



JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

WESTPORT

Matthew C. Field

1843 October 19

“...Started an hour after my friends, Kennett, Christy, Tilghman and Bay to go on in advance to Westport. My mule, with a dozen others, couldn't be found, which delayed me. Caught up with the others in an hour, now on the Santa Fe road, and soon after met a subordinate officer from Fort Leavenworth, going out to Col. Cook, at “One Hundred and Ten” [Creek] with a wagon load of corn. Just after this, 20 miles from Westport, Elizabeth Jenkins gave out, and I was compelled to walk and lead her, letting my companions leave me behind. Remembered well one of the spots I passed this morning on the Santa Fe road. Found a hole of water, and let Elizabeth crop dry grass while I wrote up journal. Afraid I shant [sic] see Westport today!

Met a young military man alone, whom I afterward learned was Sergeant Griffith of Dragon Company G. He gave me information of my friends and the road, besides a dram of whiskey— and I walked. Two miles further met more military men with a waggon [sic] load of corn, and stopped with them, as they were tramping, and it was still 10 or 12 miles to Westport. ...”

*****The journalist Field and his fellow travelers are moving from west to east, that is, from Fort Laramie to Westport, Missouri. In 1843 Field accompanied Sir William Drummond Stewart on a Rockies excursion for pleasure. **Source:** Field, Matthew C. *Prairie and Mountain Sketches*. Collected by Clyde & Mae Reed Porter. Edited by Kate Leila Gregg & John Francis McDermott. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1957, quote on p. 213.

James Josiah Webb

1845 December 22 to 24, from 1931 memoir

“From this [point] to Westport [had left Santa Fe November 2] we had good camps and fair shelter, and arrived on December 22. [We] remained one day to arrange for the wintering of the mules and storing of camp equipment, and on the twenty-fourth went to Independence.”

*****Webb and his fellow Santa Fe traders had finished the trading season in late December. Webb's writing shows that a trader could be associated with both Westport and Independence at the same time. Further, Webb indicates in his memoir that he had purchased his 1845 goods



in St. Louis and that before the end of December 1845 he would be returning to St. Louis. This supports Pat O'Brien's thesis in his book *Merchants of Independence: International Trade on the Santa Fe Trail 1827-1860*. O'Brien does not look at the parochial nature of pitting one trail town against another, but rather sees that traders and financiers were using a milieu of towns all at the same time. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the Independence to Westport Road, a local road, was part of the Santa Fe-Oregon-California trails. Even though traders might have gone back and forth between Independence and Westport for various commercial reasons, that does not mean that loaded wagons (ready to head westward) used the Independence to Westport Road. If wagons were loaded in Independence, wagon drivers would have followed the Independence Route southwesterly from Independence, rather than driving loaded wagons on the Independence to Westport Road and run into major traffic jams in Westport. On the other hand, after wagons had been loaded in Westport, wagon drivers certainly would not have traveled many miles out of the way by traveling the local road east to Independence before going south on the Independence Route. **Source:** Webb, James Josiah. *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade 1844-1847*. Ed. by Ralph P. Bieber. Introduction by Mark L. Gardner. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1955 [reprint of 1931 edition, with new introduction], quote on p. 169.

Francis Parkman

1846 May

“EMERGING FROM THE MUD-HOLES of Westport, we pursued our way for some time along the narrow track, in the checkered sunshine and shadow of the woods, till at length, issuing into the broad light, we left behind us the farthest outskirts of the great forest that once spread from the western shore of the Atlantic. Looking over an intervening of bushes, we saw the green, ocean-like expanse of prairie, stretching swell beyond swell to the horizon.”

*****Parkman's comment shows that 1846 Westport was on the edge of European-American Missouri settlements. At that point, Kansas to the west is Indian territory and would not be opened for European-American settlement until 1854. **Source:** Clapsaddle, David K. “Timber on the Santa Fe Trail”, *Wagon Tracks*, 25(2): (February 2011), 16-18, quote on p. 16.

Lorena L. Hays

1853 April 28 & 29

“29 Well, camped out last night for the first time. Started at three o'clock [sic]. Came



seven miles. Westport, four miles, is a very thriving place. ...”

*****Many families, some related, planned to move from Barry, Illinois to California. After renting a house in the town of Kansas for about five weeks while waiting for the grass to green and for others to arrive from Illinois, an extended family left the town of Kansas. After camping for a night in the vicinity of Westport, some of the Illinois company headed toward the plains. **Source:** Hays, Lorena L. *To the Land of Gold and Wickedness: The 1848-59 Diary of Lorena L. Hays*. Edited by Jeanne Hamilton Watson. St. Louis: Patrice Press, 1988, quote on p. 151.

W.B. Napton

1857 May through June 10, from 1905 memoir

“The work cattle and wagons were collected and a camp established, about the first of May, on the high, rolling prairie near the Santa Fe trail, three miles southwest of Westport. The wagons were heavy, cumbersome affairs with long deep beds, covered with sheets of heavy

cotton cloth, supported by bows. A man six feet high could stand erect in one of them, and they were designed to hold a load of seven or eight thousand pounds of merchandise each. Those in our train were made by Hiram Young, a free negro at Independence, and they were considered as good as any except those with iron axles. The freight consisted of merchandise for the trade in New Mexico. Two of the wagons were loaded with imported champagne for Colonel St. Vrain of Las Vegas and Mora.

There was a shortage of good ox drivers that spring and Captain “Jim Crow” found it difficult to supply the number he needed. Twenty-five dollars a month “and found” were the wages. One evening, while we were lounging around the corral, waiting for supper, three men came up on foot, inquiring for the captain of the train. They were ... well dressed men, two of them wearing silk hats.... They said they were stranded and looking for work. They proposed to Captain Chiles to hire ... for drivers, while they disclaimed any knowledge of the calling. “Jim Crow” ... after interrogating them ... said he would hire them on probation ...”and if I find you can learn to drive cattle before we got to Council Grove, the last settlement on the road, then I’ll keep you

They were invited to supper and assigned to a mess. ...

In the camp, three miles southwest of Westport, we were detained for a fortnight or more, awaiting the arrival of our freight at Kansas City. There were twenty-six wagon[s], five yoke of oxen to each, carrying about seven thousand pounds of freight each. There were no tents so we slept on the ground, either under a wagon or, if we preferred it, the broad canopy of heaven.



Captain “Jim Crow” commanded the company, with Rice as assistant wagonmaster [sic]. There was one driver for each wagon, and a boy of 16 ... whose duty it was to drive the “cavayard” [correct spelling] or loose cattle, taken along in case any of the teams should get lame or unfit for service. ...

While encamped below Westport I was fortunate in purchasing a first rate “buffalo horse,” ... that had been brought across the plains the previous year. ...

Camped in our vicinity were several corrals of trains belonging to Mexican merchants, who used mules instead of oxen, and had lately come up from New Mexico. These Mexicans subsisted altogether on taos (unbolted) flour, and dried buffalo meat, while our mess wagon was filled with side bacon, flour, coffee, sugar, beans and pickles. ...

There were no farms fenced up in sight of our camp at that time, but the prairie was dotted with the houses of the “squatter sovereigns,” who were “holding down” claims.

On the 10th day of June we yoked up and started on the long journey. ...”

***** Despite the lack of experience, two of the green hires became quite good wagon drivers while the third one remained quite inept, but may have continued to drive to New Mexico. As parties prepared for trip or waited for goods and/or persons of parties, camping near Independence or camping near Westport was common. Napton’s group had wagons manufactured by Hiram Young, a free African American, in Independence. Napton uses the term “negro” which would be capitalized in modern times, although now the term “Black” or “African American” would be used. Napton’s text displays a commonly held European-American

belief in the inferiority of African Americans when he explains that Hiram Young’s manufactured wagons were excellent even though Young was a Black man. **Source:** Napton, W.B. *On the Santa Fe Trail in 1857*. Arrow Rock: Friends of Arrow Rock, 1991 [reprint of Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson Publishing, 1905], excerpt on pp. 6- 11.

William Johnson

1850s late, from 1915 memoir

“...the time of which I speak, during the later fifties....

A good many of the owners of trains, who followed freighting on the plains, lived in and around Westport, Mo. Some of them whom I remember, that lived on their farms, were Majors [no comma] McKinney, Carr, Yaeger and the four Hays brothers. These men usually corralled [sic] their wagons on their farms and herded their cattle near them. Among those that I remember who lived in Westport, were the Bernards, Kearney, Hamilton and Findley. These usually corralled [sic] their wagons near the edge of the timber and close to water. They ordinarily considered that grass would be up enough by the twentieth day of May for the cattle to travel on and made their arrangements to make their start as soon after this as they



could get off. Westport was a very busy place from the middle of May to the first of July.

The Mexican trains and Indian traders began to come in soon after the first of June. These ordinarily were not freighters, although they used the same kinds of outfits. Possibly one-fifth

of the Mexicans had mule trains. These trains usually corraled [sic] their wagons on what is now the Kansas side of Brush creek.

Among the Indian traders, Bent always made his camp on what we always called "Bent's Hill." The ground is now owned by John Roe. Ward's camp was at a spring three-quarters of a mile west of the State line at about 60th street, on ground lately sold by Henry Coppook. Lexton made his camp at a spring on the Reinhardt place.

These men, Indian traders and Mexican merchants, left their train[s] here while they went to St. Louis and bought their goods and shipped them to Kansas City by steamboats. The trains would generally be in camp here from one to two months. The traders brought in with them mostly buffalo robes, buck skins, (antelope skins were classed as buck skins), beaver felts, and anything else along this line that they could trade for these goods, they shipped to St. Louis and sold them there. They also brought with them a good many ponies, these they sold at their camps or at Westport."

*****In the late 1850s, this William Johnson was a bullwhacker. This is why he would have been quite familiar with the places where the freighters and Indian traders camped. This memoir was included in the classic 1915 history of Johnson County compiled by Ed Blair. The Johnson County Genealogical Society indexed this book and then published a reprint with index in 1976. The indexers indexed "Johnson, William" and "Johnson, William M". This would seem to represent just two William Johnsons, but actually four are included in those two indexed entries. The three represented as "William Johnson" are as follows. One of these Williams, born in 1805, was the brother of Rev. Thomas Johnson, the founder of Shawnee Methodist Mission that now is a museum in Johnson County, Kansas. Another William, born in 1845, was a son of the founder of that mission. The third William was a trail bullwhacker in the late 1850s when the son of the Shawnee missionary would not have been aged 15 until 1860. The son of the missionary actually was a William M[cKendree] Johnson, and he was "born" in Kansas in 1845, whereas the indexed "William M. Johnson" belonged to the Old Settlers' Association of Johnson County and "arrived in Johnson County" in May of 1847. **Source:** Johnson, William. "Recollections of a Bullwhacker", 66-70, excerpt from pp. 69-70, in Blair, Ed, compiler. *History of Johnson County Kansas*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Johnson County Genealogical Society, 1976, reprint with added index [original Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Co, 1915].



W.P. Tomlinson

1858 May 8

“I took a walk out to Westport, and proceeded from thence to the plains of Kansas territory, where the Santa Fe trains were encamped in “corrals” ... on the prairies. I went out the Santa Fe road to Westport, and then followed the old California road until I came to where the “corrals” dotted the prairies set apart by the United States government for the special benefit of the Santa Fe and Oregon trains. It was a beautiful view; the great prairie, over whose rolling swells,

covered with waving grass, and variegated with a profusion of beautiful flowers, the herds of a hundred “corrals” were grazing or lying idly on the velvety sward; while on every eminence was the picturesque “corral” of the trader, from which would momentarily dart some Mexican, Indian, or half-breed, mounted on pony or mustang, to visit some neighboring encampment....

... Then the vast herds of cattle, feeding far and near over the prairie; the white tents
and
wagons of the emigrant, and far-traveled Santa Fe trains, with the ... Mexican teamsters....”

*****W.P. Tomlinson was a New York *Tribune* journalist traveling in the West. He describes the animals which obviously had to be kept in waiting until the wagon trains were ready to leave. The term “half-breed” was used commonly in the nineteenth century, but now is considered derogatory. **Source:** Caldwell, Martha B., comp. *Annals of Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School*. 2nd edition. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1977, quote on pp. 101-102.

Randolph B. Marcy

1859

“From Westport, Missouri, to the gold diggings of Pike’s Peak and “Cherry Creek,” N. T., via the Arkansas River.”

*****At the request of the U.S. War Department, Randolph Marcy compiled a guidebook for overland travelers. The author listed 18 possible itineraries. This one basic itinerary is listed on page 255, and the specific crossings and campgrounds are given on pages 295 to 301. **Source:** Marcy, Randolph B. *The Prairie Traveler: A Handbook for Overland Expedition*. Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publishers, 1968 [reprint of New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859, 1st edition], basic itinerary from p. 255.



Westport Border Star

1860 June 23

“...A regular wagon of the first magnitude, capable of carrying 6,500 pounds is what we here call a “Santa Fe wagon,” from the fact that so many trains of these wagons are continually leaving Westport and Kansas City for Santa Fe, New Mexico. During the spring and summer and part of the fall months we see hundreds of them every day, but as yet, have never attempted to furnish an accurate description of either wagon or train.

A large portion of these wagons are manufactured at St. Louis and at establishments in Indiana and Illinois, and are forwarded here by water. Within this year, however, a factory has been erected in our own city, under the immediate control and proprietorship of Mr. M. T. Graham, from whom we gather the following information concerning the construction of these “prairie schooners.”—In this establishment there are four departments, employing in all thirty- five men, and turning out fifty-three wagons per month. The expense of keeping a concern of this character in “full blast” would be about \$200 per diem, or \$65,000 per year.

The material for the construction of a wagon is obtained mostly in the counties of Clay and Jackson, Missouri, Wyandotte county, Kansas, and Indiana, and is consumed into “shaped lumber” at the factory, when it then undergoes a seasoning process before being worked up. As in factories for the construction of locomotives, every thing [sic] is reduced to a system—as it is in these “shops.” And in the various departments, machine shops, painting room, furnishing and trimming room, and lathe room, we find men engaged on some particular part of a wagon.

...

Such in brief is a prairie wagon.... When merchandise is forwarded in these cars they go out in trains of from eighteen to thirty-three, and sometimes fifty wagons, and are propelled by a team of six yoke of strong and heavy cattle—stock that is accustomed to the plains, many trains, however, use mules and we can safely estimate this motive power at seventy thousand head of live stock [sic]—all mules and oxen. The value of this rolling stock is no less than \$3,000,000! ...To keep this stock moving requires about six thousand men, including wagonmasters [sic], teamsters, agents, &c., at a cost of \$180,000 a month, or \$2,160,000 a year. ...”

*****While this article written by a Westport journalist purports to give just the facts, the newspaper article actually is a promotion of Westport. According to the above words, one might think that the closest manufacturer of trail wagons is St. Louis. No mention is made of the many wagon shops in Independence just miles away. The 1860 Westport newspaper obviously does not want to give any attention to competitive Independence wagon makers. In referencing locomotive shops of the East in this promotion of Westport wagons, the author, like many,



likely did not realize how quickly mechanical trains would be overtaking commercial transportation of the West. The 1860 writer does say “Westport and Kansas City”. The name for the area of the town of “Kansas” was changed to the “City of Kansas” in 1853 and then gradually changed to “Kansas City” before “Kansas City” became the official name in 1889.

Source: “Rolling Stock of the Plains”, *Wagon Tracks*, 2(1): (November 1987), 13, excerpt from p. 13.