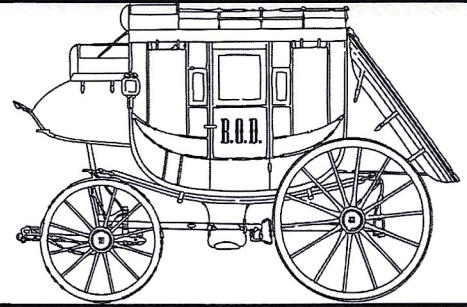


OVERLAND DESPATCH



Volume XIII No. I

Remember the Smoky Hill Trail

Fall 2020

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Greetings from my bunker at my office and at my home which, except for rare occasions, is the only place Jaynell and I go during these trying times. But for the virus we would be looking forward to our annual members

conference in Limon, Colorado. A year from now I trust, and believe, that we will be holding the conference and our lives will have returned to a more "normal" status.

I do not have much association news to share with you as the board has not been

meeting during the pandemic. We do hope to get reestablished by Zoom board meeting and make some efforts toward normalcy by spring of next year.

In the meantime, I want to emphasize how important your membership is to the Smoky Hill Trail Association. Generally, most if not all, of our membership renewals occur at the time of our annual conference.

This newsletter includes the renewal information. Please take the time and renew your membership today. I want to thank Bob Wilhelm for his time and commitment to the Overland Dispatch newsletter four (4) times a year and each of you for your support of the

SmHTA and its mission.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken Cole, President
Smoky Hill Trail Association

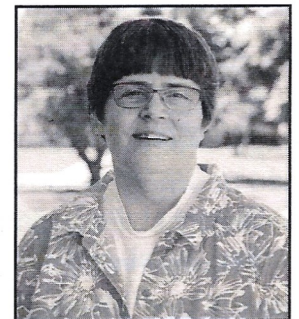


NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

As I write this, I have been back at the library full-time for one week. By the time you are reading this, I will either still be at the library or working remotely once again. This virus has thrown us all for a loop, but we will get through this!

When I am flying in a plane, I always end up wondering how the Indians, the settlers, and others who played a part in developing the American frontier would think about flying in a metal tube at hundreds of miles an hour. It took the first stage coach 12 days to reach Denver from Atchison; a flight from Kansas City to Denver today is 1 hour and 45 minutes and driving time is 8 hours and 30 minutes.

There were a lot of things on the trail that we don't have to deal with in a 1 hour 45 minute flight today. Illnesses, attacks from the Indians, broken wheels, lack of water in some places, uncomfortable seating arrangements (well, maybe that is still true today!), and lack of medical accessories. That 8½ hour drive usually takes a bit longer because we can stop at convenience stores, restaurants, gas stations,



OVERLAND DESPATCH is the official publication of the Smoky Hill Trail Association, Inc., a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), corporation chartered in the State of Kansas. Primary missions of the Association are to preserve, protect, promote, and interpret the Smoky Hill Trail for the benefit of present and future generations, and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with the remnants and locations that represent the historic trail and Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) and its successors as well as the railroad that replaced the overland trail. Letters and articles are welcome and can be sent via email to the newsletter editor at <rjwilh@gmail.com> or via USPS at **Smoky Hill Trail Association, PO Box 978, Hays KS 67601**. They become the property of SmHTA and may be edited or abridged at the editor's discretion. All rights reserved.

Membership in the Association is open to all individuals, families, institutions, and businesses. Annual dues are \$25.00 for individuals, \$30.00 for families, \$40.00 for nonprofit organizations, \$50.00 for businesses, and \$100.00 for patrons. Life membership, individual or family, is \$500.00 (may be paid in quarterly installments during one or two years). Membership fees should be sent to **Smoky Hill Trail Association**, at the address above. Other donations are always welcome.

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and rest stops along the way. We also have nice hotels to stay at or we can be driving or towing our own comfortable place to rest.

I had to cancel a long-planned trip this summer, but in its place, I have done a little traveling in Kansas to see things that I probably would not have taken the time to do otherwise. Most of it has been north of the Smoky Hill Trail, but I did go south and west to see the Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park south of Oakley. I would encourage you to go see that sometime! I'm sure that the beautiful prairie still looks like it did during the years that people traveled along the Smoky Hill Trail.

This semester Forsyth Library will be open the following hours:

Mon-Thurs: 7:30am-7:30pm

Fri: 7:30am-5pm

Sun: 1-5pm

Closed on Saturday

People with a Tiger ID (faculty, staff, and students) are allowed to enter the library without an appointment. Please contact me if you need to do some research in the SmHTA Archives and we can set up an appointment. Also, masks are required! This could change, though, in this ever-changing world we are in right now. The library has its most current schedule and updates on the website – <https://www.fhsu.edu/library/index> Stay safe and happy trails to you!

Patty Nicholas

Smoky Hill Trail Archivist



NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes any articles, comments, or suggestions to be included in the next or any future edition of the *Overland Despatch*. Deadline for the next issue is **November 30, 2020**. It is requested that your submissions be sent to the newsletter editor either by US mail or E-mail by that date (addresses in box on page two). Thank you.

Bob Wilhelm, Editor



FROM THE *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*,
FEBRUARY 5, 1859

**Routes to the Gold Mines—Smoky Hill Route
Impracticable—Great Santa Fe Route—
Testimony of Mr. J. C. McCoy, Twenty-Five
Years on the Plains.**

[From the *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*.]

Below we give a letter from our citizen J. C. McCoy, Esq. It contains more useful and general information on the subject of routes to the gold mines than all the letters and editorials that have as yet been published on the subject. It is a letter that should be read by every person intending to go the to *[sic]* mines this season.

Read it carefully:

Mr. Editor—The recent discovery of gold at the base of the mountains near Pike's Peak, has been the means of shedding a perfect flood of light in regard to the geography of the Great Plains which lie between the western boundary of Missouri and the Rocky Mountains. For more than a quarter of a century I have been yearly traversing these Plains, from the Big Platte, between Missouri and Arkansas and the mountains, about seven years of that time, from 1830 to 1837, being almost continuously employed under the Government in surveying and marking the exterior lines of Indian lands, in what was then the Indian Territory. I had traversed this region in almost every direction, had camped upon almost every creek and stream of any note, having now many lines of departure, as far west from the Missouri and boundaries as four hundred miles, and in my ignorance had supposed that I had acquired a pretty fair knowledge of the Great Plains of the West. But, however humiliating it may be to do so, I have now to confess that I have traveled these plains to but very little purpose, if one-tenth of what these writers put forth is to be believed. I, however, prefer to stick to my first impressions in regard to the country, and also to

try to prove that a great number of the writers aforesaid (I make several honorable exceptions) moved by the instigation of the ____ *[sic]* and their cupidity, have had a total disregard of the commandment.

It is very well known there are but two good roads from the Missouri to Pike's Peak, and in my humble judgment, there never will be any others which can compete with them. One is the Santa Fe road which was thoroughly surveyed and established under authority of the U. S. Government, by Commissioners George C. Sibley and Benjamin Reeves, more than thirty-five years ago and has been the only great thoroughfare ever since that time to New Mexico. The other is the route now traveled up the Big Platte river, by Fort Kearny.

To those who start from the Missouri river at any point below Nebraska City, the former is infinitely the best route; but for those starting from or above Nebraska City, the Platte route, I think, would be the best.

As regards the Smoky Hill route, about which so much has been written, it is all in the imagination of the writers, there is not, and there never will be, a good wagon road up that stream, or the Saline or Solomon's Fork, for the reason that the country is too hilly and broken. The whole line of the road would be a succession of impassable creeks, ravines and hills, and half a million of dollars would not, in my opinion, construct a road up the valley of the Smoky Hill which would at all compare to that of the Santa Fe road. The Santa Fe road is without doubt the best natural road of its length on the continent, and from Council Grove westward, it is unsurpassed. The Great Plains west of us were doubtless at some remote period of time the bed of an ocean, the country between the Smoky Hill and Republican Forks of Kansas, and the mountains eastward, would seem to have been a tongue of land extending eastwardly into that ocean, being generall *[sic]* broken and hilly, and in many places extremely so. The hills covered with iron ore and sand-stone, and cut up by innumerable creeks and ravines. And I

give it as my opinion that a wagon road will never be constructed between the Smoky Hill and Republican Fork, although it would be a saving in distance to do so.

I have been upon these routes every year for the last twenty-eight years, though of course not traveling over their entire length. A friend of mine, (now dead,) had traveled over the entire length of the Santa Fe road forty-two times, and it is universally admitted to be, as I said before, the best and natural road on the continents. Persons coming up the Missouri river, who intend to go to Pike's Peak by the Santa Fe route, know of course, if they know anything about the route, that every mile they go up the Missouri river beyond the mouth of the Kaw, that they will be increasing the distance to the Peak, for they will have to come back again to the Santa Fe road.

It is well known that, during the Mexican war. *[sic]* the Government, at the suggestion [of] officers at Fort Leavenworth, expended large sums through a series of years, to make a practical route from the Fort to the Sante *[sic]* Fe road, and that the whole thing was finally abandoned, and the trains were sent down by way of Delaware Ferry, within seven miles of the mouth of Kaw river, to get into the Santa Fe road.

I have passed over the ground between Smoky Hil *[sic]* and Republican Forks, six times, twice to a point within less than two hundred miles of the mounties *[sic]*, every time on a different route, and I have never been able to discover the good route for a wagon road through that region of country. As regards the best point for the gold seekers to start from, it is, in my opinion, but little difference, so they go upon the Santa Fe road, whether it be Kansas City or Wyandott *[sic]*—the best route is the main point. As regards distances, every one, of course, coming up the Missouri river, can see by his map that the Santa Fe road is much the shortest route.

Yours, J. C. McCoy.

This article was found and submitted by Leo Oliva. If any of our members might likewise find an interesting article in their research or readings, please do not hesitate to send them to the editor for inclusion in your newsletter! Ed.



SNIPPETS FROM THE JUNCTION CITY UNION, APRIL 20, 1867

Now is the critical period—the turning point in the history of Junction City. On the action of our business men, citizens, every one who has the least Interest here, depends our future. We have here many men of capital, and all of our citizens are enterprising from the greatest to the smallest. The only danger there is, is *[sic]* the fact that all are so occupied in the business of to-day, that they are likely to overlook the action necessary to be taken new *[sic]* to secure prosperity in the future. We have probably the best natural situation in the State, from its geographical position and facility of access from all points, for a town; we are situated near to the most important government outfitting and supply post in the West, Fort Riley, which is of vast importance to us; we are surrounded by some of the best prairie and timber lands in the State; we have unlimited quantities of as fine building stone as there is in the world, which is not only very valuable to us for building purposes, but will become a source of great income to the town from the sale of it abroad, when it shall become fully known; we have got the start, and secured a reputation which, properly backed up, will be a tower of strength to us. Junction City has a reputation far and wide as a go-a-head, lively and wide awake town, for the large quantities and varieties of the various kinds of merchandise kept by our dealers, and for their enterprise and liberality. We must, by activity and attention, clinch the nails which have been driven, and put in many more. It only requires now the

proper spirit and action, to make our town second to none in the State, for business, at least.

We have for some months enjoyed the advantage of being the terminus of the Union Pacific R.R., E. D.; we have, owing to our superior facilities and advantages, secured the centering here of all the Santa Fe trains and trade for this season; we have had the trade of smaller villages, ranchmen and farmers, for a hundred miles in different directions of the surrounding country, and prosperity has flowed in upon us. All of this has occurred from natural causes, with very little effort.

But the time has now arrived when this prosperity can only be continued and made permanent by active and combined effort on the part of all our citizens. If we sit idly down and see the prizes slipping from our grasp, and only grumble and complain of dull and hard times as other towns below us have done, we will soon, like them, be played out, notwithstanding natural advantages.

The railroad will soon pass us, in fact, it may be said to have already done so, as for two or three weeks the trains have been carrying both passengers and freight to points west from 35 to 45 miles. To be sure, in the multiplicity of our business, we have as yet noticed no effect, and some, perhaps, have hardly known it. But we shall soon feel it to our sorrow, if the position is not properly appreciated and shrewdly provided for.

We will mention a few of the avenues for enterprise and exertion which have been mentioned to us and which have occurred to our mind at various times. Every man who has capital should use it to the utmost extent in increasing his business facilities, and for the general trade, prosperity and growth of the town. We must hold out out *[sic]* every inducement, not only to farmers, but to dealers in the country, east, west, north and south of

here, to do their trading at this point. This can be done by selling cheap, advertising, soliciting, and using them courteously, and making it pleasant for them when they do come. Our Emigration Society should be pushed thoroughly. The bridges at present proposed, and several others which are needed, should be hurried up. The roads radiating in every direction should be put in good condition. We should strain every nerve, and be liberal of our means towards the early success of the Neosho Valley Railroad enterprise. In this connection, we will mention an item published in our local columns yesterday, from an Omaha paper, which is the second or third of a similar purport emanating *[sic]* from there, which we have seen, in reference to a proposed railroad from Omaha to this place, and thence on to Santa Fe. The project is feasible, and we should cooperate with them. It would certainly be greatly to the interest of Chicago to have a road from Omaha, tapping the Eastern Division here, and giving them facilities for securing a part of the large and valuable Santa Fe trade. If once placed before their capitalists, their well known enterprise would soon have it in progress. We may become, if we do our duty to ourselves, the great railroad center of the State. We have the natural position, and convenience of access from every direction. Another thing, we have it as coming from an intelligent and extensive Santa Fe trader, that we may continue to be the railroad point for the Santa Fe trade, at least for another year. The matter of some town west being forty or fifty miles nearer, will not be considered in their long journey of five to eight hundred miles if they can find better roads, bridges, greater facilities for trade, and entertainment, by coming here. Let us solicit them urgently, have a splended *[sic]* road, large stocks of goods, and great variety of such as they require for their outfitting, and hold out every inducement, in every way, that shall tend to make it desirable for them to come here. We must also have combined effort. Every person should do what he can, no matter how small it is, toward the great object. We are happy to be able to say we have never seen anything but

honorable rivalry, no jealousy of one another among our business men, whether great or small. They have always worked harmoniously together for the general good—which has been a great element in our previous success. Let us continue to do so.

We will just mention a remark we heard one of our dealers make yesterday. He said he would give, all he made during the year (and that is no small sum) towards the building up of the trade of the town and its future prosperity, if others would join in it. Was that spirit general, the future of Junction City would be secure.



FORT HARKER

Major General Hancock has recently issued an order, relative to this post, which will render it equivalent in every respect to Forts Leavenworth and Riley. Fort Harker is at present constituted of one story pine, stone and picket buildings, and stables. The order of the commanding general requires the immediate removal of many of the buildings, and the construction of large two story officers' and soldiers' quarters, to be built of stone, also a large hospital, and several stone stables. The order requires the work to be pushed through this summer, and we understand the quartermaster of the post has made his estimate for some three hundred additional mechanics and laborers.

This improvement of Fort Harker would indicate its great importance in military affairs. Its situation, at the divergence of two great military roads, one of which must for some years be supplied by wagon transportation, creates the necessity and justifies this order of General Hancock for its improvement and enlargement. The Indian Territory to the south,

as well as the military necessities of New Mexico to the southwest, must evidently be deemed by the military as tributary to Harker, hence this order.

This order is not without a civil significance. The absolute necessity to military business of a central and accessible point, induces to the very best discretion and judgment in the selection of a location. The expenditure of such a vast expenditure of money by the general government will aid in the development of a portion of our State—in settling up the numerous small valleys which center in that neighborhood [*sic*—and contributing largely to the upbuilding the enterprising town of Ellsworth, which is rapidly growing into importance. We regard the order as of peculiar significance to that point. The employment of four or five hundred mechanics during the next year and a half or two years, together with the terminus of the railroad at that point, will combine to make one of the largest and liveliest points in Kansas; to say nothing of the current expenditures of a military post of such importance. From the Atlantic westward, the selections by the military of points for their operations have, without exception, been changed to large, populeus, [*sic*] and important cities and towns—thus certifying to the wisdom which moves competent military commanders in such matters.



Hutchinson writes to the Leavenworth Times, as follows: Fort Harker Reservation is laid out in the bend of the Smoky Hill, is six miles square, and situated on a high rolling prairie. The post is located about midway between the east and west lines of the reservation, and within about a mile of the north line. The U.P. Railway, and the overland and Santa Fe roads run through it. The Overland, or Denver route, passes to the right of the post and strikes the Smoky Hill again about five miles beyond. The Santa Fe road passes through the post to the south line of the reservation and crosses the Smoky a short distance down, where Fort Ellsworth was originally laid out.

Harker is admirably situated, and in time will make one of the handsomest military posts in the country. Several small streams, lined with timber, empty into the Smoky within a few miles of it, while the Smoky has considerable timber on its banks. Three companies of troops are stationed at the post, and a large number of mechanics and laborers are employed in building quarters and erecting quartermaster and commissary storehouses. Brown sandstone abounds in this section. When first taken out is is very soft and easily worked, but becomes extremely hard on exposure to the atmosphere. It is being extensively used in building at the post, and makes fine looking structures.

The Denver News records the fact that a party of hands for work on the Union Pacific Railroad, Eastern Division, left Denver for the scene of operations on the fifth. Harry Gunnell and Martin Wall were of their number, and it is also informed that they will find their work not a great ways from Denver. The Denver News, of the 27th ult., had information from parties of tie cutters who had been up to the Black Hills, that it was utterly impossible to do anything, the ground being covered with snow to an average depth of eighteen inches. The engineers sent out by the Union Pacific Railroad are shut up in camp, and can do nothing on account of snow. At the ranches in that region men are obliged to shovel and scrape away the fleecy element that covers the grass in order that their animals may not starve.

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET PAID YOUR DUES FOR 2021, PLEASE USE THE FORM BELOW.

Check the address label on this issue of the *Overland Despatch* to find if your dues are current. The membership year will appear above your name. If it says "2021" (or "Life") you are current. If it says "2020" or any year before that, you have yet to pay your dues for the coming year.

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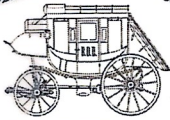
Check here if you would be willing to serve on the board or a committee: _____

Enroll me for the year _____

Make checks payable to the Smoky Hill Trail Association. All memberships expire on December 31.

Smoky Hill Trail Association
 PO Box 978
 HaysKS 67601

(OK to photocopy this form)



JUNCTION CITY UNION APRIL 20, 1867 (continued)

A number of the Directors of the Union Pacific railway, E.D., passed up the road last night, with view of locating their depot at Solomon.

Passengers, Mails, Express Goods and Freight, are now arriving regularly from the East, at our depot. The swarm of passengers immense.

Eighty-four mechanics and laborers left Junction to-day for Ft. Wallace, where they have been engaged to work on buildings which are to be erected. Ninety more leave to-morrow for Fort Larned.

A couple of companies of the 10th colored cavalry passed through town this morning en route to Fort Lyon. They were splendidly mounted, well armed, and presented a fine appearance.

Freight, mails and passengers have had a terrific time in attempting to go west by train, during the past two or three days.—Some days the trains don't come or go. When they do, there is no knowing at what time of the day or night the occurrence will take place. One of the consequences is a great deal of heavy waiting at the depot. The old reliable Kansas Stage Company is the only sure means of transit to the west at present.

A large number of rock is being shipped from Junction City westward, to be used in construction of piers and abutments, and culverts at the crossings of the different streams and gullies along the line of the road. This is but the initiatory step towards a general shipment of the article.

