



JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS

LONE ELM CAMPGROUND

James Josiah Webb

1845 early September or middle June (June in 1931 memoir, fall month from Mark Gardner)

“... The first night from the state line we camped at the Lone Elm; and there came up a violent storm in the night, and being [too] short-handed to form a guard to herd the cattle, [we] concluded to go to bed, keep dry, and trust to luck. Awaking in the morning, we found every animal gone, and hunting the tracks found they had started for “the States.” There was no way but to follow them on foot, and I started alone, leaving Mr. Doan to look after things in camp and see that the men did not leave, taking [an] outfit for which they owed and as much more as they might be able to carry. Arriving at the [state] line, I found the oxen had been taken up and corralled by Mr. Magoffin’s major domo at his camp, and the mules yarded at French’s. There had been a great deal of rain, and the roads were very muddy, and the prairie very soft. I went to the camp of Mr. Noland, who had hitched up to start, and found him putting a new tongue to one of his wagons. [It had been] the first [wagon] to make the start over the prairie [and had] mired down. And doubling teams to pull [it] out, the cattle took a short turn [and] brought the wagon “on the lock” and broke off the tongue. ...

I got the cattle under way for camp, and about half way met one of the men come to assist me. We did not arrive in time to start that evening, but managed to secure the cattle; so the experience was not repeated.”

***** Lone Elm Campground first was known as Round Grove. As the trees were cut by travelers, finally only one tree remained for a while before even that tree was gone, possibly around 1849 or 1850. This campground was on the Independence Route at Cedar Creek. Another campground was on Cedar Creek, to the northwest, but that other Cedar Creek campground was on the Westport Route. That other campground, Elm Grove, likely also started as a grove and also may have been reduced to one tree. Trail historian Craig Crease discovered that throughout most of the twentieth century historians had confused the two Cedar Creek campgrounds, probably because diarists were describing lone elms at both campgrounds.

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. 130-131.

Dr. Fredrick A. Wislizenus

1846 May 23

“At Lone Elm-tree we halted at noon; rather a poor camping place, with bad water, scanty grass, and a single elm-tree some brushes are growing along the water. How long the venerable



elm-tree, that must have seen many ages, will yet be respected by the traveller [variant spelling], I am unable to say; but I fear that its days are numbered, and that the little valley will look more desolate than ever.”

*****Around 1990, trail historian Craig Crease was puzzled by discrepancies in nineteenth-century descriptions of the Lone Elm Campground. He also was looking at descriptions of Caravan Grove, Round Grove, and Elm Grove. Trail historians had come to see all four of those names as appellations for the same trail campground, that is, Lone Elm Campground. Crease concluded that the four names actually represented two different campgrounds on Cedar Creek. Crease speculated that both campgrounds could have started as groves and then both reduced to single elms due to all the travelers cutting firewood. Elm Grove was on Cedar Creek on the Westport Route while Lone Elm was on Cedar Creek on the Independence Route.

Source: Crease, Craig. “Lone Elm and Elm Grove: A Case of Mistaken Identity?”, *Wagon Tracks*, 5(4): (August 1991), 10-13, quote on p. 10.

Susan Shelby Magoffin

1846 June 11

“All the evening we drove on well. At half an hour by sun we came up with the waggons [sic] of Mr. McMannus and a Spaniard Armigo. They were just preparing to camp at “The Lone Elm,” 35 miles from I [Independence]. This is the first camping place from Fitzu’s, which is at the border of Mo. and the place at which our wagons stayed the night before.

There is no other tree or bush or shrub save one Elm tree, which stands on a small elevation near the little creek or branch. The travelers always stop where there is water sufficient for all their animals. The grass is fine every place, it is so tall in some places as to conceal a man’s waist.

We crossed the branch and stretched our tent. ...”

*****Susan Shelby Magoffin was the wife of a Santa Fe trader. Since the Magoffins left from Independence, that party is at the Cedar Creek campground on the Independence Route of the historic trails. **Source:** Magoffin, Susan Shelby. *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico*. Edited by Stella M. Drumm. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1982 [original memoir published 1926], quote on pp. 4-6.

Benjamin Ladd Wiley

1847 July 1

“This morning we buried John N. Collins, a private in Captain Turner’s company. His grave is situated on the right hand of the road about 150 yards east of the “Lone Elm” the only tree to be seen on the prairie for miles around. And I could not but reflect that this lovely grave would



in the course of a few years be traversed by the ploughshear [sic] of civilization and the last resting place of the poor soldier who went out to fight for the rights of his country and to secure to those very *deseccrators* the rights which they value so highly, should be forgotten and rank corn should rustle above and around this spot where a few moments ago were heard the muffled drum and discharge of firearms as his comrades [sic] fired their salute over his lone grave. We this day marched 10 miles and encamped on a beautiful stream of water with plenty of wood and grass. This day was more pleasant than we had had for some time.”

*****Many soldiers heading west during the Mexican War stopped at the Lone Elm Campground, on the Independence Route on Cedar Creek. Several soldiers as well as others, died from cholera at that campground. Benjamin Wiley, a soldier of the First Regiment of the Illinois Volunteers, describes one of these deaths and burials at the campground. Wiley also tells of the location of the lone elm. **Source:** Marshall, Ross. “Lone Elm Campground to Be Preserved and Interpreted”, *Trails Head Tidings* 15(2): (August 2001), 9-10, quote on p. 9.

Thomas Lester Bryan

1847 July 13

“Marched to Lone Elm, encamped, hauled wood from Wolf Creek.”

***** In the summer of 1847, Company C of the First Illinois Volunteer Infantry, of which Bryan belonged, marched from Fort Leavenworth to New Mexico during the Mexican War. Bryan had been a practicing physician before enrollment. Bryan did not rise from enlisted rank until he became an acting assistant surgeon in October of 1847 in Santa Fe. **Source:** Clapsaddle, David K. “Timber on the Santa Fe Trail”, *Wagon Tracks*, 25(2): (February 2011), 16-18, quote on p. 16.

J.F. Pritchard

1849

“This lone tree stands on the bank of a small stream, with no other tree or shrub in sight, all its branches have been cut from it by traders and emigrants [sic] for the purpose [sic] of fuel.”

*****Pritchard was traveling to California. **Source:** Marshall, Ross. “Lone Elm Campground to Be Preserved and Interpreted”, *Trails Head Tidings* 15(2): (August 2001), 9-10, quote on p. 9.

Bernard J. Reid

1849 May 17

“Thursday May 17th. Leave two carriages with two men to die of cholera. I remain awhile. Lone Elm. Kentuckian. News from back. Snipe. Snakes. Flowers. Peas. Santa Fe trail. Indian



homes and spring. Camp at five o'clock two miles off on the Oregon trail. At dark the two carriages came up. The two men were buried together at the last camp."

*****This Pennsylvanian who had been living in St. Louis did not begin keeping regular longer entries until later in May when he mentions the Little Vermillion, Big Vermillion, Big Blue, and Alcove Spring while still in Kansas. **Source:** Reid, Bernard J. *Overland to California with the Pioneer Line: The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid*. Edited by Mary McDougall Gordon. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983, quote on p. 35.

W.H. Brady

1854, from letter of 1906 May 5

"I first saw Lone Elm camp ground in 1854 as I came back from looking at the country in Douglas County. The old tree was laying on the ground, the greater part of it had been burned up."

*****When the Santa Fe Trail still was active with travelers, Brady had settled in Kansas. Some sources indicate the tree was down by 1849 or 1850. This letter is in a brochure that trail historian Craig Crease thinks was self-published by Newton Ainsworth, the owner of the property that included the still active Lone Elm Campground shortly after Kansas was opened for settlement. **Source:** Brady, W.H. "Brady's Letter" [letter read at dedication of 1906 Lone Elm DAR Santa Fe Trail marker since Brady unable to attend], *Lone Elm Marker, Lone Elm CampGround, Santa Fe Trail Monument, Erected 1906* [booklet does not give publisher, WorldCat indicates this was reprinted from *Olathe Register* of November 13, 1906], quote on 6th unpagged page.

Newton Ainsworth

1858 May, from memoir of 1906 November 9

"In May, 1858, I saw wagon trains camped on the Lone Elm Camping ground until they covered more than this entire quarter section. In their desire not to be detained and to be on the road first in the morning, they commenced at twelve o'clock at night to hitch up and pull for the trail and the last team did not pass where we are standing [during the 1906 dedication of DAR Lone Elm Santa Fe Trail marker] until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and at one time, for three days in succession, the last teams going out of camp had not passed here before hundreds were going into camp. The rush to the Pike's Peak gold fields in 1858 is what made the heavy emigration and the heavy loads of freight. All the roads north, east and south centered to Lone Elm camp ground. The great Santa Fe Trail was the main artery and the other roads were feeders to it."



*****In 1857 Newton Ainsworth established a farm on property that included the Lone Elm Campground. He raised his family on this farm which many called the Lone Elm Farm. Ainsworth's participation in the 1906 dedication of the Lone Elm DAR marker shows he was proud of the trail history that had occurred on his farm. Ninety-five years after that dedication, the City of Olathe bought 160 acres of the Lone Elm land to create a Lone Elm Park that was dedicated in 2004. The DAR marker still is at 167th Street and Lone Elm Road. Other historical markers have been added within the park during the twenty-first century. **Source:** Ainsworth, Newton. "The Santa Fe Trail" [address read at 1906 dedication of Lone Elm DAR Santa Fe Trail marker], *Lone Elm Marker, Lone Elm CampGround, Santa Fe Trail Monument, Erected 1906* [booklet does not give publisher, but trail historian Craig Crease thinks this was privately published by Newton Ainsworth; *WorldCat* indicates this was reprinted from *Olathe Register* of November 13, 1906], quote on 3rd & 4th unpagged pages.