

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT FOUR SANTA FE TRAIL SITES IN OSAGE COUNTY, KANSAS

by Marsha Kling

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THE Archeology Office of the Kansas State Historical Society and the Kansas Anthropological Association (KAA) sponsored a five-day Kansas Archeology Training Program (KATP), April 6 to 10, 1995. Archeological investigations focused on four Santa Fe Trail sites in Osage county: McGee-Harris Stage Station, Havana Stage Station and townsite, Dragoon Creek crossing, and Soldier Creek crossing.

These sites were included among 20 Trail sites in Kansas for which National Register of Historic Places nomination forms were prepared in 1993. As part of the review of these nominations the Kansas State Historical Society recommended that archeological examinations were needed at several of the sites to determine whether subsurface deposits were present and to modify the proposed boundaries to include archeological remains. The work that was conducted as part of the KAPT was designed to address these questions at the four sites.

Field investigations conducted at the sites during the KATP included surface collection, metal detector surveys, subsurface testing, mapping of site features and Trail ruts, and piece-plotting of recovered cultural material. Volunteers were divided into teams to work on specific activities at the sites. The teams were led by members of the Archeology Office and by skilled KAA volunteers. A total of 159 individuals volunteered their time during the five-day period to work on these four sites. The volunteers included 30 school-age children, several members of the Santa Fe Trail Association and the Topeka Treasure Hunters Club, and many experienced members of the Kansas Anthropological Association. Volunteers came to the project from 33 Kansas counties and four other states (Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Missouri). We would like to thank all of the volunteers who participated in the project.

The McGee-Harris Stage Station Historic District (14OS399) was the eastern-most of the four sites. This proposed district includes both the 110 Mile Creek crossing and campground, which was actively used by travelers from 1821 until circa 1866, and the McGee-Harris Stage Station which op-

erated from 1854 to ca. 1870. The ruins of two buildings are currently standing on the site.

The stream at this site was referred to as Oak Creek prior to 1825, when the George C. Sibley survey team renamed it 110 Mile Creek because it was 110 miles from Fort Osage where the survey began.¹ The 110 Mile Creek crossing was referred to in many of the journals and accounts kept by civilian and military travelers. It was an overnight camping site where water and timber were available. In November 1829 Major Bennet Riley and his military battalion, escorting a caravan captained by Charles Bent consisting of approximately 35 wagons and 70 men, camped at the crossing where they found sufficient grass, wood and water for their needs.² Josiah Gregg camped at the site on May 28, 1831, and included it on his list of places along the Trail.³ In September 1835 Colonel Henry Dodge's Expedition to the Rocky Mountains returned to Missouri by way of the Santa Fe Trail and crossed the 110 Mile Creek.⁴

The 110 Mile Creek was referred to as "Camp No. 5" by Susan Shelby Magoffin. She stayed at the site the night of June 12, 1846, while traveling with her husband, who was a Santa Fe trader, a trade caravan, and their military escort. Magoffin described the site: "The camping place tonight is near a creek, which at present is quite small. A thick woods is just before us which we must pass in the morning; some repairs must be done on it [the road] first, or we should have gone over tonight. Took a little walk this evening while they were fixing the tent, and picked some little pebbles which I shall take home as a specimen of my Prairie curiosities. . . . It is the life of a wandering princess, mine. . . ."⁵

The 110 Mile Creek crossing was a much used campground during the war with Mexico. In late June and early July of 1846 the crossing served as a campground for various units of Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West. The soldiers camped on both sides of the creek, and some of them celebrated the 4th of July there.⁶ One of the soldiers, Abraham Robinson Johnston, made this entry in his diary on July 5, 1846: "We camped on the right bank of 110, where we found Captain Angney's company of infantry and Hudson's company of Laclede

Rangers (an independent company from St. Louis intended to do duty with the dragoons, which, having left Fort Leavenworth when Colonel Doniphan did, took the lower ferry road by mistake, and thus we overtook them.) One of the baggage wagons of the artillery broke an axle today, which has to be mended before morning."⁷

By the early 1850s travelers along the Road to Santa Fe reported the presence of permanent residents at the 110 Mile Creek crossing. Dr. Wilson Hobbs, a Quaker missionary to the Shawnee Indians, indicated that Samuel Cornetzer, an Anglo laborer at the mission, married a Shawnee girl and built a house near the 110 Mile Creek crossing in 1850.⁸ Other travelers also mentioned the small settlement at the crossing consisting of three families of Shawnees and whites, including a man named Richardson. Journalist G. Harris Heap, stayed at the crossing on May 15, 1853, and described three families living in "a few log-houses situated, in a hollow, near a small stream shaded by cottonwoods."⁹

In August 1854 Fry P. McGee and his brother, Mobillon McGee, then residents of Westport, Missouri, purchased the claims at 110 Mile Creek crossing as a commercial venture. Fry McGee's wife, Martha, and three daughters settled with him at the site in July 1854.¹⁰ The McGee brothers were leaders of the proslavery element in that part of Kansas Territory. Fry McGee owned three slaves, a woman and child who helped in the house, and a young man who did various chores.¹¹ McGee's establishment was the polling place for the 7th district in the territorial election held November 29, 1854. A total of 607 votes were cast at the site, even though only 52 eligible voters resided in the district. This precinct was used by Horace Greeley as an example of voting fraud and the disregard for law and order displayed by the proslavery forces.¹²

The 1857 General Land Office Survey map showed the route of the Santa Fe Trail crossing 110 Mile Creek, "McGee's Field" southeast of the crossing, and a "Road from Ft. Riley to Hundred and Ten" intersecting the Trail a short distance east of the stream crossing. No structures were shown at the site on this map, probably due to the fact that the buildings

were located well away from the section and quarter section lines followed by the surveyor. In the same year the Kansas Territorial legislature passed "An Act to Declare the Santa Fe Road a Territorial Road," in which "McGee's on 110 Creek" was mentioned as a landmark along the route.¹³ An 1858 guide to the gold regions of Pike's Peak listed the items and services available at "110 Creek" as a "Mail station, coal, wood, water, grass, entertainment."¹⁴ Fry McGee was also the first postmaster of Richardson Post Office, which was established at the site on January 9, 1855. This post office was discontinued on September 29, 1874.¹⁵

Twice a month the mail coach to Santa Fe stopped at McGee's overnight. The stage typically carried from 12 to 14 passengers. They were fed and slept in McGee's house, which served as an inn for these passengers and other travelers. The house, which had four rooms, was located on the south side of the Trail. A combined kitchen/dining room ran the full length of the building on the south side, with a huge fireplace at each end. This room provided the sleeping accommodations for single men travelers. The north half of the building was divided into three rooms. One room was occupied by travelers with wives. McGee's daughters slept in another room, and the parents used the fourth room as a sitting room and bedroom.¹⁶

Today there are no standing ruins associated with McGee's house. The scatter of limestone and artifacts in the plowed field appear to be the remains of this house. A grid containing 49 squares, each measuring 20 x 20 m, was laid out over this area. Each grid square was subjected to surface collection and metal detector survey. In addition, one unit was excavated within the concentration. Quantities of small whiteware shards and fragments of both window and bottle glass were collected. A large number of handwrought and machine cut square nails were recovered from this concentration. The metal detection survey in this area also recovered escutcheon plates from door or trunk locks, a small wrench, a lead ball, and a variety of other metal items. No evidence of intact foundation was identified during the limited testing.

McGee built a toll bridge over 110 Mile Creek ca. 1854, and rebuilt it in 1860. The bridge abutments were constructed of log cribs filled with stone. Log stringers and split log flooring reportedly provided the surface of the bridge.¹⁷ Excavation across a portion of the west bridge abutment showed evidence of stone fill. The abutments indicated that the bridge was 14.7 feet

wide, spanned a gap of approximately 32 feet, and was raised nearly 10 feet above the bed of the stream. McGee charged a toll of 25 cents per wagon, sometimes collecting \$20 to \$30 per day.¹⁸ He operated the toll bridge until his death on September 19, 1861.¹⁹

Several log cabins (probably those originally occupied by the earlier Shawnee and white inhabitants), a blacksmith shop, and a store and tavern, were located on the north side of the Trail in the 1850s.²⁰ Two excavation units were completed in the vicinity of the low stonewall and foundation remains thought to be the blacksmith shop. The large quantities of iron objects and scrap which are typical of blacksmith sites were not recovered. Collectors who previously had worked this vicinity reported the recovery of large amounts of iron from the area (personal communications 1995). The initial result of the analysis of this feature are inconclusive.

The standing remains of a stone building, which presumably served as the store, post office, and tavern, were documented. This rectangular building, which measured approximately 14.5 feet x 48 feet, and a steeply sloped roof. It appears to have been aligned with the long axis parallel to the route of the Santa Fe Trail through the site. In December 1857 McGee's oldest daughter, America Puss McGee, married William D. Harris. They built a new frame residence and storehouse near McGee's in 1857.²¹ This new residence was located on the north side of the Trail, attached to the south side of the earlier stone store or tavern. Limestone foundations of the frame addition were located and examined in four excavation units. Much of the historical cultural material recovered from the vicinity of this building dated to the post-Trail occupation of the site. An 1854 Liberty Seated dime was recovered by the metal detector survey in the meadow a short distance northeast of this structure. The extent of wear on this coin suggests that it was lost at least several years after its mint date, but quite likely by a member of the McGee family or by a traveler on the Santa Fe Trail.

Harris also built a large stable and storehouse at the site, a portion of which is still standing. This rectangular building, which measured approximately 22 feet x 50.5 feet, was aligned perpendicular to the route of the Trail through the site, with the long axis extending roughly north to south. The wall in the southwest corner of this structure was much higher than the other remaining walls. Two excavation units were placed near this structure.

After McGee's death in 1861, William and America Harris continued operating the stage station until 1870. Following the decline of the Santa Fe Trail in that area the 1860s, the site no longer operated as a stage and mail station. Harris sold the property in 1872 and the site was subsequently operated by several owners as a working farm. The Harris' frame house was occupied as a farmhouse by several different families.²² The well-worn 1881 Indian Head Penny and the farm machinery parts, recovered during the metal detector survey near this structure and in the surrounding meadow, date to the post-Trail farm occupation of the site. In 1927 the frame portion of the house was torn down and the older stone portion was converted for use as a corn crib and the house yard was cultivated.

The Havana Stage Station (14OS1301) is located on the south side of K-31 approximately four miles west of Burlingame. No structures were present at this site in 1857 when the General Land office Survey was conducted. The first stage station was constructed at this location in 1858 when the adjacent townsite of Havana was founded. The ruins of this building are still standing. The station operated as a stop on the mail stage line offering meals and lodging until ca. 1869, when the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad arrived in nearby Burlingame.

Only limited historical background information was available on the town and stage station. A brief historical sketch of Havana was presented in the 1879 (Edwards Brothers) atlas: "The [Havana] City company was composed chiefly of Germans from Chicago and St. Louis. A large stone hotel was erected at this city, also a large stone distillery and a brewery were commenced on a grand scale. Some half-dozen small buildings were completed. About fifty German and French families settled in and around this place. The machinery for a mill was brought in, an extensive store was opened, and Teutonic industry made the country around blossom like a rose. Soon, however, the leading merchant failed, the members of the company quarreled with each other, and most of the settlers discovered that they were unaccustomed to the ways of rural life. Alas, there is not one of them left to chronicle its rise and downfall. The distillery is now Davis' grist mill, and hotel Dewitt's barn, and echo answers, Where? as to the rest of it. . . ."²³

A large distillery was in the process of being built on the bank of Soldier Creek when the town of Havana was

abandoned in the early 1870s. Many of the German residents moved to Alma, and the townsite property was sold for non-payment of taxes.²⁴ After the stage station and townsite were abandoned, the site was part of a farm. The remaining buildings were used for storage, a red barn was built to the east, and a granary was built to the south of the stone stage building. The old townsite lands were used for hog pens, pasture, and cultivation (personal communication).

By 1879 only three structures were shown in the area which had been Havana.²⁵ One building was indicated on the south side of what is now K-31, probably the stone building. Two structures were shown on the north side of this road, "School No. 8" and a residence, probably the large stone hotel built at Havana.

Archeological investigations conducted at this site included metal detection survey, excavation of three units, documentation of the standing ruins, and mapping of the site and piece-plotted artifacts. In addition to a large quantity of machine-cut square nails, farm machinery parts, and fragments of barbed wire, several more interesting pieces were recovered during the metal detection survey; a brass finial, a padlock, and a metal step possibly from a stage or buggy.

The stone stage building was a rectangular structure which, as originally built, was approximately 18 feet wide and consisted of a line of four interconnecting rooms. A single excavation unit was placed along the west side of this building to examine the foundations of the ruined portion of the structure.

A rubble mound, probably the remains of the large stage stable or barn, is located south of the stage station within a partial stonewall enclosure. A capped well with a pump is situated a short distance southwest of the mound. A single unit was laid out near the northeast corner of the mound. After excavating through considerable stone from the fallen walls, a large foundation stone with underlying footings and a possible drain feature were exposed in the west wall of this unit.

A third unit was excavated across the north wall of a small stone-lined depression, a possible small house or shed. This proved to be a cellar foundation, measuring approximately 11 x 16 feet. It is located northeast of the rubble mound.

Visitors to the site during the KATP event furnished information about modifications to the site. Most indicated that over the years large quanti-

ties of limestone have been removed from the site, resulting in the destruction of buildings and stonewalls. They also provided a number of differing interpretations of the history and layout of Havana, and of the location and function of specific buildings. Mr. Workman, who grew up in a large three-story stone house across the highway from the site that has since been demolished, suggested that this house had been the stage station or hotel. He referred to the stone ruins as a tavern, in which his family stored grain and hay. Mr. Workman and others indicated that the stonewalls to the south had formed a completely enclosed, rectangular stone corral. The mound inside the enclosure was referred to as having been a large stone barn, possibly the stage stable, that had stone arched openings at the east and west ends.

The Dragoon Creek crossing (14OS1303) is a rock bottom stream crossing located on the north side of K-31 west of Burlingame, a short distance east of Havana. In 1825 Benjamin Reeves, returning from Santa Fe in August with Sibley and the Santa Fe Road Commission, described what appears to be the Dragoon Creek crossing as having a bold current and a "good rocky ford."²⁶ Wilson Hobbs mentioned that in July 1852 he encountered "deep fording for ponies" at Dragoon Creek. He indicated that "the stream ran in a very narrow and deep channel, so that a small increase of water made fording difficult or impossible."²⁷ The 1858 *Guidebook to Gold Mines of Western Kansas* indicated that at Dragoon Creek "wood, water, and grass will be found on the west side of the creek, and south of the road."

The exact location of this crossing is disputed. The 1857 General Land Office Survey shows the Santa Fe Trail crossing Dragoon Creek just south of the center of section 7. The location identified as Dragoon Creek crossing by the National Park Service (1990) and the URBANA Group (1993) is on the western edge of the section near the section line road. This side, which is generally referred to as "Rocky Ford," has a solid rock bottom. It also has a very deep bank on the west side.

Both crossing locations and the Trail route leading to and from the crossings were briefly examined during the project. The fields to the south and west of Dragoon Creek were in the process of being burned off, making survey difficult. We were not able to determine which of the two suggested locations was the Dragoon Creek crossing of the Santa Fe Trail. It is possible that both

crossings were used during the sixty years that the Trail was actively used as a freight road. Additional investigations would also be required to determine whether a campground is present on either or both sides of this stream crossing.

Soldier Creek crossing (14OS1302) is located south of K-31, a short distance west of Havana, and a short distance southeast of the grave of Samuel Hunt. Hunt was a young dragoon in Col. Dodge's expedition to the Rocky Mountains who died of measles near this crossing on September 11, 1835.²⁹

This creek was variously referred to in early accounts. Benjamin Reeves mentioned the stream as "another fork of the Osage, 15 or 20 feet wide, in places high rocky banks, bold running current, good ford, thinly timbered, oak, elm, walnut, &c."³⁰ Sibley's notes of the survey expedition refer to this stream interchangeably as "Waggon Creek" and "Pat's Creek" because in 1825 Garrison Patrick had broken a wagon tongue while crossing the stream.³¹ Captain John C. Fremont probably meant Soldier Creek when he recorded on the 4th of July, 1845, that his expedition camped and celebrated on the hill beyond a small creek which he referred to as "Independence Creek" in honor of the day.³² The earliest reference found to the stream as Soldier Creek was made by trader F. X. Aubry in August of 1847 when reporting that he had met "Noland, Harrison, Herrald and Oldham of Independence, with 12 wagons of provisions" at "Soldier creek."³³

The 1857 General Land Office Survey shows the Santa Fe Road crossing Soldier Creek just northwest of the center of section 14. Ruts in the pasture on the east side of the crossing provide evidence of the wagon traffic along this portion of the Santa Fe Trail. The creek banks at this crossing site are relatively low and the bed of the stream is covered with loose limestone slabs and gravels.

Metal detector survey was conducted on the east side of the creek in the wooded area near a short segment of stone wall and in a small portion of the pasture where the Trail ruts are visible. A number of pieces of relatively modern field machinery and trash were recovered. The major find at this site which could be attributed to the period of the Santa Fe Trail consisted of an 1823 silver Liberty dime of the "Capped Bust" type. The "3" in the date had been struck over a "2" in a coin minted the previous year. A single .64 caliber lead ball and several bolts and nails, possibly used on freight wagons,

were also recovered during the metal detector survey at the Soldier Creek crossing.

In conclusion the archeological investigation conducted during the five-day KATP event in Osage County contributed to the body of data available about these four Santa Fe Trail sites. The fieldwork at the 110 Mile Creek crossing and McGee- Harris Stage Station sites helped to determine the location of McGee's house, document the construction of the toll bridge, and define the boundaries of this important Trail site. Further analysis of patterning in the distribution of the piece-plotted artifacts located during the metal detector survey may help in locating the log cabins that were present on the side when the McGees arrived. The KATP investigations at the Havana Stage Station and townsite provided important documentation. We now know that even though post-Trail period activities at the site have resulted in the demolition of most of the structures and removal of quantities of building stone, intact subsurface foundations and other remains are present. Further documentary research and fieldwork at this site might allow the location of the additional buildings mentioned in the histories and features such as trash pits or privies associated with the stage station occupation. While the limited investigations of the Dragoon Creek crossing vicinity could not settle the dispute over the location of this crossing, it did result in the identification and recording of the late- nineteenth-century McCoy Farmstead site. The limited fieldwork conducted at the Soldier Creek crossing provided evidence of Santa Fe Trail period artifacts, suggesting that a more intensive survey of this crossing might result in establishing the locations of campgrounds and better defining the site's boundaries.

NOTES

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2. Otis E. Young, *First Military Escort on the Santa Fe Trail, 1819* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1952), 160-161.
3. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. by Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 217.
4. "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge, to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," *Military Affairs*, 6 (654): 130-146, *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States* (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1861), 144.
5. Stella M. Drumm, ed., *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 10-12.
6. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of*

the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854 (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 617-621.

7. Bieber, Ralph P., ed., *Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1936), 79-80.
8. Wilson Hobbs, "The Friends' Establishment in Kansas Territory," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, 8 (1903-1904): 257-258.
9. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 1152-1153.
10. Mrs. S. M. Berry to F. G. Adams, March 19, 1887, MS, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
11. William F. Eckart to Charles R. Green, October 30, 1903, MS, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
12. James R. McClure, "Taking the Census and Other Incidents in 1855," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, 8 (1903-1904): 237.
13. *Kansas City Star*, Sept. 9, 1928.
14. Louise Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek Crossing," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 37 (1971):136n.
15. Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1986), 108, 213.
16. Eckart to Green, Oct. 30, 1903.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Berry to Adams, Mar. 19, 1887.
20. Eckart to Green, Oct. 30, 1903.
21. Charles R. Green, *The McGee Genealogy*, MS, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
22. Sarah Kuykendall, *One Hundred Ten Mile Crossing: Stopover on the Santa Fe Trail* (1972), MS, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, 9.
23. James Rogers, "History of Osage County," *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Osage County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1879), 8.
24. *Ibid.*; A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1531; *Topeka Daily Capitol*, October 7, 1934.
25. *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Osage County, Kansas*.
26. Gregg, *Road to Santa Fe*, 171.
27. Hobbs, "Friends' Establishment in Kansas Territory," 258.
28. William B. Parsons, "The Gold Mines of Western Kansas," *Pike's Peak Gold Rush Guidebooks of 1859*, ed. by LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1941), 172.
29. *American State Papers*.
30. Gregg, *Road to Santa Fe*, 171.
31. *Ibid.*, 186, 272.
32. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 551.
33. *Ibid.*, 713.

142 MILE CREEK DAR MARKER REDEDICATED

by Helen M. Ericson

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THE DAR Trail marker at the site of Old Allen on 142 Mile Creek in the north part of Lyon County, KS, was rededicated May 17, 1995, by Mrs. Vincent Traffas, state regent, and the Old Trails Chapter of the DAR. Also attending were members of the board of the Heart of the Flint Hills Chapter, SFTA, led by President Don Cress.



DAR marker at 142 Mile Creek, rededicated May 17, 1995, l to r: Helen M. Ericson, Don Cress, and Mrs. Vincent Traffas. (Photo by Joleen Day.)

Don Schlessler related the history of Old Allen, pointing out where Charles Withington had his toll bridge, smithy, and trading post. He also identified the locations of homes at the old townsite that were moved into New Allen when the railroad came through in 1881. There remains, on a hill, a cemetery of mostly unmarked graves.

The DAR marker was originally 1/8-mile west of the present location, but it had fallen into a ditch and Mr. Schlessler had retrieved it in 1976. Since then it had lain inside a fence just west of 142 Mile Creek. It is now located directly on the Trail, 2 1/2 miles north of Allen on County Road L then 1 1/2 miles east. Harry Veatch constructed a round base of limestone gathered by Oliver Samuel, and Buster Wheat donated land adjacent to the road for the new location.

Prior to the rededication ceremony, the DAR chapter toured all markers under their jurisdiction from Lost Springs to 142 Mile Creek, evaluating those needing resetting or base repairs. This project will be completed by September 1996. The Heart of the Flint Hills Chapter is erecting interpretive signs at DAR markers and other important Trail sites. Signs are already up at ruts five miles west of Council Grove and at the Seth Hays Stone Barn one mile east of Council Grove. One is being prepared for erection at 142 Mile Creek crossing.