  

In contrast, we do not know what went through Armijo’s head on August 16 when he made an abrupt about face. We do not know whether Armijo moved his forces east simply with the hopes of receiving a large caravan that held goods he was expecting. We absolutely do not know whether he took a bribe from Connelly, Magoffin, or Cooke. Nor are we any surer that Armijo’s retreat to the interior was some sort of indication of guilt for taking a bribe. And—my personal favorite—we do not know if he simply decided to cut his losses and pursue business interests in Mexico. What is really curious is that Manuel Armijo’s legacy has largely been constructed from what we do not know or, worse, know not to be the case.

So, what, if anything, can we make of him? On the one hand, he was entirely emblematic of a New Mexico transformed by the emergence of the overland trade with the United States. While many nuevomexicanos struggled in the new commercial landscape, Armijo’s career ascended after 1821 and, through business and administrative positions, he solidified his rice status. On the other hand, he, more than any other individual, had to figure out a way to pilot New Mexico through the sea of change. As we have seen, the job of governor often required one to wear an impressive array of hats: advocate for nuevomexicanos, defender of Mexican national interests, friend of a noisy population of foreigners, and guardian against powerful Indians. We have also seen that these roles rarely combined into a synchronized agenda. In that sense, Armijo performed rather well, particularly during his first two terms when tense moments or even violence came to the fore. Even as Americans grew frustrated with officials and regulations after 1841, Mexico City appeared to become more comfortable with the situation in New Mexico—a lone beacon of good relations between Mexico and the United States. Strangely, it was during Armijo’s third and decisive term as governor when the goals and demands of the various interests groups coincided around security from Utes and Navajos. Armijo knew this and aggressively pursued a resolution.

When trying to make some sense of Armijo’s peculiar actions on August 16, it is useful to remember how his previous two terms had ended. His behavior was patterned and actually not so strange in the long view. Under duress and expecting the worse from his superiors, he withdrew from the public eye, turned over duties to an acting governor, and put in for his resignation. Federal officials were unlikely to remove him in either case, especially in 1843. Yet he stepped aside anyway. Perhaps he was ashamed that he couldn’t keep his administrators in order in 1829, or concerned that he had dishonored New Mexico and the nation with his defeats to Texan raiders in 1843. On August 16, maybe Armijo simply couldn’t bear the idea of losing in battle to the United States, or the embarrassment he’d experience in his homeland had he returned to Santa Fe with his forces. Whatever the case, he decided he’d rather face charges of high treason in Mexico than either come up short in pitched battle or surrender New Mexico. Either outcome would be a failure.

Armijo traveled from Chihuahua to Mexico City, where accusations of cowardice and charges of treason awaited him. He managed to avoid imprisonment—even taking command of a small detachment in Durango to ward off raiding Comanches—and returned to Albuquerque for a time in 1848. Perhaps because of the treaty he again went south into Chihuahua in 1849. There Governor Angel Trias promptly jailed Armijo, but federal judges ordered his release. He spent the rest of days in Lemitar, New Mexico, in exile. He died in 1854.

As they tend to do, Armijo’s performance during pivotal moments has defined Armijo. In particular, his humiliating defeat against raiders in 1843 sullied his reputation in Chihuahua, where he was regularly mocked in the press thereafter. Similarly, the maltreatment of the Texan prisoners in 1841 served as the foundation for mounting tensions with Americans in New Mexico as well as an emerging literary campaign in the United States peddling a narrative of a cruel, treacherous, and capricious Governor Armijo. Therefore, when he faltered in August 1846, the groundwork was in place for both American observers and many authorities in Mexico to easily pin the loss of New Mexico on Armijo. His disloyalty was a fait accompli. We need to be careful about this discourse that remains with us in both American and Mexican accounts. The “traitor” Armijo narrative—the embodiment of the “corrupt officials” narrative pervasive in Santa Fe trade literature—perpetuates a stingy and disturbing understanding of nineteenth-century American expansion. If Armijo was actually bribed, then Americans did achieve a “bloodless conquest” of New Mexico and, worst of all, nuevomexicanos did it to themselves—their ignorance, infidelity, and inferiority made manifest in one fell swoop. Armijo and New Mexico, in this sense, have served to justify what befell much of the continental West. The “Manifest Destiny” of the United
States overwhelmed Mexicans, Indians, and everything in between, peacefully, with its markets and civilization. But we know that the American invasion and occupation of New Mexico was anything but bloodless; it was literally an act of war. Nuevomexicanos made that very clear throughout 1847. Violence was stashed deep in the arsenal of nuevomexicano resistance. Manuel Armijo knew that better than anyone.

Endnotes


4. Lansing B. Bloom, New Mexico under Mexican Administration, 1821-1846, Old Santa Fe 2, no. 4 (April 1915): 370.


8. Secretary of State Juan José Espinosa de los Monteros to Antonio Narbona, Mexico City, April 3, 1827, MANM 6: 553.

9. Manuel José de Zuloaga to Comisario Substituto Juan Bautista Vigil, Chihuahua, November 12, 1825, MANM 4: 208.

10. For an overview of these commercial controls, see Max L. Moorhead, New Mexico’s Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), chapter 3.


12. Armijo circular, Santa Fe, May 21, 1827, MANM 6:1122; Durán to Armijo, Santa Fe, May 22 and May 27, 1827, MANM 6:1017-1018, 1020.


15. Bloom, “New Mexico under Mexican administration,” Old Santa Fe 1, no. 3 (January 1914): 264-266; Tyler, “New Mexico in the 1820s,” 16-22.


20. Albino Pérez to José María Ronquillo, Santa Fe, August 2, 1837, MANM 23:626.


22. José Caballero to the alcaldes of Río Abajo, Santa Fe, September 9, 1837, MANM 23: 662.


24. Plan de Tomé, copy, Tomé, September 8, 1837, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico (NMSRCA), 1076.

25. Lecompte, Rebellion in Río Arriba, 64-67.


27. Lecompte, Rebellion in Río Arriba, 67-75.

28. Plan de Tomé, copy, Montoya Collection.


30. Armijo to Comandante General, Santa Fe, May 7 and 8, 1838, MANM 24: 1257-1260.


32. Decree of the President, Mexico City, June 13, 1838, MANM 24: 904.


34. Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, 332.


37. U.S. Citizens to Daniel Webster, Santa Fe, September 16, 1841, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico (NMSRCA), Benjamin M. Read Papers, box 1, folder 9a.

38. Kendall, Narrative, 1: 308.


40. For a brilliant analysis of the trial and American outrage, see Marc Simmons, Murder on the Santa Fe Trail: An International Incident, 1843 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987), particularly chapter 5.

41. Manuel Dublán and José María Lozano, Legislación mexicana o colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la República (Mexico City: Imprenta del Comercio, 1876), 4: 507.

42. José María Bocanegra to Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, Mexico City, December 6, 1843, Archivo Embajada de México en los Estados Unidos de América, 1805-1925 (AEMEUA), leg. 28, exp 3, 200-201.

43. Simmons, Murder on the Santa Fe Trail, 65-68.
44. The most famous (and largest) of these was the Beaubien-Miranda Grant of which Armijo owned one-quarter interest at one point. See Lawrence R. Murphy, “The Beaubien and Miranda Grant, 1841-1846,” New Mexico Historical Review 42, no. 1 (January 1967): 27-47.


47. Minister Luis Gonzaga Cuevas to the “Señor in charge of the Government of the Department of New Mexico,” Mexico City, July 24, 1845, MANM 38: 55.


49. Manuel Álvarez to James Buchanan, Independence, June 18, 1845, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Santa Fe, New Mexico, RG 59, General Records of the Department of the State, M199 (Despatches).

50. Armijo Proclamation, January 10, 1846, NMSRCA, Sender Collection (microfilm) 2: 589-590.

51. Charles Bent to Manuel Álvarez, Taos, February 24, 1846, NMSRCA, Read Papers, 2: 73.

52. See, for instance, Bent to Álvarez, Taos, April 8, 1846, NMSRCA, Read Papers, 2: 82.

53. Álvarez to Buchanan, Santa Fe, September 9, 1846, Despatches.

54. Reference to order of March 5, 1846 in Report of the Ministerio de Guerra y Marina, Mexico City, 1878, NMSRCA, Ward Alan Minge Collection, Copies of Armijo Papers in Beinecke Library (microfilm).

55. Ministero de Guerra y Marina to Armijo, July 20, 1846, Mexico City, State Archives of New Mexico, Beinecke copies.


57. These are some of the “greatest hits” often put forward by scholars and the public alike. It seems that the sources of the narrative that Armijo privately wavered and toiled over what he would do in the weeks leading up to August 16, particularly as Kearny’s emissaries “worked on him,” are the emissaries themselves. In particular, Magoffin’s claim submitted to the U.S. government for $50,000, some of which was plainly itemized to have persuaded officers—namely Diego Archuleta—to stand down is held up as indisputable evidence of Armijo’s treachery. See Magoffin Papers, Historical Society of New Mexico Collection; Philip St. George Cooke, The Conquest of New Mexico and California (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1878), 32; Álvarez to Buchanan, Santa Fe, September 4, 1846, Despatches. See also Tyler, “Armijo’s Moment of Truth,” 312-316.


59. This view of nuevomexicano violence, especially the 1847 uprising, as an expression of broad patriotism for Mexico is echoed by Robert J. Tórrez in “Mexican Patriotism in New Mexico, 1821-1846,” in Telling New Mexico: A New History, ed. Marta Weigle (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 129-140. ¶

Matt Saionz is a historian living in Gainesville, Florida. He has an M.A. in history from Virginia Tech and is working toward the completion of his Ph.D. at the University of Florida. His interests surround the Mexican-era Southwest, and he enjoys sharing his research at public lectures and conferences.

Speaker's Bureau Updated

The Santa Fe Trail Association Speaker's Bureau offers a roster of speakers for public presentations on a variety of Trail topics. This list is in the process of being updated. Funding for speakers is available only through chapters of the Santa Fe Trail Association.

If you would like to be considered for the Speaker's Bureau, please send the title(s) of your presentation(s), a description of the topic(s), a short biography, your fee, and any mileage limits to the Santa Fe Trail Association (trailasn@gbta.net).

Truckers Radio US Partners with SFTA

Truckers Radio USA is the newest media partner with the Santa Fe Trail Association in marking the historic trails bicentennial in 2021.

“Our hero truckers are following in the footsteps, and often along the same trail, as our caravans of traders did in the past carrying much needed goods and supplies across the nation,” SFTA President Larry Short said. TruckersRadioUSA.com is an internet radio station based in Kansas with listeners all over the world. Country and Western music star Rex Allen Jr. is president of the company which features traditional country music and “Land Line Now,” the daily trucking news magazine.
Montgomery Bell: Wealthy and Respected Businessman of New Mexico

By Doyle Daves

Montgomery Bell, a Missourian, came to New Mexico in 1867 and stayed until his death in 1915. He became a wealthy and respected citizen of Las Vegas, active in civic affairs and local politics. What makes his story unusual and special is that Montgomery Bell was African-American and a freed slave. In fact, as a freedman in the post-Civil War Southwest, Bell’s achievements, financial success, and standing as a business and civic leader have no parallels.

Family Background

Montgomery was born in Ray County in western Missouri on March 3, 1845, the second child and first son of Elijah and Martha Bell. The Bell family is listed in a census record, the 1865 Kansas state census, living in Atchison some 75 miles west of Ray County. Thus, when they attained freedom, the Bells had moved away from Ray County, which had 475 slave owners and 2047 slaves in 1860, to an area of Kansas with little history of slavery. According to the 1880 census for Atchison, Kansas, Montgomery Bell’s father, Elijah, was the son of an Irish immigrant and his mother, Martha, was the daughter of a man born in France. Thus, both Elijah and Martha, always listed as “mulattoes,” were children of European men and African slave women. This record also indicates Elijah was born in Kentucky and Martha was born in Tennessee. It is likely that they were originally held by different slave owners. How, when, and where they met is not known. Their children, Rose, Montgomery, Joseph, and Armeda were born into slavery in Missouri; Alice was born in Kansas after their move in 1865.

The Move to New Mexico

Montgomery is listed twice in the 1865 census for Atchison, Kansas, with his parents and siblings but also with another family where he is listed as a servant, already independent of his family. In the summer of 1867, he joined a wagon train headed for New Mexico on the Santa Fe Trail to begin a new life. At this time, Bell, 22, could not read or write and possessed no obvious skills to help establish himself in a new place where he had no family or friends.

Business Career and Sheep Man

While Bell worked for Elkins, he learned to read and write, he became fluent in Spanish, and began to understand and adjust to the complex multi-ethnic New Mexican culture and to make friends. His later life makes clear that he had no intention of remaining a servant.

In the summer of 1870, Bell left Elkins’s employ and set out independently to be a sheep man; he had saved enough money to purchase 350 sheep. He did not become a partidario who tended sheep owned by a wealthy patron for a share of the increase. “Partidarios faced great risks to fulfill their contracts—the elements, predators, sick animals, and mounting debt. [Too often,] a partidario...became so mired in obligations to the sheep dealer that...he could not...ever extricate himself.” Bell’s only cost was the purchase price of the sheep; grass was free on the open range and he could manage a small flock himself without hired help.

Bell took his sheep to lush pasturage along the Pecos River and Los Tanos Creek not far from the present town of Santa Rosa. Only a few years earlier, the area had been extremely dangerous. When military forces were diverted by the Civil War, Indian raids increased greatly; however, by 1870, when Bell began pasturing sheep, the army had...
re-engaged in protecting the eastern and southern plains of New Mexico and raids were less likely although still an issue.13

Bell remained in the Pecos Valley with his sheep for 14 years. His timing was excellent. Indeed, from 1870 to the early 1880s, the sheep population in New Mexico was growing steadily and “wool... remained sufficiently profitable... to sustain the industry.” In fact, a sheep man “can make a profit... from his wool and have all the increase [in flock numbers] in addition.”14 Luckily for Bell and other sheep men, “In 1877, a sharp rise in wool prices occurred.”15

Under these propitious conditions and, with few expenses other than his own upkeep, Bell could easily build wealth by the sale of wool and wethers. In 1884 when Bell sold his flock and liquidated his sheep business, the Emporia [KS] Gazette (December 18, 1915) reported that “he made a fortune.”

At age 39, Bell had been in New Mexico 17 years and had progressed from a house servant with few skills to an established independent businessman with substantial personal skills and financial assets. Having liquidated his sheep business, he was prepared for new opportunities. Now financially secure and, after years of social isolation, he chose a quite different experience. He accepted a position where he “spent the next three years in Mexico, as interpreter for an engineering corps.”16

In Las Vegas for Life

Following his sojourn in Mexico, Bell settled permanently in Las Vegas. Lynn Perrigo17 reports that, at this time, “with money borrowed from Stephen B. Elkins...he opened a store in Las Vegas.” Marcus Gottschalk18 amplifies, saying that, using money borrowed from Elkins, he “opened up Bell & Co., Plaza Grocers on the west side of the plaza in Las Vegas.” This story is, almost certainly, not correct.

The 1882–1883 business directory for Las Vegas, five years before Montgomery Bell moved to Las Vegas, lists “Plaza Grocers, 50 Plaza, H. C. Bell.”19 At the time of Bell’s move to Las Vegas, he had significant financial resources of his own and was very unlikely to seek such a loan, especially not from Elkins who had moved to West Virginia in 1876.

When Bell settled in Las Vegas in 1887, it was a major trade center and, since the railroad’s arrival in 1879,20 was growing rapidly; indeed it was a boomtown. Montgomery Bell was now 42, he was an experienced businessman, having sold wool and sheep for 14 years, he had financial resources and he was known to local leaders, as Las Vegas was the nearest trade center during his sheep-raising years along the Pecos. He clearly had options when he arrived in Las Vegas.

Contemporary newspaper reports21 indicate that Bell became a buyer and seller of livestock and land. The newspapers contain many legal notices listing him as either a buyer or seller, usually of a small real estate holding or of a few animals. A typical transaction: Bell sold a pair of matched roan mules to H. A. Harvey for his mountain resort (Las Vegas Daily Optic, September 16, 1905). While there are instances where Bell’s transactions involved community leaders, many of his business transactions were with relatively poor people. Indeed, it was stated that Montgomery Bell “was a friend of the poor people. He was their money lender.”22 Bell faced risk in his dealing and routinely enforced compliance in his transactions: many legal notices reported in the newspapers are of court proceedings about the enforcement of contracts.

There is at least one business relationship that differed significantly from Bell’s usual buying and selling in small-dollar deals. Charles S. Onderdonk, a wealthy Philadelphia businessman, established a ranch at Lamy, New Mexico, where he pastured as many as 20,000 goats (El Paso Herald, May 21, 1902). Montgomery Bell, acting as a broker, purchased many goats for the ranch. The Albuquerque Citizen reported (July 22, 1898) that “Montgomery Bell is purchasing all the goats that the natives bring in from the country.” This appeal obviously did not produce enough goats as, soon after, there is a report that “Montgomery Bell is back from northern Mexico where he has been buying goats for the Onderdonk Livestock Company of Lamy.” (Santa Fe New Mexican, September 21, 1898) Again, Bell did not find enough goats as, almost immediately, he “left for Arizona on an extensive goat buying trip.” (Las Vegas Daily Optic, September 24, 1898)

Civic and Political Activities

Bell’s character and capabilities, exhibited in his business dealings, were well known and appreciated and he was drawn into the civic and political activities of Las Vegas. Contemporary newspaper reports indicate just how extensively Bell participated in the affairs of the town: San Miguel County Sheep Raisers Association appointed Montgomery Bell as inspector for Las Vegas (Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, April 19, 1893). Montgomery Bell was appointed Road Supervisor for West Las Vegas (Las Vegas Daily Optic, October 10, 1899). “The 52 bondsmen of Carlos Gabaldon, the defaulting county collector, have left the settlement with the county in the hands of Don Eugenio Romero, Ike Davis and Montgomery Bell (Albuquerque Citizen, May 17, 1900). Montgomery Bell was one of seven elected as delegates to the Republican county convention where he “gave a stirring address,” (Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, October 10, 1902). Montgomery Bell served on the federal grand jury (Las Vegas Daily Optic, May 1, 1905). A public meeting in Las Vegas decided to experiment in the raising of sugar beets; Montgomery Bell was named to oversee the experimental planting (Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, June 14, 1907).
Domestic and Community Life

Montgomery Bell, for much of his life, concentrated on his demanding business activities. In 1893 at age 48, now well established in his community and financially secure, Bell married Mrs. Annie Moore of Washington, D.C. Following his marriage, Bell acquired a large, imposing home some two blocks north of the Las Vegas Plaza where he and Annie lived until she died in 1910.

Almost nothing is known about Annie, how and where she met Montgomery, or where they were married. The Las Vegas Daily Optic (September 18, 1899) reported that Annie had left Las Vegas for Newport, Rhode Island, apparently for an extended stay as she arranged to receive the Las Vegas Daily Optic while there. Newport was then a summer resort where the super-rich built huge, imposing mansions; what took Annie Bell there is not known, but the trip was surely expensive and attested to the Bell's resources.

Montgomery Bell was accepted and treated as an equal by business and civic leaders. The Las Vegas Daily Optic (January 30, 1900), to show its respect, accorded him the Spanish honorific “Don Montgomery Bell.” The Ilfelds, one of the most prominent business families of Las Vegas, gave “their support, confidence and respect to the African-American businessman, Montgomery Bell.” At the time of his death in December 1915, reports attest further to his community standing: “[T]here was not a white person who knew him, but respected him, and admired his many good qualities.” “White men, among the most prominent of [Las Vegas], acted as pall bearers at the funeral of Montgomery Bell....” (Sierra County Advocate, December 17, 1915).

While Montgomery Bell was respected within the Las Vegas community, there is no evidence that he and Annie were active socially. They did give Christmas gifts to neighborhood children and, according to Fabiola Cabeza de Baca’s childhood memories, “One of the best liked families [were the Bells]...and I have never known finer persons.”

African-Americans in Territorial New Mexico

A few African-American slaves were brought into New Mexico before the Civil War, principally by military officers from slave-holding states. In 1866, the 57th and 125th infantry regiments brought the first African-American, “buffalo soldiers” to New Mexico where they served continuously for almost 40 years. After the Civil War and emancipation, “black homesteaders and [discharged] buffalo soldiers ventured westward by the thousands,” but few came to New Mexico. The 1870 U.S. census reports that of almost 92,000 New Mexicans, 173 were “colored.” Mainly, freedmen traveled to “where they knew others,” like Atchison, Kansas, where Bell’s parents had settled. The best example of this movement into New Mexico was the little farming community of Blackdom, 18 miles south of Roswell. Blackdom was founded in 1903 by ex-buffalo soldier, Frank Boyer, and by 1920 had some 300 black residents. It failed before 1930, owing to lack of water and insect infestations that destroyed crops. Inevitably, such communities attracted animosity from non-black neighbors; the southeastern New Mexico Ku Klux Klan chapter threatened the community.

Most freed slaves had little or no education and possessed only farm labor or household skills. The 1870, 1880, and 1900 census schedules for Las Vegas illustrate this. In 1870, 10 African-Americans were counted: 2 farm laborers, 4 cooks, a washerwoman, a barber, and a housewife. In 1880 there were twice as many entries but the jobs had not changed. Some advances are evident by 1900 with listings for railway porters, telegraph operators, a carpenter, and a bartender. For African-Americans in heavily Hispanic New Mexico, which never participated in the worst of reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation, life with a job and relative independence was a significant improvement.

Not a Typical Freed Slave

Montgomery Bell, apparently quite deliberately, made a strikingly dif-
different choice than other freedmen. He did not chose to locate among people like himself. Census records reveal that the African-Americans in Las Vegas lived in East Las Vegas (New Town) otherwise almost entirely inhabited by “Anglos,” recent arrivals from the east. Bell, fluent in Spanish, lived among the native New Mexican Hispanics of West Las Vegas (Old Town). Bell may have had acquaintances among other African-Americans in town, but he did not closely identify with them.

Unlike other freedmen, Bell quickly abandoned life as a low-level working man dependent on an employer, almost certainly of a different race, for his livelihood. He chose to become an independent businessman. In this course, Bell was helped by his novelty as a lone black man in a New Mexico society commonly defined as tri-racial: the majority Catholic Hispanics, the pueblo Indians and the recently arrived, usually Protestant, “Anglos.” The tensions and prejudices of this established order had no category for a man like Bell; this gave him space to make it happen.

A Well Lived Life

When Montgomery Bell, at age 22 and two years after freedom from slavery, chose to leave Kansas and his family for New Mexico, he, like many other freedmen, may have hoped to find “freedom and equality, and a life devoid of Jim Crow segregation...”30 Unlike most, Bell did not seek to remain part of a community of freedmen. Instead, he chose to join, by himself, the complex New Mexico community. He learned Spanish and developed other talents: reading and writing, and understanding the mores of New Mexico’s multi-ethnic society and the laws and practices that governed the business world of the time. With this advantage, Bell joined the hurly-burly, dynamic society of burgeoning Las Vegas. He behaved as if his race would not hold him back and it did not. Indeed, Bell proved that in the still wide-open frontier that was New Mexico, a man could be judged primarily by his skills, trust-worthiness, and willingness to contribute to the common good. The success Bell achieved has no analogy in New Mexico history. It is almost unimaginable; one can only admire his audacity, sagacity, and hard work that made it happen.

Endnotes

2. George T. Gould, Illustrated Las Vegas, 1903, as quoted in Joseph A. Lordi, Las Vegas, New Mexico (Kennett Square, Pa: Carolina Press, 2016), 121.
5. It is possible that one or both of these slave women also were mulatto.
10. For quite a different, but almost certainly incorrect, account of Montgomery Bell’s entry into business, see Bruce A. Glasrud, African American History in New Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 8.
17. Lynn I. Perrigo, Gateway to Glorieta, 168, 169.
25. Cabeza de Baca, We Fed Them Cactus, 822.
26. For example: Captain James H. Carleton arrived at Fort Union in 1851 with his wife, Sophia and at least 2 slaves. Leo E. Oliva, Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest (Washington: National Park Service, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Professional Papers No. 41, 1993), 188.

continued on page 28
Hell on Wheels: Ellsworth, Kansas

By Dr. Michael L. Olsen
Project Historian

“We have most unfavorable reports from Ellsworth as to wicked lawlessness. The telegraph gives an account of the hanging of two men by the vigilance committee, named Johnson and Craig. They were in the hands of the officers of the law and taken from them by the mob.”

Weekly Caucasian (Lexington, Missouri), October 19, 1867

Location: Central Kansas, in the Smoky Hill River Valley; 215 miles west of Kansas City, 400 miles east of Denver, Colorado.

Approximate distance remaining on the old Santa Fe Trail: Via Cimarron Route—550 miles; via Mountain Route—600 miles. Ellsworth lay on the Fort Riley–Fort Larned Military Road, which joined the Santa Fe Trail at Fort Zarah on the Arkansas River.

Ellsworth, Kansas, is pre-eminently remembered as a “cattle town,” one of the shipping points for herds trailered north from Texas. Although the Union Pacific Eastern Division Railroad (UPED, after 1869 incorporated as the Kansas Pacific) arrived in 1867, Ellsworth’s “boom times” date from 1870 to 1875. Abilene, some 60 miles east, was the terminus for the cattle trade from 1867 to about 1870, but the advancing agricultural frontier on the plains forced Texas cattlemen to use railroad facilities farther and farther west.

Ellsworth’s location was determined by the Smoky Hill River crossing of the Fort Riley–Fort Larned Military Road, a major route for U.S. Army patrols headed out onto the plains and into Colorado and New Mexico. The army established a temporary encampment at this site—Fort Ellsworth—in 1864 and then constructed a permanent post—Fork Harker—nearby in 1866. By the late 1860s this fort housed 1,500 soldiers and civilian employees. From 1865 until the arrival of the railroad in 1867, the Butterfield Overland Despatch stagecoach line also maintained a station at Ellsworth on its through service to Denver, Colorado Territory.

Most historical accounts of Ellsworth’s infancy express wonder that it survived its first year. Indians raided sporadically, usually driving off herds of mules and oxen grazing just on the outskirts of town. On June 8, 1867, the normally placid Smoky Hill River flooded, carrying off most of the tents, sodies, and temporary log structures comprising the community at that point. Then a month later, in July, a cholera epidemic struck both Ellsworth and Fort Harker. Even newspapers in New York City took notice, with the New York Herald on July 30, 1867, observing, “Twelve hundred people have fled from Ellsworth City during the last week. The average mortality is about ten per day. Nine out of every ten persons attacked dies in from two to fifteen hours.” Nevertheless, Ellsworth persisted. The railroad moved on and the cattle era waned, but it was the county seat of Ellsworth County and developed as a thriving trade center for farmers and ranchers.

The Railroad

According to the Emporia News of July 19, 1867, “The railroad and telegraph were entirely completed to Ellsworth on the 15th, and through passenger and freight trains now go to, and come from, that point.” Within three months, though, the UPED covered the 65 miles west to Hays City, which then became its railhead.

In his memoir My Life on the Frontier, Miguel Otero, Jr., provides a rare glimpse of the work and camps of railroad construction crews, in this instance between Ellsworth and Hay City. He recalled, “One feature of Ellsworth that lingers in my memory is the great danger from savage Indians... Nearly every day the construction gangs laying the railroad toward Denver were attacked by Indians.” Army troop detachments did protect the crews and usually drove off the raiders, but “the Indians were able constantly to harass those laying the track, and occasionally would venture close enough to kill a man or two.” Otero laconically concluded, “But when all is said, it must be admitted that a member of a railroad construction gang in those days was engaged in what might properly be called a hazardous occupation.”

The Town

Established: May 1867. The name reflects the former Fort Ellsworth, which was so designated for Second Lieutenant Allen Ellsworth, who commanded the army detachment that constructed and occupied that temporary post in 1864.

Post Office: July 3, 1867 - present

Population: 1870 - 448; 1880 - 929; 1890 - 1620 (U.S. Census reports).

William Bell, an inveterate Eastern sportsman on an extended buffalo hunt, briefly mentions Ellsworth in his travel account, New Tracks in North America. Passing through in the spring of 1867, he remarked, perhaps sarcastically, “We left Fort Harker... and, three miles beyond, passed through Ellsworth, a wonderful place, having seven or eight “stores,” two hotels, and fifty houses of other kinds, occupied by nearly a thousand persons, and yet just one month old.”

Commercial Activity

There are several contemporary accounts of commercial activity in Ellsworth during its brief months as the UPED “end-of-track-town.” Significantly, Otero, Sellar & Company, destined to become one of the major
freighting and mercantile enterprises in the Southwest, got its start there at this time. Miguel Antonio Otero, Sr., of New Mexico, and John Sellar, a Scottish immigrant, joined forces and fortunes and from this point followed the Kansas Pacific, the Denver & Rio Grande and, most importantly, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe as these lines moved west. It became customary for Otero, Sellar & Co. to disassemble its store and warehouses at any given railhead when the rail line moved on, load the sections on flatcars, and reassemble them at the next town, expanding their facilities each time. Rivals such as Chick, Browne & Company also headquartered in Ellsworth for a time.

Trains of freight wagons from New Mexico and the Colorado plains, in particular, brought wool, hides, furs, and buffalo robes to the shipping docks at Ellsworth and then took on entire stocks of goods for Southwest grocers, dry goods merchants, army posts, townsfolk, sheep herders, and cattle ranchers—everyone from Colorado to Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas who depended on these “imported” commodities. A comment in the August 15, 1867, New York Tribune indicates the volume of this trade. Commenting on how shipments west from Ellsworth had been interrupted for ten days by Indian attacks, the Tribune noted, “The United States Express Company have over 1,000,000 pounds of freighting here for Western points, which is now being loaded.”

A further contemporary glimpse of business houses is provided by the Kansas historian William Cutler, writing in the early 1880s in his History of the State of Kansas. He says, “Scarcely was the town site surveyed and platted, when buildings began to spring up like mushrooms, E. W. Kingsbury leading the way by building the first house, which was known as the “Stockade,” and which was used in the double capacity of store and hotel.” Cutler goes on to list Lockstone & Phelps, O. Hall, Coffin & Hailkes, Robbins & Mathews, and Vaugh & Sweezy—all “groceries and provisions;” J. H. Bell, “tinware and stoves;” Arthur Larkin, “hotel;” Geiger & Co. “dry goods and clothing;” and Andrew Schmitt, “boots and shoes.” He ends his directory by emphatically stating, “This was a wonderful growth for less than three months.” The list also, of course, presages Ellsworth’s future as a cattle town and regional trade center. Also, by the end of 1867, Ellsworth had a tri-weekly newspaper, the Advertiser, which the editor of the Emporia News for December 12, 1867, welcomed in his columns.

**Hell on Wheels**

Miguel Antonio Otero, Jr., whose memoirs are referenced above, was eight years old when he lived just for the summer of 1867 with his family in Ellsworth. His recollections, then, are pointedly revealing as far as the disruptive social impact of the UPED in the three months it claimed the town as its railhead. Otero remembered, “Unquestionably, too, Ellsworth was a lively town. It seemed as if nearly every other house in the town was a drinking place, while gambling rooms and dance halls and other questionable resorts were most common. Shooting scraps were every-day occurrences, and the nights were frequently made hideous by drunken men firing off pistols promiscuously . . . .”

It was also this summer that, seemingly right on schedule once the railroad arrived, “a set of roughs and cut-throats . . . undertook to run the town, and who, by their desperado deeds, sought to rule the people by establishing a ‘reign of terror.’” Two desperate characters, by the name of Craig and Johnson, were the recognized leaders of this gang, and, like all such scoundrels, undertook to govern with a high hand,” according to William Cutler in his History of the State of Kansas (1883). A Vigilance Committee soon dealt with them: “one night Craig and Johnson, after committing some of their depredations, were seized, carried to the Smoky, and there hung to the limb of a cottonwood tree. The others of the gang took the hint and hied themselves to other regions . . . .” But at least another decade of lawlessness ensued.

**On to Hays City**

The dates are revealing: the Union Pacific Eastern Branch built into Ellsworth on July 19, 1867; it completed its tracks to its next railhead, Hays City, on October 14, 1867. Three years later, on September 1, 1870, renamed the Kansas Pacific, it finished its link to Denver, Colorado.

**Ellsworth Specific Bibliography**

Anderson, George L. Kansas West—An Epic of Western Railroad Building (San Marino, California: Golden West Books, 1963).


Hults, Jan, and Sondra McCoy. 1001 Kansas Place Names (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

Oliva, Leo E. Fort Harker—Defending the Journey West (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 2000).


This series of articles is a project submitted to the National Trails Intermountain Region (Santa Fe Trail NHT) Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2019. Besides documenting the impact of these towns on the demise of the Santa Fe Trail, the project included highlighting the “rowdy” Wild West aspect of each railhead, hence “Hell on Wheels.”

[Wagon Tracks readers may want to go to www.kshs.org/km/items/view/146, the Kansas Historical Society site, "Kansas Memories," to view a stereograph "Crossing the Smoky Hill River at Ellsworth, KS 1867."]

Dr. Michael L. Olsen holds a B.A. from St. Olaf College, and the M.A. and Ph.D. in American History from the University of Washington. He taught for 30 years at New Mexico Highlands University and for four years full-time at Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado Springs. He has published extensively on the Santa Fe Trail and has consulted with the National Park Service on projects related to the old Santa Fe Trail.


In eastern and southern New Mexico, which, after the Civil War, attracted many from Confederate states, discrimination and segregation ended only in the 1950s and 1960s; this never happened in historic Hispanic areas. See Glasrud, African American History in New Mexico; Charles E. Becknell, Sr., No Challenge-No Change, Growing Up Black in New Mexico (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2003).

Doyle Daves received the Jack D. Rittenhouse Memorial Stagecoach Award in 2019 for his extensive writing about Santa Fe Trail travelers. His articles have appeared in previous issues of Wagon Tracks and can be found at www.santafetrail.org.

The Douglas County Chapter donned their masks and created footpaths at the Black Jack Ruts. See the chapter report for full details. At left are Joe Hoelscher, Nick Pumphrey, Christi Darnell, and Linda Wright filling buckets with dirt. Photos: Roger Boyd.
SFTA Annual Membership January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020

Name(s) ________________________________________________ □ Life $1000, payable over 4 years
Address ________________________________________________ □ Patron $100/year
City _______________________ State _______ Zip ____________ □ Family $65/year
Phone _______________ Email ____________________________ □ Individual $50/year
□ New member □ Renewing member □ Youth (18 and under) $5/year
I am a member of the following chapter (s) ___________________ □ Non-profit Institution $65/year
□ New member □ Renewing member □ Business $65/year
I’d like to make a donation to assist the SFTA with programs and events.
I’d like to donate to the Junior Wagon Master Fund.
I’d like to donate to the Marker Fund.

To pay by credit card, go to www.santafetrail.org, and click on “Join the Organization.”

TOTAL ENCLOSED ___________________
Make checks payable to Santa Fe Trail Association

Mail to Ruth Olson Peters, Treasurer, Santa Fe Trail Center, 1349 K-156 Hwy, Larned, KS 67550

Renew by mailing using the above form or renew online at www.santafetrail.org

If you have renewed your membership, pass the form along to a friend or colleague.

Chapter Reports

Chapters are listed in order from the beginning of the Trail in Missouri westward.

TO CONTACT CHAPTER PRESIDENTS, PLEASE EMAIL THEM AT info@santafetrail.org.

Missouri River Outfitters
Independence, MO
President Anne Mallinson

MRO held a short ZOOM membership meeting online on Wednesday, July 24, with information on login sent to members via email before the meeting.

The Treasurer’s report, minutes of the last meeting, updates on plans for the bicentennial, and information on the new website were sent ahead of the meeting. Members voted on the chapter slate of officers as well as approved changes in the bylaws.

MRO has obtained ownership of the website www.3trailscorridor.com from the estate of the late Lou Austin. This outstanding website was developed by Lou to relate the information about our Trails sites along the 47-mile pedestrian corridor that is under development in the greater Kansas City area from the Upper Independence Landing on the Missouri River to Gardner Junction in Kansas. The site is and will remain an important tool to educate those who travel and research the trails.

Douglas County
Baldwin City, KS
President Roger Boyd

Our fall meeting that had been scheduled for Sunday September 27 is postponed to February 21. The program will be by Baker University Archivist Sara Decaro and her topic will be “History of the Baldwin City, Kansas, Area.” 2020 is the Sesquicentennial for Baldwin City, but much of the celebration has been postponed to 2021.

This spring and summer we have been making great progress on the new footpath at the Black Jack Ruts. The ruts are located on the Ivan L. Boyd Memorial Prairie Preserve, which is owned by Douglas County. There are five prominent wagon ruts on the site that are up to four feet deep as they come down a hill. The site is 18 acres of which half is still unplowed native prairie. Dr. Roger Boyd has documented over 250 species of native plants on the site during his tenure at Baker University. After the prairie is burned there are at least five other wagon tracks that can be identified. The trail that is under construction is a collaborative effort organized by Dr. Boyd with the Douglas County Chapter of SFTA. Funding, advice, labor, or materials have been provided by Douglas County Department of Public Works, Kansas Department of Transportation, Kansas State Historical Preservation Office, Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council (HCC), Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA), Santa Fe Trail Association, and Cory Donnelly and Carole Wendler of the National Park Service office in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Phase one of the project has been constructing a three-foot-wide compacted dirt trail that is 1,250 feet long and loops around and through the major ruts. Once this is completed a 350-foot-long compacted gravel trail five feet wide will connect the park loop road to the dirt trail. The gravel trail will be handicap-accessible and will have three interpretative signs developed.
by NPS. The dirt trail is nearing completion at this time and the gravel trail should be in place by the end of the summer. [See Dave Kendall’s drone video of the ruts at https://vimeo.com/418086098, “Black Jack Ruts: A New Access Trail Takes Shape.”]

The interpretative signs should be completed next spring, and a dedication ceremony will be held in June 2021. The Douglas County Chapter has received a $17,800 grant from HHC and a $3,000 grant from FFHA. Over 300 hours of volunteer labor have been contributed so far on the project. We look forward to many visitors next summer.

Heart of the Flint Hills
Council Grove, KS
President Sharon Haun

The COVID-19 has shut things down in the Flint Hills, just like everywhere else. The SFT 200 committee work has slowed down, but we had a recent meeting to discuss how we are going to adjust to the new world of face masks and social distancing. Plans are still progressing for 2021. Our SFT sites are open for outside and social distancing viewing, including the wonderful new Rock Creek Crossing trail. We are seeing many individual and small group SFT travelers.

Stay safe and shut it down so we can enjoy the SFT 200 events next year.

Cottonwood Crossing
Hillsboro, KS
President Doug Sharp

Our activities are at a standstill right now. However, recently an area light plane pilot has flown and recorded his flight over the western Marion county trail at my request. We hope he will fly the entire Marion county trail in the not too distant future. The video will make a great trail promotion piece for trail enthusiast’s gatherings. We hope to show the video at our next chapter meeting, whenever that happens.

Quivira
McPherson, KS
President Linda Colle

The Quivira Chapter program scheduled for Monday, July 27, 2020, at the Barton County Historical Society Museum, was canceled due to COVID-19. Our speaker, Jay Clark, founder and organizer of the Wichita Buffalo Soldiers, has agreed to reschedule for next year.

Just because COVID-19 has put a damper on our programs doesn’t mean that Trail activities are not taking place! Rack cards describing the Quivira Chapter activities commemorating the Santa Fe Trail 200th anniversary have been distributed to our area communities. In addition, the Quivira 200th Anniversary website is active. The website lists Quivira Chapter events and will also include participating community events and activities, as well as places to eat, go, see, and stay. Quivira Chapter website santafetrail2021.com The Quivira Chapter Facebook page for the 200th anniversary is also active. Go to www.facebook.com/200thSantafetrailKansas/.

The Quivira Chapter had reserved a booth at the Kansas State Fair for both weekends. However, it sounds like the Fair may be canceled as the Fair Board has called another meeting due to the increasing numbers in cases. We will wait and see. Ralph’s Rut Interpretive Sign has been ordered from Pannier Graphics. A delivery date for the sign has not been given but should probably be in the next two months. The cost is $1,184, to be paid by the Quivira Chapter. The first half was due when the sign was ordered and has been submitted. Once we get the sign, we will work on getting it installed.

New signs marking the trail will be installed by Barton County near Great Bend and the city of Ellinwood in the town of Ellinwood. SFTA President Larry Short helped coordinate the ordering of these signs. The signs were paid for by the National Park Service. Installation of these signs will help to further mark the Santa Fe Trail.

Ken Embers and Britt Colle went out on a hot June 29 to locate one of the Turkey Creek tributary crossings on the Embers land southeast of McPherson. Ken would like to mark the crossing. At one time, Ken’s dad, Duane Embers, had kept the area mowed and the crossing was visible. Now the trees and undergrowth have made the crossing hard to identify. More research is needed.

On June 23rd Britt Colle met Rex Buchanan and Dave Kendall of Prairie Hollow Productions to help them tour some...
Quivira Chapter sites for Dave’s documentary on the Santa Fe Trail. Two sites were all they had time for in the Quivira Chapter as Rex and Dave stopped at Lost Spring on their way. You may have seen a segment of the Prairie Hollow Lost Spring video posted on Facebook. The first stop in our area was the Kaw Treaty Site, which of course we don’t know the exact location, just the general vicinity. Dave used his drone to record footage of the area while they discussed the site.

They moved on to the Little Arkansas Crossing area where they were fortunate to meet with Joe Swanson at Swanson’s Swales. Joe and his dog chauffeured the group around to all the sites—Swanson Swales, Camp Grierson/Station Little Arkansas, the Stone Corral site, the former marker Cottonwood site and Fry Ruts. They also looked at possible locations for the source of the dolomite rock used in the construction of the Stone Corral. A lot of Trail discussion occurred during their tour of the area. We hope they will come back and tour more of our sites.

**Wet/Dry Routes**
Great Bend, KS
President George Elmore

Hope that you are safe and doing well. This has been a difficult time to hold our normal Wet/Dry chapter programs, and sadly we had to postpone the 2020 Trail Rendezvous. I have been struggling with what to write during the COVID-19 pandemic, now also as we watch the quickly-changing events overshadowing the virus and shaping our nation’s history. We do not want the events to divide us but unite us as we work together in our mission to preserve and promote the history of the Santa Fe Trail. The trail’s history had tremendous cultural diversity with difficult times and loss of the traditional way of life for many.

We have the responsibility for honestly representing the Santa Fe Trails history, including giving voice to all the people who used the trail and cultural perspectives that are not always well-represented in history books. The trail had people in different statuses in life from the wealthy to the poor trying to make a living, different colors of skin, and different cultural backgrounds. The trail’s history includes brutality, unrest, injustices, as well as spreading of diseases. It must have been a lot like today with the myriad of emotions and struggles with overwhelming feelings for everyone.

As we study the trail, also consider the sweeping events taking place around us. We need to understand we are feeling and sharing events that are difficult to talk about and, at times, to think about, just as the events around the trail were. We need to be proud of the rich trail history and not only study but tell all the difficult aspects of the trail history. We must embrace this opportunity to be inclusive of all the stories of cultures and aspects of all the people of the trail. As they found unity to survive the difficult years, we can learn from the past, to stay united, stay safe, stay strong, and let’s get through this together. The Wet/Dry Chapter is looking forward to starting our educational and awe-inspiring programs experiences again in October.

**Dodge City/Fort Dodge/Cimarron**
Dodge City, KS
President Bill Bunyan

Nothing happening here now. Hopefully we will get some-thing going in the fall.

**Wagon Bed Spring**
Lakin, KS
President Linda Peters

**Cimarron Cutoff**
Elkhart, KS
President Jay Williams

**Bent’s Fort**
Lamar, CO
President Kevin Lindahl

Are you longing to see your Santa Fe Trail friends and get out on the Santa Fe Trail again? I know, the Bent’s Fort Chapter members sure are! This has been such a crazy 2020. Who would have known our planned treks and activities would have to be cancelled? Well, here is a bit of good news. As of today, our chapter event to be held at the historic Grand Theater in Rocky Ford August 8 has been approved. Even though we will be following the state and county health guidelines, it will be great to see everyone again—even if we will be doing safe social distancing.

Also, as of today, our October chapter trek to Las Vegas, New Mexico, and the surrounding area is STILL ON. How about that? This is going to be a fantastic weekend and lots of wonderful activities are planned, not to mention getting to lodge at the Historic Castenada Hotel and/or the Historic Plaza Hotel. The itinerary and hotel rates can be found on the Santa Fe Trail eblast and the chapter’s eblast. Though the Las Vegas weekend will be limited to chapter members, you are welcome to join us for the nominal fee of $15, our chapter membership dues.

Many of our chapter members are involved in planning the 2021 Symposium to be held at Bent’s Old Fort. It has been interesting having our planning meetings via Zoom. It is always fun to see committee members on the screen. We are very thankful the Symposium wasn’t planned for this September. Just a reminder that you can register for the 2021 Symposium on the SFTA website via The Last Chance Store.

**Corazon de los Caminos**
Cimarron, NM
President Doyle Daves

The year started off well and we planned an impressive series of programs for 2020. Then, COVID-19 hit, our Governor took action, and we have had to cancel all of our programs from March through September. We have made preliminary plans related to the bicentennial of the Trail. We have committed to a program in Las Vegas for November 2021 to mark the meeting between William Becknell and Captain Pedro Gallegos that effectively began Trail traffic. In addition, we have contacted officials in Raton, Clayton, Cimarron, and Wagon Mound concerning the planning of SFT recognition events for 2021. We had begun talks with the End of Trail Chapter about coordinating events in Las Vegas and Santa Fe. We anticipate that by fall we can resume planning. We look forward to an exciting year along the Trail in 2021.

**End of the Trail**
Santa Fe, NM
President Joy Poole
Town of Westport

lithograph by Tom Phillips, 1970s, donated to SFTA by Jackson County Parks and Recreation