

the 7 Wonders of Osage County Santa Fe Trail



Photos courtesy Corinne Dubois

Early day views of the Santa Fe Trail as it passed through Burlingame.

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The portion of the Santa Fe Trail that went through Osage County went to Overbrook and Burlingame, and crossed 110-Mile Creek, Dragoon Creek, Soldier Creek, south of the third standard parallel.

In 1849, Waldo, Hall and Co., made a contract to carry the mail to Santa Fe, N.M. for \$40,000 and a claim to a section of land every 20 miles for stagecoach stations.

Stations were at Dragoon, Mile, Elm and Big John creeks. In 1854, a mail stage passed once a month each way over the trail. Coaches were large enough to carry 20 people, one ton of mail and provisions and feed for the journey to and from Santa Fe.

As described by T.O. Hill in 1915, the old Santa Fe Trail passed over different parts of the county:

"It took to the heads of the creeks, avoided all large streams and wide bottom lands. On the south was the low wetland of the Marais des Cygnes River. On the north, the equally wet bottoms of the Wakarusa. Between the state line and the grove, no stream could hinder the train more than 12 hours at a time. Dragoon, Elm and Rock Creeks were the large streams between Burlingame and the Neosho."

In the early days of the trail, hunters came from all over Europe to hunt western game. They came and went by this road. Its renown was worldwide. It was the greatest natural road the world saw.

When the covered wagons were traveling on the trail, wolves and coyotes came to feed on crippled animals. If they did not get their fill, attacks would be targeted at settlers' livestock. Besides wolves and coyotes, settlers dealt with what was then called bedbugs, a cousin of the chinch bug.



A troublesome reptile resembling a lizard encountered along the trail was the adder. Its body was 16 inches long and six inches wide, and when its mouth opened, a man could fit his fist inside.

Also making travel a challenge was the fact that there were few bridges, so crossing creeks was treacherous.

Wagon trains traveled the Santa Fe Trail in large numbers. A regular train consisted of 26 wagons, with six yoke of oxen to each wagon. With added cattle and horses, wagon trains sometimes herded over 300 head.

Train personnel consisted of a headman, the boss, an assistant boss and 26 drivers. Each wagon was loaded to capacity, a total of 6,500 pounds.

It was year in and year out travel on the trail that led to deep ruts, still visible in many areas today.

The trains moved many times at night. Passing through a town, wagons creaked, livestock lowed, the driver yelled and whips cracked like pistols. Strangers to this confusion were often frightened, believing the place to be under attack by a band of robbers.

Today, many people reenact the travel of pioneers over the old trail. Many others travel the paved Santa Fe

Trail. All in all, the Santa Fe Trail was and always will be a significant part of the history of Osage County.

Early day Osage County Chronicle newspapers were used in research of this article.

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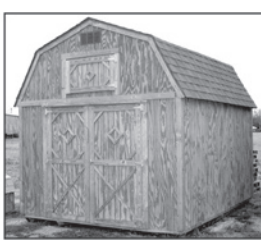
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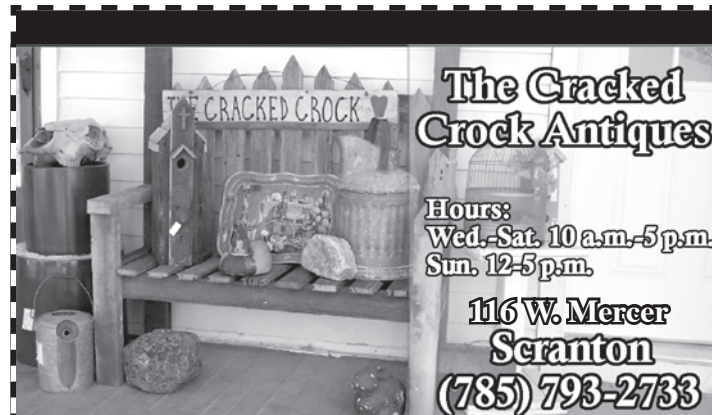


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