

# WAGON TRACKS

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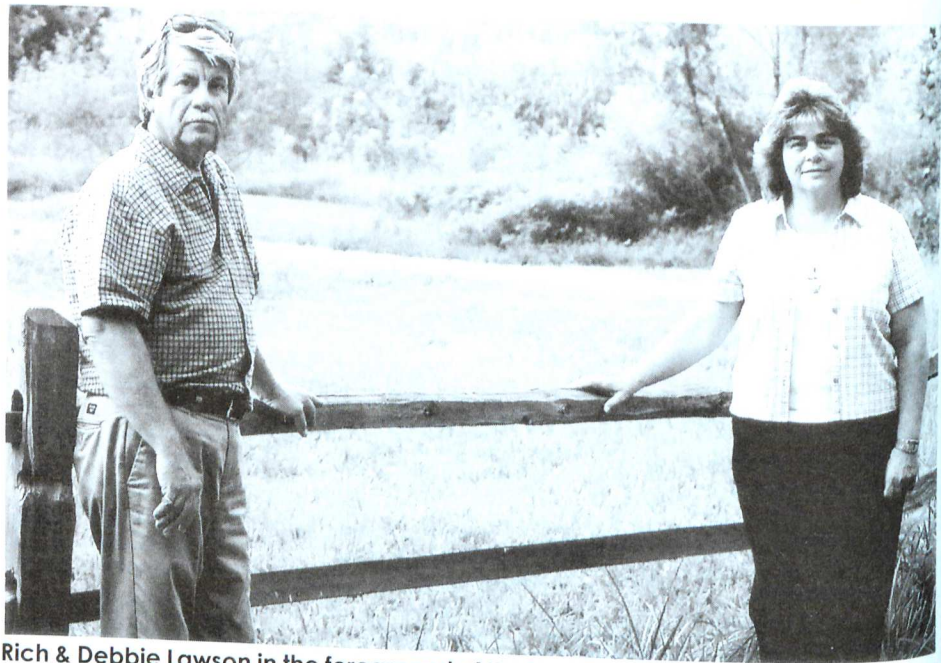
NUMBER 1

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**SANTA FE TRAIL CROSSING OF MISSOURI RIVER AND THE BIG ARROW ROCK DISCOVERED**

A Santa Fe Trail crossing of the Missouri River and the "big arrow rock" have been discovered by Rich and Deborah Lawson on their property in Saline County, Missouri. The site was discovered near their bluff-top property perched on the south side of the Missouri River, just north of historic Arrow Rock, Missouri.

After a great amount of research the couple discovered that this was the place noted during Lewis and Clark's expedition as "being a good place to cross the river, a good place for a town." This was the place spoken of for the next 200 years as "the Arrow Rock." As part of the greater Boone's Lick area this land daily recorded the footprints of Nathan and Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, William Clark, and many other notable statesmen and frontiersmen. If Missouri was the crossroads of the nation, as numerous authors suggest, then Arrow Rock and its Santa Fe Trail crossing was in fact an epicenter of America's commerce and growth in the early 1800s.

Ignoring the river brush, poison ivy, and snakes on the bluff, Rich said he was in awe of the incredible tall shade trees and a hilltop that was begging for a big log cabin. Unaware of the property's rich history, one day he wondered, "just how close did the river come to our newly acquired bluff?" Rich asked a good friend, Dr. William E. Foley (educator, author, and historian), how that might be determined. Dr. Foley had just released his book *Wilderness Journey*, so Rich knew he could point him in the right direction and he did. Dr. Foley suggested the information they sought was contained in the Harlan and Denny book *Atlas of Lewis and Clark in Missouri*. Locating a copy, the Lawsons soon discovered the river certainly did lap right up on their property and likely backed up in the valleys on the north and south sides. Rich noted with interest the comments logged by Lewis and Clark during the expedition and realized no doubt the Indians had been crossing here for hundreds of years. Suspicions still had not registered in regards to the Santa Fe Trail. They didn't know nor even suspect the historic importance of this site.



**Rich & Debbie Lawson in the foreground of the location of Todd's Ferry, the Missouri River Crossing for the Santa Fe Trail, discovered on their property north of Arrow Rock, MO, in Saline County. In the 1820s the Missouri River flowed just behind them.**

Rich says he didn't know how time-consuming information gathering would be, yet he found it both fun and rewarding. After much travel and reading hundreds of documents, he found that Judge David S. Todd, the first judge of Howard County, was the first owner of the river property. Todd bought the property from the state when land ownership was authorized in Missouri. It is interesting to note that David S. Todd's father was General Levi Todd, a well-known warrior in many early American theaters. He also was an uncle of Mary Todd Lincoln. One might wonder if politics had anything to do with a Howard countian purchasing property in Saline County that just happened to be so strategically located.

Devouring more historical documents, notations about licensing for "ferries" kept surfacing. In one of many early 1800's surveys Rich noticed that one of the license applicants owned land directly across the river from David Todd's ferry landing. At this point the thought occurred to him, "my gosh, if this was in fact an important crossing, it may well have been the crossing for the Santa Fe Trail." If this were correct, then arguably David Todd's property was the first stop and one of the first gathering points on the Santa Fe Trail. Travelers left Franklin, Mis-

souri, led by William Becknell, passed by Cooper's Fort, crossed the river, gathered up the wagons on Todd's land, and headed up the gentle slope crossing the Todd property heading west to the Grand Pass. Rich says he has now pieced together that early route from his research and found that the Boone's Lick Road crossed onto the property on the north side of the Missouri where the ferry was located. The Santa Fe Trail overlaid it. Rich also believes a portion overlaid the Osage Trace, an age-old Indian highway.

They did not let themselves accept their initial suspicions. Their research indicated there were many ferries and this particular ferry may possibly hold no acclaim whatsoever. Rich backed into the information, researching all the ferries, assuming that any of them may have been the Santa Fe Trail crossing. Ferries which were not strategically located were eliminated first. Then, tracking license renewals, Rich quickly found that most of the ferries were in operation perhaps for only a season then never reopened. The ferry at the Todd location appears to have been in existence the longest and to have been operating prior to David Todd's ownership, some suggest as early as 1811. There is a long list of license applicants, including Todd himself. Records indicate that, even

though Todd owned the ferry, most of the time it was licensed by other people. In formulating a list of those license holders it could be that some of the Becknells, organizers of the Santa Fe Trail, held license for a period of time.

Crossing the river was treacherous and no doubt some who tried to cash in on the boom in Boone's Lick discovered it was not an easy business. The license identified the landing site, yet with the heavy current of the Missouri River a ferry operator no doubt often landed wherever he could. It is a fact that both Howard and Saline counties couldn't build roads fast enough to handle the river crossing traffic. David Todd then began buying up land on the north side of the river, including the ferry landing in Howard County. It is interesting to note that the Howard County elections were held at the ferry landing on at least one occasion, pointing out the importance of this ferry site. None of the river ferry sites should be confused with the Arrow Rock Landing.

The Arrow Rock Landing was not the ferry crossing point for the Santa Fe Trail. Runaway ferries may have landed there in desperation, but the Arrow Rock Landing was typically for the heavy steamboat traffic going up and down the river moving people and cargo from port to port. The Arrow Rock Landing is a significant historical site itself and presently is in discovery mode. More information can be found about Arrow Rock and the Boone's Lick area in Michael Dickey's *Arrow Rock: Crossroads of the Missouri Frontier*. His research and attention to detail makes a most informative account.

There has been long-standing confusion and speculation as to which bluff in the Arrow Rock area was the "big arrow rock" and which is the "little arrow rock." The "arrow rock" that Lewis and Clark spoke of, the "arrow rock" that is noted in hundreds of documents as a place of dynamic commerce, the "arrow rock" that is described by numerous early travelers—Bourgmont, Maximilian, and Duke Paul—is in fact the bluff on the Todd property just north a few feet and visible from Todd's ferry landing. A court document issued by Judge Todd commanded attendance, for the purpose of testimony, at his

ferry house in Saline County at "the big arrow rock."

Rich says this was an unexpected but pleasant find. This is the "*Pierre a Fleche*" (Rock of Arrows) noted on the 1732 map by cartographer Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville. On June 9, 1804, William Clark reported seeing several small streams or creeks joining the river below a bluff and the Prairie of Arrows. Small streams are on both the north and south side of the Todd property and the Prairie of Arrows is adjacent on the west of the Todd property. The huge rock bluff was no doubt an impressive sight to river travelers. It jutted out into the river and would have been easy to identify as "arrow rock" whether traveling up or down stream. Rich believes that when the bluff is cleared of river brush one will also be able to see that the bluff is shaped like an arrow head. Time will tell!

Although some of the face of the bluff was blown away during a quarrying effort in the 1900s, one can still identify pockets of flint which local Indians gathered to make arrow heads. These flint deposits were spoken of by several early explorers and travelers. Numerous floods and a couple hundred years of commerce and farming have left little evidence of the once active riverfront.

Rich, a limited partner with Edward Jones Investments, and Deborah, a teacher at Sterling Elementary School in Warrensburg, MO, intend to apply for certification as Trail property owners and provide suitable signage at the site. Studying the Santa Fe Trail is a regular unit of history and discovery covered by Deborah in her classroom.

Clearing away the brush along the bluff will again expose a natural feature spoken of in many early documents and more clearly expose "The Crossing" on the Santa Fe Trail.

## COUNCIL TROVE

### —DOCUMENTS—

#### A TRAGIC FANDANGO STORY

Emily Kieta's "New Mexico Fandango" article in the May 2005 issue mentioned very few instances of violence at those gatherings. Some, however, at least in later years, resulted in fights and killings. The following incident occurred after the

Trail had been replaced by the railroad.

SFTA member Richard Poole forwarded a note from Ned Smith Raun, Stillwater, OK, who told of an 1881 fandango that ended in a gun fight, with three persons killed, including Raun's great-grandfather Albert "Frank" Smith. Raun noted that newspaper reports indicated "alcohol and insults were flowing freely, and the result was simply that some people got killed." The following article from the Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, January 17, 1881, was provided by SFTA member Alma Gregory. It is not a pleasant story. Thanks to Poole, Raun, and Gregory. The article appears as originally published.

#### A BATTLE AT A BAILE.

A Fierce Fight at a Mexican Fandango Ends Three Lives  
And Stirs Up Another Bitter Feeling Between the Races.

Another very unfortunate misunderstanding between the American and Mexican factions occurred on Saturday evening at a baile, or dance, given by the latter named people of Las Mula, this county. The place is located on the Rio de la Paco, a tributary to the Rio Pecos and is some six miles

#### EAST OF OLD PECOS TOWN.

And distant about three miles from McPherson, a tie camp, at which a gang of Walsen & Levy's tie choppers are stationed. All of the above named places are in San Miguel county near its western boundary, and in an air line from Las Vegas cannot be over thirty or thirty-five miles in an almost westerly course.

From the circumstances gathered by an OPTIC reporter, it appears that among the Americans who attended the fandango were two conspicuous young men named

"DOC" HODGES AND FRANK SMITH.

As is too frequently the case, a bitter feeling against the whites was engendered among the natives, and in the course of a few brief minutes a "free for all" row took place, and the sequel is that oft-told tale—human blood spilled to satiate the demands of unruly passions and life, held so dear to every one, taken to pay the awful penalty.

#### JUST HOW IT HAPPENED

Is not known to our informant, other