



Kansas State University Libraries
New Prairie Press

Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

The Santa Fe Trail (Sandy Carlson, editor)

Trail Tales

Symphony in the Flint Hills, Inc.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh>

Recommended Citation

Symphony in the Flint Hills, Inc. (2021). "Trail Tales," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*.
<https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2021/flinthills/7>

To order hard copies of the Field Journals, go to shop.symphonyintheflinthills.org.

The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

TRAIL TALES

“We struck our camp on the hill. There is a large mound just by us, from the top of which is a splendid view is to be had. On one side, to the west, is a wide expanse of prairie; as far as the eye can reach nothing but a waving sea of tall grass is to be seen. Out the other, for miles around are trees and hills. I went up onto it at sunset, and thought I had not seen, ever, a more imposing sight.”

“Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico, The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847”

“We reached the edge of the elevation from where we had a view of the wooded valley of the Neosho and the delightfully situated little town of Council Grove. We halted almost involuntarily in order to feast our eyes longer on the landscape which was lovely beyond all description. The dense, vigorous forest with its strange distinct contours hid the little river from our view. But I thought that I had never seen anything more beautiful and more charming than when I looked down on the tops of the oaks and hickories, the sycamores and cottonwoods which with their magnificent shades of color blended together as in one single carpet,

and as I watched, the shadows of light feathery clouds glided along lazily and yet animatedly over the expanse of the woods and darkened the fresh green of the trees for a few minutes at a time.

“We rode down from the upland and when we entered its only broad street we noticed crudely painted signs on all the houses on both sides of the street; the houses numbered about thirty. By these signs we saw that the place was inhabited exclusively by merchants. There were also two inns and each stood out because they were painted white. We entered one of them which also had a store connected with the hotel.

“We halted there long enough to read an 8-day-old newspaper and to eat breakfast which was served us by an old negress and consisted chiefly of fresh, cool buttermilk and cornbread. we bought as much of the buttermilk as we could put in our bottles, and enriched in this way we left the town. After crossing the Neosho we rested for several hours in the shade of tall trees. While the mules were enjoying themselves in the rich grass, we refreshed ourselves by a bath in the little river and not until the sun had



Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen
Kansas Historical Society

crossed the noon line did we leave the charming valley.”

Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen, “Over the Santa Fe Trail through Kansas in 1858”

This is a beautiful spot, one hundred and fifty miles from the town of Independence, Missouri. Here the Santa Fe traders generally pause a day or two for rest — to enjoy the shade of the tall trees, and drink the clear cool water that runs bubbling, through the grove — as dear a sight to the prairie wanderer as the glance of love from the eye of beauty. Here the

different adventurers meet to elect their leader, arrange their plan to travel, put their firearms in order, and hold council on other matters connected with their enterprise. From this the place derives its name of “Council Grove.”

We were ten days travelling from Independence to this spot; we remained two days, and never in hall or drawing room, did we spend a more delightful time. Reading or sleeping, beneath the trees on the banks of the chrystal water in the hot noon — or fishing, where we could see the little finny creatures playing

with our bait. Or, in the evening, singing in the moonlight the songs we had been used to sing at home, those Native strains that melt us while we sing them. We sang duets, one on one side, and one on the other of the beautiful stream. We sang loud choruses [sic], and the lonely woods give us back a running accompaniment of echos [sic]. And when the night-birds screamed, after we had laid our heads upon our saddles to sleep, we laughed at the poor be knighted creatures, and raised our voices in merry imitations of the doleful sounds, till the hungry wolves caught up our cry, and awed us into silence with their dismal howlings.

excerpt from “Matt Field on the Santa Fe Trail,” collected by Clyde and Mae Reed Porter

“Wanted — A middle-aged man six feet, four inches high, well proportioned, to stay in our office, and kick men downstairs, who interrupt the printers, spew tobacco juice about the floor, smoke in the office, meddle with the type, read copy. If such a one does not come soon, we shall commence the work in person.”

Council Grove Press, May 4, 1863

“Trains Moving — For a week past, there has been one continued throng of wagons passing, to and fro, on Santa Fe Avenue [present Main Street] — Even the devil himself can’t keep count and attend to his

legitimate business. Several large trains, eastward bound, are encamped out west of town, and as we put this to type, the main thoroughfare is completely lined with large caravans, heavily loaded, from Kansas City, as far as the eye can reach, east and west.”

Council Grove Democrat, July 1, 1866

Early explorers to Kansas discovered a plethora of animals and birds. One of the most unique birds to be found in great numbers was the Carolina Parakeet. It was described as a small green neotropical parakeet with a bright yellow head, reddish orange face, and a pale beak.

Many journal and diary entries mention the Carolina Parrot. In 1804, William Clark mentions “I observed a great number of Parrot queets this evening.”

Lt. James W. Abert reports in 1847, while traveling on the Santa Fe Trail, that, “The day was stormy and cold, but we pressed on until we reached ‘Council Grove.’ Paroquettes [sic] were sweeping rapidly in large circuits among the topmost branches of the ancient denizens of the forest, and their screams shrill, and grating echoed through the lofty arches of boughs, now shorn of their summer glory.” Abert also mentions seeing a great number of Prairie Hens.

By the time Kansas began to be settled in 1854, the Carolina Parakeet numbers



Still Life: Carolina Parakeet (detail)

Kirsten Furlong

were greatly reduced, mainly from overhunting and capture for pets. By 1880, the parakeet was extinct in Kansas, and sadly the last surviving bird died in the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens in September 1914.

Mark Brooks, Council Grove historian

Seth Hays, businessman and trader, came to Council Grove crossing on the Santa Fe Trail in 1847 and brought Sarah “Aunt Sally” Taylor, an African American slave. She remained in his household as a servant after she was freed in 1861 when Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state. Sally was the caretaker for bachelor Hays’ adopted daughter, Kittie

Robbins Hays. Kittie’s mother died when Kittie was a baby, and she was brought to the Hays home.

In 1867, Seth Hays built another home. Aunt Sally lived in the basement quarters and cared for the family until her death in 1872. Her funeral was held in the Hays home, and Seth Hays insisted she be buried in Council Grove’s Greenwood Cemetery, instead of the portion of the original cemetery where some African Americans are buried. Upon his death, Hays was buried in the same cemetery lot as Aunt Sally.

Vicki Patton, Flint Hills historian