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## Flint Hills Trails And Tracks

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November 2020  
Kelly Yarbrough

## FLINT HILLS TRAILS AND TRACKS

The Santa Fe Trail is by far the most prominent historic trail through the Flint Hills, including Morris County. However, other local trails and tracks passed through the area as well.

### TRAILS

**Prehistoric Indian Trail** This trail passed through Kansas, roughly following today's K-177 highway. Immediately south of Council Grove, an ancient pile of stones marks the supposed site of the martyrdom of Father Juan de Padilla, the first Christian martyr in the United States, 1542. Subsequent research has established that Father Padilla more likely met his fate east of Lyons. Instead, the pile of stones was an ancient Indian guide marking the route of the prehistoric Indian trail. The town of Herington has a monument to Padilla in the City Park, and a historical kiosk on U.S. 77 highway at Herington tells his story.

**Kaw Trail** Roughly parallel to the Santa Fe Trail, this trail led the tribe from its reservation southeast of Council Grove to its traditional hunting grounds in western Kansas.

**Fort Riley to Fort Scott Road** This military road connected the two forts, angling southeasterly through Council Grove and Emporia.

**Fort Riley to Lost Springs Road** This connected the fort to the Santa Fe Trail through western Morris County to the campsite at Lost Springs.

**Mormon Trail** Traveled by some Mormons going to Utah, this route passed through the northernmost portions of Morris County before traveling northwesterly, eventually joining the main Mormon Trail along the Platte River in Nebraska.



**Topeka to Council Grove Road** An early day wagon road which became Kansas highway K-4.

## TRACKS

### **Union Pacific Railway, Southern Branch**

The first section opened for traffic on October 27, 1869, when a special excursion train escorted the Kansas governor, James Madison Harvey; railroad officials; and others from Junction City to Council Grove. In 1870, the name was changed to the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway. Council Grove has the only M-K-T depot still on its original site in Kansas.

**Missouri Pacific Railroad** Construction began in Council Grove in 1882 and proceeded west to Pueblo, Colorado, as the Topeka, Salina & Western RR. In 1886, the Council Grove, Osage City & Ottawa Railway connected with the TS&W. Both of these lines merged into the Missouri Pacific Railroad which made Council Grove a division point and maintained a roundhouse for locomotive repairs for many years. It merged with the Union Pacific in 1982. The tracks were removed from Osawatomie to Herington in 1994-1995, and the right-of-way is now a rail-trail, the Flint Hills Trail State Park. As the trail approaches Council Grove, it roughly parallels the Santa Fe National Historic Trail.

**Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Co.** Built in 1887, the railroad line still exists across northern Morris County, passing through Dwight and White City. Owned by a series of companies, the line is currently owned by Union Pacific Railway.

### **Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway**

The main line of the ATSF reached the Flint Hills at Emporia in 1870, proceeding through Strong City, Florence and on through Newton and Dodge City. It reached the Colorado line in December of 1872 and Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1880. Years later, 1887, a spur or short line was built through southwestern Morris County and the towns of Diamond Springs and Burdick. Often referred to as the Santa Fe, the railroad company merged with the Burlington Northern in 1996 to form the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, now called BNSF. The Morris County tracks were removed in 2006, but the main line has seen increased traffic in recent years and remains an important transportation thoroughfare through the Flint Hills.

**Kenneth W. McClintock** is a fifth-generation resident of Morris County, where all eight of his great-grandparents and four great-great grandparents lived prior to 1900. Retired from his practice of law, Kenneth and his wife, Shirley, operate the Trail Days Café and Museum as volunteers at Council Grove.



**Prairie Slope Sketch**

Lisa Grossman