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The Santa Fe Trail (Sandy Carlson, editor)

"Trail To Santa Fe"

Annie Wilson

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March 2020
Kelly Yarbrough

“TRAIL TO SANTA FE”

These ruts you see before you where the land is sunk and bowed,
Are remnants of the pathway to Nuevo Mexico.
Near 60 years the wagon trains passed along this way,
As wealth and power moved along this trail to Santa Fe.

Across the wide Missouri back in 1821,
This “commerce of the prairies” had only just begun.
They traveled west with cloth and shoes, mirrors, buttons, beads;
Returned with gold and silver and donkeys for the East.

No this was not a one-way trail for emigrants bound west;
These travelers were merchants seeking markets that were best.
They wagered fortunes, bet their lives against the desert sun,
Going back and forth to Santa Fe and past the Cimarron.

Cross the rolling wide “green ocean,” Kansas prairies fed them well.
A sea of grass without a tree as many diaries tell.
They camped along at water holes a day’s walk in between
And passed by herds of buffalo the likes they’d never seen.

Nine hundred miles they traveled far beyond the bluestem grass,
Past sandy plain, blue desert sky and rugged mountain pass,
To that valley of adobe homes and Mission San Miguel,
The Plaza, and Palacio, and Santa Fe’s sweet bells.

When war broke out with Mexico, the Army filled the trail
With goods for all its western forts and bags of precious mail.
Each day you’d hear the hoof-beats of the oxen and the mules,
The creak of wood and leather as they’d lift their iron shoes.

Comanche, Kaw and Kiowa, the Cheyenne and Osage
In sadness watched as thousands rode this trail they first had made.
Every day more people came like sands upon the shore,
The buffalo were hunted out and the Indians grew poor.

But the lifeblood of this trading trail would soon no longer flow.
Steel rails had reached Pueblo lands within New Mexico.
In 1880 Santa Fe's first railroad cars came through;
So the oxen and the mule trains on this trail were finished, too.

Today the story lies between these ruts of hooves and wheels,
Of lives and fortunes gained and lost in ventures mercantile.
That will to trade and wander to places far away
Led all those souls to follow the trail to Santa Fe.

"Trail to Santa Fe" is the official song of the Santa Fe Trail Association.

Annie Wilson, named the Kansas Flint Hills Balladeer for her songs about the Flint Hills, is an educator, rancher and singer-songwriter with the band Tallgrass Express. She thanks historian Steve Schmidt for advice on this song.



Okesa III
Norman Akers