

Archeologists Investigate Four Santa Fe Trail Sites in Osage County (Part I)

Editor's Note: This is part one of a two-part article prepared by Marsha King, a staff archeologist in the Archeology Office of the Kansas State Historical Society, on the April 1995 investigations by the Kansas Archeology Training Program, a joint effort of the Kansas State Historical Society and the Kansas Anthropological Association.

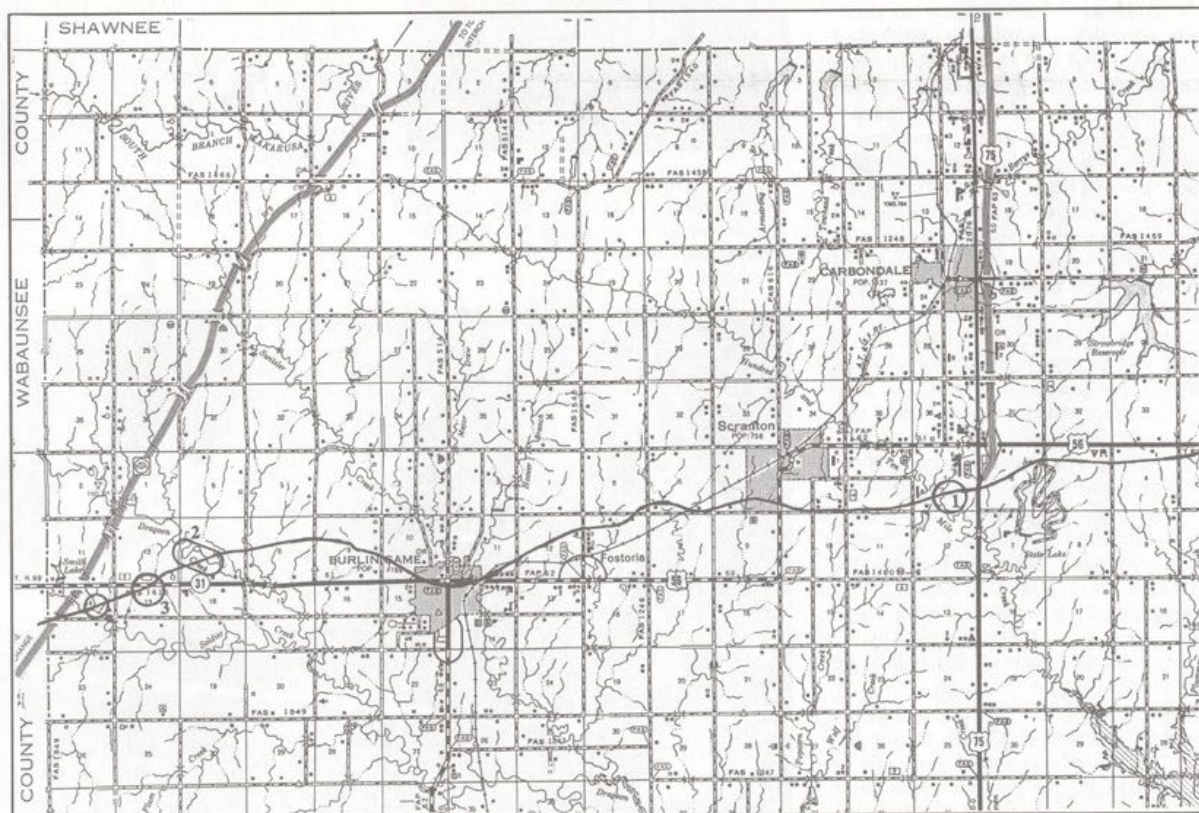
For almost sixty years, from 1821 until 1880, the Santa Fe Trail figured prominently in the history of the West. The trail was established as an international trade route linking the United States with the northern states of Mexico. The route of the Santa Fe Trail between the Missouri River and the Rio Grande in what is now north-central New Mexico provided a natural highway for travel and

communication between the two regions. American and Mexican traders hauled manufactured goods and cloth from the United States to Santa Fe and other Mexican towns, returning to Missouri with cargoes of furs, wool, gold and silver, and burros. During the Mexican War (1846-1848) and in subsequent years military activity along the trail increased. By 1850 regular stage and mail service was opened along the trail to provide communication with the new territories in the Southwest. Following the Civil War the railroads began constructing lines through Kansas and gradually usurped the trail traffic. In 1880 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad reached Santa Fe, and the Santa Fe Trail slipped into history.

In 1987 the Santa Fe Trail was designated by Congress as a National Historic Trail. A total of 489 miles of the Santa Fe Trail lie within the modern state of Kansas, nearly 41 percent of the entire 1,200 mile route. The Mountain and Cimarron (also referred to as the Dry Route or Jornada) branches follow the same course through the state for 358 miles. The Long Distance Trails Branch of the National Park Service in 1990 identified seventy-seven Santa Fe Trail-related sites of various types in Kansas. To date, archeological fieldwork, at varying levels of intensity, has been conducted at only thirteen of the Santa Fe Trail sites in the state.

With a grant from the National

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The map above plots the route of the Santa Fe Trail across Osage County as depicted on General Land Office surveys. The sites investigated at the 1995 Kansas Archeology Training Program were: 1 - McGee-Harris Stage Station, 2 - Dragoon Creek Crossing, 3 - Havana Stage Station, and 4 - Soldier Creek Crossing.

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Park Service, the New Mexico preservation office hired an Illinois consulting firm in 1993 to prepare nomination forms for Santa Fe Trail sites, including twenty in Kansas, for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As part of the review process 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 boundaries to include archeological remains. The work that was conducted as part of the Kansas Archeology Training Program (KATP) was designed to address these questions at four trail sites in Osage County: McGee-Harris Stage Station at 110-Mile Creek Crossing, Havana Stage Station and Townsite, Dragoon Creek Crossing, and Soldier Creek Crossing.

A total of 159 individuals volunteered their time during the five-day period (April 6-10) to work on these four sites. The volunteers included thirty schoolage children, several members of the Santa Fe Trail Association and the Topeka Treasure Hunters Club, and many experienced members of the Kansas Anthropological Association (KAA). Volunteers came from thirty-three Kansas counties and from four other states (Massachusetts, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri). Field investigations conducted at the Osage County 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 (Casey DeMarais, Verna Detrich, Marsha King, John Reynolds, Chris Schoen, Martin Stein, Tim Weston, and Virginia Wulfkuhle) and by skilled KAA volunteers (Todd Bevitt, Lin Lohmeyer, Barb Porter, and Harold Reed).

The McGee-Harris Stage Station Historic District (14OS399) 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 operated from 1854 to ca. 1870. The ruins of two buildings

currently are standing on the site.

The 110-Mile Creek Crossing is referred to in many of the journals and accounts kept by civilian and military travelers. The stream at this site was named 110-Mile Creek by George C. Sibley, who commanded the federal survey of the "Road to Santa Fe" that was authorized by Congress in 1825. It was 110 miles from Fort Osage (now Sibley, Missouri), the starting point of the expedition. In November 1829 Major Bennet Riley



Metal detectors (in foreground) and excavation units close to the structure were combined to study the McGee-Harris Stage Station.

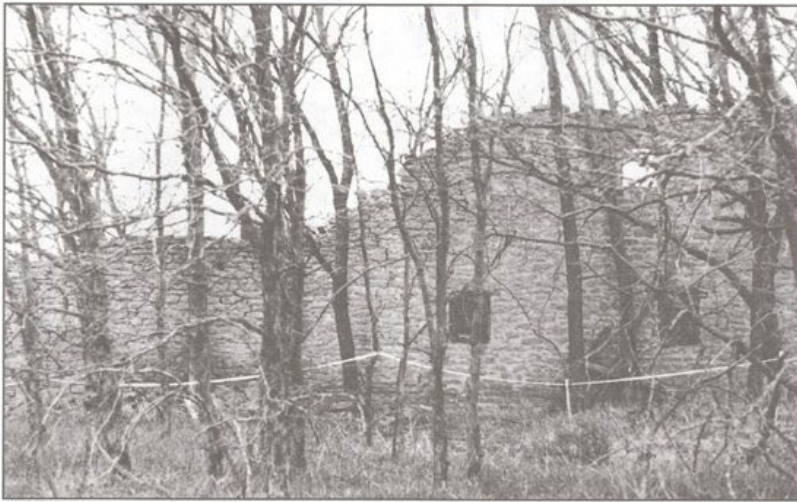
and his military battalion, escorting a caravan captained by Charles Bent, camped at the crossing where they found sufficient grass, wood, and water for their needs. Josiah Gregg camped at the site on May 28, 1831, and included it on his list of places along the trail. The 110-Mile Creek was referred to as Camp No. 5 by Susan Shelby Magoffin, one of the first Anglo women to travel the Santa Fe Trail, when she stayed there the night of June 12, 1846. The War with Mexico brought many soldiers down the trail and to this crossing and campground. In late June and early July of 1846, the crossing served as an assembly point and campground for Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny and his 1,657 man Army of the West. The soldiers camped on both sides of the creek and celebrated the Fourth of July in the campground.

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. Other travelers also mentioned the small settlement at the crossing consisting of three families of Shawnees and whites, including a man named

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A youth crew received instruction in archeological techniques as they began excavations in the possible location of the blacksmith shop of the McGee-Harris Stage Station.



Stone ruins of the Harris stable/storehouse were documented during the Kansas Archeology Training Program.

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Richardson. Journalist G. Harris Heap, who stayed at the crossing on May 17, 1853, described three families living in "a few log-houses situated in a hollow, near a small stream shaded by cottonwoods."

In August of 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. The McGee brothers were the 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. The 1855 General Land Office Survey map shows the Santa Fe Trail crossing 110-Mile Creek, "McGee's Field," and the intersection of the "Road from Ft. Riley to Hundred and Ten." No structures are shown, probably because the buildings were located well away from the section and quarter-section lines being surveyed. An 1858 guide to the Pike's Peak gold fields listed the items and services available at "110 Creek" as "Mail station, coal, wood, water, grass, entertainment."

McGee's house, situated on the south side of the trail, served as an inn, providing overnight accommodations to passengers traveling on the

twice-monthly mail coach to Santa Fe and to other travelers. A combined kitchen/dining room ran the full length of the building on the south with two huge fireplaces, providing sleeping accommodations for single men. The north half of the building was divided into three rooms, one occupied by travelers with wives, one by McGee's daughters, and the fourth by McGee and his wife. While no standing ruins remain today, a dense scatter of limestone and cultural material in the cultivated field mark the location of McGee's house. Among the artifacts recovered from this concentration were small white-ware sherds, fragments of both window and bottle glass, many hand-wrought and machine-cut square nails, escutcheon plates from door or trunk locks, a small wrench, a lead ball, and a variety of other metal items. No evidence of intact foundations was identified.

McGee built a toll bridge over 110-Mile Creek about 1854, and rebuilt it in 1860. The bridge abutments were constructed of log cribs filled with stone, while log stringers and split log flooring reportedly provided the surface of the bridge. The bridge abutments were located and documented, and a unit excavated across a portion of the west abutment showed evidence of the stone fill. The bridge was 14.7 feet wide, spanned a gap of nearly 32 feet, and was raised about

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Review Board Approves Three... (Continued from page 4)

with the growth and development of the Catholic church in Manhattan, its association with Monsignor Arthur James Luckey, and for its significance as an example of a Romanesque Revival church. It was designed by Henry W. Brinkman (1881-1949) of Emporia, the designer of many schools, Catholic churches, and public buildings throughout the Midwest.

The Lake of the Forest Multiple Property Nomination contains resources nominated for their historical association with the growth and development of the Lake of the Forest community just west of Bonner Springs. Included in these resources are stone retaining walls, the gatehouse, the caretaker's house, a stone staircase, the lake, an island, and a fountain. The nomination will include the clubhouse that was previously approved for National Register listing. The lake was created in 1888 and originally used to harvest ice for the Union Pacific Railway. It was also used as a recreational area. After 1910 it was developed as a private lake front community for Kansas City commuters.

Worth Noting...

Governor Graves has appointed **J. Eric Engstrom** of Wichita as his designee on the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review. Engstrom had previously served for sixteen years on the review board until his replacement in January 1994. He replaces Mark Sheeks of Topeka, who had been the designee of former governor Joan Finney.

Recent additions to the National Register of Historic Places include the **Snokomo School**, Paxico vicinity, Wabaunsee County; **William A. Quayle House**, 210 N. 6th, Baldwin City, Douglas County; **Engine House No. 6**, 1300 S. Broadway, Wichita, Sedgwick County; **Emerson Coulson House**, 813 N. Olive, Abilene, Dickinson County; **Mount Barbara**, 100 Mt. Barbara, Salina, Saline County; **Babbitt-Doerr House**, 423 W. 5th, Larned, Pawnee County; and **Douglass Township Community Hall**, 206 S. Forest, Douglass, Butler County. Kansas now has 634 listings on the National Register.

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10 feet above the bed of the stream. McGee operated the toll bridge until his death on September 19, 1861, charging a toll of twenty-five cents per wagon, and sometimes collecting twenty to thirty dollars per day.

Several log cabins (probably those occupied by Cornetzer, Richardson, and others), a blacksmith shop, and a store and tavern were located on the north side of the trail in the 1850s. Two units were excavated adjacent to a low stone wall and foundation thought to be the blacksmith shop. Large quantities of iron and scrap metal, typically associated with blacksmith sites, were not recovered. Collectors who previously had worked in this vicinity reported the recovery of large amounts of iron. Initial results of the analysis of this feature are inconclusive.

The standing remains of the stone building, which presumably served as the store, post office, and tavern, were documented. This rectangular building, which measured approximately 14.5-by-48 feet and had a steeply sloped roof, appears to have been aligned with the long axis parallel to the route of the Santa Fe Trail through the site. After his marriage to McGee's oldest daughter America "Puss" McGee, in December 1857, William D. Harris built a new frame residence on the north side of the trail, attached to the south side of the earlier stone building. 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 during 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, perhaps by a member of the McGee family or by a traveler on the Santa Fe Trail.

Harris also built a large stable and storehouse north of the trail, a portion of which is still standing. This rectangular building, which measured approximately 22-by-50 feet, was aligned perpendicular to the trail, with the long axis extending roughly north to south.

Two units were excavated near this structure.

After Fry McGee's death, William and America Harris continued operating the stage station until 1870. 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. 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, the older stone portion was converted for use as a corn crib, and the house yard was cultivated.

The Kansas State Historical Society expresses its appreciation to all the volunteers who participated in the project. Part two of this article will discuss the history and the KATP activities at the Havana Stage Station, the Dragoon Creek Crossing, and the Soldier Creek Crossing.—*Marsha K. King.*

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Laverna Ernst of Enterprise works on a scale drawing of the frame structure at the McGee-Harris Stage Station while Bob and Shirley Coykendall of Wichita use a metal detector.