



## JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

### INDEPENDENCE

**William McCoy**

**1838 July 34**

“... We have an incongruous assortment at all times here [Independence]. The mountain & Santa Fe traders, who are frequently here, are a class “sui generis” ...There are sometimes Indians here of almost all the tribes known .... There were some here a few days ago of the Blackfeet, Flatheads & Snakes who had never seen a white settlement before. There are Shawnees, Delawares, Peorias, Potawattomies, Kickapoos, Kaskaskias, Wehaws, Miamis, Sac and Foxes & I don’t know how many more situated on the frontier who make occasional peregrinations through this place. Mexicans, Californians and strangers from every state in the Union find their way thither.”

\*\*\*\*\*William McCoy moved to Independence in 1838 and opened a store that same year. When he says the mountain men and Santa Fe traders frequently are in Independence, he calls them “sui generis” to mean that they are not necessarily proper gentlemen. Many different Indian tribes were represented on the Kansas frontier as many Indians had been moved from their eastern lands. When those Indians received their annuity payments from the federal government, they often needed to cross into nearby Missouri to find stores with manufactured items. Further, Indians from farther west passed through Independence as they traveled farther east. **Source:** O’Brien, William Patrick. *Merchants of Independence: International Trade on the Santa Fe Trail 1827-1860*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State Univ. Press, 2014, quote on pp. 119-120.

**Jesse C. Douglas**

**1838 October 31**

“Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> Octr.

Left Encampment this morning at half after 7 o’clock [sic]—the company under Capt. Hull being attached to the emigration—and at 12 o’clock passed through Independence. At 1 [o’clock] we reached our present encampment two miles south of Independence, and ten miles from the camp of yesterday. After reaching camp in the evening a small quantity of shoes were distributed among the emigrants. Many Indians came into camp during the afternoon much intoxicated.”

\*\*\*\*\*In the late 1820s and throughout the 1830s, the U.S. government negotiated with various Potawatomi groups over 40 times to move Potawatomi Indians west to Indian Territory. Some Potawatomi still refused to move. In 1838 federal officials ordered the removal of some remaining Potawatomi in northern Indiana. More than 800 were rounded up and forced to walk from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas. The leaders who refused to walk were transported in a jail wagon. The diarist Jesse Douglas was the agent for William Polke, the federal conductor of this forced removal which came to be called the Potawatomi Trail of Death. Thus the train going



through Independence would have consisted of the jail wagon, many supply wagons, hundreds of walking Potawatomi, some Potawatomi on horseback, and all the guards, mostly on horseback. This forced walk followed various established roads, including the Santa Fe Trail from Lexington, Missouri to somewhere in Johnson County, Kansas. **Source:** Douglas, Jesse C. “Journal of an Emigrating Party of Pottawattomie Indians, 1838”, 147-177, quote on p. 173, in Willard, Shirley and Susan Campbell, editors. *Potawatomi Trail of Death—1838 Removal from Indiana to Kansas*. Rochester, Ind.: Fulton Co. Historical Society, 2003.

If you wish to know locations of Trail of Death markers, click on **MARKERS OF POTAWATOMI TRAIL OF DEATH**.

### **Thomas J. Farnham**

#### **1839 May 21**

“On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 1839, the author and sixteen others arrived in the town of Independence, Mo. Our destination was the Oregon Territory. Some of our number sought health In the wilderness—others sought the wilderness for its own sake—and still others sought a residence among the ancient forests and lofty hights [sic] of the valley of the Columbia; and each actuated by his own peculiar reasons of interest began his preparations for leaving the frontier. Pack mules and horses and pack-saddles were purchased and prepared for service. Bacon and flour, salt and pepper, sufficient for 400 miles were secured in sacks; our powder-casks were wrapped in painted canvas; and large oil-cloths were purchased to protect these and our sacks of clothing from the rains; our arms were thoroughly repaired; bullets were moulded [archaic spelling]; powder-horns and cap-boxes filled; and all else done that was deemed needful before we struck our tent for the Indian Territory.”

\*\*\*\*\* Farnham and others traveled with Santa Fe Trail traders to Bent’s Fort before heading west over the Rockies. This quote shows that considerable poundage could be placed on pack animals.

**Source:** Farnham, Thomas J. *An 1839 Wagon Train Journal Travels in the Great Western Prairies the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains and in the Oregon Territory*. Seattle, Wash.: Northwest Interpretive Association, 1983 [reprint of 1843 edition], quote on p. 4.

### **Thomas J. Farnham**

#### **1839 May 30**

“On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, we found ourselves prepared to move for the Indian Territory. Our Pack-saddles being therefore girded upon the animals, our sacks of provisions &c. snugly lashed upon them, and protected from the rain that had begun to fall, and ourselves well mounted and armed, we took the road that leads off southwest from Independence in the direction of Santa Fe. But the rains that had accompanied us daily since we left Peoria, seemed determined to escort us still, our ill-natured scrowls [sic] to the contrary notwithstanding.—We had traveled on three miles when such torrents fell that we found it necessary to take shelter in a neighboring school-house for the night. It was a dismal one; but a blazing fire within, and a merry song from a jovial



member of our company imparted as much consolation as our circumstances seemed to demand, till we responded to the howling storm the sonorous evidences of sweet and quiet slumber.”

\*\*\*\*\* Farnham and his party had arrived in Independence on May 21, but did not leave until the 30<sup>th</sup>. Mention of a school house shows that the establishment of schools already was a concern just twelve years after the beginning of Independence. Farnham and others traveled with Santa Fe Trail traders to Bent’s Fort before heading west over the Rockies. **Source:** Farnham, Thomas J. *An 1849 Wagon Train Journal Travels in the Great Western Prairies the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains and in the Oregon Territory*. Seattle, Wash.: Northwest Interpretive Association, 1983 [reprint of 1843 edition], quote on p. 6.

### **Unidentified Traveler**

#### **1841 early May through May 19, from 1842 book**

“... When I arrived at St. Louis, I found I had to proceed to Independence, the upper country on the Missouri river and adjoining the Indian boundary.... There I found three different caravans busily recruiting; the Rev. Bishop Smith with a caravan to establish a mission amongst the Blackfeet Indians, in the valley of the Columbia river; who left with the caravan to California by the way of the head waters of the Columbia river, commanded by Col. Bartleson and Richma [spelling as in article], composed of about ninety persons, male and female. The second to California, composed of about 100 men and 30 women and children; and the third, the yearly caravan composed of merchants, to the city [Santa Fe], Chihuahua, and Senora, consisting of about 80 men and 40 wagons loaded with merchandise, &c. The caravans all left between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of May. After ascertaining the object of the California caravan, Governor Boggs and myself, having understood that a caravan would positively leave Santa Fe to join the one by way of the Columbia, raised ten men, and agreed to start in time to overtake the Santa Fe company at or near the Arkansas; but on the evening previous to our departure the goveror’s [sic] wife was taken ill, and he was compelled to abandon the adventure. According, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, myself and eight others, with three little wagons loaded with provisions and arms, and three riding mules, left the line of Missouri for the far west. ...”

\*\*\*\*\*The above description clearly shows that traders, missionaries, and emigrants all were in Independence in 1841 recruiting travelers for their wagon trains. The leaders desired large numbers in each wagon train to provide safety in numbers when traveling in Indian country. **Source:** “Trail Trip, 1841”, *Wagon Tracks*, 3(1): (November 1988), 14, quote on p. 14, [reprint with explanation of account that was included in Charles J. Folsom’s book *Mexico*, published in 1842].

### **James Josiah Webb**

#### **1845 early September or mid-June (June date in 1931 memoir, fall date from Mark Gardner)**

“Arriving in Independence [after purchasing goods in St. Louis], we commenced buying our outfit, and bought fifteen yoke of oxen (two teams of six yoke each and three yoke for kitchen wagon, and sufficient goods to make two good loads to pay duties on. We bought three new wagons, loading the large wagons [with] 5,000 pounds and the small one with about 1,500,



besides provisions, etc. Solomon Houck had bought a lot of wagons in Pittsburg, and among them were two heavy wagons with iron axles—a new experiment for freight wagons and one looked upon as quite hazardous. What if an axle should break or get badly sprung on the plains? No chance of fitting a wooden axle to the box for an iron one, or straightening the iron one if badly bent. Wagons were scarce, and Houck proposed selling one of these; and after due consideration I made up my mind to take the risk. This, I believe, was the first freight wagon with iron axles that ever went over the plains, and Mr. Houck followed some weeks after with the second—the mate to it. Gradually they came into use for the Santa Fe trade, but not for the low country.

...we concluded to start when ready, and on reaching Council Grove wait for enough to make up a train. ...”

\*\*\*\*\* Webb may have attributed an occurrence to a wrong year when writing his memoir years later. Many pages later in memoir when describing what most likely happened in 1847, Webb himself wrote that iron axles were not used on the prairies until 1848, yet he includes an iron-axle incident in a recounting of 1845. **Source:** Webb, James Josiah. *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade 1844-1847*. Edited by Ralph P. Bieber. Introduction by Mark L. Gardner. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995 [reprint of 1931 edition, with a new introduction], quote on pp. 129-130.

### **James Josiah Webb**

#### **1845 December 24 to 26, from 1931 memoir**

“[Left Westport] ... and on the twenty-fourth went to Independence. At the hotel, there was a ball being held, which I looked in on—the first ball I ever witnessed in my native land. Fandangos I had seen in New Mexico, and one quadrone ball in New Orleans, but this was the first real American ball I ever witnessed, and ... I do believe it was the only one I ever witnessed.... [I] spent Christmas in Independence, and on the twenty-sixth started by stage for St. Louis.

On my arrival at Independence I met George Peacock, who told me that they had been very anxious about our safety and had made preparations to start out on the prairie to our assistance, as we were so much behind the time we were expected, and the weather had [been] so cold and blustering they feared [that we] were lost or had lost our animals. We had expected to get in a month earlier, and my partner, Mr. Doan, had told them when we might be expected. I felt very grateful that our friends thought enough of us to go to our relief, trouble to organize an expedition to go to our relief, and still remember my old friends in Independence with sincere respect and gratitude, not only in this instance but [in] many others when they rendered me efficient service by giving me their confidence and support, when both were so greatly needed as to be of great encouragement and benefit to me. ...”

\*\*\*\*\*Webb completed his Santa Fe trading trip in late December. He mentions that he soon will leave for St. Louis. While some traders purchased their merchandise in Independence and/or Westport, some others traveled to St. Louis and elsewhere for purchases. Webb had purchased goods for the 1845 trading season in St. Louis, and he was heading east to that city at the end of the same trading season. **Source:** Webb, James Josiah. *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-*



1847. Edited by Ralph P. Bieber. Introduction by Mark L. Gardner. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995 [reprint of 1931 edition, with new introduction], quote on pp. 170-173.

### **Francis Parkman**

#### **1846 early May, from memoir**

“...Being at leisure one day, I rode over to Independence [from town of Kansas]. The town was crowded. A multitude of shops had sprung up to furnish emigrants and Santa Fe traders with necessities for their journey[s]; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from a dozen blacksmiths’ sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired and the horses and oxen shod. The streets were thronged with men, horses and mules. While I was in the town, a train of emigrant wagons from Illinois passed through to join the camp on the prairie, and stopped in the principal street. ...”

\*\*\*\*\*Parkman mentions a wagon train of Illinois emigrants passing through Independence. This is one example to show that not all emigrants to Independence and Westport came by steamboats. **Source:** Parkman, Francis. *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life*. Edited by William MacDonald. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1911, 1919, quote on pp. 25-26. Accessed online at U-M Library Digital Collections at [quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/5087610.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/5087610.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext) on April 13, 2020.

### **James Josiah Webb**

#### **1846 May 9, from 1931 memoir**

“On May 9, 1846, we left Independence on my third trip, with high hopes and bright prospects. We ... traveled more rapidly than [on] any trip with a [wagon] train that I ever made before or since. ... [We] made up a train sufficiently strong for protection, without any delay. Besides our five wagons, there were three of W.S. McKnight, [Norris] Colburn, Juan Armijo (one of the governor’s), J.B. Turley, and some others. Armijo had been reinstated as governor and had a train of wagons ahead of us.”

\*\*\*\*\*This Santa Fe trader mentions the concern for sufficient numbers of wagons in a wagon train. A large train was less likely to be attacked by Indians than just a few wagons. **Source:** Webb, James Josiah. *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*. Edited by Ralph P. Bieber. Introduction by Mark L. Gardner. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995 [reprint of 1931 edition, with new introduction], quote on p. 179.

### **Tamsen E. Donner**

#### **1846 May 11**

“Independence Mo. May 11<sup>th</sup> 1846.

My Dear Sister

I commenced writing to you some months ago but the letter was laid aside to be finished the next day & was never touched. A nice sheet of pink letter paper was taken out & has got so much soiled that it cannot be written upon & now in the midst of preparation for starting across the



mountains I am seated on the grass in the midst of the tent to say a few words to my dearest & only sister. ... My three daughters are round me[,] one at my side trying to sew[,] Georgeanna fixing herself up in old indiarubber cap & Eliza Poor knocking on my paper & asking me ever so many questions. They often talk to me of Aunty Poor. I can give you no idea of the hurry of the place at this time. It is supposed there will be 7000 waggons [sic] start from this place this season. We go to California, to the bay of San Francisco. It is a four months trip. We have three waggons [sic] furnished with food & clothing &c. drawn by three yoke of oxen each. We take cows along & milk them & have some butter, though not as much as we would like. I am willing to go & have no doubt it will be an advantage to our children & to us. I came here last evening & start tomorrow morning on the long journey. ...  
Farewell, my sister, you shall hear from me as soon as I have an opportunity. ....”

\*\*\*\*\*Tamsen was one of the Donner family that succumbed to starvation in the Sierra Mountains. When in Independence in 1846, Tamsen heard that 7,000 wagons would be leaving from that town during that year. Historians need to verify such numbers because trail towns regularly boosted their claims for purposes of advertisement. **Source:** “The Donner Party Letters: Tamsen E. Donner & Virginia E. B. Reed”, 65-82, letter on pp. 68-69, in Holmes, Kenneth L., editor. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1849*, Vol. 1. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995 [reprinted from 1983].

### **Susan Shelby Magoffin**

**1846 June 9**

“... Tuesday evening we went into Independence; there we stayed one night only at Mr. Noland’s Hotel. On Wednesday morning I did considerable business; some shopping—little articles I had thought of only within a few days. I called to see Mrs. Owens, and on my return from there received two or three visits—next I arranged my trunk “plunder basket” &c. And after dinner between the hours of 3 and 4 we left the little village of I—[Independence] for the residence of Mr. Barns, ....”

\*\*\*\*\*Susan Shelby Magoffin was married to a veteran Santa Fe trader. The Magoffin couple stayed at the Noland Hotel, one of the quite successful Independence hotels during trail times. Magoffin’s diary is considered a classic among Santa Fe Trail enthusiasts. **Source:** Magoffin, Susan Shelby. *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847*. Edited by Stella M. Drumm. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1982 [ originally printed 1926], quote on pp. 1-2.

### **James Josiah Webb**

**1847 July 13, from 1931 memoir**

“We reached Independence without further adventure, made arrangement for the care of our stock, and left our wagons with Mr. Stone (the maker) for repair, expecting to make another trip to New Mexico that season. The wagons were a curiosity. The running gear and bodies [were] so dilapidated that repair seemed impossible. They had run eight thousand miles without the repairs



of a blacksmith. Many breaks [had been] repaired by extra parts and timber carried for the purpose, and others made secure by wrapping with rawhide in the green state, which when dried, would shrink so tight as to make them as secure as iron bands for a time; and when they gave out, were renewed with the same material. Mr. S. measured some of the wheels and told me they were three to four inches lower than when new, caused by the tire becoming loose and wedging up, cutting out the fellows, and forcing the spokes into the hub; so that it frequently became necessary to cut them off inside the hub with a chisel. No iron axles were run on the prairie for carrying freight until 1848.”

\*\*\*\*\*When Webb wrote in his memoir about a trip that most likely occurred in 1845, Webb had said that he purchased a wagon with iron axles. In light of his comment above, Webb may have attributed the 1845 purchase to the wrong trip to the Southwest. Nonetheless, Webb’s comments of 1847 show that wagonmakers were busy repairing trail wagons as well as manufacturing the wagons. **Source:** Webb, James Josiah. *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*. Edited by Ralph P. Bieber. Introduction by Mark L. Gardner. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995 [reprint of 1931 edition, with new introduction], quote on p. 300.

### **William Gilpin**

#### **1849 January 8**

“[Independence is an] emporium of the commerce of the prairies... [and has] indisputable and peculiar advantages over all other starting off places along the river. ... Other points higher up the Missouri, as Weston, St. Joseph, and the Mormon settlement near Council Bluffs, have occasionally been selected by emigrating parties. The places have all the disadvantages of being on the eastern bank of the Missouri, and as yet far behind Independence in the abundance, adaptation, and cheapness of supplies.”

\*\*\*\*\*These boosteristic comments appeared in a letter printed in the Independence *Expositor* of January 8, 1849. At that time, Gilpin obviously was a promoter of Independence over rival jumping-off places. The boosters of various towns aimed to influence emigrants to select a particular town at which to outfit wagons. **Source:** Mothershead, Harmon. “River Town Rivalry for the Overland Trade”, *Overland Journal*, 7(2): (1989), 14-23, quote from pp. 15-16.

### **Randall Fuller**

#### **1849 April 17, from 1849 June 6<sup>th</sup> diary entry**

“June the 6<sup>th</sup> we arrived at fort laramy ... this place is a bout [sic] 522 miles from Council bluffs and from fort carnly 565 miles and from Saint Joseph 600 miles and from Independence 700 miles. We left Council bluffs or winter quarters the 9<sup>th</sup> of May at three oclock [sic] in the after noon [sic] and we arrived here June the 6<sup>th</sup> and **we beat teams [sic] that started from Independence on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April.**”

\*\*\*\*\*Fuller was in a wagon train that had left Council Bluffs area on May 9<sup>th</sup>. He said the Council Bluffs wagons arrived at Fort Laramie on June 6<sup>th</sup> and had arrived there before the wagon trains



from Independence that had left on April 17<sup>th</sup>. While this quote was written at Ft. Laramie, these words show that wagons headed toward Ft. Laramie had left from Independence that same year. Further, Fuller's comments are indicative of the competition between the trailhead jumping-off places of Independence, Westport, St. Joseph, Council Bluffs, and others. **Source:** Fuller, Randall. "The Diary of Randall Fuller", edited by Charles W. Martin, *Overland Journal*, 6(4): (1988), 2-34, quote on p. 8.