



JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS

ACROSS JOHNSON COUNTY

Frank Holsinger

1857 March 8, from 1904 memoir

“I became reminiscent while seated upon the lawn. Forty-seven years ago, scarce out of my teens, I had passed through this garden. There were no trees here then, no houses, no fences, no civilization—a dreary wilderness of grass and heaven—sky above, grass, grass all around. These lands belonged to “Sam”—our Uncle Sam. All one had to do was to stop upon them and they belonged to him. The surroundings were then uninviting because they were uninhabited. Could one have been able to look into the future and divined the beauty, wealth, comfort and intelligence, that in less than fifty years would here develop I doubt not I should have driven my stake here. Yet I plodded on down the Santa Fe trail in the hope that I should or might find a home worthy my ambition, one that would give me bread and furnish a home. It is a fact that to the emigrant this section was unattractive. These lands were considered thin and not so good farming land as that further west. This doubtless was because of the immense herds of cattle and mules used in the Santa Fe trade, which got all this sustenance from the luxuriant grass that was grazed. So I trundled on foot, sore and weary, with all my belongings upon my back. I think this day the hardest day’s work I ever did. Of my own I had \$2.50 in wealth, transportation to Lawrence was \$5 by the hack, so I walked, determined to make Lawrence, forty miles away. In this I fell short, making Franklin,”

*****Holsinger says that Johnson County was wilderness without any houses in 1857. Actually Shawnee houses in Johnson County would have pre-dated 1854 when Kansas Territory was opened for European-American settlement. Further, some European Americans already were settling in Johnson County by 1857. Holsinger says he walked the Santa Fe Trail across Johnson County, although the reader does not know where he began in the morning. One might wonder if Holsinger really was on the Santa Fe Trail or if on the Westport to Lawrence Road, also called the California Road. Holsinger had hoped to reach Lawrence, but instead he stopped just inside of what is now Douglas County. When giving a talk to the Johnson County Horticultural Society in 1904, the above author began reminiscing about when he walked on the Santa Fe Trail in Johnson County decades earlier. This Frank Holsinger then wrote those memories for a column in the *Western Fruit-Grower*. Rodney Staab, a former director of the Grinter House in Kansas City, Kansas, found this memoir. **Source:** “Walking the Santa Fe Trail Proved Too Much,” *Trails Head Tidings* 13(1): (February 1999), 6, quote on p. 6.