

Chapter 1

Western Missouri

The Beginning of a Trade with Mexico

A portion of the story of the United States' international trade with Mexico is tied to a specific place. The lands known today as Jackson County, Missouri, are located at approximately latitude 39° north and longitude 90° west in western Missouri. In this region, lush woodlands end and high, rolling prairies and open spaces meet the Missouri River. Here, the Kansas River, coming from the west, empties into the Missouri River as it turns its muddy mass from south to east on its 364-mile journey to the Mississippi River.¹ Today geographers call this region the Osage Plains and categorize it as a transitional landscape or “tension zone,” where competing and conflicting natural phenomena create a dynamic energy. The diverse human populations involved in the United States' nineteenth-century trade with Mexico complemented those natural phenomena of competition and conflict, and created an economic and social energy all their own.

The first European incursions into the region of Missouri occurred along both northern and southern routes. The Spanish, coming into the area from the south, founded Santa Fe in 1609 and established a tenuous control over the region of modern New Mexico, southwest of the Osage and Kansa peoples. The French, traveling along rivers, explored sections of Canada and the Gulf Coast and built colonial centers at Montreal in 1641 and New Orleans in 1718, with the Mississippi River providing a natural north–south commercial

1. As various historians have observed, history “takes place”—that is, events happen within certain locales for certain reasons. See Meinig, *Southwest*, vii–viii, 38; Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 3–15; White, *Roots of Dependency*; White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” 3–4; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 6–7; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 19, 384. See also Fremont, *A Report on the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 98; Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri*, 10, 11, 14, 18, 23; *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 73–89.

conduit for their fur trade. The Missouri River provided an adjunct to this route, allowing traders to move upstream and west to the Kansas River. The earliest known European reference to the Missouri/Kansas region is found in a letter from Father Gabriel Marest of the Kaskaskia mission in the Illinois country, who mentioned the Kansas River in a letter to Sieur d'Iberville on July 10, 1700.²

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Osage Plains and the regions to the southwest supported an international economic and cultural exchange between not only the Mississippi/Missouri Valley and what would later become known as the American Southwest, but also between markets in Europe and central Mexico. Ports such as Veracruz charged exorbitant duties and fees for various imported European goods entering Mexico, making international overland trade through the United States both desirable and profitable. In addition, a more loosely controlled and regulated border between Mexico and the United States and a more accommodating political environment made possible a greater flexibility in trade and a greater variety of goods, although smuggling was common in the Mexican trade for most of its tenure. For a time, Independence served as one the American centers for this overland enterprise on the nation's western frontier. Here, just east of the junction of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, relatively easy and inexpensive water transportation ended and more costly overland transportation to the southwest began.³

The Osage Plains provided part of a relatively unobstructed route from the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers into Mexico. Hundreds of miles of monotonous tallgrass prairie stretched to the Southwest, its undulating sea-like quality inviting travelers to dub it "the Prairie Ocean." In spring a riot of color broke the monotone grasslands with carpets of wildflowers. Ultimately, wagoners had to choose between the longer and slower but better-watered Mountain Route and the faster and shorter but deadly dry Cimarron Cutoff, also known as the Jornada del Muerto—the Journey of Death. Most travelers avoided the plains between September and March; however, some braved blizzards and frostbite to travel in the ferocious winter months. The

2. Din and Nasatir, *Imperial Osages*, 26; Hoffhaus, *Chez Les Canses*, 6–9; Sieur D'Iberville, quoted in Nasatir, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 6; Father Gabriel Marest to Sieur d'Iberville, July 10, 1700, in *Jesuit Relations*, 66:6.

3. Erdman, Shacklette, and Keith, *Elemental Compositions of Selected Native Plants and Associated Soils*, C5; Terral, *Missouri Valley*, 16–17.

other seasons generally remained conducive to travel, with forage sprouting in various locations along the route in April and May and remaining until August and September.⁴

The woodlands of western Missouri provided an abundance of oak, cottonwood, Osage orange, hickory, ash, walnut, and other types of woods that made possible the manufacture of wagons and yokes important to the trade. Even with an abundance of resources, however, a local wagon industry was slow to develop in western Missouri. Many merchants continued to ship wagons from the eastern manufacturing centers such as Chicago and Pittsburgh, sending the necessary wheels, tongues, axles, and planking to the point of departure and reassembling them later for the trip to Santa Fe and Chihuahua.⁵

The fur trade experience served as an important economic and social foundation for the later nineteenth-century trade between Mexico and the United States. Both French and Spanish merchants considered possibilities of mutual trade, but European colonial competition made later trade impracticable if not impossible. By 1804, the French had been familiar with western Missouri for more than one hundred years; Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and expedition member Sergeant Charles Floyd mentioned permanent French fur trade camps and settlements in the region. Thirty years later, the Osage Plains served as a base for international trade between the United States and Mexico.⁶

As Lewis and Clark explored the northwest portion of the Louisiana Purchase, merchant adventurers moved into the Southwest. In 1804, William Morrison, a Kaskaskia merchant in the Illinois country on the east side of the Mississippi River, supplied trade goods to Jeannot Metoyer and Baptiste Leland for trade with the Pawnee. José Gervais, a fur trapper, guided them from the Pawnee villages on the Platte River to Santa Fe. Gervais had been in the village the year before, attempting to effect peace between the Pawnee and the Spanish. As far as we know, Metoyer and Leland transported the first goods overland from the American settlements to Santa Fe, although what prompted the traders to make the journey is unknown. Also in 1804, Lorenzo

4. See National Park Service, *Santa Fe National Historic Trail: Comprehensive Management and Use Plan*, 14–19; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 1:212–13; Inman, *Old Santa Fe Trail*, 1–12, 480–90.

5. References to merchants purchasing wagons at Pittsburgh and elsewhere for the Santa Fe trade are plentiful. See Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 804; Walker, *Wagonmasters*, 97; Winther, *Transportation Frontier*, 32–33; Gardner, *Wagons for the Santa Fe Trade*, 31–45.

6. Osgood, *Field Notes of Captain William Clark*, 75; Hoffhaus, *Chez Les Canses*, 127, 134.

Durocher and Jacques D'Eglise ascended the Missouri with the intention of going overland to Santa Fe. Although they both arrived at the Spanish settlement, their exact route is not known.⁷

A sporadic trade between Spanish Mexico and the United States had been developing ever since the American Revolution. Based on the exchange of European and American manufactured goods for Spanish specie and furs, that trade's success had relied on the resolution of international differences and the occasional willingness of the two countries and their respective frontier representatives to accommodate their business people. The United States' acquisition of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 affected the developing Mexican trade in two important ways. American common and civil law now began to replace the French Code Napoléon and Spanish civil law in the Louisiana Territory. Within American and British bipartite common law legal systems, the ability to observe and control trade and the collection of debts became easier than they had been under the French and Spanish systems, which did not have the benefit of common law structure. Administration of contract obligations and collection of debts were more complicated in French and Spanish courts, whereas the common law gave individuals more direct access to the courts and due resource and process. The common law, however, did not benefit women, who had higher status and a greater ability to hold and transfer property under the former Spanish and French codes.

Monetary and exchange systems also changed from French and Spanish systems to American systems, with *livres*, *francs*, *piasters*, *arpents*, and *varas* giving way to dollars, cents, acres, and yards; systems of exchange remained flexible as Louisiana and the Southwest underwent frequent changes until the nineteenth century. One thing that did not change was the importance of Native American laws and custom, and while European and American systems competed, Native customs remained relatively constant. After the 1830s, over thirty cis-Mississippi tribes occupied present-day Kansas, and continued to live in the area until 1854. Various indigenous tribes also lived in the region between Independence and Santa Fe. And each tribe had specific strictures regarding trade. Considering the number of tribes along the Santa

7. Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 13:182, 183; Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe*, 172; Nasatir, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 1:113, 2:755, 756; Brandon, *Quivira*, 245–46; Jackson, *Journals of Zebulon Pike*, 1:378–79; Nasatir, "Jacques D'Eglise on the Upper Missouri"; Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 356, 357, 360. And see Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition*, 240–45; and Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 50–51.

Fe route, the potential for legal complications was substantial. Occasionally, Native American laws and customs had direct and immediate consequences for traders, although the extent to which this situation complicated trade relationships is not known. The sources, however, do provide some examples. Josiah Gregg recorded in 1844 that a free mulatto teamster who owed money to a Cherokee merchant was forced to pay the debt under Cherokee bankruptcy law. He was given lashes in the amount of money owed, one lash for each dollar. The Cherokee applied the punishment with hickory or cowhide switches and abusive comments in a ritual of public humiliation.⁸

In the years following the United States' acquisition of the Louisiana Territory, the developing trade with Mexico consisted mostly of the transportation of manufactured goods (mainly textiles) from Europe and the United States to Santa Fe and Chihuahua in Mexico. Before 1821, the Spanish government remained internally unresolved and capricious in their attitude toward the trade and consequently smuggling was common. The conflicts inherent in contracting for the movement of goods across international boundaries had important consequences for the Mexican trade in the negotiation of contracts and the settlement of debts. Contracts drawn up in one country might not be honored in another. A lack of international law often complicated the administration of contracts between businessmen of different nations. Due to misunderstandings in language, or even outright attempts to commit fraud, traders needed an understanding of the various legal systems in which they operated. Court proceedings might take place in a foreign land under a different set of laws than the ones used to execute contractual obligation, causing confusion. Wars might disrupt trade or a change in government could complicate collection of debt or execution of contracts.⁹

In 1805, two years after the travels of Lewis and Clark and of the merchants from St. Louis and the Illinois region into the Louisiana Territory, Zebulon Pike launched his expedition to the Spanish Southwest at the request of the United States government. Pike had been given orders by General James "Jamie" Wilkinson to make contact with Indian tribes and perform general reconnaissance, to return a number of Osage from the East to their tribes, and to continue to gather information. He was arrested by Spanish authorities

8. Jones, "One Hundred Years of Banking in Missouri, 1820–1920," 355–56; Anderson, "Frontier Economic Problems in Missouri, 1815–1828, Part 1," 39, 49; White, "Missouri Merchant One Hundred Years Ago," 104–5; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 173–74, 279–80.

9. Walker, *Wagonmasters*, 132–33; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 227.

and held in Chihuahua, but was released and returned to the United States in 1807. Wilkinson was later implicated, along with Vice President Aaron Burr, in attempting to create a separate country in the Southwest, and many years later Wilkinson was discovered to have acted as a double agent for Spain. Pike's actual involvement in or knowledge of Wilkinson's actions remain unclear, but his travels served to increase American interest in western empire in general and the Santa Fe trade in particular.¹⁰

Pike's southwestern reconnaissance prompted the United States government to take action to secure the area. In 1808, newly appointed Governor of the Upper Louisiana

Meriwether Lewis stated in a report to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn that, as a result of trade and political negotiation, the Kansa, Pawnees, Mahas, and Poncas now supported the Spanish, leaving only the Osage as American allies. Under the Osage Treaty of 1808, William Clark established a fort in an attempt to consolidate the Great and Little Osage nations and to establish relations and trade with them. The treaty promised the tribes a blacksmith, a mill, and plows, as well as blockhouses at each of the local Osage "towns" to be established near the fort. Clark established a fur trade factory and fort at Fire Prairie, approximately twenty miles below the mouth of the Kansas River on the south side of the Missouri, in the region that would soon serve as the American gateway to the Southwest and Mexico.¹¹

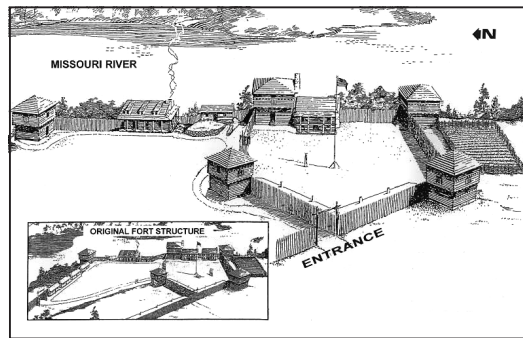


Figure 1.1. Fort Osage, ca. 1808, drawing by James Anderson and George Fuller Green, ca. 1950, for Fort Osage Restoration Records, Native Sons of Greater Kansas City Archives/ Jackson County Parks and Recreation.

10. Jackson, *Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 1:ix; NPS, "Zebulon Pike: Hard Luck"; Hart and Hulbert, *Southwestern Journals of Zebulon Pike 1807–1886*, xlii–xliii, lxiv, lxxvii, 1–4.

11. "Treaty with the Osage, 1808" (November 10, 1808; 7 Stat. 17, ratified April 28, 1810), in Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 2:95–98; Governor Lewis to Secretary of War, July 1, 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 14:196–98.

Ostensibly, the United States government established the fort and factory to regulate the fur trade with regional tribes by periodically checking on the interactions of traders and Indians, and acting as a federal middleman in the procuring and transportation of furs to St. Louis. In reality, the Americans distrusted the French traders' long relationship with Spain and the Osage and feared French and Indian collusion with the Spanish. The proximity of New Spain to the Louisiana Territory, alleged intrigue with Spain by Burr, Wilkinson, and others, the connections of the Plains tribes to the Spanish, rumors of Spanish establishment of trading bases with the Osage, and the long-standing relationship among Osage, Kansa, French, and métis fur traders all prompted the United States government to establish the factory and fort some few miles east of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, assigning George Champlin Sibley as factor, or government manager, in 1808.¹²

Sibley's letters, combined with the reports of Lewis, Wilkinson, and Pike, amply illustrate the expansionist intent of American government representatives and vividly underscore the feelings of many United States citizens, including Governor Lewis, regarding Fort Osage and its relationship to the regions southwest of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Sibley recorded the strategic placement of the fort and its importance to supplying military forces if the rich lands of Mexico needed to be invaded. In a letter of January 18, 1809, he wrote,

And should Spain also declare war against us, it is likely that this will be rallying point from whence to attack Santa Fee, we could march there and seize their rich mines in less than 20 days. And I have no doubt if we have a war that seize them we shall. To those who look upon Wealth as the chief good, here is a field worth their attention. Twenty days or a month at farthest would place them in the very lap of fortune.

Expansionist intent was seldom noted in official correspondence—Sibley's brash statement is an exception. However, apart from the the alleged machinations of Wilkinson and Burr, there is the following additional reference:

On the 9th of this instant, Robert Westcott, the son in law of Joseph Brown Secretary of the territory of Louisiana, and who resides at St Louis . . . was arrested . . . upon a charge of having begun or set foot or provided or

12. Governor Lewis to Secretary of War, July 1, 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 14:196–98.

prepared the means for a Military expedition against the Territory or Dominions of Spain, a prince with whom the united states are at peace. . . .

It is clear that some saw the Missouri/Kansas region as a base for southwestern conquest and an opportunity for great economic profit.¹³

William Clark wrote in a September 1808 letter to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn that he had negotiated for the transfer

to the United States [of] all the claim title & interest of the Osage to all of the Country East of a line to run from the Fort near Fire Prarie to the River Arkansaw, and between the Missouri and the Arkansaw amounting to near 50.000 Squar Miles of excellent Country—for which I have promised the Osage protection under the guns of the Fort at Fire Prarie, to keep a Store at that place to trade with them, to furnish them with a Blacksmith, a Mill, Plows, to build them two houses of logs . . .

Clark also agreed to settle claims by American citizens against the Osage for the horses and property stolen since the American acquisition of the Louisiana Territory. Clark made the Osage presents of guns, powder, ball, paint, and blankets valued at \$317.74 and promised to ask the “Great Father” for \$1,200 in merchandise to be delivered to the fort the next July. In addition, the Great and Little Osage tribes received five hundred dollars each, with the main chiefs receiving one hundred dollars apiece. Clark held a second set of negotiations with the Osage on November 10, 1808, and obtained additional lands when questions arose over the legality of the first treaty. Clark justified his actions concerning the Osage treaties. However, a few years later, in 1811, American writer Henry Brackenridge visited Fort Osage and recorded his impressions of the unfair methods by which Americans compensated Indians for their lands, stating that such practices seemed only a continuation of the earlier land frauds perpetrated by Europeans. In addition to large amounts of land in western Missouri, the treaty called for the establishment of the fort-factory and a two-league (six-square-mile) reservation around the installation for farm and livestock grazing in support of the fort.¹⁴

13. George C. Sibley to Henry Sibley, January 18, 1809, George Sibley Papers, MHMA; John B. C. Lucas to General Henry Dearborn, [Endorsed] Duplicate of Judge Lucas letter, February 9, 1809, Meriwether Lewis to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, July 1, 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 14: 96–97, 198–99 (also excerpted in Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 59–60); Brandon, *Quivira*, 249.

14. William Clark to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, 23 September 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 14:224–28, quote at 225. See also William Clark to Secretary of War, December 2, in *ibid.*, 14:242–44;

After the treaty negotiations, the United States government built Fort Clark (renamed Fort Osage) in the region later known as Jackson County, Missouri, about twelve miles northeast of the future town site of Independence. Clark built the fort and factory not only for trade but also for observation and defense, equipping it with a three-pound cannon and four swivel guns. Clark also considered adding a six-pound cannon, supplied with canister and grapeshot, to the fort's defenses.¹⁵ The site was directly north of the Osage Trace, a centuries-old Native American route that headed west from central Missouri to the Great Plains. This section of the Osage Trace later became part of the surveyed American road to Mexico.¹⁶

A new name, Six Mile, quickly supplanted the regional geographic names of Fire Prairie (formerly known as Prairie de Feu by the first Europeans in the region) and "the Blues" for later Americans from the upper South. The name underscored the establishment of a new Anglo-American order in the region within a military and governmental framework.¹⁷ The name Six Mile referred to the two-league administrative area surrounding Fort Osage. The Six Mile neighborhood centered on the American government's intent both to control trade and to watch the Spanish, as well as to cooperate with the St. Louis French and assess Spanish holdings in New Mexico.

The Fort Osage/Six Mile community was multicultural and multilingual. Anglo-Americans administered the fort and its governmental structure, and commonly brought their families to the site. French fur trappers, who both brought families and established new métis ones, worked from the fort, as did Native American groups, including the Osage and Kansa. The French and Native American métis offspring served as interpreters and businessmen.¹⁸ African-American slaves, mulattos, and free blacks also worked in the region as both agricultural hands and skilled laborers. Hispanos frequented the fort, both those involved in the fur trade from St. Louis and those interested in the

Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 70, 74; Mathews, *Osages*, 386–92; Clark, *Westward with Dragoons*, 64–75.

15. William Clark to the Secretary of War, September 23, 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 14:224–48.

16. Clark, *Westward with Dragoons*, 1–10; Adair and Feagins, *Analysis of Prehistoric Plant Remains from an Archeological Test at the Sibley Site*, 1; Coues, *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark*, 1:30; Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers*, 37, 101–2; Webb, *Centennial History of Independence, Missouri*, 52–53; Mathews, *Osages*, 386–92.

17. William Clark to the Secretary of War, December 2, 1808, in Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 14:242–44; and Gregg, "History of Fort Osage," 445. See also Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 60–61.

18. Mathews, *Osages*, 178; Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 117.

overland commercial traffic with Santa Fe.¹⁹ Fort Osage and Six Mile, far from being a lonely outpost of Anglo-American civilization, operated as a cosmopolitan collection of various peoples who had been absorbed, along with Anglo-Americans, into the United States as a result of the Louisiana Purchase.²⁰

The year 1821 proved to be an important year for the Six Mile region. In that year Mexico gained independence from Spain and Missouri became a state; also in that year, François Gesseau Chouteau, son of St. Louis fur trader Pierre Chouteau, established a permanent trading house and port in the vicinity of the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, some twenty miles upriver from Fort Osage. Here Chouteau traded with Native peoples for furs and made pelts for transport to St. Louis. Traders knew the site variously as Kawsmouth, Chez Les Canses, or Les Canses. Chouteau established a fur warehouse in the region one year before the American government discontinued its direct participation in and regulation of the fur trade and closed the government factory at Fort Osage. As Fort Osage's direct federal supervision of the fur trade ended, French traders quickly established their own base of operations for the fur trade. Thus, the Chouteaus established the first Euro-American settlement independent of a military or government installation in what later became Jackson County.²¹

French and métis families from Saint Charles, a town just west of St. Louis, populated the Chouteau settlement at Chez Les Canses, along with various Native Americans. They arrived, for the most part, as fur trade employees of the Chouteau family. The families were interrelated, many coming from Cotes San Dessein, a mixed-blood community in the St. Louis region. These families also contained Iowa, Osage, Otoe, and Pawnee members, as well as métis offspring. In addition, others had Kansa or Osage wives, while some merely cohabited with women from these tribes. By the 1830s, Flatheads,

19. George Sibley to Mr. Williams and General O'Hara, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 6, 1808, George Sibley Papers, MHMA; Brandon, *Quivera*, 20, 25, 27; Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 10, 24, 39, 105–8; Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 107, 131–32; Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 216; Thorne, "People of the River," 255, 305–16; Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History*, 27; Rowe, "Mary Sibley," 24; Mergenthal, "Border Lines," 1:120n119.

20. For additional references to free black, mulatto, and métis interaction in the region, see Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 117. See also J. Robidoux to Pierre Chouteau Jr., February 22, March 10, and November 22, 1834; ALS[?] to General William Clark, November 10, 1834; M. Grand and P. M. Papin to Pierre Chouteau Jr., November 20, 1834; François Chouteau to Pierre Chouteau Jr., November 29, 1834; John Ruland to Pierre Chouteau Jr., November 29, 1834; Joseph Robidoux to Pierre Chouteau Jr., February 26, 1835; all in Chouteau Family Papers, MHMA.

21. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 102–3.

Kutenai, Cree, Gros Ventres, Sioux, Kickapoo, and Pottawattomi were in contact with or living at the village. Negroes and mulattos also lived at the settlement, some as slaves, others as free people. Other Anglo-American trappers, including Andrew Drips and his Native American wife, lived adjacent to the French settlement.²²

Chez Les Canses represented an important fur depot and transfer point for the Rocky Mountain fur trade. From here, merchants shipped bales of pelts purchased from Native Americans and trappers to St. Louis for sale. In addition, Chouteau made his fur barges available as public transportation to people in the region traveling to St. Louis.²³

Chouteau's fur operation remained very successful during the 1830s but was not without mishap. On March 27 about 4:00 pm, the keelboat *Beaver* sank in the Missouri River not far from his settlement. Chouteau lost fifteen thousand deerskins, four hundred pounds of beaver, fifteen hundred muskrat skins, four hundred otter skins, two thousand raccoon skins, two barrels of tallow, two barrels of "wax" (presumably beeswax), and forty-five bear skins. "I should have gone down with the boat," he observed despondently. Chouteau and his company occupied an important place in the region's trade. He wrote that the Anglo-Americans and other new settlers moving into the area often came to him saying, "let us know the price at which you value this skin, so that we are able to set the cost for ours."²⁴

Trappers from the immediate region and from the far West rendezvoused here for supplies shipped from St. Louis. The settlement consisted of about fifteen families in the 1820s; by the 1840s the community numbered some two hundred people. François Chouteau brought his wife, Bernice Menard, to the village. His marriage to the seventeen-year-old daughter of fur trader and merchant Pierre Menard of Kaskaskia, Illinois, underscored the importance of interfamilial alliances in the lower Missouri fur trade. Similar marriages later proved important to merchants involved in the Mexican trade. In both instances, merchants married women from families involved in

22. Thorne, "People of the River," 305–7, 309; Hoffhaus, *Chez Les Canses*, 200–201; Hafen, *Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West*, 321, 325, 332; *History of Jackson County, Missouri*, 480; Unrau, *Kansa Indians*, 114.

23. François Chouteau to Pierre Menard, March 31, 1829, in Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa*, 52–53.

24. François Chouteau to Pierre Menard, March 3, 1829, and April 22, 1830, in Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa*, 52–55, 79–80. According to Chouteau, in his shipment of April 22, 1830, one hundred raccoon skins constituted a "pack" (at least for that shipment); he also shipped 236 bundles of deer hides weighing 25,000 pounds.

their respective trades in order to strengthen their participation in that trade, to combine resources, and to more closely observe investments and the business affairs of family members.²⁵

Just west of Chouteau's fur depot, additional developments had important consequences for both the fur and Mexican trades. Between 1825 and the early 1830s, the United States government set aside reservations for both cis- and trans-Mississippi Native Americans west of the Missouri state line in what the Americans called "unorganized territory." The boundaries of this territory ran from the present-day Missouri/Kansas state line west to the 100th meridian. The 100th meridian and the Missouri River constituted the northern boundary of the reservation lands; the Red River on the southern border of present-day Oklahoma provided the southern boundary. By the 1840s, the reservations included those of the Delaware, Shawnee, Kickapoo, Wyandotte (Huron), Kansa, Ottawa, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, Piankeshaw, and Pottawatomie. The Otoe, Pawnee, and Omaha lived to the north of the Missouri/Kansas confluence. South of the Shawnee Reserve were the Osage, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, and Choctaw. By 1854, the American government had displaced over eighty thousand Native Americans from the East to these border reservations. The wagon road from western Missouri to Santa Fe, formally established by treaty in 1825 to 1827, cut through Indian reservation lands carved from the earlier Osage holdings, particularly those of the Shawnee and Pawnee.

The Mexican trade had significant effects on Native Americans residing on reservation lands, although this subject has not been explored by historians. Wyandotte Chief William Walker had contact with Mexican traders and the Wyandotte nation operated a store on the reserve. Hiram Northrup, married to Wyandotte Margaret Clark and an adopted member of the tribe, became very successful in the Mexican trade's commission merchant business as a partner in the firm of Northrup and Chick. Josiah Gregg mentioned the arrest of a mulatto teamster of a Santa Fe wagon train by a Cherokee store owner for nonpayment of debt.²⁶ The proximity of such a trade route created conflicts with some tribes but opportunities for others; the Wyandotte, for example, later became involved in international commerce through the Mexican trade. Generally, those tribes

25. Thorne, "People of the River," 305–7, 309; Hoffhaus, *Chez Les Canses*, 200–201.

26. Walton, *Sentinel of the Plains*, 19, 20; Prucha, *Great Father*, 184–213; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 12–13, 173–74.

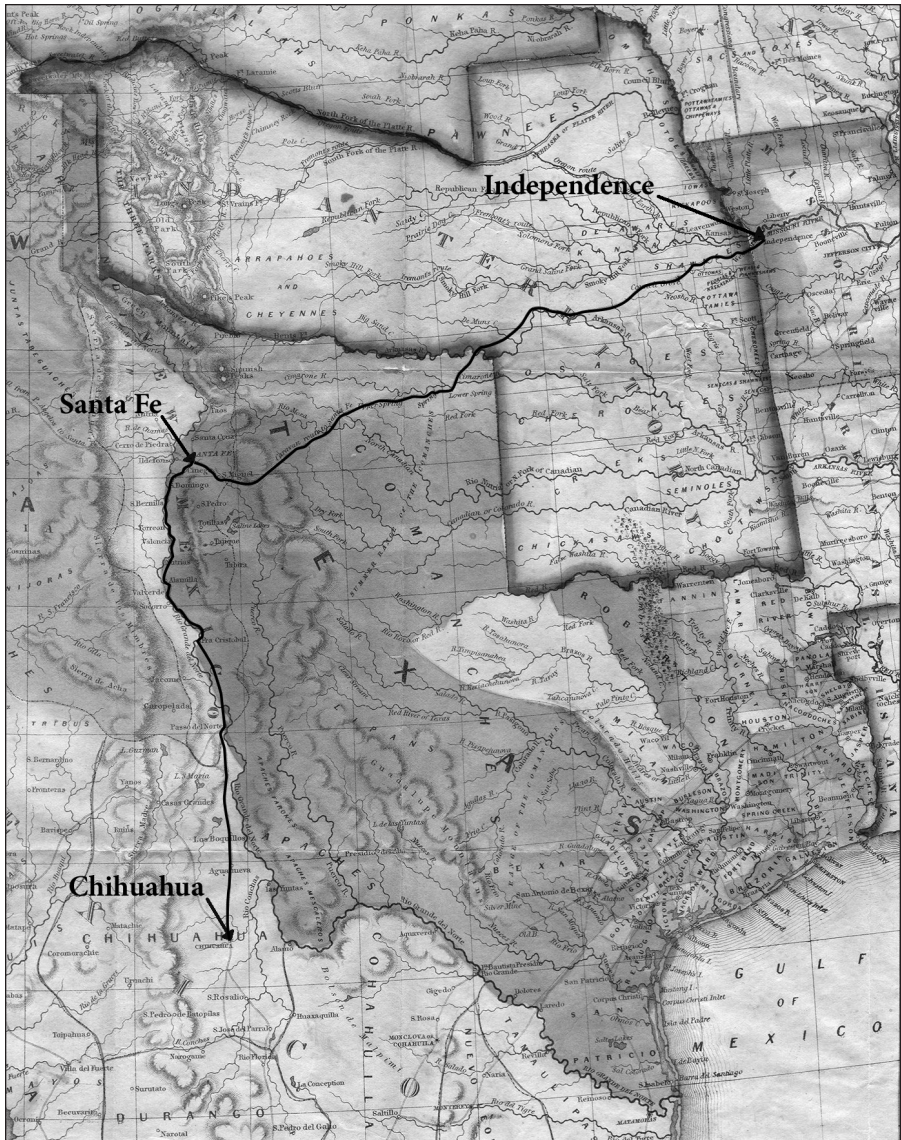


Figure 1.2. Detail of Mitchell, *A New Map of Texas, Oregon, and California*, 1846, with arrows added indicating locations of Independence, Santa Fe, and Chihuahua, and the trail between those cities darkened.

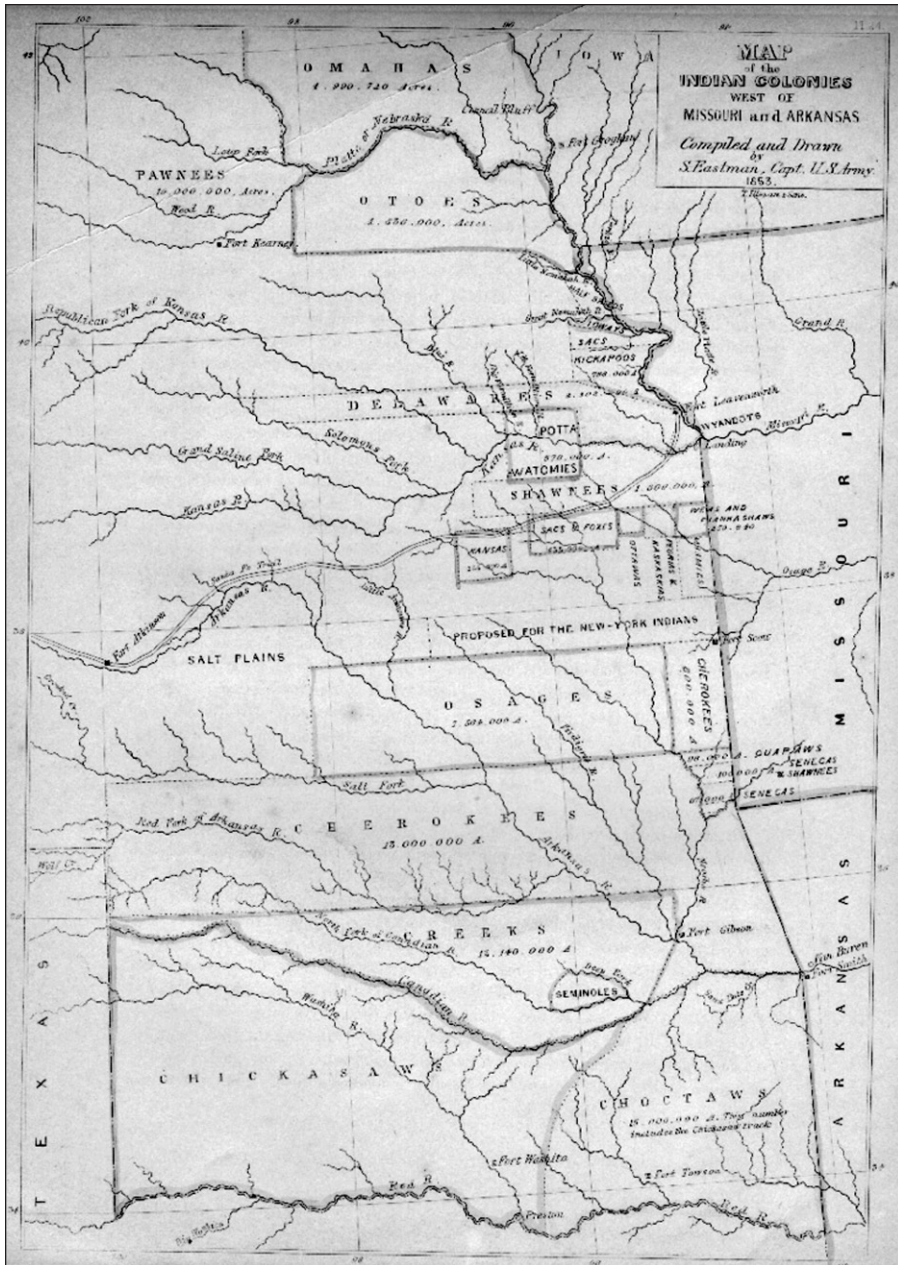


Figure 1.3. Eastman, *Map of the Indian Colonies West of Missouri and Arkansas*, 1853. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Wichita State University Libraries.

who had become highly Anglicized found it easier to profit from the trade. The potential for conflict with the various tribes remained high, and traders and Indians constantly found the need to resolve differences through consensus or, at times, with violence.²⁷

Many members of the highly diverse and often divisive population of the Fort Osage/Six Mile community supported a trade with Mexico. A population of French, métis, Native Americans, Africans, and Anglo-Americans contained the potential for conflict as groups interacted and weighed how best to benefit themselves. After the establishment of Fort Osage, Americans continued to travel to Santa Fe, and from 1808 to 1825 contact with the Southwest increased. In 1807, John Sibley in Natchitoches, father of George C. Sibley, spoke to Dr. John Robinson about Robinson's earlier trip to Santa Fe—Robinson would later become assistant factor at Fort Osage. That same year, Jacques Clamorgan of St. Louis, in the company of three Frenchmen and a Negro slave, arrived in Chihuahua by way of Santa Fe and returned to the States in 1808 with a profit—the first American to do so. By 1808 Robinson was at Fort Osage, involved in a number of speculative enterprises. Their success was partly due to luck, as the Spanish government remained, at best, capricious regarding the Americans. Spanish officials, fearing American intentions regarding New Mexico, often imprisoned foreign traders, treating them as foreign agents and spies.²⁸

In the years that followed, Fort Osage's connection to the Southwest became more and more pronounced. In December of 1812, while the nation contemplated war with Great Britain, Dr. Robinson, former subagent at Fort Osage, journeyed to Chihuahua under the authority of the United States government. His meeting with Governor Salcedo over trade proved unproductive, but not uneventful: Salcedo accused Robinson of being in league with Mexican revolutionaries and questioned his authorization from the American government to act as a representative.²⁹ As it turned out, Salcedo had accurately assessed Robinson's intentions. On his way back to the

27. Walker, *Journals of William Walker*, 228–29, 303–4nn1–2; “Joseph S. Chick,” 224–26.

28. John Sibley to Samuel H. Sibley, June 30, 1807, George Sibley Papers, MHMA, 1; Loomis and Natsir, *Pedro Vial and the Road to Santa Fe*, 249–51; James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, 286–92; U.S. Congress, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 302, “Spain—Imprisonment of Citizens of the United States Communicated to the House of Representatives April 15, 1818,” 4:207–13; Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition on the Upper Missouri 1812–1813*, 14, 15, 33–36n26. See also Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 59, 62–63, 68–69.

29. Jackson, *Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 2:380–87.

States, Robinson met José Álvarez de Toledo, a Mexican revolutionary, and together they laid plans for an American invasion of Mexico. Secretary of State James Monroe also quietly encouraged the Mexicans to revolt in an attempt to remove European influence from Mexico. By 1813, Robinson had returned to the United States and printed a broadside in Philadelphia, in which he noted the economic advantages to the United States of establishing a Mexican republic.³⁰

United States citizens continued to promote the possibilities of a trade between their country and Mexico, and the acquisition of additional territory. In 1820, a party that included nineteen-year-old David Meriwether, a black youth named Alfred, and a number of Pawnees left from the vicinity of Council Bluffs. The goal of their mission, which was sponsored by politician John O'Fallon of St. Louis and Captain Lewis Bissell, was to find out "the amount of gold and silver in New Mexico" and to explore the possibility of a wagon road from Council Bluffs to Santa Fe. Spanish government officials captured the group and escorted them to Santa Fe, where they were later released for reasons unknown.³¹

Soon after the American-backed O'Fallon-Bissell expedition, Mexico broke from Spain and established itself as an independent nation in August 1821. By the time of Missouri's entry into the Union in that same month, Americans had decided to take advantage of the political instability resulting from the Mexican revolution by making extensive trading expeditions into the region. In 1821 both the McKnight-James and William Becknell parties traveled to Santa Fe from Missouri by separate routes. Trader William Becknell left Franklin on the Missouri River on September 1 and traveled overland to Santa Fe, arriving November 16, 1821. That same year, St. Louis merchant John McKnight (in search of his brother Robert, a Spanish prisoner since 1812) and trader Thomas James traveled by way of the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers to Fort Smith and across the prairie to Santa Fe in August 1821, arriving on December 1 of that year. Becknell's venture proved so profitable on the small amount of goods transported that he repeated it in

30. Ibid.

31. "No. 302, Spain—Imprisonment of Citizens of the United States Communicated to the House of Representatives, April 15, 1818," in U.S. Congress, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 4:207–13; Meriwether, *My Life in the Mountains and on the Plains*, 82–103.

1822. Miss Fanny Marshall, who invested sixty dollars in Becknell's second venture, realized a profit of nine hundred dollars.³²

Other traders soon followed. In 1823, Joel Walker, Joseph Rutherford Walker (who became one of the nineteenth century's greatest, and most modest, explorers and mountain men), and Stephen Cooper of Six Mile journeyed to Santa Fe with a group of thirty traders. Each prospective merchant carried small amounts of trade goods consisting of manufactured items including cloth and furs, valued at about two hundred dollars each. The *Niles' Weekly Register* of December 13, 1823, reported that they returned to Missouri with "400 Jacks and Jennets and mules, a quantity of beaver, and a considerable sum in specie," although reporters did not give the exact amount.³³

In 1824, eighty-three people and 186 horses left Franklin, Missouri, some one hundred miles east of Fort Osage, and headed for Santa Fe. The *Niles' Weekly Register* of January 15, 1825, quoted Augustus Storrs reporting that they returned with \$180,000 in gold and silver and \$10,000 in beaver pelts. The United States consul at Santa Fe, Augustus Storrs, wrote an account of this trip, extolling the advantages of the trade and the potential for great profits. The account later played a significant role in Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton's move to finance a survey of a road from western Missouri and Fort Osage to Santa Fe, to provide a surveyed route for the Mexican trade.³⁴

The trade continued to grow both in the number of traders and in the amount of realized profits. Although some lost money in the trade, the potential for profit remained large in the minds of traders, driving them to make larger and larger trading trips. Becknell made a third trip in 1824. Manuel Álvarez and François Robidoux set out for New Mexico from Council Bluffs the same year. In 1825, Augustus Storrs and 105 American Santa Fe traders left the Fort

32. Becknell's journal for 1821–22 was reprinted in the *Missouri Intelligencer* on April 22, 1823. James' *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans* (1846) tells of the McKnight-James expedition. See also Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 96–97, 105–6; and Walker, *Wagonmasters*, 133. For details of these trading expeditions, Barry (*Beginning of the West*, 97, 105–6) cites newspaper articles in *Missouri Intelligencer* (April 22, September 3, and October 8, 1823), *Missouri Republican* (August 27, September 3, and November 8, 1823), and *Saint Louis Enquirer* (September 2, 1822, and November 10, 1823).

33. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 110. For more on Joseph Walker, see Gilbert, *Westering Man*, 4, 57–69.

34. Storrs's statement about the journey was printed in the *Niles' Weekly Register* of January 15, 1825 (27:313). Barry notes that Marmaduke's diary was reprinted in the *Missouri Intelligencer* of September 2, 1825; *Beginning of the West*, 116, 118. For details on the road survey, see Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg.

Osage area for New Mexico, as did forty Tennesseans traveling from Fort Smith, Arkansas. Also that year, a large expedition from New Mexico left for Missouri with nearly five hundred mules and asses, although the Osage stole about 120 head of stock as the expedition was on its way back to the States. This caravan is significant because it contained both Anglo-American and Mexican traders who cooperated in the trading venture. The details of their relationships or the manner in which they formed their alliance remain unknown.³⁵

The same year in 1825, James Ohio Pattie, with 112 men and 300 mules and horses, left the Fort Atkinson area near Council Bluffs and traveled to Taos. While camped near the mouth of Walnut Creek on September 29, 1825, on their way to Santa Fe, the American travelers from Missouri met a band of twenty men with large numbers of mules, horses, and loads of merchandise going to Santa Fe. An hour later, eighty-one more people showed up at the camp, on their way home to the States from New Mexico. Archibald Gamble, a member of the Missouri group, reported in the *Missouri Republican* of October 24, 1825, that the returning party included in their profits \$18,568 in silver, \$182 in gold, \$10,220 worth of beaver pelts, 416 mules, 25 jacks and jennets, and 189 horses worth \$15,700, for a grand total of \$44,670—a typical reflection of the money to be made in the trade's early days.³⁶

Dreams of international trade as old as Columbus were now being realized, and if the riches of India and China still remained out of reach, then the wealth of Mexico would do until those dreams could be made manifest. Benton filled American newspapers and the halls of Congress with speeches regarding the ancient trade of the Silk Road and Europe and the imminent destiny of the United States to complete “the circumambulation of the globe” and access the wealth of the Orient by virtue of “lines of communication with eastern Asia and channels for that rich commerce, which, for forty centuries, has created so much wealth and power wherever it has flowed.” Benton’s constant promotion of the West as the door to Asian trade caught the popular imagination and prompted the publication of his more pointed promotional speeches by the “Missourian Office” in 1844. As Henry Nash Smith noted in his groundbreaking *Virgin Land* in 1950, Jefferson,

35. Storrs and Benton, *Answers of Augustus Storrs . . .*; entry for Monday, January 3, 1825, in U.S. Congress, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of . . .*, 62; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 27 (January 15, 1825), 312–16; Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 264n117; Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 116.

36. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 126.

Benton, Gilpin, Whitman, and others promoted the imperial vision of the American West and its storied potential for global trade with Asia both in politics and in art. Frederick Jackson Turner would later craft these cultural observations and his own into a new nationalistic image that persists to this day. Mexico and its silver markets fit nicely into this dream of international commerce—particularly if future lines of transport linked the United States with the Pacific and markets of the Far East.³⁷

An international overland trade was developing between Mexico and the United States, and the bulk of that trade passed through the Missouri/Kansas River junction region near Fort Osage. As the trade developed, traders found that manufactured goods from the United States and Europe could not only be sold for a profit in Santa Fe. They could also make arrangements to take the goods farther south to Chihuahua, where traders found profits to be even greater.³⁸

Senator Benton dreamed of empire. He continuously promoted westward expansion—not only for the gain of territory but also for commerce—to open trade with Asia. Many of his contemporaries initially found his ideas fanciful. Benton referenced the ancient trade of Asia and Europe, the caravans of the Silk Road, the chance for the United States to complete the long sought-after economic circumnavigation of the globe by establishing transportation routes to the Pacific. His vision of international trade would ultimately be realized in a relatively short span of time—he wasn't nicknamed "Old Bullion" by accident. His St. Louis monument's inscription bears testimony to his vision: "There is the East; there is India."³⁹

In March 1825, with the sponsorship of Senator Benton, President Monroe authorized the survey of a road from Fort Osage to Santa Fe at a cost of \$30,000,⁴⁰ and former Fort Osage factor George Champlin Sibley headed the expedition. Sibley's involvement in the road survey coincided with his own personal financial interest in the Southwest trade. He wrote to

37. Benton, *Selections of Editorial Articles from the St. Louis Enquirer on the Subject of Oregon and Texas*, . . . , 5, 7; Smith, *Virgin Land*, 15–18, 19–34, 35–43, 44–48, 250–60.

38. Boyle, "Comerciantes, Arrieros y Peones," 2–3; Boyle, *Los Capitalistas*, 7–10, 28–29; Sandoval, "Trade and Manito Society," 38–48.

39. Smith, *Virgin Land*, 22–34, quote at 23.

40. "An Act to authorize the President of the United States to cause a road to be marked out from the western frontier of Missouri, to the confines of New Mexico," March 23, 1825 (sess. 2, ch. 50), in U.S. Congress, *Statutes at Large*, 4:100–101. See also Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 118–19.

his brother-in-law that “having lately engaged in that trade and intending to embark in it pretty extensively . . . I feel considerable solicitude about it,” referring to his investments in trade goods in conjunction with other local traders.⁴¹ The same year, Augustus Storrs published his account of the trade with Santa Fe, noting that specie, furs, and mules were entering the state of Missouri in large numbers.⁴²

The survey of a road between western Missouri and northern New Mexico by the United States constituted formal acknowledgment of a clear route that already existed across the plains. Native Americans and Europeans had known the general route for many years. In fact, Sibley mentioned a rock 330 miles from Fort Osage, later known as Pawnee Rock, “with the names of many Persons, who have at different times passed this way to and from New Mexico.”⁴³ A survey of the route remained important for two reasons. First, the survey marked the American government’s acknowledgment of the trade’s fiscal importance as a market for American goods and as a source of raw materials. Senator Benton, in petitioning Congress to fund the survey, called it a “highway between nations” and concentrated on its economic importance, particularly to the trade in gold and silver. Second, the survey established a means for supervising the trail traffic and the ensuing economic and political activities by providing a definite route that could be watched and controlled by the American government. The trail’s potential as both an economic highway and a military route to the Southwest played equal roles in the execution of the 1825 survey.⁴⁴

Sibley began the survey on July 17, 1825, at Fort Osage, Missouri. Forty personnel were attached to the survey, many with major business and political interests in the Missouri region.⁴⁵ Sibley’s experiences during the survey underscored the need for coalitions among business people to help offset complications in varying and uncertain political and legal environments. The survey took a southwesterly route through the lands of the Osage and

41. Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 9.

42. Weber, *Taos Trappers*, 105; Walker, *Wagonmasters*, 19. Storrs’s report was published in 1825 (see note 35). For excerpts, see Gregg, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 4–5.

43. Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 73.

44. Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 4–5, 7. Americans acknowledged the Santa Fe Trail as a prime military route from its beginning. American troops used the trail as early as 1829. After the Mexican War, the trail was incorporated into the various military roads in present-day Kansas. See Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 15–18; Jackson, *Wagon Roads West*, 199–20.

45. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 122–24.

Kansa. Surveyors paid eight hundred dollars (five hundred in trade goods and three hundred in credit) to the Osage and Kansa tribes to secure for the U.S. government a right-of-way in perpetuity. Later, when the American government partitioned Osage and Kansa lands in 1825 into reservation lands for other groups such as the Shawnee, these new residents inherited the problems and opportunities of international commerce and the Santa Fe Trail, along with established trail rights-of-way held by the American government.⁴⁶

After his negotiations with Native American groups, Sibley waited at the Mexican boundary from September 11 until September 20 for permission from Mexican authorities to enter. At this time the expedition divided. Benjamin Reeves and Thomas Mather returned to Missouri, feeling that they could not proceed without authority from the Mexican officials. Sibley and Brown continued to Santa Fe by way of Taos, establishing survey points and recording journal and survey notes along the way, and arrived in Santa Fe on November 29, 1825. Sibley continued to wait for formal permission from the Mexican government to continue the survey. The Mexican government finally granted permission the following summer. Sibley and Brown finished the survey and returned to Missouri in July 1827 to find the region bustling with activity and ominous meteorological portents. In his June 30 journal entry, Sibley mentioned the rain and the fact that “The Men did not come with Bacon ’til after Noon (having to go nearly down to the County Town for it)” —he could only have meant the newly platted Jackson County seat of government at Independence. On his return trip, Sibley avoided the newly platted town site, traveling instead on an alternate route past the Blue Spring (today’s Blue Spring, Missouri) and arriving home at Fountain Cottage on July 8, 1827, exactly one day before the first sale of town lots in Independence on July 9, 10, and 11. Why he did not participate in the sale is uncertain. It may have been sheer exhaustion: Sibley had been involved in a freak lightning strike on July 6 while asleep in his tent. He escaped with little injury, save momentary numbness and slight deafness.⁴⁷

46. *Ibid.* The payment was part of the negotiations with the Osage and Kansa at Council Grove. The Chouteaus handled the Osage transaction; however, Sibley gave the Kansa business to the firm of Curtis and Eley, who had a trading house at the mouth of the Kansas River not far from the Chouteau settlement. It is unclear why Sibley did not involve the Chouteaus in these negotiations. Perhaps his earlier treaty transactions in 1808 had made him wary of involving them; see Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 24.

47. Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 23, 38, 190–93; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 30n9.

By the time Sibley returned to Missouri, Americans had founded a new county and established a new county seat about fifteen miles southwest of Fort Osage. Traders needed a town where supplies and livestock could be purchased and freight could be transferred to and from St. Louis by river, a town where they might finalize legal transactions and assemble goods for freighting to Mexico, and where they could monitor each other's business interests. Monitoring (that is, observing the progress of business interactions by tracking cases and petitions through the courts and government) became very important to traders and merchants as they attempted to assess and control each other's actions through both contractual obligation and legal coercion. The Missouri towns of Franklin, Boonville, and Lexington, east of the Missouri/Kansas region, lost their appeal for traders when merchants found it possible to ship goods still farther west by boat. For the moment, Independence fulfilled their needs. Many of those people looking for a new town in which to do business came from the Six Mile area around Fort Osage and from Chouteau's fur trading post at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers.⁴⁸

The trans-Appalachian founders named the county Jackson in honor of Tennessee's Old Hickory, and, according to local tradition, they named the county seat Independence for what they perceived as Andrew Jackson's main characteristic. Jacksonian Democrats established the county's politics with little or no opposition. They controlled both its politics and economics, including the growing international overland trade with Mexico.⁴⁹

Thus, the earlier French and Indian fur traders and the later Americans of the region known as the Six Mile around Fort Osage served as the social and economic foundation for the town of Independence and its trade with Mexico. The region's inhabitants consisted of Osage, Kansa, métis, French, Africans, Spanish, and trans-Appalachian Anglos engaged in the fur, Indian, and Mexican trades. From 1830 to 1860, Americans combined military prerogatives with civilian economic enterprises, attempting to bring vast territories and diverse populations under the control of the

48. Sibley, *Road to Santa Fe*, ed. Gregg, 55, 133–35.

49. Anglo-Americans liked the term "independence." Pike named one of his camps Camp Independence, and the first steamboat on the Missouri was the *Independence*. The name reflected an attitude of self-reliance. Ever since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, to be independent was to be American. The town's identity hinged on the idea of "independence." See Mathews, *Osages*, 365; Pike, *Account of the Expeditions*, app. to pt. 2, 40.

United States. Independence served as an important administrative and economic center during this time. From the beginning, various ethnic and political subcommunities made up Independence's population base, but the desire to participate in trade served as a common hub of interest among the inhabitants. Multilingual and multicultural, with access to great wealth from its inception, Independence became an international crossroad as the United States expanded its empire into the American West.