

A short field season in the first three weeks of September was again conducted at Fort Scott located on the northern edge of the present day community of Fort Scott, in Bourbon county, Kansas. This was a joint effort between the historical architects of the National Park Service and the archeological division of the Kansas State Historical Society. Information was needed concerning three buildings in order that the restoration of the fort could be finalized with adequate architectural drawings. Work centered around the old fort hospital, the well housing and magazine located respectively on the north and south sides of the parade, and the oven foundation located under the old flooring within the original confines of the post bakery which is still standing. The post hospital will be reconstructed and serve as the visitor's center for the fort with the well housing and magazine being reconstructed through archeological remains that have been uncovered. This also applies to the oven foundation in the old bakery. One additional season is anticipated at Fort Scott and this will transpire during the summer months of 1971.

Kansas State Historical Society
Topeka, Kansas

SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE TRADING HOUSE

AT THE WALNUT CROSSING

By

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Walnut Creek Allison and Booth Respectfully informs their friends, and the public generally, that they have established a trading house and general depot at Walnut Creek, on the Santa Fe road; where they keep constantly on hand groceries, and provisions suitable for travellers. Also for Forage. With corrals and inclosures for the security of animals. Prices reasonable.¹

The advertisement above appears to be the earliest documented reference to the establishment of a trading house on the Walnut Creek. The Allison and Booth mentioned were both plainsmen of some repute, and this attempt at the establishment of a trading post mid-way between Independence, Missouri, and Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory, appears to have been influenced heavily by their knowledge of the region. The March 3d, 1855, broadside, however, was a bit premature, for in August of the same year, the Kansas Free State at Lawrence published:

A short time since...they (Allison and Booth) started on an expedition to the gold region (California), their mules and provisions dying out.. ...they abandoned the idea and returned here determined to settle on Walnut Creek. Booth left a month or so since and Allison this week (between July 30 and August 4), and from the last reports on Booth's progress he was busily engaged in building houses and corrals, etc.

¹Santa Fe Weekly Gazette, March 3, 1855.

The trading post was probably finished and provisioned in late August, and undoubtedly waxed profitable on the returning armada of Santa Fe caravans. The winter was taken up with hunting and more building, it must be supposed, as the post was not abandoned. The Kiowa "winter camp" is purported to have been just opposite the mouth of Walnut Creek on the south bank of the Arkansas River, and to have left the buildings vulnerable to their curiosity (and their practical desire for ready-cut firewood) would have been most unwise.

I was able to locate little information concerning the post in 1856, save that Booth attempted to raise corn. The attempt ended in abject failure. It may also have been a very dry winter, for at least one person travelling the Trail in May of 1857, "found a poor miserable country. Mr. Booth tried to raise corn but could not." It is of interest that the same chronicler also records "about eighty Rappahoe (sic.) Indians"....about the post. The Indian trade had already commenced in earnest.

Francis Booth died in 1857. The Santa Fe Weekly reported that he had been murdered by a Mexican who split his head open with an axe. The culprit was apprehended three weeks later.

There is no contemporary description of Booth, but of William Allison there are several. He was described by "Uncle Dick" Wooton as a "brave daring fellow", while another acquaintance says that "in his buckskin suit (he) was a fine specimen of (a) frontiersman". Only the Kiowas, however, made reference to the fact that Allison had but one arm. They called Walnut Creek "T_sodalhentedi P'a" (Armless Man's Creek) because of his post there.

It might aid in the description of Allison to record here how he lost his arm. It seems that he had fought with his stepfather and that they had exchanged shots. The stepfather was fatally wounded, and Allison lost his arm. Wooton was certainly correct in calling him a "brave daring fellow".

By 1858, the buildings and grounds were fully established. The building is described as being built of logs of equal length set upright in the ground "stockade style". The following year, A. E. Raymond recorded in his diary (May 5, 1859), that the ranch was "built of poles inclosed with sod". The roof was flat. Around the building (to the west) were stone and sod walls enclosing about an acre of land that was used as a corral.

There are more contemporary references to the trading house in 1859, than in any other year. This is undoubtedly due to the discovery of gold in Colorado, and the mass exodus to that state. It may be assumed that 1859, was also Allison's peak year in sales, and he may have made one, or several, trips back to Independence for supplies. It is known that he made one trip there in the fall, for he died there from heart failure. Within four years after the establishment of the trading house, both of its founders were dead.

The post continued to function through the intervention of George Peacock. Peacock was also a man of long experience on the plains for he is mentioned as the

²ibid, October, 31, 1857.

G. H. Peacock of the Ives expedition, and he (or a George Peacock) was known to have been in Independence as early as December of 1845, and the St. Louis Weekly Reville (November 10, 1845) lists "Peacock, a Santa Fe trader".

It is said that Peacock rented the trading house after the death of Allison. References³ also cite Peacock as having had a ranch on Cow Creek, 25 miles to the east. If this is true, however, it was a post of rather short duration, having been built after 1857. It could possibly have been the same establishment later belonging to William "Buffalo Bill" Mathewson. At the same time, the Rath brothers established a post at Ellinwood, which they named "Fort" Lateral. Of it, little is known save the name and the location of its ruins, but both establishments figure greatly in the life of Peacock and his management of the trading house.⁴

It is during the Peacock era that the post began to acquire a bad reputation among the white travellers. His basic business, of course, was in catching the trade of persons travelling the Trail, and of swapping furs for supplies with the Indians. He also speculated in trading for lame, or "give out" animals from passing trains and, after fattening them, in their resale. Beyond that, however, he was also selling vast quantities of liquor to the Indians, a practice which R. M. Wright accuses him of bringing with him from Cow Creek. This liquor traffic was to prove his undoing.

Peacock passed through Council Grove in April of 1860, for the Kansas Press (April 9, 1860) records that he stayed overnight. He was on his way to Kansas City with a load of 2,000 pelts which he was going to sell. He also intended to lay in his summer supplies. He undoubtedly returned by the middle of May, and passed a profitable summer in trade. In September, he died, and I take the liberty of inserting in its entirety

George Peacock was killed at Allison's ranch, also his clerk and a Mexican herder, on Sept. 9, 1860, by Satanta, war chief of the Kiowas.... Peacock was killed for personal reasons only. Among other things, Satanta came to Peacock and asked for a letter of introduction stating that he was a chief of importance, in order that he might be treated civilly and entertained when he came to the camps of freighters, or others traveling the trail, as was customary of the plains. Peacock wrote as follows: "The bearer of this, Satanta, is the dirtiest, laziest, louseyest (sic.) vagabond on the plains; if he comes to your camp kick him out." The next train that came along, Satanta presented his letter of introduction, and to his surprise he met with derision, contempt and abuse; and it occurred to Satanta, who was very civil, decent and proud-spirited individual (at least I have always found him so), that there was something wrong with his

³R. M. Wright. "Frontier Life in Southwest Kansas", Kansas Historical Collections, vol. VII, 1901-1902, pp. 48.

⁴ibid. Records that William Griffenstein (also Grieffenstein) also had a trading post on Walnut Creek. It has never been located, and this is the only reference I have found pertaining to it.

credentials. So he goes to Mathewson's ranch on Cow Creek to see William Mathewson, the original "Buffalo Bill", who read the letter to Satanta, who swore vengeance. Mathewson sent word to Peacock as to what might be expected, but he laughed at it. The killing was adroitly planned:

Satanta, with some of his men, came to the store and told Peacock there was a lot of soldiers coming. Peacock had a tall lookout built on top of his trading house. Peacock climbed to the top of his lookout to see when Satanta shot him. If he had treated the Indians decently probably he would not have disturbed.⁵

There are several variations to the above, and Satanta was in no way a "civil and decent" individual, but the story still stands. It might also be noted that Wright, Mead, and others point out that Peacock and Satanta were close friends and often got drunk together. Satanta also warned him of approaching troops, that he might secret his whisky, as the sale of whisky to the Indians was illegal.

Again, as in the case of the death of Allison, someone stepped in to manage the post. This time it was Charles and Christopher Rath. They were brothers, and German immigrants, and reportedly had a post seven miles to the east. Ida Ellen Rath (a grand-daughter of Charles) intimates that the Raths made a fortune from Peacock's death, owing to the latter's habit of burying his money on the place.

The buildings, although only five years old, appear to have fallen into a state of disrepair. After speaking in glowing terms of the American Fur Company's posts on the Upper Missouri, Baron H. B. Möllhausen continues with the following description of the post.

But here in the trading post on Walnut Creek it was different and, although I cannot explain it, I felt that many things were not as they should have been, and that this establishment could not be considered one of the trading posts of the American Fur Company by which the natives are always treated according to certain principles, even if the accusations against the company are true, and military order partly takes the place of law.

Even with such a derogatory statement from visiting royalty, Rath did much to improve the trading house. He built a toll bridge over the Walnut Creek, and incorporated it January 14, 1863. By 1867, he had replaced the old sold and timber structure with one of sandstone.

By 1869, however, the trading house on the Walnut Creek had been abandoned. The abandonment was probably the result of several factors. The birth of Ellsworth, in 1867, meant that supplies could be cheaply gained to within forty miles of the post from the eastern end. The building of Fort Zarah (1864-1869) at the Walnut Crossing probably heavily curtailed the Indian liquor traffic. The signing of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge, October 21, and 28, 1867, banished the Plains Indians of Oklahoma. All of these were heavy factors weighing in the abandonment of the

⁵J. R. Mead. "Addenda", Kansas Historical Collections, vol. X, (1907-1908), pp. 665.

post. Finally, the post was destroyed by fire while still occupied, however, had there been heavy trade at the time, it is fairly certain that it would have been rebuilt.

The final contemporary description of the trading house is given in The Heart of the New Kansas. It was recorded in 1880, and there was nothing left but a foundation.

The main building is 70 feet long north and south, by 30 feet across. A cross wall divides it into two rooms--the north one thirty feet square, the south one thirty by forty. Attached to the southeast corner appears to be a hexagonal ruin of earth and rock, each of the sides being twelve feet long. On the west side of the building are earthworks, about sixty by eighty yards with various cross works and walls. These were the walls of the corral which was divided into apartments.⁶

Excavations by the Kansas Anthropological Association in collaboration with the Kansas State Historical Society, led to further substantiation of both the physical aspects of the main building and its function. Indian trade materials along with numerous gun parts, bottle fragments, and household items give a fairly accurate picture of the post in its declining years. Of it now, nothing remains, save a few unexcavated portions, several tons of rock, a few pounds of artifacts, and a handful of written references.

⁶Bernard Bryan Smythe. The Heart of the New Kansas, p. 85.

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