

Santa Fe Trail Historic Sites



Walnut Creek Crossing in Great Bend, Kansas, today. [\[source\]](#)

Walnut Creek Crossing

Background

Six years before the American Civil War, in 1855, William Allison and Francis Boothe established a trading post along the imposing Arkansas River. This crossing came to be known as Walnut Creek Crossing, an important milestone on the Santa Fe Trail. Wagons would often be forced to stop and set up camp along the river banks to wait out flooding. Allison and Boothe saw this site as the perfect spot for a trading post to sell essentials to wagon trains and Native Americans.



This is a family portrait of the Campbell family, thought to be related to the Allison—one of the prominent families behind the trading post. [\[source\]](#)

Allison and Boothe

Allison and Boothe became quite famous among travelers for running such a successful post. Walnut Creek specialized in wolf killing and fur trading, and became a hub of activity as a post office and Army fort were added. A Missouri newspaper described Allison and Boothe as “famed prairie men” that were “determined to make a settlement at Walnut Creek on the Santa Fe road.”

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Allison is said to have had only one arm ², which raises questions on whether he was born that way or overcame remedial surgery. The Kiowas who traded there called the creek “Tsodalhente-da pa” or “Armless mans creek” for Allison. ³

Conflict

The Santa Fe Trail could be a violent place, and travelers were left open to attack by Native Americans and thieves. Although a St. Louis newspaper saw the trading establishment as “lessening the distance between civilized points and affording those in danger or want an opportunity to obtain relief,” this was not always the case.¹ In 1973 human remains were uncovered at Walnut Creek. Archaeologists concluded that 140 individuals were massacred by Kiowas warriors. Of the unfortunate travelers, one boy of fourteen, Robert McGee survived the attack and spent the rest of his life showing off his scalped head in sideshows. ⁴



A photo of Robert McGee who survived the massacre. He made his living showing off his injuries in sideshow acts. [\[source\]](#)

Ownership Changes

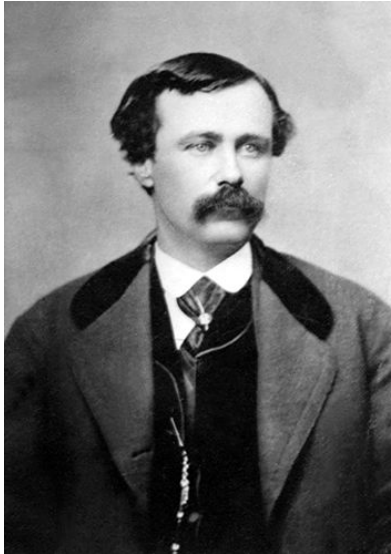
Ownership of Walnut Creek trading post changed throughout the years. Allison and Boothe, the original owners, both met dark fates. Boothe was reportedly murdered by a Mexican passing through¹. Allison followed a few years later dying of heart failure while in Missouri.¹

Peacock

After Allison died, ownership of the trading post passed to George Peacock. Peacock successfully ran it for a short time until a Kiowa war chief, Satanke, was arrested at Peacock's post. He asked Peacock to write a letter of good character, showing that he was a "good Indian." Instead Peacock wrote that Satanke was treacherous and dangerous. Satanke had the letter translated and learned of Peacock's actions. He led warriors kill Peacock and steal the livestock.¹

Charles Rath

After Peacock died, the post was taken over by Charles Rath, a notorious buffalo hunter and trader. He was a prominent man in the area, and the first to implement a toll bridge. In 1860 he married a Cheyenne woman and they had one daughter together. Despite his attempts at keeping a peaceful alliance, the trading post was raided multiple times. In order to protect Charles, his wife told him they should get a divorce. In 1869, Charles met and married Caroline Markley. Together the couple had three children. In 1885 he divorced Caroline and married Emma Nesper, with whom he had a son. One of his sons and one of his grandsons later played Major League Baseball. ⁵



Charles Rath, Buffalo Hunter
[\[source\]](#)

Joseph Douglas

Joseph Douglas was the last person to have ownership of the trading post at Walnut Creek Crossing. Although an observer had once described the ranch as “a large building strong enough to resist the attack of hundreds of Indians or white men, unless they have the assistance of artillery,” a party of Cheyennes and Arapahoes succeeded in burning the trading post in 1868.¹

Tribes

There were three main Native American tribes that interacted with the site. First were the [Kiowas](#), whose name translates to the “Principal people.” Historically they have been people of the plains. There was also the [Comanches](#), which translates to “Lords of the Plains.” Historically they were from the southern Great Plains. Lastly there was [Arapahoes](#), who are known historically as being from Colorado and Wyoming.

Fort Zarah



Fort Zarah plaque at the site today [\[source\]](#)

During the upheaval of the 1860s, soldiers established Camp Dunlap near Walnut Creek Crossing to protect the mail service. ⁶ Eventually the post was renamed Fort Zarah, after the commanding officer's son. ⁷ It cost \$100,000 in today's dollars to build the fort. A soldier present during campaigns against Native Americans in the late 1860s described life at the fort:

A short distance from the bridge across the Walnut Creek one came to the Stage Station, which, also adobe, was half dugout and half above ground, loop holes for cross-fire. On its roof an employee of the Stage Company was stationed, also an lookout for trouble; and of this there was quite an anxiety during June, July and August previous (1867 and during) our visit. Fort Zarah was right on a much travelled Indian trail from the Indian Territory & northern hunting grounds, besides there are, about fifteen miles south, some salt springs much frequented then by Indians from the North as well as from the Territory. Small war and hunting parties, consisting mostly of young "bucks" which had slipped out from the control of the Tribal chiefs hovered most of the summer time around.

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It was abandoned in December 1869, and became overrun with thieves and marauders. Nothing remains of the site today.⁷

Today

You can still visit the Walnut Creek Crossing, to this day. The site is located in Great Bend (Barton County), south of Highway 56. All that is left today at the site is the foundation of the store.

Allison Ranche, along with a town of Zarah that would develop a short distance to the north about 15 years later, have both disappeared – meeting the fate of more than 6,000 other settlements that once populated the state in the latter half of the 1800s. ⁹



Archaeology in the 1960s [\[source\]](#)

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1247 words.

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