

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research,
Department of History

History, Department of

6-1931

The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cut-Off as a Factor in the Early Development of Nebraska and the West

Charles Boyd Mapes
University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historydiss>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Mapes, Charles Boyd, "The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cut-Off as a Factor in the Early Development of Nebraska and the West" (1931). *Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research, Department of History*. 20. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historydiss/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cut-Off as a Factor In
The Early Development of Nebraska and the West

By
Charles Boyd Mapes

A THESIS
Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University Of Nebraska
in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for the Degree of Masters of Arts
Department of History

Lincoln, Nebraska
June, 1931.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. NEBRASKA TRAILS BEFORE THE NEBRASKA CITY- FORT KEARNY CUT-OFF LOCATED 1860.	
Oregon Trail	
William Sublette Expedition, April 10, 1830-----	1
Independence Missouri, Eastern Terminus-----	2
Route Through Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon.-----	2
Mormon Trail	
Mormon Church Organized, April 6, 1830-----	5
Persecution of Mormons in Missouri and Illinois--	5
Assassination of Joseph Smith-----	6
Expulsion From Nauvoo-----	6
Mormons on the Missouri--Winterquarters-----	7
Trouble With Indians--Expelled Again-----	7
Seeking a New Zion in the West-----	8
Route of Mormon Trail-----	8
Settlement in Utah-----	9
Old California or Ox-Bow Trail	
Route of Trail-----	10
The Great American Desert-----	10
Factors Determining Routes of Trails	
Proximity to Water, Fuel and Food-----	10

CHAPTER II. ORIGINS OF NEBRASKA CITY AND FORT KEARNY

Table Creek Selected as Military Site-----	13
Post Established at Table Creek-----	13
Missouri Troops Winter at Table Creek-----	14
Lieutenant Woodbury Selects Military Site on the Platte-----	15
Table Creek Troops Transferred to Fort Kearny-----	16
Name Changed From Fort Childs to Fort Kearny-----	16
Buildings at Fort Kearny-1863-----	17
Purchase of Fort Laramie-----	17
Lieutenant Woodbury Proposes Abandonment of Fort Kearny-----	17
Fort Kearny Becomes Great Emigrant and Freighting Center-----	18
Fort Kearny on Missouri Abandoned-----	19
Nebraska Territorial Organization-----	19
Nebraska City Founded-----	19

CHAPTER III. NEBRASKA CITY BECOMES A GOVERNMENT

FREIGHTING DEPOT-----

Mormon War In Utah

Strife Between Mormons and Gentiles-----	21
Civil Government Organized-----	21
Deseret Seeks Admission as State-----	22
Application Denied--Utah Territory Organized-----	22
Trouble Between Mormons and Civil Officials-----	23
State of Deseret Again Seeks Admission--Petition	

	Page
Ignored-----	23
Judge Drummond and the Mormons-----	24
Attempt to Remove Brigham Young as Governor---	25
Brigham Young Shouts Defiance-----	25
United States Troops Sent to Utah-----	25
Government Freighting Contract Awarded Russell,---	
Majors and Waddell-----	
Nebraska City Selected as Freighting Depot----	26
Initial Freighting Outfit at Nebraska City----	28
Majors Disciplines the Bull-Whackers-----	29
No Direct Route To Fort Kearny--Early-----	
Freighting Trains Used Ox-Bow Trail-----	29
Agitation For a Direct Route To Fort Kearny---	30
Mormon War Ends--Majors Demands Direct Route--	
To Fort Kearny-----	31
Nebraska City People Renew Efforts to Locate--	
Road-----	31
CHAPTER IV. NEBRASKA CITY-FORT KEARNY CUT-OFF OR	
STEAM WAGON ROAD-----	
Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail Laid Out-----	
Mass Meeting of 1860-----	33
City Engineer Harvey Surveys the Trail-----	34
Well-Beaten Path--Nebraska City to Olathe----	34
Breaking Plow Survey to Fort Kearny-----	35
Route of Trail Through Otoe, Lancaster, Sew-	
ard, York, Hamilton, Hall, Adams and Kearny	

	Page
Counties-----	36
Steam Wagon-----	
Major Joseph Renshaw Brown-----	39
First Steam Wagon Used in Minnesota-----	40
Second Steam Wagon in Nebraska City, 1862-----	41
Steam Wagon Accident-----	41
Nebraska City People Vote Bonds to Improve---	
Steam Wagon Road-----	42
Steam Wagon Abandoned-----	43
What Became of the Steam Wagon-----	44
Concrete Results of Steam Wagon Incident-----	46
CHAPTER V. ALONG THE TRAIL-----	
Rivalry Between Omaha and Nebraska City for Emi-	
grant and Freightng Business-----	48
Russell, Majors and Waddell Freightng Contract	
Gives Nebraska City Advantage-----	49
Trail Ranches-----	
Description and Purposes of Ranches-----	49
Otoe County Ranches--Wilson's Ranch and Nur-	
sery Hill-----	49
Lancaster County Ranches--Meacham's, Salt-	
illo, Cheese Creek-----	52
Seward County--Camden, Thompson, Daniel Mills-	
paw and Houses-----	54
York County Ranches--Porcupine, Jack Smith,	
McDonald, Antelope, Jack Stone-----	55

	Page
Hamilton County--David Millspaw, Prairie Camp and	
Deep-Well-----	56
Hall and Adams County Ranches-----	57
Kearny County Ranches--Valley City or Dogtown,	
Ben Holladay-----	58
The Old Ranch vs. Modern Tourist Camp-----	60
Settlers Sell Produce at High Prices-----	60
Freighting over the Trail-----	
Length of Freighting Season-----	60
A Freighting Train-----	60
Volume of Traffic and Freighting Rates-----	61
Emigrant Travel-----	62
Traffic Through Fort Kearny-----	62
CHAPTER SIX. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEBRASKA	
CITY-FORT KEARNY TRAIL-----	
Opened South Platte Territory to settlement-----	63
Brought Wealth into South Platte Territory-----	64
Gave South Platte Territory Political Ascendancy during	
Early History of Nebraska-----	65
Capitol Removal Controversy-----	66
Locating State Institutions-----	67
Contribution of Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail to	
the West-----	68
Freighting and Stage Coach Lines Discontinued in Nebr-	
aska-----	69

Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail used as Highway until	
1873-----	69
Present Day Landmarks of the Old Trail-----	69
The Old Trail Obliterated-----	70

*

Chapter 1

EARLY NEBRASKA TRAILS BEFORE THE NEBRASKA CITY- FORT KEARNY CUT-OFF LOCATED 1860

By far the major portion of the early overland travel into what we now know as the western and northwestern portions of the United States, passed through the territory which is included in the present state of Nebraska. This traffic soon settled into definite paths, each of which took on a name significant of the destination of most of the travellers who followed its course. The most important of these highways were the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail.

Fur traders had been travelling into the western and northwestern territory for many years previous to ¹ 1860 which marks the advent of the first wagon train ² over the Oregon Trail. On April 10 of this year, Captain William Sublette left St. Louis with ten wagons and two carriages bound for the Rendezvous on Big Wind ² river in Wyoming. He followed the general route used by those who had gone before him in the search for furs.

While Captain Sublette started this first wagon

-
- 1 Washington Irving, Astoria, 20th Century Edition 491, 525. George P. Putnam 1849, New York.
 - 2 Senate Executive Documents 39, 21 Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 21-23. Reproduced Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Volume 4, 395.

train from St. Louis, Independence, Missouri, which is located near the junction of the Kansas and Missouri rivers, soon came to be the real eastern terminus³ of the Oregon Trail. Freight and passengers came to this point by boat. Here they left the water route and took up the long overland journey across the western prairies and mountains. The Santa Fe and Oregon Trails followed the same route⁴ for forty-one miles out of Independence along the south side of the Kansas river. At this point, the Oregon Trail bore off to the northwest. It crossed⁵ the Kansas river just west of Topeka and crossed the⁶ Blue river where Marysville, Kansas, is now located. It entered Nebraska at the extreme southeast corner of Jefferson county, it ran northwest across Jefferson⁷ county to a point about six miles south of the northwest corner of the county; here it turned almost due west through Thayer county and then bore northwest across the northeast corner of Nuckolls county and the extreme southeast corner of Clay county. Here it entered Adams county, at a point about one mile

3 Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, Vol. 1, 463-64.

4 Ibid., Vol. 1, p.464. Francis P. Parker, New York 1898.

5 W. J. Ghent, The Road to Oregon (London 1929) p.124.

6 Hulbert, The Crown Collection of American Maps. Series 4, Vol. 1, No. 24.

7 Ibid., No. 29.

north of the southeast corner of the county, and passed diagonally across the county to a point about three miles south of the northwest corner of the county. It next entered the northeast corner of Kearny county where⁸ it struck the Platte river bottom.

After reaching the Platte river, the trail turned west and followed along the south banks of the Platte and South Platte rivers to a point four miles west⁹ of the present town of Brule in Keith county. Here the trail crossed the South Platte and bore northwest across Deuel and into Garden county where it struck and followed the south bank of the North Platte river through Garden, Morrill, Banner and Scott's Bluff counties. It left the present Nebraska domain at the¹⁰ Northwest corner of Scott's Bluff county. Shortly after leaving Nebraska, the wayfarers came to the trading post in Wyoming which was purchased by the¹¹ United States government in 1849 and was known thereafter as Fort Laramie. Here they could rest without

8 Hulbert, The Crown Collection of American Maps, Series 4, Vol. 1, No. 28.

9 Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 37, Vol. 2, Nos. 7,8,9,10.

10 Ibid., Vol. 1, Nos. 10,11,12,13,14 and 15.

11 Ibid., Vol. 2, Nos. 66. Also Lt. Woodbury to Gen. Joseph J. Totten, Chief Engineer, Wash., D. C. June 26, 1849.

much fear of attack by Indians. Necessary repairs could be made and provisions obtained for the next lap of the long journey which still lay before them. After leaving Fort Laramie, the Oregon Trail followed the south bank of the Platte to the site of the present town of Casper where it crossed to the north side of the river.¹² Here it turned southwest through South Pass to Fort Bridger which was located near the site of the present town of Rock Springs.¹³ Thence northwest to Fort Hall on the Snake river in Idaho.¹⁴ From Fort Hall it followed the semi-circular course of the Snake to Fort Boise on the western border of Idaho.¹⁵ From Fort Boise the trail ran northwest across northeastern Oregon to Oregon City and Portland.¹⁶

The Mormon Trail came into existence as a direct result of the persecution of the Mormons and their expulsion from the various points at which they had settled during the first fifteen years of their existence as a church. The Mormon church was organ-

12 Hulbert, Crown Collection of Maps, Series 4, Vol. 1, No. 28.

13 Ibid., Vol. 2, Maps 22-33

14 Ibid., Vol. 2, No. 33, Vol 3, No. 7.

15 Ibid., Vol. 3, Nos. 16-34.

16 Ibid., Vol. 3, Nos. 34-56.

ized under the laws of New York on April 6, 1830.¹⁷

From the very beginning of their history they were persecuted by other religious bodies and became a wandering people. Settlements were made at both Kirtland, Ohio, and Independence, Missouri in 1831.¹⁹

The Missourians were extremely antagonistic and actual shedding of blood and killing took place at Independence in 1833,²⁰ in Clay county in 1836 and at Far West in Caldwell county in 1838.²¹ The Mormons appealed to the legislature for redress but in January 1839,²² they were told by the legislature that they need expect no consideration at the hands of that body or any other group of Missouri citizens.²³

A few Mormons had settled near Quincy, Illinois,²⁴ and by April 20, 1839, the last of the saints had departed from Far West in Caldwell county, Missouri.

-
- 17 Hubert Howe Bancroft's Works, History of Utah, Vol. 26, Historical Publishing Company, San Francisco, Calif., p. 65., (39 volumes).
 - 18 History of the Latter Day Saints, 1805-1835. Vol. 1, p.169. Joseph and Heman Smith, Lamona, Iowa, (4 vols.) 1908.
 - 19 Ibid, p. 178.
 - 20 Beadle, Life in Utah, p. 38. National Publishing Company, Philadelphia in 1870.
 - 21 Bancroft, 101-102 in Volume 26.
 - 22 Ibid, p. 128.
 - 23 Ibid, p. 134.
 - 24 Ibid, p. 135.

to take up their abode in Illinois. The village of Commerce, in Hancock county, Illinois, was purchased in 1839 and its name was changed to Nauvoo in May 1840.²⁵ Here the Mormons prospered as never before and when the persecutions were renewed by the gentiles, they were even more vigorous than they had been in Missouri. These activities culminated in the assassination of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, and his brother, Hyrum, at the jail in Carthage, Illinois on June 27, 1844.²⁶ Matters grew steadily worse and a meeting was held at Quincy on September 22, 1845²⁷ at which it was agreed that further efforts to live in peace with the Mormons were useless. A copy of the resolutions passed at this meeting was sent to the Mormons and six months was named as the time in which the Mormons must depart.²⁸ The Mormons replied on September 24 that it was their intention to leave as soon as they could dispose of their property. To this plan the men of Quincy assented and the exodus began in February of 1846.²⁹ The last of the Mormons crossed the Miss-

25 Ferris, The Mormons, P. 141, New York 1856.

26 Bancroft P. 178-179 in Vol. 26.

27 Ibid., P. 209.

28 Ibid., P. 211.

29 Ibid., P. 216-217.

30

issippi on September 17, 1846.

The main body of the Mormons reached the Missouri at the spot now known as Council Bluffs and by early
 31
 autumn 12,000 of them were assembled in this neighborhood. Colonel Allen, who was acting for the United States here, granted the Mormons permission to pass through the Indian territory and to remain as long
 32
 as necessary. Most of them crossed to the west bank of the Missouri and went into camp at Winter-quarters, which was located about nine miles north of the present city of Omaha. Here cabins were erected and preparations made to spend the winter and prepare themselves to continue the search for
 33
 a new Zion.

The Indians, in the vicinity of Winterquarters, had consented to have the Mormons occupy some of their lands but early in the spring of 1847 they complained to Captain Allen that the Mormons were cutting too much timber and the Mormons were ex-
 34
 cluded from the territory. Some of the exiles returned

30 Bancroft, p. 231 in Vol. 26.

31 Ibid., p. 222-223.

32 Ibid., p. 237.

33 Ibid., p. 249.

34 Sorenson's Story of Omaha, p. 23, Omaha in 1923.

to the east bank of the Missouri river to find a new place to abide, but the vast majority prepared to go into the almost unknown regions to the west to seek peace and a home in the possession of which they would not be molested.

In April, 1847, Brigham Young, who had been elected to head the Mormons after the death of Joseph Smith, led a party of 143 people into the wilderness of the west to seek a new location.³⁵ They followed the north bank of the Platte and North Platte rivers all the way to the present site of Fort Laramie, Wyoming, where they crossed the Oregon Trail and followed a route somewhat south of it to Fort Bridger.³⁶ Here they turned south into the Utah country which proved in time to be the Promised Land for the Mormons.³⁷ Word was sent back to the members of the sect who had remained behind until news of the location of the new Zion should come to them.³⁸ The exodus then began in earnest. By 1852 more than 25,000 Mormons had settled in the vicinity of Great Salt Lake and each year this number was aug-

35 Bancroft, p. 253 in Vol. 26.

36 Ibid., p. 256.

37 Ibid., p. 258.

38 Ibid., p. 283-284.

mented by new converts who came from all parts of
³⁹the civilized world. Practically all of these people
 passed over the trail north of the Platte river.
 Most of them travelled in wagons drawn by oxen, mules,
 or horses, but many of them went on foot. Most of
 those who travelled on foot either pulled a cart or
 pushed a wheel-barrow, in which they transported all
⁴⁰of their earthly possessions.

A third trail, of limited importance nationally
 but of great importance in the early history of the
 South Platte territory of Nebraska, was known as
 the Old California or Ox-Bow Trail. This trail
 extended four miles west from Nebraska City and then
 turned northwest across Cass county. It crossed
 Salt Creek at Ashland in Saunders county and came
 down on to the Platte river bottom in the vicinity
 of the present town of Cedar Bluffs. It then follow-
 ed along the south bank of the Platte until it
⁴¹joined the Oregon Trail in Kearny county. It ap-
 pears that this trail came into existence some time
 previous to 1855. In his writings, J. Sterling

39 Bancroft, footnote p. 397 in Vol. 26.

40 Ibid., pp. 423-424 in Vol. 26.

41 Hulbert, Vol. 1, Nos. 48-59.

Morton tells of a trip which he made over this route in 1855 in company with O.P.Mason and three others. The purpose of this expedition was to investigate the Great American Desert which was the expression used to describe the territory lying west of Salt Creek during the early years of Nebraska's History.⁴²

In bringing this chapter to a close, the writer desires to call attention to several factors which practically determined the routes of these trails. The most important of these factors was a water supply for the animals used for draft and other purposes and for human consumption. This meant that the trail must always be laid out within a reasonable distance from some stream.

The eastern portion of the Oregon Trail followed the Kansas, the Blue and the Platte rivers across Kansas, Nebraska and the greater part of Wyoming. The western portion of this trail lay along such streams as the Sweetwater, Sandy, Snake and Columbia rivers. The Mormon Trail followed the north bank of the Platte river into Wyoming and then followed the Sweetwater river and other western streams to Great Salt Lake. The Old California or Ox-Bow

42 Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. 4, pp. 11-18.

Trail took the indirect course which it followed from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny in order that water might always be available. Absence of a large stream running in a somewhat nearly direct line between Nebraska City and Fort Kearny was probably the principal reason why a direct route to Fort Kearny was not laid out at the time traffic was first opened between these two points.

A second necessity was fuel and since most streams are bordered by more or less timber, this constituted another good reason for keeping near to the various rivers and creeks in the territory traversed by the trails. Scarcity of wood to be used as fuel was not as serious an obstacle to over-land travel as scarcity of water was, however. When wood was not available, the pioneer could always resort to the use of buffalo chips as a fuel supply.

A third and very essential factor was a proper supply of grass for grazing purposes. The pioneer depended almost entirely on grass as a food supply for his animals and he could not travel long in a region in which there was not an ample supply of grass. This was another reason for keeping near the rivers and other streams as there is usually abundant

forage in the valleys. Thus we see that, while the pioneer travelled through a wide-open and untrammelled territory, he was not free to go where fancy might direct. Always he must keep near the streams in order to supply himself with game for food, water for himself and animals, fuel to burn and forage for his stock.

Chapter 2

ORIGINS OF NEBRASKA CITY AND FORT KEARNY

On July 2, 1836, the United States Congress passed a law in which provision was made for establishing a military road, extending from the junction of the Des Moines and Mississippi rivers to the Red¹ river. S. W. Kearny and Nathan Boone were appointed to designate the points at which military posts should be established for protection of traffic along the route. On April 26, 1838, these commissioners reported to the War Department that they had selected a site for a post at the junction of Table Creek with the Missouri river. In the spring of 1846, Colonel Kearny received instructions from the secretary of war to proceed with the construction of a military post at Table Creek.² Lieutenant Smith was sent to Table Creek in May of 1846³ with thirty soldiers from Captain Moore's company. Colonel Kearny remained at Fort Leavenworth until a boat carrying materials from which to build a fort, came from St. Louis. He then proceeded to Table Creek, accompanied by the remainder of Captain Moore's company.⁴

1 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 5, p.67.

2 Special Orders, No. 17, March 6, 1846.

3 S. W. Kearny to Brigadier Gen. R. Jones, March 17, 1846.

4 S. W. Kearny to Brigadier Gen. R. Jones, May 12, 1846.

Colonel Kearny remained at Table Creek only long enough to make plans for building the post and then returned to Fort Leavenworth.⁵ When Colonel Kearny reached Fort Leavenworth he found orders awaiting him which made it necessary to withdraw Captain Moore and forty-five of his men. Major Wharton, who was left in charge, had only thirty-nine soldiers and seven mechanics for use in erecting the buildings.⁶ Major Wharton was withdrawn for duty at Fort Leavenworth in a very short time and Lieutenant Prince was left in charge.⁷ Lieutenant Prince proceeded with the work and had succeeded in erecting a two-story block house when he was ordered to abandon the work.⁸ In the fall of 1847, five companies of volunteers were recruited in Missouri to be used in protecting the western traffic against the Indians,⁹ but it was too late in the fall for the troops to go into the west. Because of failure to receive certain orders, Lieutenant Colonel Wharton had ordered these troops to winter at Table Creek.¹⁰ Shortly after these Missouri

5 W. E. Prince to Thomas Jesup, August 6, 1858.

6 Idem.

7 Idem.

8 R. Jones, Adj. Gen. to Brig. Gen. George M. Brooke, June 22, 1846.

9 R. Jones, Adj. Gen. to Maj. Clifton Wharton, August 20, 1847.

10 Lt. Col. C. Wharton to Brig. Gen. Jones, Aug. 3, 1847; Adj. Gen. Jones to Lt. Col. Wharton, Oct. 13, 1847; Col. C. Wharton to Brig. Jones, Oct. 27, 1847; Ibid; November 18, 1847; Ibid, November 6, 1847.

troops reached Table Creek, Colonel Powell, who was in command, ordered Lieutenant Woodbury to proceed to the Platte for the purpose of locating a military¹¹ post on the Oregon Trail. Lieutenant Woodbury left Table Creek, or Fort Kearny as it had now come to be called, on September 23, 1847, with seventy mounted¹² volunteers. Lieutenant Woodbury and his men followed a course a little north of west and came out at the foot of Grand Island on the Platte. After travelling about forty miles farther west and a total of 180 miles from Fort Kearny on the Missouri, they struck the Oregon and California road from Independence. Lieutenant Woodbury then proceeded to survey the territory thoroughly and came to the conclusion that the military post should be located seventeen miles west from the point at which the trail turned away from the river toward Independence. This site was near the head of Grand Island and the principal reason for selecting it was its proximity to abundant timber which was¹³ needed for building and fuel purposes. After deciding

-
- 11 War Department order, No. 4, September 22, 1847. See also Thesis of Lillian Willman, reprinted Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. 21, p. 225.
 - 12 Lieutenant Woodbury to Colonel Joseph G. Totten, Chief Engineer, Washington, D. C., Nov. 2, 1847.
 - 13 Lieutenant Woodbury to Colonel Joseph G. Totten, November 10, 1847.

upon the location for the new post, Lieutenant Woodbury and his troops returned to Fort Kearny to spend the winter. In the spring of 1848 all of the troops were withdrawn from the post at Table Creek and transferred to the new post on the Oregon Trail. On June 3, 1848, Lieutenant Woodbury proposed the name of Fort Childs for the new post at the head of Grand Island. Brigadier General Childs, who was the father-in-law of Lieutenant Woodbury, had distinguished himself at the battle of Cerro Gordo in the Mexican War and Lieutenant¹⁴ wished to honor him in this way. The post was known as Fort Childs during the summer and fall of 1848, but in December of 1848 the War Department changed the name to Fort Kearny in honor of Colonel Stephen W. Kearny,¹⁵ who had also distinguished himself in the Mexican War. Lieutenant Woodbury remained at Fort Kearny on the Platte during the year 1848 and the early part of 1849 for the purpose of erecting buildings. During the fall of 1848, he reported the completion of a sod house with four rooms for temporary officer's quarters, an adobe store house and six other sod and frame buildings to be used to house both men and horses. In June 1849, Lieutenant Woodbury

14 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon, Minden, Nebr., Sept. 1, 1925.

15 Order by R. Jones, Adj. Gen., Washington, D. C., December 30, 1848.

submitted a report in which he told of his return from Table Creek with materials for the erection of a hospital, two double blocks of officer's quarters¹⁶ and one block of soldier's quarters. By 1863, the post included a barracks and a dozen or more buildings. Some of the buildings were of sod but the houses occupied by the officers were substantial frame¹⁷ structures.

Under date of June 26, 1849, Lieutenant Woodbury reported that he had visited and purchased the site at Fort Laramie to be used as a means of defense against the Indians and to protect traffic along the North¹⁸ Platte in Wyoming. On February 14, 1850, Lieutenant Woodbury wrote the adjutant general a letter in which he suggested the possibility of abandoning Fort Kearny and called attention to the opinions of many officers to the effect that Fort Kearny was an unnecessary post. He felt that the work which was being done by the soldiers at Fort Kearny could be handled from Fort Leavenworth on the south and Fort Laramie on the west.

16 Lieutenant Woodbury to General J. G. Totten, Oct., 31, 1848; December 7, 1848; June 2, 1849.

17 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 239.

18 Lt. Woodbury to Gen. J. G. Totten, June 26, 1849.

This would eliminate the expense of maintaining Fort
¹⁹
 Kearny. During 1851, the War Department gave serious consideration to the proposal to abandon Fort Kearny because of inadequate military funds, but Indian troubles arose again and it was found exped-
²⁰
 ient to continue the garrison at Fort Kearny. As has been stated already, all of the important middle western trails either passed through or passed near by Fort Kearny and without doubt Fort Kearny was the greatest center of emigrant and freighting traffic in the entire western territory in the decade previous
²¹
 to the coming of the railroads.

And now to return to Table Creek or Old Fort Kearny. The commandant in charge during the winter of 1848 had used this name in honor of Brigadier General Stephen W. Kearny who had had so much to do
²²
 with the history of the site up to that time. After the withdrawal of the troops in the spring of 1848, little is heard about Old Fort Kearny. A Mr. English was left in charge of the government property

19 Lieutenant Woodbury to General R. Jones, Adj. Gen. U. S. A., Washington, D. C., February 14, 1850.

20 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon at Minden, Nebraska, September 1, 1926.

21 Idem.

22 Memoranda from files of the War Department, Wash., D. C.

at the post. Mr. English was superseded by Colonel John Boulware in 1849, and he, in turn, by Colonel H. P. Downs in 1850. Colonel Downs continued in control until the government gave up all claim to the site in 1854.²³ Certain parts of Nebraska were opened to settlement under territorial organization of June 1, 1854. Nebraska City was laid out in the summer of 1854 by H. P. Downs, S. F. Nucholls, and Judge A. A. Bradford. Kearny City was laid out in the same year by John Boulware and John McMecham. South Nebraska City was laid out in 1855 by Judge C. F. Holly, John B. Boulware and several others.²⁴ On December 31, 1857, the territorial legislature passed an act which provided for the consolidation of Nebraska City, Kearny City, and South Nebraska City.²⁵ This act was published in the Nebraska City News of April 3, 1858.²⁶ The governing bodies of the three corporations had approved it with the provision that it should go into effect on May 3, 1858. Thus we see come into existence the town of

23 A. T. Andreas, History of Nebraska, (2 volumes) Vol. 2, p. 1199. Published by the Western Historical Co., Chicago, 1882.

24 Sketch of Nebr. City, Nebr. City News, March 27, 1858.

25 Nebraska Council Journal, 4,5,6 session, p. 85, December 3, 1857.

26 Nebraska City News, April 3, 1858.

Nebraska City which even at this time had been selected as the eastern terminus of the great government military supply route to Utah and other centers of military activity in the west.²⁷

²⁷ Nebraska City News, February 27, 1858.

Chapter 3

NEBRASKA CITY BECOMES A GOVERNMENT FREIGHTING DEPOT

During their first two years in Utah, the Mormons were entirely under the control of their church leaders in both spiritual and temporal matters. Disputes were settled by their bishops and the church frowned upon all litigation.¹ This plan would have worked quite well in all probability except for the fact that there was a small percentage of gentile citizens gathered from nearly all of the civilized nations of the world. Quite often litigation arose among the gentiles or between Mormon and gentile. The gentiles were not always willing to abide by the decisions of the bishops and were soon complaining of the lawless oppression of the Mormons. This made it necessary to establish some judicial authority whose mandates would be respected by both Mormon and gentile and would also have the support of the United States government.² Accordingly a convention was called to meet at Salt Lake City on March 4, 1849 for the purpose of adopting a constitution under which the people might govern

1 Bancroft, p. 439 in volume 26.

2 Ibid., p. 439-40

themselves until congress should provide otherwise. A constitution was adopted and a provisional government under the name of the State of Deseret was formed. The seat of government was to be at Salt Lake City and the general organization of the government was the same as in all other states.³ A general election was held on March 12, 1849, and Brigham Young was elected governor. The general assembly met on July 2, the oath was administered to the executive officials and thus was organized the State of Deseret.⁴ On July 5, Almon W. Babbitt was elected delegate to congress and on July 9 a memorial was adopted asking congress for admission as a state.⁵ This memorial accompanied by a copy of the constitution of the State of Deseret was presented to the Senate on December 27, 1849 by Stephen A. Douglas.⁶ The House of Representatives refused recognition to the State of Deseret by a vote of 108 to 77.⁷ On September 9, 1849, a bill passed congress providing

³ Bancroft 440, in volume 26.

⁴ Ibid., 443, in volume 26.

⁵ Ibid., 444, in volume 26.

⁶ Congressional Globe, 1849-50, 21, 92.

⁷ Ibid., 1849-50, passim.

a territorial organization for Utah under the name⁸ of the Territory of Utah. Under the provisions of this law, a legislature was elected on the first Monday in August 1850, three judges were appointed, and Brigham Young was appointed governor and super-⁹intendent of Indian affairs. The gentile officials who had been appointed did not arrive in Utah until August 1851. They were kindly received and between September 7 and 10 a general conference of the Church was held at which Judge Brocchus obtained permission to speak. He drifted into the subject of polygamy and exhorted the women to virtue. He also took some of the leaders to task for having spoken disrespectfully of the government. The Mormons were highly incensed and probably would have done violence to the judge if they had not been held in check by Brigham¹⁰ Young. This incident is typical of the relationships which soon came to exist between the Mormons and the gentile officials. In January 1854, Utah again sought admission as a state. Their petition was ignored. Following this, a convention met in March 1856 and

8 United States Public Laws, 31st Congress, 1 Sess., pp.453-8.

9 Bancroft 456, in volume 26.

10 Ibid., 457, in volume 26.

the people again adopted a constitution under the style of the State of Deseret. This constitution and a second memorial were presented to John M. Bernhisel who held the position of territorial delegate between 1851-59. Both were again ignored and the saints were sorely offended.¹¹ Another cause of dissatisfaction was the failure of Congress to make such appropriations as were granted for other territories. Even the expenses of the assembly were not paid promptly.¹² The person who did more to bring on the Mormon War than any other individual was W. W. Drummond. He was appointed a territorial judge in 1854 and upon his first appearance in court, he insulted the community by mocking at their laws and institutions and especially at polygamy. He also openly declared that he had come to Utah to make money and in the presence of the chief justice he said: "Money is my God."¹³ After the departure of Drummond, other gentiles refused to accept appointment in Utah on the ground that they feared for their lives at the hands of the Mormons.¹⁴ An attempt was made to

11 Bancroft 483-484, in volume 26.

12 Ibid., 485, in volume 26.

13 Remy's Journey to Great Salt Lake City, Vol. 1, p. 469. (2 vols.), Jules Remy, London, 1861.

14 Bancroft 492, in volume 26.

replace Brigham Young as governor in the fall of 1854. Lieutenant Colonel Steptoe had arrived in Utah on August 31st of that year and as Brigham's term of office was about to expire, President Pierce offered the place to Steptoe. Steptoe refused the offer and joined with the other officials in recommending that Brigham be re-appointed. The request was granted and Colonel Steptoe and his command remained in the valley until the following spring.¹⁵ On the sabbath after Steptoe's departure, Brigham repeated a remark which he had made in the tabernacle two years before, "I am and will be governor," and then went on to threaten death if there should be a recurrence of the situation which had occurred during the previous winter.¹⁶ It now seemed evident that the Mormons intended to refuse obedience to gentile law, and President Buchanan determined that Brigham should be removed as governor and that a force should be sent to the territory to sustain the authority of the new governor.¹⁷ Accordingly, troops were assembled at Fort Leavenworth.¹⁸ By June of 1858 more than six

15 Bancroft 493, in volume 26.

16 Ibid. 494, in volume 26.

17 Remy's Journey to Great Salt Lake City, pp. 468-73.

18 Bancroft 497, in volume 26.

thousand troops were in Utah or enroute to that territory.¹⁹ The command was given to Brigadier General Harney, a man of much rude force of character and a very capable officer. But he was hardly the man for this task as it was one which required diplomacy more than fighting ability. No expedition was ever dispatched by the United States better equipped and provisioned²⁰ than was the army of Utah, and it is with the task of keeping this army properly provisioned that this article next concerns itself.

In January 1858, the War Department awarded a contract for the delivery of war supplies for the Utah army to the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell of Fort Leavenworth.²¹ This contract involved approximately two million dollars in money and ten million pounds of goods.²² These goods were to be delivered to some point on the Missouri river by boat and were then to be freighted across the plains to the army in Utah. It was left to Russell, Majors and Waddell to select the river port at which the goods should be unloaded from the boats.

19 House Ex. Doc., 35th Congress, 2 Sess., volume 2, part 2, Document 2.

20 House Ex. Doc., 35th Congress, 1 Sessl, Volumes 9, No. 33, 12 No. 89.

21 James D. White to editor of Nebr. City News, February 13, 1858.

22 Nebraska City News, February 20, 1858.

The responsibility for making the final decision in this matter was left in the hands of Mr. Alexander Majors. Mr. Majors visited the different towns along the river during the latter part of February 1858. He visited Nebraska City during the week previous to February 20, 1858 and attended a mass meeting of the citizens. Mr. Majors discussed with this group the feasibility of selecting Nebraska City as the unloading point. He made several very definite demands which he asked the people of Nebraska City to meet as a condition to having their town designated. The members of the mass meeting accepted all of these terms readily but Mr. Majors withheld his final decision on the ground that he desired to visit some of the towns farther up the river before reaching a final decision.²³ Under date of February 27, 1858 a report was given of another mass meeting at Nebraska City at which Mr. Majors was present and gave his decision in favor of Nebraska City. The people of

23 Nebraska City News, February 20, 1858.

Nebraska City agreed as follows: (1) to spend \$100,000 in building a proper port or landing place; (2) to provide ample grazing land for the stock used in freighting; (3) to provide adequate warehouse facilities; (4) to drive all liquor dispensaries out of their town; (5) to provide free ferry; (6) to lay out a highway directly west through Otoe county. To carry out this last provision, a road committee consisting of J. Sterling Morton, H. P. Downs and Judge Daily was appointed and instructed to hire a surveyor to lay out a direct route to Fort Kearny.²⁴ On April 10, 1858, Mr. Majors returned to Nebraska City to make preparations for opening the new freighting line from Nebraska City to Utah.²⁵ The initial freighting outfit consisted of 2,000 wagons, 16,000 oxen, 8,000 mules and 2,000 men.²⁶ The men who worked for Russell, Majors and Waddell were put under a very strict discipline. As soon as a man was hired he was given a Bible and a hymn book. He was forbidden to swear at the oxen or mules and he was not permitted to drink liquor.

24 Nebraska City News, February 27, 1853.

25 Nebraska City News, April 10, 1858.

26 Nebraska City News, February 27, 1858.

The trains were not permitted to travel on Sunday. By the latter part of May 1858, freighting trains were leaving daily for Fort Kearny and arrangements²⁷ for starting the Utah trains were completed. No definite action had been taken in the matter of laying out a road directly west through Otoe county as had been provided at the mass meeting of February 27, 1858. This made it necessary for Russell, Majors and Waddell to use the old Ox-Bow Trail which crossed Salt Creek at Ashland, in Saunders county and followed the Platte river to Fort Kearny. The greater portion of this route lay along the Platte river bottom and when the weather was bad, it was exceedingly difficult for the freighting trains to make satisfactory progress as they travelled only twelve to fifteen miles a day when the roads were good. Following the Ox-Bow Trail also required the emigrants and freighters to traverse a greater distance than would have been necessary if there had been a direct route from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny. The Fort Kearny site is located one and four-tenths miles south²⁸ of Nebraska City. From this fact it can be readily

27 Nebraska City News, May 22, 1858, May 29, 1858.
 28 Peoples' Press, April 10, 1860.

seen that a direct road between the two points would have made the distance much shorter with a consequent saving in time in making the trip from the Missouri river to Fort Kearny and other points in the western territory. The desirability of such a road had been constantly agitated from the time of the selection of Nebraska City as a government supply depot in February 1858. Various efforts were made between 1858 and 1860 to raise funds with which to build this road but all of them had failed.²⁹ All traffic into the west from Nebraska City during these two years followed the Ox-Bow Trail. By the spring of 1860,³⁰ the Mormon War in Utah had ended and with it had ended the government freighting contract of Russell, Majors and Waddell. Mr. Majors had become very much attached to Nebraska City during his sojourn there and desired to remain and continue in the freighting business if a satisfactory route could be established.³¹ His firm had invested a large amount of money in warehouses, stables, corrals, rolling stock, live stock and other equipment used in the transportation business. To remove all of this

29 Peoples' Press, February 17, 1860.

30 Bancroft 575, in volume 26.

31 Peoples' Press, February 17, 1860.

equipment to some other point or to have abandoned a portion of it would have entailed an unwarranted loss. Each wagon train which Russell, Majors and Waddell had sent out from Nebraska City after establishing themselves there had made a profit of two thousand to three thousand dollars while each train from Leavenworth had been run at a loss. Naturally they did not care to abandon a route which offered such fine opportunities for profit as were offered by the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail but Mr. Majors felt that, since they no longer held a lucrative government contract, it would be necessary for them to have a shorter and better road if they were to continue to make a profit. The people of Nebraska City and Otoe county were also intensely interested in having Russell, Majors and Waddell continue to make their headquarters at Nebraska City ~~as~~ it was generally conceded that ~~this~~ firm and particularly Mr. Majors had been almost entirely responsible for the ³²great prosperity which had come to Nebraska City. Efforts to establish a direct route to Fort Kearny in accordance with the promises which had been made to Mr. Majors in the spring of 1858 and to meet his present demands were renewed by the people of Nebraska

32 Nebraska State Hist. Soc., Vol. 20, p.323.

33
City. It is with the laying-out of this road and the famous Steam Wagon episode that we shall concern ourselves in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

NEBRASKA CITY-FORT KEARNY CUT-OFF OR STEAM WAGON

ROAD

On February 14, 1860, a mass meeting was held at Nebraska City for the purpose of making plans for the opening of spring traffic into the west. Mr. Alexander Majors and Governor Black were the principal speakers on this occasion. Governor Black urged the need of a clear and well-defined road to Fort Kearny and referred to the fact that the previous legislature had asked Congress to appropriate funds to construct a military road to Fort Kearny. This same legislature had appointed three commissioners to have charge of building operations when Congress had made the necessary appropriations. These commissioners were requested by resolution to proceed with the location of a road. At the same meeting, a committee of five was appointed to request subscriptions in money, lumber, labor and merchandise with which to build bridges and improve the proposed road in other ways. A memorial was also prepared in which Congress was asked to appropriate \$50,000 for use in the construction of this road.¹

1 Peoples' Press, February 17, 1860.

No tangible results came from this mass meeting of 1860 in so far as road building was concerned. Inertia, lack of funds, difficulties encountered in crossing Salt Creek in Lancaster county and the Blue River in Seward county, fear of the Indians, who constantly menaced the outlying settlers and travellers who ventured too far from the beaten paths, and the absence of an important stream to follow would seem to be the principal reasons why so little was accomplished. Absence of a prominent stream along which the trail might be laid out was undoubtedly the most important of these causes. Matters drifted on in this way until the latter part of March 1860, when Mr. Majors and his firm hired a Mr. Harvey, who was city engineer for Nebraska City, to go out and locate the road. He was also to examine existing bridges, fords and the bottoms of the streams to see if they were in proper condition to be used by the heavy freighting trains.²

According to census statistics for 1860, Otoe county had a population of 4,211 while Lancaster³ county had a population of 153. Most of the Lancas-

² Peoples' Press, March 30, 1860 and April 13, 1860.

³ Johnson's History of Nebraska, pp. 169 and 170.
Published by Herald Printing House, Omaha 1880.

ter county settlers lived either along Salt Creek or on Stevens Creek which is seven miles east of Salt Creek. All of these people had to go to Nebraska City to obtain groceries and other supplies and when Mr. Harvey began the task of laying out a new road to Fort Kearny, he found a well-beaten path to Olathe⁴ on Salt Creek.

Mr. Harvey's work really began west of Salt Creek. The method of surveying was exceedingly simple as compared to our present understanding of the term. Mr. Harvey and his assistants went ahead on horseback and indicated the course to be followed. The road was marked in a more definite manner by having a man with four mules hitched to a breaking plow follow the surveyors and turn over a furrow. This process was continued all the way from Olathe, later called Saltillo, to Fort Kearny. When the wagons came along later, they travelled astride this furrow and before long the trail was well marked.⁵ By 1863, so much traffic had passed along its course that deep ruts had been worn into it and it was generally about two hundred feet

4 Peoples' Press, March 23, 1860, Also personal interviews with L. A. Simmons.

5 H. M. Rolfe, Written statement on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

6
wide.

The general course of this trail lay through the present counties of Otoe, Lancaster, Seward, York, Hamilton, Hall, Adams and Kearny. Its exact location by sections and townships in Otoe, Lancaster and Seward counties has never been definitely determined and made a matter of record previous to this time. The original government surveys were made in these three counties before 1860. For this reason, the original plats give no information as to the location of the trail in Otoe, Lancaster and Seward counties. In the counties west of Seward,

-
- 6 Personal interview with L. A. Simmons at Lincoln, July 3, 1930. When a boy five years of age, Mr. Simmons came to Nebraska City from Iowa with his parents on September 6, 1862. The family lived on the farm where the Steam Wagon broke down for two months after their arrival in Nebraska and were there when the accident occurred. They then moved to Wilson's Creek where they spent the winter of 1862-63. In March 1863, they came to Lancaster county and pre-empted land near the old town of Saltillo. The heirs of the family still own this land. Mr. Simmons has been closely associated with the history of Lancaster county since 1863 and is considered by Dr. A. E. Sheldon to be the best living authority on the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail in Otoe and Lancaster counties. Mr. Simmons now resides at 139, North 12, Lincoln, Nebr.

the original government surveys were made after 1860⁷ and the plats show the location of the trail clearly.

By means of interviews with pioneer settlers, and reference to written records now available, maps have been prepared which show the exact course of the trail through Otoe, Lancaster and Seward counties. For present purposes, the path of the trail will be given by townships only.

Nebraska City is located in township eight, range thirteen east. The trail ran almost due west in township eight on a line approximately one mile south of the north line of this township. At a point about half way between the present towns of Dunbar and Syracuse, it swung south to the Nemaha valley at a point about three miles south of the north line of township eight. It then followed the Nemaha valley in a north-westerly direction across ranges ten, nine and eight in township eight to the northwest corner of township eight, range eight.⁸ Here it entered Lancaster county

7 Original government plats on file in the office of State Surveyor, State House, Lincoln, Nebraska.

8 Map prepared by W. N. Hunter, editor of the Syracuse Democrat. Map now on file at Nebraska State Historical Society.

at the northeast corner of township eight, range seven and followed the north line of township eight to the southeast corner of township nine, range five. It ran northwest across township nine, range five and entered Seward county at a point about two and one-half miles north of the southeast corner of township nine, range four and crossed the Blue river at Camden in the southwest corner of township nine, range four.⁹ It then bore southwest across township nine, range three to the West Blue river where it turned northwest across township nine, range two, and cut across the northeast corner of township nine, range one. Here it bore northwest along the north side of the West Blue to the junction of Beaver Creek with the West Blue river. It crossed Beaver Creek at the southwest corner of township ten, range one east, and entered York county at the southeast corner of township ten, range one west.¹⁰ It ran in a northwesterly direction along the south side of Beaver Creek across township ten, ranges one, two, three; and four to a point about two miles south of the northeast corner of township ten, range five. Here it

9 Map by L. A. Simmons on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

10 Personal interview with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, March 28, 1931.

entered Hamilton county and bore southwest along the south side of Beaver Creek across township ten, ranges five, six, seven and eight. It entered Hall county about three miles north of the southeast corner of township ten, range nine and turned southwest along the Platte river across township ten, range nine, township nine, range ten, township nine, range eleven. It then cut across the southeast corner of township nine, range twelve and the northwest corner of township eight, range twelve. Thence southwest across township eight, range thirteen and into township eight, range fourteen in which township Fort Kearny was located.¹¹

The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail came to be known as the Steam Wagon Road after 1862 and it is to the explanation of this change of name that we now turn our attention. Major Joseph Renshaw Brown went into Minnesota as a drummer boy in the regular army in 1819. After completing his enlistment in 1825, he became a clerk for an Indian Trader. In 1830, he

11 Original government survey plats on file in the office of the State Surveyor, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska.

entered the Indian trade on his own account under the
auspices of the American Fur Trading Company.¹²

In 1860, Major Brown was living at Henderson, Minnesota where he was engaged in freighting from St. Paul to Fort Ridgely and the Indian agencies along the Minnesota river. He also had a stage line running from St. Paul to Traverse Des Sioux and other settlements. While thus engaged, Major Brown decided that a better and faster means of transportation was needed. In trying to solve this problem, he conceived the idea of building a steam wagon. J. A. Reed of New York City was employed to construct the wagon which was sent to Henderson by steamboat in 1860. Here it was assembled and tried out by hauling freight from the steamboat landing to the stores up town. The trials indicated that some changes in its construction were needed and after these were made the wagon departed on its initial trip to Fort Ridgely. There had been a good deal of rain and before long the freight wagon which the engine was pulling became stuck in the mud and had to be abandoned. When the Steam Wagon reached Three Mile Creek near Fort Ridgely, it sank deep into the mud and could not be extricated. A snow storm came on and the drifts were so deep that the

¹² South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. 10, p.362, 1920, (15 Volumes), Pierre, So. Dakota.

wagon was abandoned for the winter. Some time later the engine and boiler were taken to Henderson and used in Major Brown's grist mill. Other parts of the machinery were stolen and no effort was ever made¹³ to reassemble this first Steam Wagon.

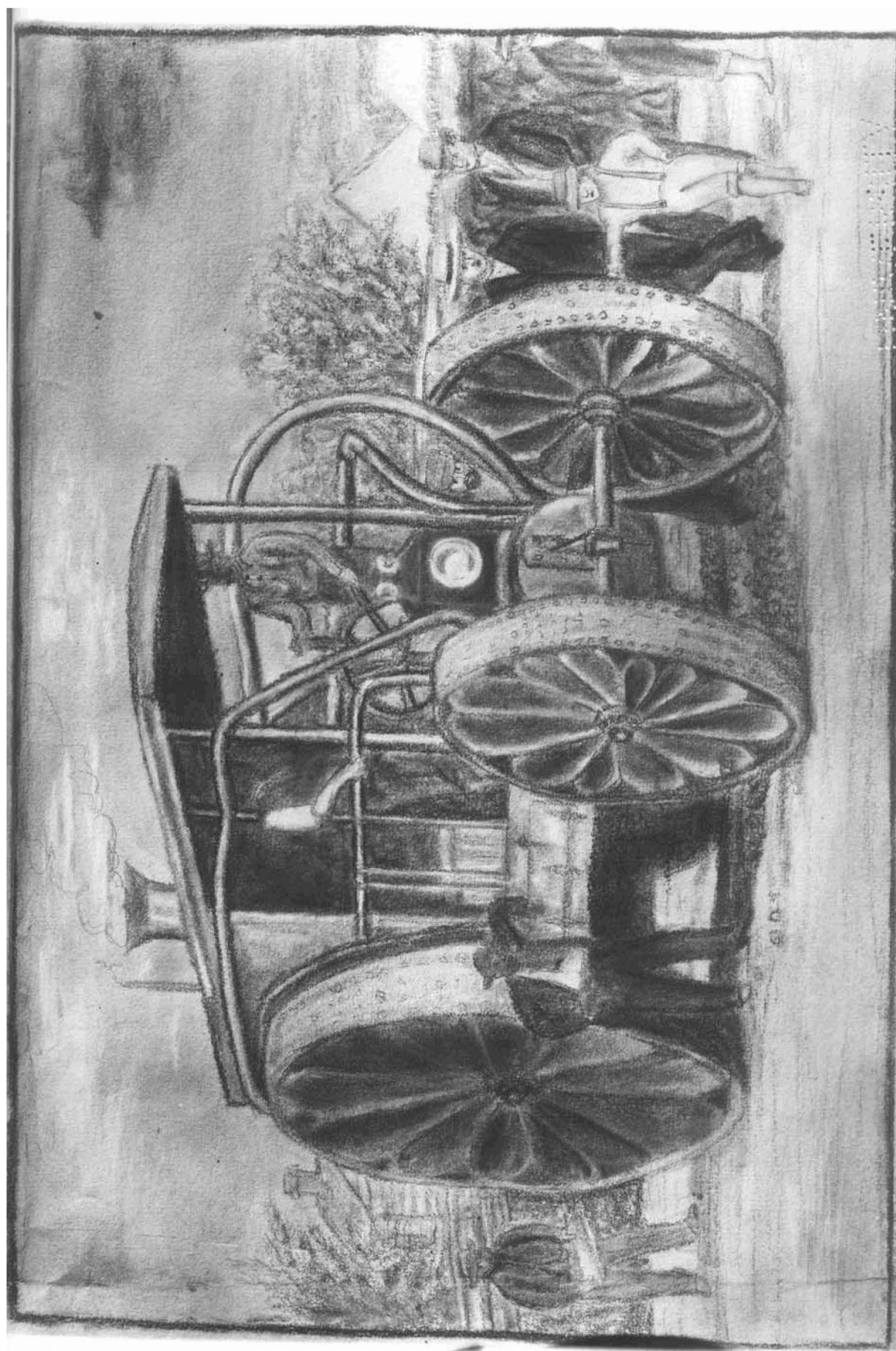
We hear no more about Steam Wagons until the summer of 1862. A number of influential business men at Nebraska City had heard about Major Brown's experiment with the Steam Wagon in Minnesota. They communicated with Major Brown and finally became convinced that steam wagons could be used successfully over the high prairies of Nebraska. Arrangements were made with Major Brown to bring a steam wagon¹⁴ to Nebraska City. Major Brown went to New York City and had John Reed build another wagon which was delivered at Nebraska City by steamboat on July¹⁵ 12, 1862.

For several days after the Steam Wagon reached Nebraska City, it was driven about the city and given various tests. The tests were so successful that it was decided to start it on its initial trip to Denver.

13 South Dakota History Collection, Vol.10,pp.371-373.

14 Address of C. S. Paine on Steam Wagon Road on file at Nebraska State Historical Society.

15 Nebraska City News, July 19, 1862.



The "Tractor" Steam Wagon, Invented by Maj. Joseph A. Brown

The Prairie Motor, or Steam Wagon, left Nebraska city on July 22 drawing three freight wagons each of which carried the usual load of 5,000 pounds. At a distance almost exactly three miles west of the northwest corner of Arbor Lodge, a crank shaft broke and the trip had to be abandoned as repairs¹⁶ were not available.

The people of Nebraska City and Otoe County were so well pleased with the preliminary tests made by the Steam Wagon that they had asked Major Brown to have enough of them built to furnish a daily service to Denver. In return for this service the people agreed to vote bonds for the purpose of building a road which would be suitable¹⁷ for the steam wagons. Major Brown had already left for New York City but under date of August 16, 1862, he wrote the editor of the Nebraska City

-
- 16 Nebraska City News, August 2, 1862. Stone monument marking spot where Steam Wagon broke down is located three miles west of Arbor Lodge on the southwest quarter of section 2, Township 8, Range 13 east. This location is also verified by L. A. Simmons who resided with his parents on this quarter section of land at the time of the Steam Wagon accident. Mr. Simmons disagrees as to the date on which the Steam Wagon broke down. He came to Nebraska on September 6, 1862 and he says that he was present when the accident occurred. He sets the date on or about Sept. 30, '62.
- 17 Otoe County Commissioner Record, No. 1, p. 149.

News stating that he was sending the crank for the Steam Wagon which was then at Nebraska City. He also outlined a program of construction which would enable him to give a daily service to Denver after¹⁸ October 1, 1863.

Upon the basis of this agreement on the part of Major Brown, the people of Otoe county held a special election on December 29, 1862 and voted bonds in the sum of \$2,500 bearing ten percent interest, for the purpose of building a Steam Wagon Road and bridges from Nebraska City to the west¹⁹ line of the county.

After completing an agreement with John A. Reed of New York to build the steam wagons which would be required to give a daily service from Nebraska City to Denver, Major Brown returned to²⁰ his home in Minnesota. Upon his arrival in Minnesota, Major Brown found that the Indians had been making trouble and that nearly all of his pro-

- 18 Letter of Major Brown to editor of Nebraska City News dated at New York, August 16, 1862.
 19 Otoe County Commissioners' Record, No. 1, pp. 153.
 20 Copies of this agreement are on file at the Nebr. State Historical Library. See also letter of Major Brown to editor of Nebr. City News, Aug. 16, 1862.

perty had been destroyed or carried away. Major Brown enlisted for service against the Indians and was unable to give any further attention to his steam wagon project until the close of the Civil War in 1865.²¹ By this time, a railroad had been built to Omaha and definite plans were on foot for extending the railroads into the western territory. This made it seem unwise to pursue the Steam Wagon idea further and the whole scheme was abandoned.²²

There are many conflicting stories as to the final disposition of the Steam Wagon. After reading the available written matter on the subject and interviewing a number of pioneers who are old enough to have some personal knowledge of this matter, it seems safe to conclude that no serious effort was ever made to repair the Steam Wagon and that it stood where it broke down for a number of years. Some time in the late sixties the old engine was dragged over to Arbor Lodge at Nebraska City by the Morton boys and their hired men. Here it remained for some time in the immediate custody of J.

21 Address by C. S. Paine on file in Nebraska State Historical Society.

22 Idem.

Sterling Morton who without much doubt had had a major part in influencing Major Brown to bring it
23
to Nebraska City.

In the late seventies Mr. Theodore Byslaugh made arrangements with J. Sterling Morton to remove the old Steam Wagon from Arbor Lodge. Mr. Byslaugh dragged it to the iron foundry in Nebraska City where he removed the boiler and sent it to Hamburg, Iowa to be used in a cereal mill which he had established at that point. After being used for several years, the boiler became so badly rusted that it had to be removed from the mill. It was then thrown into the Missouri river and probably lies buried in the bed of that stream at this time. The rest of the Steam Wagon stood behind a blacksmith shop at the old iron foundry until 1888 at which time it was knocked to pieces and sold for junk. The only part which was saved was one of the cylinders. This cylinder is now in the possession

23 Letter of J. B. Irvine to Secretary of Nebraska State Historical Association, March 3, 1921.
On file at Nebraska State Historical Association.

of Mr. E. S. Gregg of Nebraska City.

While the Steam Wagon failed to measure up to the expectations of those who had sponsored it, there would seem to be little doubt that the story of its construction and attempted use merits a place in the local history of Nebraska. It also had a wider significance in that it demonstrated the possibility of propelling vehicles over ordinary dirt roads by use of steam or similar types of power. It was unquestionably the progenitor of our modern tractor and automobile.

Another very definite result of the Steam Wagon incident was the voting of bonds to provide money for improving the road through Otoe county and for building bridges. A part of this money was used to build bridges across both Salt Creek and the Blue river.

24 Interview with Mr. Gregg at Nebraska City on April 15, 1931. Mr. Gregg was born at Nebraska City in 1861 and has resided there continuously. Interviews were also held on April 15, 1931 with Mr. Thomas Dunbar, of Dunbar, Nebraska, who came to Otoe county in 1855 with Mr. Edward McCallum who has resided at Nebraska City since 1862 and with Mr. John Gilmore who has resided at Nebraska City since 1866. The written material consists chiefly of personal letters which are on file at the Nebraska State Historical Library.

25

during the winter and spring of 1863.

Fords had been built in these streams when the trail was laid out in 1860 by hauling in rocks and throwing them into the streams to a depth such that they could be forded by the freighting trains and other vehicles.²⁶ Having to ford these two streams had been the only serious obstacle to traffic on this road. After these streams were bridged the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny trail was unquestionably the most satisfactory route from the Missouri River to Fort Kearny.²⁷ It was shorter than any other route; it had fewer streams to ford and it had the advantage of following for most of its length, the high divide between the Platte and Kansas Rivers. It did not take the travelling public long to discover these advantages and by 1865, it had become the most important overland trail in this country.²⁸

25 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon at Nursery Hill in Otoe County, October 22, 1930. Reproduced in the Lincoln Sunday Star, October 26, 1930.

26 Idem.

27 Idem.

28 Idem.

Chapter 5

ALONG THE TRAIL

As travel into the west increased in the late fifties and early sixties, a great rivalry sprang up between the various towns along the Missouri river for control of this traffic. The most intense rivalry existed between Omaha and Nebraska City.¹ Omaha was the eastern terminus of the North Platte route while Nebraska City held the corresponding position in the South Platte territory. During the years in which Nebraska City was gaining a foothold as a freighting and emigrant center, the people at Omaha were concerning themselves chiefly with the question of having a railroad built into Omaha.² This made them more or less indifferent toward their opportunities in the freighting business. This attitude of indifference on the part of the people at Omaha played a very important part in the decision of Russell, Majors and Waddell to locate the government freighting depot at Nebraska City in the spring of 1858.³

-
- 1 Omaha Times, July 15, 1858. Omaha Times, Oct. 7, 1858, Omaha Times, November 25, 1858. Nebr. City News, Sept. 25, 1858. Nebr. City News, Aug. 9, 1862. Nebraska City News, November 6, 1858.
 - 2 Omaha City Times, June 11, 1857. Omaha Times, July 15, 1858.
 - 3 Omaha Times, July 15, 1858.

The advantage which came to Nebraska City as a result of obtaining the Russell, Majors and Waddell contract brought about an intense interest in both freighting and emigrant traffic at that point. The Nebraska City newspapers, published during this period, devoted an undue amount of space to the merits of Nebraska City as a freighting and supply depot. They were particularly zealous in proclaiming the superiority of the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail⁴ over the Omaha or North Platte route. Of course, the Omaha papers did not allow this attitude to go unchallenged but they were not so vehement in their claims because of their interest in prospective rail-⁵roads.

Along all of the old trails, there grew up early in their history what were known as ranches or over-night stations. These ranches usually consisted of a large log or underground stable which would accommodate two hundred or more horses and mules, a ranch house in which travellers might spend the night, one or more stores, several saloons, and

4 Peoples' Press, Febr. 3, 1860 to Nov. 21, 1860 passim.

5 Omaha City Times, June 11, 1857 to July 15, 1858 passim.

and a blacksmith shop. The smaller ranches did not offer all of these accommodations, as they were often little more than private dwellings where travellers occasionally were accommodated and where meals were served on the trip between the larger stations. It was necessary that these stations be quite close together as the ox teams usually travelled only twelve to fourteen miles per day and the freighters preferred to stay at the stations because of the accommodations which they offered and for protection from Indian attacks. Horses and mules were usually put in the ranch stables and fed hay and grain but the oxen were always turned loose to graze as they subsisted entirely on grass. The men who drove the freight wagons always slept outside with their loads to protect⁶ them from Indians and others who might molest them.

The history of the most important ranches which were located along the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail will be given by counties. The first Otoe county ranch to which the traveller came after leaving Nebraska City was located on Wilson's Creek about one mile north of the present town of Dunbar.

6 Personal interview with J.B. Westfall of College View on July 3, 1930. Also interview with L. A. Simmons, 139 No. 12, Lincoln, Nebr., Apr. 15, 1931.

The land on which this ranch was located was owned by a man named Wilson and both the creek and the ranch were named after him. This was not a large ranch as it was too close to Nebraska City but it had a good patronage from freighters and emigrants who got started out of Nebraska City too late in the day to reach the first large ranch which was located further west at Nursery Hill.⁷

Nursery Hill, the first large ranch and stage station, was located twenty-two miles west of Nebraska City at a point which is one and one-half miles southwest of Syracuse. This spot is now marked by means of a stone monument which was dedicated on October 22, 1930.⁸ Nursery Hill was established in 1859 by Professor Rockwell Thompson, a botanist who had come into Otoe county to pursue his scientific studies. The ranch was first known as The Brick Postoffice but in 1861, Professor Thompson sold a half interest in the ranch to a Mr. Rochester Hedges. These two then formed a partnership and went into

⁷ Personal interview with L. A. Simmons at the site of this ranch, April 15, 1931.

⁸ Address by Dr. E. A. Sheldon at Nursery Hill, October 22, 1930.

the nursery business. This gave the ranch its name.⁹

The next ranch to the west was Meacham's located in Lancaster county along the line between Otoe and Lancaster counties. Mr. Meacham received a government patent for the land upon which this ranch was located in 1861.¹⁰ The ranch served more as a dinner station or half-way station between Nursery Hill and the ranch at Salt Creek.¹¹ The Salt Creek ranch was established in the spring of 1859 by John Cadman and was located eight miles south of Lincoln and adjacent to the north line of the territory which at that time constituted Clay county.¹² The ranch was at first

9 Letter from W. N. Hunter, editor of the Journal Democrat at Syracuse, Nebraska, to Dr. A. E. Sheldon, October 15, 1931.

10 Record A, page 257 in the office of the Register of Deeds, Lancaster county.

11 Statement of L. A. Simmons, April 15, 1931.

12 Statement of George O. Cadman, son of John Cadman, to L. A. Simmons at Chicago, April 18, 1931.

Clay county was divided into two equal parts by action of the legislature in 1864 through the efforts of John Cadman. The south half was given to Gage county and the north half to Lancaster. This is the reason why these two counties are each thirty-six miles in width from north to south while the neighboring counties are each twenty-four miles square. See Sawyer's Lincoln and Lancaster county. 2 vols., pp. 27 and 28. S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois in 1916.

called Olathe but some time previous to 1863 the
name was changed to Saltillo.¹³ A controversy arose
between John Cadman, Festus Reed and other settlers
over the matter of a new name for this ranch. An
old soldier, who had served in the Mexican War, came
forward and asked to be allowed to select the name.
This was agreed to and he called it Saltillo after
the Battle of Saltillo in which he had participated.¹⁴

The next ranch to the west was known as Cheese
Creek. The exact date of the establishment of this
ranch is not definitely known at the present time
but there are photographs in existence which indicate
that the ranch house was built some time previous to
1864. It was located on a creek in the western part

13 Sawyer's Lincoln and Lancaster County, Vol. 1,
page 25. S. J. Clarke Co., Chicago, 1916.

14 Interview with L. A. Simmons, May 16, 1931.
Saltillo was probably the best developed of all
the ranches along the trail with the possible
exception of the Benn Holladay Ranch at Fort
Kearny. It had two stores, three saloons, a
flour mill, a blacksmith shop and an exception-
ally large stable and ranch house.

of Lancaster county and the people, who operated it, specialized on the making of cheese which they sold to the freighters and others who stopped at the ranch. Thus it came to be called Cheese Creek Ranch.¹⁵ The first two ranches in Seward county were located at or near the point at which the trail crossed the North Blue river. J. L. Davidson established a ranch one mile west of the crossing in the fall of 1862 and A. J. Wallingford established one at the cross-¹⁶ing during the same fall. This point came to be known as Camden and still bears that name.

Next came the Thompson Ranch, which was located near the mouth of Walnut Creek. It was established by W. J. Thompson in 1862. Four miles west of the Thompson Ranch was located the Daniel Millspaw Ranch or Hole in the Ground, so called because it was constructed in the form of a dugout.

Fouse's Ranch was located four and one-half miles northwest of the Daniel Millspaw Ranch. It was set up by John E. Fouse in the fall of 1862. The ranch consisted of a log house thirty-six feet by sixteen feet in dimensions, situated on the bank

15 Interview with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, May 9, 1931.

16 W. W. Cox, History of Seward County, p. 27.
Published by the State Journal Company in 1888.

of Beaver Creek. The stable was built on the bank of Beaver Creek so that it was hidden from view to protect the stock from the Indians. A trap door connected the ranch house with this underground stable so that the inmates of the house might have a better chance of escape in case of attack by Indians.¹⁷

The Fouse Ranch was located in the fork formed by the junction of Beaver Creek and the West Blue river. The trail crossed Beaver Creek at this point and the ford became known as Beaver Crossing. In later years a mill was set up about three miles east of this point on the West Blue river. After the trail was abandoned the people who had established themselves in business at Fouse's Ranch, moved their establishments over to the mill site on the West Blue and carried the name of Beaver Crossing with them. This explains how the town¹⁸ of Beaver Crossing on the Blue river got its name.

York county had five of these pioneer ranches. The oldest one was Porcupine Ranch, located at Porcupine Bluffs near the western boundary of the county. It was established by Benjamin F. Lushbaugh, Indian Agent for the Pawnees in 1863. It served as both a ranch and stage station and

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Personal interview with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, March 31, 1931.

was conducted by Samuel Kearny. The Jack Smith Ranch was also started by Benjamin F. Lushbaugh in 1864. A Mr. Chapin was put in charge for a period of six months, after which the ranch was sold to Jack Smith who kept it until the freighting business was done. This ranch was located about three miles southeast of York. The other three York county ranches were located between the Jack Smith and Porcupine Ranches. Just east of the Porcupine Ranch was located the McDonald Ranch, which was named after the man who founded it in 1864. This ranch was purchased in 1865 by a Mr. Baker who kept it until freighting ended.

East of the McDonald Ranch was located the Antelope Ranch, which was founded by James F. Mathewson in 1865. Mr. Mathewson operated this ranch until freighting closed. Between the Antelope and Jack Smith Ranches was the Jack Stone Ranch which was set up in August 1865 by George Chapman. Mr. Chapman operated this ranch for six months and then sold it to John McClellan (alias Jack Stone) who kept it until the end of the freighting business.

We now take up the story of ranches in Hamilton county. The one near the eastern border of the county

was opened by David Millspaw in 1861. Mr. Millspaw operated this ranch throughout the freighting period. Thirteen miles west of the Millspaw Ranch was located the Deep-Well Ranch. This ranch was established in 1865 by John Harris and Alf Blue, two confederate soldiers who had been captured during the Civil War and confined at Camp Douglas near Chicago. Upon being liberated at the close of hostilities in 1865, they decided to come west. They came by way of Nebraska City and when they reached Hamilton county, decided to stop and set up a ranch. They built a sod house and a barn which would accommodate 165 horses. In digging a well they found it necessary to go 65 feet deep to get an adequate supply of water. This gave the ranch its name and it became very popular because there was always a good supply of pure water. Mr. Harris and Mr. Blue operated the Deep-Well Ranch for two years and then abandoned it because of the decrease in traffic which began in 1867. Prairie Camp, a stage station was opened in 1863. It was located six miles west of the Millspaw Ranch.

The Deep-Well Ranch was located six miles south and one mile west of the present town of Aurora. In a letter to the Aurora Republican in 1915, Mr. John Harris mentioned a ranch which was called the John Brown Ranch in the

early days. He stated that this ranch was located eleven miles west of the Deep-Well Ranch. This location would place the John Brown Ranch in Hall county and this constitutes the only authentic knowledge which the writer has been able to find in regard to definitely established ranches in either Hall or Adams counties on the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail.²⁰

Attempts were made to establish ranches on the south side of the Platte in Hall and Adams counties, particularly by George Martin and Peter Campbell, but the Indians were so hostile that the ranches had²¹ to be abandoned.

In Kearny county there were two ranches which had to do with the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail. These were Valley City, or Dogtown, located at the junction of the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny and Oregon Trails²² and the Ben Holladay Ranch, which was located

-
- 20 Dale P. Stough, History of Hamilton and Clay Counties, Vol. 1, p. 369. Published by S. J. Clarke Company, Chicago, 1921.
 - 21 Johnson's History of Nebraska, pp. 195, 368 and 369.
 - 22 Hulbert, Crown Collection of Maps, No. 37. This location for Dogtown is also confirmed by a written statement by J. G. Masters of Omaha on May 2, 1931. On file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

two miles west of the fort.²³ These Kearny county ranches were placed in this relationship to the fort because the military reservation was ten miles wide and civilian settlement within the reservation²⁴ was not permitted.

The old trail ranches were all rather crude affairs when compared to the hotel accommodations of the present day but they did service in the period before any towns were established in the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail territory. It requires no great stretch of the imagination to see in these ranches the counterparts of our modern tourist camps. The old ranches served a more vital purpose than tourist camps do because there were no hotels in the early days to which the traveller might turn if he did not like the ranches.

The settlers along the trail found other means of making a lucrative income aside from engaging in the ranch or hotel business. Eggs sold readily

23 Overland Stage to California, Root and Connelly, page 240.

24 Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, page 194, Vol. 16. Published by the Historical Society in 1921.

at fifty cents a dozen and butter at sixty cents per pound. Vegetables of all kinds were in demand by the emigrants and freighters and brought good prices.²⁵ Grain of all kinds and hay brought excellent prices. The winter of 1863-4 was an exceedingly severe one and hay sold for seventy-five dollars²⁶ per ton at Denver. Corn sold regularly at Fort Kearny and other points along the trail at a very high price. Settlers along the Missouri river made a good income by buying corn in their own neighborhoods at about twenty-five cents per bushel and then selling it at Fort Kearny for as much as five dollars²⁷ and sixty cents per bushel.

The freighting season lasted ordinarily from May until November. The trains to Denver made only two trips each season. A train consisted of twenty-six or more wagons each carrying a load of five to seven thousand pounds of goods. Each wagon was

-
- 25 Personal interview with L. A. Simmons, April 15, 1931.
 - 26 The Overland Stage to California by Frank A. Root and William Elsey Connelly, published by authors, Topeka, Kansas, 1901.
 - 27 Personal interview with J. B. Westfall of College View, July 5, 1930. Mr. Westfall formerly lived at Brownville and engaged in freighting by hauling corn to fort Kearny.

drawn by six yoke of oxen or six mules.²⁸ The freighting business from Nebraska City increased in volume each year until 1865. A census taken in 1865 as to the amount of traffic westward from Nebraska City showed that 7,365 wagons, 7231 mules, 50,712 oxen and 8,385 men were being used to handle the business. The amount of goods transported was 31,445,428 pounds. The customary rate to any point to which only two trips could be made per year was one dollar per hundred pounds per hundred miles. Winter rates to Denver were from ten to twelve cents per pound. The established rate to Salt Lake City was²⁹ twenty-five cents per pound. Trouble with the Indians also caused prices to increase. In 1864, the Indians were particularly troublesome and freighting³⁰ charges were more than twice the normal rate.

In addition to this great freighting business which passed over the road from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny, there was an enormous volume of emigrant traffic. Pioneers, who lived along the trail in the sixties say that emigrant and freight wagons were al-

28 MS. by H.M. Wolfe on file Nebr. St. Hist. Soc.

29 Idem.

30 Overland Stage to California, Root and Connelley, p. 309.

ways in sight during the season for travel.³¹ In 1866, General W. T. Sherman visited Fort Kearny and "observed that there was a great deal of travel by Fort Kearny. We found no trains of heavily loaded wagons on the north side of the Platte but many emigrants."³² It was not unusual for five hundred heavily loaded wagons to pass through Fort Kearny in a single day. During a six weeks period in the spring of 1865, six thousand wagons passed the fort.³³ Not all of this traffic came by way of Nebraska City but from the figures quoted above, it can be readily seen that a major portion of the Missouri river business passed over the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail. Some authorities estimate that fully seventy-five per cent of the western traffic was passing over this route by 1865.³⁴

-
- 31 Interview with L. A. Simmons, April 15, 1931.
 32 Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, Vol. 16, p. 246.
 33 Overland Stage to California, Root and Connelley, p. 242.
 34 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon at Nursery Hill, October 22, 1930.

Chapter 6

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEBRASKA CITY-
FORT KEARNY TRAIL

The purpose of this final chapter will be to show the part which the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail played in the early history of Nebraska and the West. Its most outstanding contributions to the development of Nebraska would seem to lie in the fact that it penetrated into the very heart of the rich South Platte prairies and opened them up to settlement at a much earlier date than would otherwise have been possible.¹ As traffic over the trail increased, ranches were set up and people gathered about these ranches to engage in merchandising, blacksmithing and other lines of business. In this way, small settlements were formed and as emigrants came along, they selected land near those ranches. This gave them a certain amount of protection against the Indians and afforded them opportunity for social contact with the other settlers. Most of the larger ranches were designated as post offices. They also carried limited stocks of groceries and other supplies if no other provision had been made

1 Personal interview with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, May 9, 1931. Also Nebraska News, March 6, 1858.

for meeting this need. Another factor which tended to expedite settlement was the opportunity which the settlers had for selling their produce to the freighters and emigrants at fancy prices. Most frontier settlers did not have opportunities like this. As a result many of them became discouraged and returned to their former homes or sought more favorable conditions in some other locality.²

A second factor to be given consideration here is the immense amount of money and other types of wealth which came into the South Platte territory as a result of the freighting and emigrant traffic. Thousands of men were employed by the freighting companies and stage coach lines at lucrative wages.³ Thousands of dollars were also spent at Nebraska City and other points along the trail for equipment and stock to be used in the overland traffic.⁴ Many of the settlers also made good incomes by engaging in the freighting business on a limited basis.⁵ All of

2 Personal interview with L. A. Simmons, Apr.15, 1931.

3 Overland Stage to California, Route and Connelley, p.455.

4 Nebraska State Hist. Publication, Vol. 20, pp.296, 323. Advertisement in Nebraska News, Apr.28, 1858.

5 Personal interview with J. B. Westfall, July 5, 1930.

these things combined made the South Platte region prosperous and many people came into the territory⁶ to share in its prosperity.

Another way in which the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail influenced the early history of Nebraska was in the political field. By penetrating the South Platte territory and opening it up to settlement before the North Platte territory was settled, the South Platte country gained the ascendancy in voting strength and held it until 1900. In 1860 the population south of the Platte was 16,284 as compared to 11,594 for the North Platte region. For 1870 the South Platte region had 71,343 and the North Platte region had 48,041. In 1880 the figures were South Platte 271,503; North Platte, 171,353. The corresponding figures for 1900 were South Platte, 510,555;⁷ North Platte, 555,884.

It is thus seen that the South Platte country held the political balance in Nebraska for a period of approximately forty years and these were the years in which our constitution, political practices

⁶ Personal interview with A. E. Sheldon, May 7, 1931.

⁷ Census figures taken from Nebraska Blue Book for 1901, pp. 163-165. Printed by State Journal Company, 1901.

and institutions were being developed.

Probably the best concrete example of the early political ascendancy of the South Platte territory is found in the capitol removal controversy. Shortly after Nebraska was admitted to the Union in 1867, a session of the legislature was called and the principal question which came before the members was that of removing the capitol from Omaha to some point in either Seward or Lancaster counties or in the south half of Butler or Saunders counties. When the vote was taken the measure carried by a vote of eight to five in the Senate and by a vote of twenty-five to fourteen in the House. In the Senate the vote was cast entirely on the basis of residence north or south of the Platte. No senator who lived south of that river voted to leave the capitol at Omaha, and no senator who lived north of the Platte voted for removal. In the House, one man, who lived south of the Platte, voted to leave the capitol at Omaha, while five who lived north of the Platte voted for removal. Mr. Hoile of Richardson county was the South Platte man who voted against removal. Mr. Slader, Mr. Unthank, Mr. Beebe, Mr. Morton and Senator Davis were the

8 Morton, History of Nebraska by Albert Watkins, Vol. 3, pp. 8, 9. (3 Volumes), Western Publishing Company, Lincoln, 1913.

North Platte men who voted for removal. Charges of corruption were made against all of these men except Beebe and Morton. Mr. Hoile was accused of selling his vote for \$500.00, and the three North Platte men were accused of being officers of the Northern Nebraska Air Line Railroad Company which had recently been given seventy-five sections of land by the legislature.⁹ The same legislative act which located the capital at Lincoln also provided for locating the university and college of agriculture, penitentiary, and other public institutions at or near the capital city.¹⁰ Besides the capital, university and college of agriculture, and the penitentiary, the following state institutions were located south of the Platte river between the years 1867 and 1891: Peru Normal,¹¹ 1867; asylum for the insane, at Lincoln, 1868;¹² asylum for the incurably insane, at Hastings, 1887;¹³ school for the blind, at Nebraska City, 1885;¹⁴ institute for the feeble-minded, at Beatrice, 1885;¹⁵ and the industrial school for girls, at Geneva, 1891.¹⁶

9 Morton, History of Nebraska by Albert Watkins, Vol. 3, pp.8, 9.

10 Ibid., Vol. 3, p.8.

11 Ibid., 35.

12 Ibid., 29.

13 Ibid., 217.

14 Nebraska Blue Book 1901-1902, p. 375.

15 Ibid., 377.

16 Ibid., 388.

During this period only three state institutions were located north of the Platte river. These were the school for Deaf at Omaha in 1869,¹⁷ the industrial school for boys at Kearny in 1881¹⁸ and the Asylum for the insane at Norfolk in 1885.¹⁹ Here again is seen the ascendancy of the South Platte territory in early Nebraska Political affairs.

The part which the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail played in the development of the territory west of Nebraska lies primarily in the fact that it afforded the shortest route from the Missouri river to Fort Kearny in both time and distance. The road itself was much better than any of the other trails because it had practically no sand and it had no large streams which were not adequately bridged. Because of the shorter distance and the excellent road bed, it was possible to travel much faster in going to Denver and other western points than was possible on the other trails. This not only expedited passenger traffic but it also made it possible for the better freighting outfits to make extra trips and to haul larger loads. The extra goods brought into the western country in

17 Ibid, 376.

18 Ibid, 387.

19 Ibid, 393.

this way made it possible to sustain a greater population and hastened the permanent settlement of the West.

When the Union Pacific railroad was built across Nebraska and on to the Pacific Coast in 1869, it was no longer profitable to transport goods and passengers into the West by means of wagons and stage coaches.²⁰ The great freighting firms and stage coach companies withdrew their equipment from service and the old trails were abandoned.

The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Trail continued to be used as a high-way by emigrants and settlers until about 1873. By this time the territory was becoming so well settled that traffic was forced to follow the section lines.²¹ At various places along the old trail, evidence of its existence can still be seen. This is particularly true at the old fords at Salt Creek in Lancaster county, At Camden on the North Blue in Seward county and at the old Beaver Crossing site in Seward county. Deep ruts commemorative of the old trail can also be plainly seen in some of the rough unbroken prairie land in the western part of Lancaster county. Farther west, the land is more gently rolling and it has all been converted to agricultural purposes. No

20 Overland Stage to California, p. 457.

21 Interview with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, May 21, 1931.

definite signs of the old trail now appear in this territory.²² In Lancaster county the trail followed an almost due east and west line along the southern boundary of township nine throughout nearly the entire distance across the county. This constitutes the only part of the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cut-Off which was ever graded and improved for road purposes.²³ The rest of this magnificent pioneer highway has been definitely obliterated by the advance of the frontier, the plow of the husbandman and the ravages of time.

-
- 22 The writer and Mr. L. A. Simmons have visited most of the accessible points along this trail during the past twelve months and the statements regarding present day evidences of the old trail are the result of personal observations. These statements are also confirmed by Dr. A.E.Sheldon.
- 23 Interviews with L. A. Simmons and Dr. A. E. Sheldon, May 21, 1931.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

1. Manuscripts:

Typewritten copy of an address delivered by Dr. A. E. Sheldon at Minden, Nebraska, September 1, 1926.

Typewritten statement of H. M. Rolfe on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Address on Steam Wagon Road by C. S. Paine on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Copy of agreement between Major J. R. Brown, of Henderson, Minnesota, and John Reed, of New York, on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Letter of J. B. Irvine to Secretary of Nebraska State Historical Society on file at Nebraska State Historical Society.

Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon at Nursery Hill in Otoe county, October 22, 1930, reprinted in the Lincoln Sunday Star, October 26, 1930.

Letter from W. N. Hunter, editor of the Journal Democrat at Syracuse, Nebraska, to Dr. A. E. Sheldon on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

2. Newspapers:

Nebraska City News, February 13, 1858-August 16, 1862.

Omaha Times, June 11, 1857-July 15, 1858.

People's Press, February 3, 1860-November 21, 1860.

3. Personal Interviews:

Series of interviews with Mr. L. A. Simmons, 139 North 12th, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Series of interviews with Dr. A. E. Sheldon, Secretary of Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Interview with J. B. Westfall, College View at Lincoln, Nebraska.

Interview with E. S. Gregg at Nebraska City, Nebraska.

Interview with Thomas Dunbar at Dunbar, Nebraska.

Interview with John Gilmore at Nebraska City, Nebraska.

Interview with Edward McCallum at Nebraska City, Nebraska.

4. Books:

Beadle, John Hanson, Life in Utah, National Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pa., 1870.

Ferris, Benjamin G., Utah and the Mormons, New York, 1856.

Remy, Jules, Journey to Great Salt Lake City; two volumes, London, 1861.

Root, Frank A., and Connelley, William E., Overland Stage to California; published by authors, Topeka, Kansas, 1901.

5. United States, State, and County Documents and Records:

Senate Executive Documents 39, 21st congress, second session, pp. 21924; reproduced Oregon State Historical Society Quarterly, vol. 4, p. 395.

United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 5; 45 volumes, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

House Executive Document, 30th congress, 1st session, No. 8; 35th congress, 1st session, vol. 9, No. 33, vol. 12, No. 89; 35th congress, 2nd session, vol. 2, part 2, document 2.

Nebraska Council Journal, 4, 5, 6 sessions, Omaha City, 1857.

Congressional Globe, 1849-50, 31st congress, 1st and 2nd sessions.

United States Public Laws, 31st congress, 1st session, original government survey; plates on file

in the office of State Surveyor, State House, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Otoe County Commissioner's Record, No. 1.

Record A, office of the Register of Deeds, Lancaster county.

Nebraska Blue Book for 1901, State Journal Company, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Photostatic copies of all war orders and correspondence used in footnotes of this Thesis on file, Nebraska State Historical Society.

6. Maps:

Hunter, W. N., Map of Trail Route in Otoe County, on file State Historical Society.

Simmons, L. A., Maps of Trail Route in Lancaster County and Eastern Seward County, on file Nebraska State Historical Society.

7. Collections by Historical Societies:

Nebraska State Historical Society Publications:
21 volumes; volume 4, 1892; volume 16, 1911; volume 20, 1922; volume 21, 1930.

Oregon State Historical Society Quarterlies:
30 volumes; 1901-1930; volume 4, 1903.

South Dakota State Historical Society Collections:
15 volumes; 1902-1930; volume 10, 1920, Pierre, South Dakota.

Secondary Sources

Books:

Miscellaneous

Bancroft, Hubert Howe, Works, 39 volumes, Historical Publishing Company, San Francisco, California, 1889.

Chittenden, Hiram Martin, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, three volumes, Francis P. Parker, New York, 1902.

Ghent, W. J., The Road to Oregon, Longmans, Green

and Company, London, 1929.

Irving, Washington, Astoria, 20th Century Edition, George P. Putnam, 1849, New York.

Smith, Joseph and Heman, History of the Latter Day Saints, 4 volumes, Lamona, Iowa, 1908.

Local History

Andreas, A. T., History of Nebraska, 2 volumes, Western Historical Publishing Company, Chicago, 1882.

Cox, W. W., History of Seward County, State Journal Company, 1888.

Johnson, Harrison, History of Nebraska, Herald Printing House, Omaha, 1880.

Morton, History of Nebraska by Albert E. Watkins, 3 volumes, Western Publishing Company, Lincoln, 1913.

Sawyer, Andrew J., Lincoln and Lancaster Counties, 2 volumes, S. J. Clarke Company, Chicago, 1916.

Sorenson, Alfred, Story of Omaha, Omaha, 1923.

Stough, Dale P., History of Hamilton and Clay Counties, S. J. Clarke Company, Chicago.

Maps: Nebraska, Nebraska.

Hulbert, Archer Butler, The Crown Collection of American Maps, 6 volumes, Series 4.