

# Old Ruts and New

## The History of Santa Fe Trail History

by Michael L. Olsen

Apart from the Indian menace, travel on the Santa Fe Trail was necessarily easier than on the Oregon Trail for it was conducted by professionals. This was the commerce of the prairies, not a migration of individualists, and the best procedures were enforced. In this area Manifest Destiny took the shape of a large-scale freight operation.

Bernard DeVoto  
*The Year of Decision 1846*

**T**he letter that Mary Culver received at her Missouri home in the spring of 1847 was short and to the point. Her husband, Romulus, who had traveled to Santa Fe the previous autumn, was dead, killed by New Mexicans rebelling against the American conquest and occupation of New Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

Romulus Culver had left Missouri late in September 1846 as a member of a party driving cattle to sell on speculation to the American army. Later he acted as an agent for the army, purchasing corn in and about Santa Fe. He wrote home to Mary several times. From Big Cow Creek

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1. Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision 1846* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943), 250.

2. Jesse Morin to Mary Culver, February 7, 1847, Romulus E. Culver Collection, Joint Collection University of Missouri Historical Collection, Columbia, and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia. The author wishes to thank both Mary Jean Cook and Harry Myers for bringing this collection to his attention.



*Authors of the Santa Fe Trail history include (clockwise from top): Susan Shelby Magoffin; Henry Inman (right, with Buffalo Bill Cody); James Josiah Webb; Matthew Field; and Marion Sloan Russell (right, with husband Richard).*

on October 6, while headed west, he admonished her to "get the house covered in" and look after the family cattle.<sup>3</sup> By the time he reached Bent's Fort, he regretted ever setting out at all, writing on November 1, "Please excuse me for leaving you for so long. I see my error and hope that you forgive me." His closing comment in this letter was eerily prophetic or perhaps just indicative of melancholy feelings at the time. He told Mary, "I remain your affectionate husband till death."<sup>4</sup>

In his final letter home, written from Las Vegas, New Mexico, on January 1, 1846, Culver referred to the "Taos Revolt," as it generally became known. "The news here," he related, "is that we have just suppressed a rebellion which was got up amongst the Spaniards to put all Americans to death at this place. The rise was to be a general one but happily was frustrated by a womans [sic] giving the intelligence."<sup>5</sup> His confidence was misplaced. Two weeks later Charles Bent, first American governor of New Mexico, was assassinated in Taos. Culver himself, having decided to return to "the States," was caught and murdered at Mora along with six traveling companions. A few days later friends buried his body with four others in a wagon box southwest of the plaza in Las Vegas.<sup>6</sup>

Romulus Culver's experiences and death on the Santa Fe Trail reflect many elements that have sparked the interest of historians, trail enthusiasts, novelists, and tourists for the past 175 years. For each of them the trail has had a personal fascination and importance. Some saw it as a highway of commerce, conquest, and national destiny. Others reveled in the romance of the trail as an aspect of westward expansion, evoking Native American life, the deeds of Spanish conquistadors, the freedom

of the fur trapper, the dangers faced by Missouri traders, the apprehensions of infantrymen and dragoons, and the brashness of eastern entrepreneurs. More recently the trail has been analyzed as a medium of cross-cultural encounter, the precursor of a pluralistic, multicultural society emerging in the American Southwest.

There is a difference between those who would celebrate the trail and those who seek to interpret its significance. Strictly historical accounts fall into four chronological categories, each reflecting the views and attitudes of a particular era in American history. The first trail historians were actual traders and travelers, men such as Josiah Gregg and Henry Inman. Later other authors, including Robert L. Duffus and Stanley Vestal, embellished their work. By the mid-twentieth century more academically inclined historians like Max L. Moorhead and Marc Simmons reconsidered the trail experience. Today a new pluralistic perspective is advanced by David Weber, Thomas D. Hall, Thomas Chávez, David Sandoval, and Susan Calafate Boyle, among others. Each of these writers, sometimes directly and sometimes unconsciously, has asked the question, "What is the importance of the Santa Fe Trail?"

Josiah Gregg's account of the Santa Fe Trail as it was between 1821 and 1844 is its pre-eminent history. Gregg traveled to and traded in Mexico, via New Mexico, off and on during these years and then published a compendium of his exploits under the descriptive title *Commerce of the Prairies: or the Journal of a Santa Fé Trader, During Eight Expeditions Across the Great Western Prairies, and a Residence of Nearly Nine Years in Northern Mexico.*<sup>7</sup>

Not everyone who crossed the Plains wrote about his or her adventures, although there is a "vast sea of books dealing with the historical old Santa Fe Trail,"

3. Culver perhaps was at Cow Creek Crossing, approximately four miles west and one mile south of present-day Lyons, Kansas.

4. Romulus E. Culver to Mary Culver, October 6, November 1, 1846, Culver Collection.

5. Romulus E. Culver to Mary Culver, January 1, 1847, *ibid.*

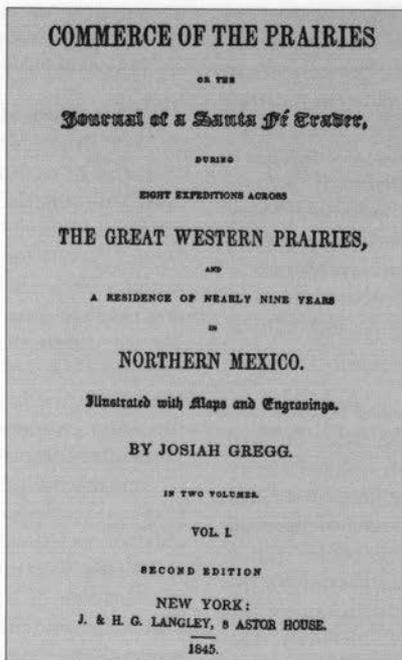
6. F. P. Burke to W. L. Culver, March 30, 1880, *ibid.*

7. The first edition of Gregg's work appeared in 1844, published in two volumes in New York by Henry G. Langely. It frequently has been reprinted, most recently in 1990 by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, as edited by Max L. Moorhead with a foreword by Marc Simmons.

as historian Marc Simmons has put it.<sup>8</sup> Only a few who did pen diaries, journals, and reminiscences appreciated the broader significance of the drama in which they played a part. While the diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, Matt Field's colorful descriptions of trail life, or Marion Russell's poignant memoirs of childhood and marriage on the trail are vital and entertaining historical documents, they are informative rather than interpretive.<sup>9</sup> Few writers chose to or were able to participate in the daily routine of trail travel and yet stand back, either at the time or later, and see themselves in a national and international perspective. Josiah Gregg was one of these.

Gregg first ventured to Santa Fe in search of better health.

Born in Kentucky, he lived as a child in Illinois, then Missouri. He tried several professions including teaching, law, and medicine. In 1831, twenty-five years old and suffering from dyspepsia and consumption, he again went west, his doctors prescribing prairie air and life in the open as a cure. It worked. He joined a Santa Fe bound caravan in Independence, Missouri, and within weeks was spending



fully recounted repeated American incursions into New Mexico, beginning with that of James Purcell in 1805. He was one of the first writers of the day to review the history of the Spanish in the Southwest for American audiences, introducing them to men like Juan de Oñate and events such as the Pueblo Revolt. He evoked the "Black Legend" so dear to the hearts of nineteenth-century Americans, commenting on the Spaniards' "sordid lust for gold and power" and their "religious fanaticism—that crusading spirit, which martyred so many thousands of the aborigines of the New World."<sup>10</sup> Along the way he also gave a vivid pen portrait of New Mexicans and, to him, their exotic culture.

But it is the trade with Santa Fe and the importance of that trade to the future of New Mexico and

invigorating days on horseback hunting buffalo. In 1833, having returned from his first "voyage" on the prairie ocean, he entered the trade and stayed with it until 1840. He loved prairie life, remarking, "I have hardly known a man, who has ever become familiar with the kind of life which I have led for so many years, that has not relinquished it with regret."<sup>10</sup>

Since its publication in 1844, which it is important to remember was before the Mexican War, *Commerce of the Prairies* has been a primary source of accurate information, from how to pack cargo on a mule to the value of merchandise crossing the Plains in 1838. At the same time, Gregg was the first chronicler to place the trail in the context of America's thrust to the Pacific. He carefully

8. Marc Simmons, "Foreword," in Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (1844; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), ix.

9. Various editions of these works exist: Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Trail and into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847*, ed. Stella M. Drumm (1926; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Clyde Porter and Mae Reed Porter, comps., John E. Sunder, ed., *Matt Field on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Marian Russell, *Land of Enchantment: Memoirs of Marian Russell along the Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985). The proper spelling of Russell's first name is Marion, but *Land of Enchantment*, published after her death, carries an alternate spelling.

10. Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 328-29.

11. *Ibid.*, 84.

the United States that is central to his narrative. He observed, "In point of revenue, the Santa Fe Trade has been of but little importance to the government of Mexico," but asserted that it was vital to the fortunes of New Mexico and New Mexicans.<sup>12</sup> Even as he wrote, Mexican president General Santa Anna closed New Mexico (temporarily as it transpired) to trade with the United States. In Gregg's judgment, Santa Anna would "certainly be compelled to open [the] northern ports, to avoid revolution in New Mexico."<sup>13</sup> As with later historians, Gregg appreciated the consequences of two decades of economic and cultural exchange.

More than a half century passed before a second general history of the Santa Fe Trail appeared. That treatment, Colonel Henry Inman's *The Old Santa Fé Trail; The Story of a Great Highway*, is perhaps the worst account of the trail ever written.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Inman could spin a good yarn. Imaginative in both style and content, *The Old Santa Fé Trail* reflected a romanticization of the frontier and the jingoist temper of the times. The book was published in 1897, in the midst of Spanish-American War hysteria.

Appropriately, Buffalo Bill Cody wrote the introduction, setting a tone of nationalism and using empurpled prose that rivaled that of Inman. As Cody saw it:

At the commencement of the "commerce of the prairies" in the early portion of the century, the Old Trail was the arena of almost constant sanguinary struggles between the wily nomads of the desert and the hardy white pioneers, whose eventual lives made the civilization of the vast interior region of our continent possible. Their daring compelled its development, which has resulted in the genesis of great states and large cities. Their hardships gave birth to the American homestead;

and their determined will was the factor of possible achievements, the most remarkable and important of modern times.<sup>15</sup>

Although he claimed to be a veteran of the Santa Fe Trail, Henry Inman's knowledge came mostly secondhand or from the later years of the trail. Born in New York state, he entered the U.S. Army as a private in 1857 and served throughout the Civil War. By 1866 he had risen to the rank of major, being cited for meritorious service in the Quartermaster Department. At one point he was stationed at the Fort Union, New Mexico, quartermaster depot. He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1869, this time for meritorious conduct in the Indian wars. Then, on July 24, 1872, the army cashiered him. He died in 1899, several years after completing *The Old Santa Fé Trail*.<sup>16</sup>

Inman retailed every legend, myth, curious happenstance, celestial revelation, and aberrant personality connected with the Santa Fe Trail. His treatment of Indians, who are excoriated on nearly every page, is indicative of his general views. Acknowledging that he can find little to say in their favor, he proceeds to use all the nineteenth-century epithets available to describe them. They are "savages, devils, villains, dissemblers, scourges of the plains, wicked, murderers, and terrorists," all in the space of twenty-five pages. Anyone who decried the plight of the Indians is dismissed as an eastern or Washington "sentimentalist." His account of the 1849 killing of Dr. James M. White and the kidnapping of White's wife and daughter and the daughter's nurse is typical and inaccurate in time, place, and details. Of the actual attack, he wrote:

Out dashed the savages, gorgeous in their feathered war-bonnets, but looking like fiends with their paint-bedaubed faces. Stopping the frightened mules, they pulled open the doors of the coach and, mercilessly dragging its helpless

12. *Ibid.*, 336.

13. *Ibid.*, 345.

14. Henry Inman, *The Old Santa Fé Trail; The Story of a Great Highway* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1897).

15. W.F. Cody, "Preface," in *ibid.*, viii.

16. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 563.

and surprised inmates to the ground, immediately began their butchery. They scalped and mutilated the dead bodies of their victims in their usual sickening manner, not a single individual escaping, apparently, to tell of their fiendish acts.<sup>17</sup>

In his concluding chapter, Inman pulled the themes of nationalism, expansion, and the spread of American civilization together as the "Old Santa Fe Trail" died and the railroad supplanted it. He recalled how in 1872 he stood on a "delicious October afternoon" at the confluence of the Pawnee Fork and Arkansas River near Larned, Kansas. On the one hand he noticed a few Indian "skin lodges" housing the "remnants of a tribe powerful in the years of savage sovereignty," and on the other the "peaceful little sod houses, dugouts, and white cottages of the incoming settler." Far to the east, "a train of [railroad] cars could be seen approaching," while to the west "a caravan of white-covered wagons . . . was slowly crawling toward the setting sun." It was a miraculous moment "marking the course of empire in its restless march westward."<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1900s most "veterans" of the Santa Fe Trail, like Inman, had died. In commemoration the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed distinctive stone markers along the trail in all the trail states except Oklahoma between 1902 and 1912. Members of the DAR feared that knowledge of the trail's route would be lost with the passing of the last generation of actual travelers. A similar sentiment motivated the organizers of the 1910 Fourth of July

17. Inman, *The Old Santa Fe Trail*, 161-62.  
18. *Ibid.*, 488-90.

# MATT FIELD

## ON THE

# SANTA FE

# TRAIL

*Collected by Clyde and Mae Reed Porter*

*Edited and with an introduction and notes  
by John E. Sunder*

NORMAN: UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

Fiesta in Las Vegas, New Mexico, to sponsor an "Old Trailer's Reunion" as part of its festivities. About one hundred "old trailers" participated. And beginning in 1912 a National Old Trails Route Association, headquartered in Kansas City, attempted to mark the Old National Road from coast to coast with red, white, and blue signs. Its efforts included the Santa Fe Trail.<sup>19</sup>

This nostalgia generated a new interest in the Santa Fe Trail and its history. Two of the most important memoirs of trail personalities now appeared, those of Marion Russell as dictated to her daughter-in-law in the early 1930s and of James Josiah Webb, originally written in 1888 but edited by Ralph Bieber and published by the Arthur H. Clark Company in 1931.<sup>20</sup>

Even the National Geographic Society immortalized the Santa Fe Trail in an article by Frederick Simpich, "The Santa Fe Trail, Path to Empire," in 1929.<sup>21</sup> For Simpich, the ghosts of Kit Carson, Zebulon Pike, Josiah Gregg, "pioneer mothers," Uncle Dick Wootton, Bill Williams, and Stephen Watts Kearny once again trekked this "hard, hoof-worn highway, often 100 feet wide, so beaten and packed that for years afterward it couldn't be plowed, and with not a white settlement on its whole savage-haunted

19. Marc Simmons summarized the efforts of the DAR and others in *Following the Santa Fe Trail: A Guide for Modern Travelers*, 2d ed. (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1986), 8-14. See also Michael Olsen, "The Fourth of July 1919 in Las Vegas, New Mexico: Was It the Last Roundup for Santa Fe Trail Veterans?" *Wagon Tracks: Santa Fe Trail Association Quarterly* 8 (May 1994): 9-12.

20. Russell, *Land of Enchantment*; James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*, ed. Ralph Bieber (1931; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

21. Frederick Simpich, "The Santa Fe Trail: Path to Empire," *National Geographic Magazine* 56 (August 1929): 213-52.

length."<sup>22</sup> Many of the pictures accompanying the article featured the modern cities and improved roads of the trail states, as well as the numerous monuments and statues erected by the civic-minded to honor the "sunburnt, longwhiskered traders and trappers in buckskins and moccasins" who "braved the perils of the West to help make America."<sup>23</sup>

During this period, Robert L. Duffus and Stanley Vestal reflected the romanticization of the Santa Fe Trail in their books *The Santa Fe Trail* and *The Old Santa Fe Trail*, published in 1930 and 1939 respectively. The sheer power of Duffus's prose and his careful research made his study the better of the two. It became and has remained one of the basic texts on trail history, perhaps only second to that of Josiah Gregg. Duffus has often been reprinted. Vestal's work, on the other hand, while entertaining, was somewhat fictionalized and is not highly regarded.<sup>24</sup>

At the time he wrote, Duffus was a reporter for the *New York Times*. From 1937 to 1962 he served on its editorial staff. Born in Vermont and educated at Stanford, he loved the drama of American history. He had an unerring sense of time and place, as demonstrated in the opening pages of his book. There, using the device of having the reader stand on the banks of the Missouri River, the "far brink of civilization" (much like Inman in western Kansas), he intoned:

Behind you could be heard the voices of reformers denouncing human bondage, inveighing against property and the use of meat, demanding, of all things, equal suffrage; behind you were communities in which women wore pounds and pounds of wool, exposure of the ankles was considered indecent and exposure to the night air dangerous; behind you were soft living, indigestion, politics, intolerant religions, slums, and a growing national boredom which it took the vast blood-sucking leech of the Civil War to cure.

22. *Ibid.*, 213.

23. *Ibid.*, 214.

24. Robert L. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930); Stanley Vestal, *The Old Santa Fe Trail* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939).

But in front of you, you knew, were opportunity and romance.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the book Duffus again bids the reader to stand with him, this time on the plaza in Santa Fe. There, "[a]fter midnight it is dark and still, and the ghosts come"—Indians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Mexicans, including "Dona Tula," "wicked, dashing, [and] retaining to the last some remnants of her youthful loveliness," and a host of Americans, among them Susan Shelby Magoffin, "nineteen, romantic, beautiful, [and] so much in love with her weather-beaten husband."<sup>26</sup>

Stanley Vestal's book, as noted, is in this same romantic mode, although with less restraint on his imagination. For Vestal and, he asserts, for the "hardy pioneers," the "[t]rail stood for adventure, travel, romance, danger, wealth, and the love of women." He promised his readers that they would "recapture the feelings, the sensations, the hopes and fears and humors which [the pioneers] knew."<sup>27</sup> A reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* expertly caught the tone of Vestal's work and neatly summarized the general "romantic" approach, remarking:

The reader will become for a while an eager Santa Fé pilgrim. He will see the caravan made up, the long strings of mules and oxen straining to the load, hear the vociferous persuasions of the teamsters, help roll the laden wagons out of bogholes, stand night guard against thieving Kaw and swooping Comanche; he will run buffalo and "make meat," listen to tall tales, some of them true, more invented for the benefit of greenhorns.<sup>28</sup>

More such embellished treatments continued to appear, although not in serious, book-length studies.

25. *Ibid.*, 1-2. For Duffus's career, see Michael Olsen, "That Fabulous Procession: An Appreciation of Robert L. Duffus, Author of *The Santa Fe Trail*," *Wagon Tracks: Santa Fe Trail Association Quarterly* 9 (February 1995): 7-10.

26. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail*, 247.

27. Vestal, *The Old Santa Fe Trail*, viii.

28. Mertice M. James and Dorothy Brown, eds., *Book Review Digest* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1940), 157.

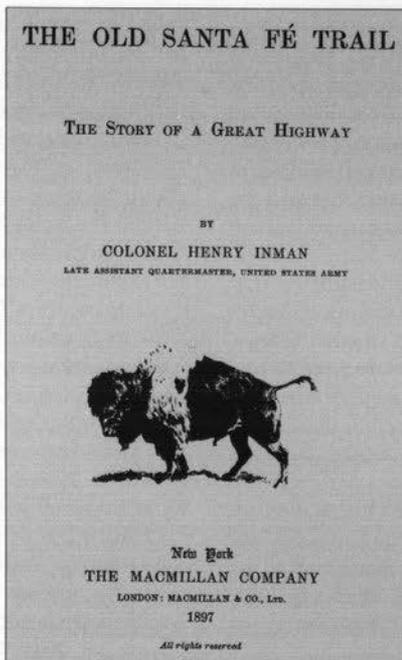
In 1946 the editors of *Look* magazine produced what can perhaps be regarded as the coda to the romantic era of trail books, a mostly pictorial history called *A Chapter in the Opening of the West: The Santa Fe Trail*.<sup>29</sup> Much like the movie *How The West Was Won*, distributed in 1962, this picture book seems to suggest that generations toiled down the trail to achieve one ultimate goal—the freeway system of Los Angeles.

It should be noted that there were some serious studies of the Santa Fe Trail during these years, foreshadowing later academic considerations. F.F. Stephens, Walker Wyman, and Lewis E. Atherton all wrote on aspects of the economic history of the trail. Their work reflects a general interest before World War II in American economic history, an interest stimulated by progressive ideals, the business-generated prosperity of the 1920s, and the Great Depression.

Stephens studied the relationship between Santa Fe traders and the U.S. government as expressed in congressional queries and early military escorts. He also investigated the types of business associations used by traders and their methods of finance and supply. He recognized that two enduring frontier Missouri icons, hard specie (coins) and mules, resulted from trade with New Mexico. But, as his editor at the *Missouri Historical Review* remarked, "The possibilities of interpretation, Doctor Stephens modestly leaves to others."<sup>30</sup>

29. *A Chapter in the Opening of the West: The Santa Fe Trail* (New York: Random House, 1946).

30. F.F. Stephens, "Missouri in the Santa Fe Trade," *Missouri Historical Review* 10 (August 1916): 232–62, and 11 (April–May 1917): 289–312. The editor's comment appears in the introduction to the latter.



Walker Wyman published a half-dozen articles on trail topics between 1931 and 1937. He particularly reviewed freighting on the trail as it related to the history of Kansas City or military use of the trail after 1846. His general theme was that in the 1850s "overland freighting became a great business, employing a vast outlay of capital and great numbers of men and animals."<sup>31</sup> In similar fashion from 1935 to 1940 Lewis E. Atherton, one of the great historians of the frontier, wrote various articles on businessmen, their techniques, and the impact of the Mexican War on their trade. Toward the end of his distinguished career, he returned to this topic with a study of "The Santa Fe Trader as Mercantile Capitalist." In that article he summarized the economic approach to the Santa Fe Trail by concluding that Santa Fe traders belonged "to that larger fraternity of mercantile capitalists who constituted the economic occupational groups during the Commercial Revolution that preceded the development of the Industrial Revolution."<sup>32</sup>

31. Walker Wyman, "Freighting: A Big Business on the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (November 1931): 17; see also Wyman, "Bullwhacking: a Prosaic Profession Peculiar to the Great Plains," *New Mexico Historical Review* 7 (October 1932): 297–310; Wyman, "F.X. Aubry: Santa Fe Freighter, Pathfinder and Explorer," *ibid.* 7 (January 1932): 1–31; Wyman, "Kansas City, Mo., a Famous Freighter Capital," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 6 (February 1937): 3–13; Wyman, "The Military Phase of Santa Fe Freighting, 1846–1865," *ibid.* 1 (November 1932): 415–28.

32. Lewis E. Atherton, "The Santa Fe Trader as Mercantile Capitalist," *Missouri Historical Review* 77 (October 1982): 2; see also Atherton, "Business Techniques in the Santa Fe Trade," *ibid.* 34 (April 1940): 335–41; Atherton, "Disorganizing Effects of the Mexican War on the Santa Fe Trade," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 6 (May 1937): 115–23; Atherton, "James and Robert Aull—A Frontier Missouri Mercantile Firm," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (October 1935): 3–27.

After World War II, western American history writing became more academic. Increased western tourism and burgeoning populations in the cities and states of the West helped fuel this change. Colleges and universities offered courses and even degrees in western American studies. In 1970 the Western History Association, formed by both lay and academic historians, began publishing its *Western Historical Quarterly*.

As might be expected, study of the Santa Fe Trail was affected by this trend and has been influenced by bitter debate over "old" and "new" western history. No general study of the trail has appeared, but its history came to be much more widely understood through specialized research and publications. The role of the military in Santa Fe Trail affairs, the presence of women, the lives of individual personalities, and major events in the evolution of the trail all received attention. The formation of the Santa Fe Trail Association in 1986, followed by the creation of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail by Congress in 1987, further stimulated interest. Both served as catalysts for trail studies.

Recent academic works have not supplanted Josiah Gregg or Robert L. Duffus. One that defies classification is Louise Barry's *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West 1540-1854*.<sup>33</sup> First produced as a series of articles in the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* in the 1960s, it was issued as a book by the Kansas State Historical Society in 1972. In her work Barry dauntingly attempted to record the passage through Kansas of every person important to Kansas history for more than three hundred years. She seemingly examined all the relevant documents. Trail scholars are deeply indebted to her. In this same context, Jack D. Rittenhouse's bibliography *The Santa Fe Trail* also must be mentioned.<sup>34</sup> Pub-

lished in 1971 it remains a central research tool and has an interpretive introductory essay, the title of which, "Trail of Commerce and Conquest," reveals Rittenhouse's basic approach.

Max Moorhead's *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail*, while ostensibly about the route from Santa Fe south, devotes equal time to the Santa Fe Trail.<sup>35</sup> Moorhead contends that the two trails should be seen as one and emphasizes the commercial and economic connections uniting them. In contrast, *Broadcloth and Britches; The Santa Fe Trade* by Seymour V. Connor and Jimmy M. Skaggs, has no central focus.<sup>36</sup> It gives an overview of trail days and activities, but unearths no new material, includes extraneous developments in Texas at the time, and lacks footnotes and an adequate bibliography. Unlike Moorhead, or Duffus and Gregg for that matter, it has never been reprinted.

During this period, it was Marc Simmons who became the pre-eminent Santa Fe Trail historian. Simmons has written numerous articles and books on various aspects of the trail. His most enduring contribution has been to generate interest among both "trail junkies," as they designate themselves, and scholars. There does not seem to be a personal account, newspaper article, or public document about the trail with which he is not acquainted.<sup>37</sup>

In his works Simmons does not take a particularly interpretive approach, but he views the trail as an economic highway that led in many ways inevitably to cultural change in and eventual American conquest of New Mexico. With reference to the beginnings of commercial trade by William Becknell in 1821-1822, he notes, "The successful flow of caravan

35. Max L. Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (1958; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

36. Seymour V. Connor and Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Broadcloth and Britches; The Santa Fe Trade* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977).

37. Besides his popular trail guide *Following the Santa Fe Trail*, Simmons's trail-related books include: *On the Santa Fe Trail* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail; An International Incident, 1843* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987); *Along the Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986, 1989), with photographs by Joan Myers.

33. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West 1540-1854* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972).

34. Jack D. Rittenhouse, *The Santa Fe Trail; A Historical Bibliography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

traffic, which direction [Becknell] had pointed, soon demonstrated the ease with which the United States might conquer the Southwest. His successors, without quite intending to do so, paved the way for the nation's expansion to the Pacific."<sup>38</sup>

"I did not set out to become an authority on the subject; it occurred almost by accident," Simmons has remarked. His early scholarly work emphasized the Spanish colonial period in the Southwest, although in 1971 he published a short essay in pamphlet form, *Opening the Santa Fe Trail*, marking the trail's 150th anniversary. In 1978 the National Geographic Society asked him to do a chapter on the Santa Fe Trail in its publication *Trails West*. One of the requirements for this assignment was that he travel the length of the trail.<sup>39</sup>

From that time on, Simmons was hooked. In 1984 he issued his traveler's guide to the trail, replete with historical notes, photos, detailed local maps, and helpful references to the people and places of the trail. Two years later he provided the text and Joan Myers the photographs for *Along the Santa Fe Trail*, a comprehensive consideration of the trail through time and space. That same year the University Press of Kansas brought out a collection of trail documents that he edited. In 1987 Texas Western Press awarded its C. L. Sonnichsen prize to Simmons's *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail; An International Incident, 1843* in which he investigated the death of Antonio José Chávez, a

## LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

*Memoirs of Marian Russell along the  
Santa Fé Trail  
As dictated to*

MRS. HAL RUSSELL



*Edited by Garnet M. Brayer  
Decorations by David T. Vernon*

THE BRANDING IRON PRESS  
Evanston, Illinois: 1954

prominent Hispanic trader. As one reviewer wrote, "Simmons does a fine job of developing the historical significance of Chávez's murder. This volume is well written and researched with an exhaustive survey of material in the National Archives."<sup>40</sup> It was also at this point, in 1986, that Simmons spearheaded the organization of the Santa Fe Trail Association and supported the passage of congressional legislation creating the Santa Fe National Historic Trail.

The one consistent theme in Simmons's work is his insistence that the trail to Santa Fe was "first and last a highway of commerce," that it truly carried the "commerce of the prairies."<sup>41</sup> For him, the frontier merchant is the ultimate trail hero. He cele-

brates the mercantile development of mid-nineteenth-century America when the outpouring of factories in the eastern states and Europe and the advance of steamboat navigation and then the railroads promoted trade with areas as remote as New Mexico. In appreciation of the merchants who took advantage of these changes, Simmons has written:

In hustling to turn a buck, the frontier trader learned the best techniques for moving bolts of cloth, hardware, cutlery, clothing, and a dozen other categories of goods from east to west over vast distances. He became adept at collaborating with others and in meeting competitors head on. He mastered the Spanish language. He perfected his negotiating abilities with Indians of the plains

38. Simmons, *Along the Santa Fe Trail*, 11.

39. *Ibid.*, xviii; Marc Simmons, *Opening the Santa Fe Trail* (Cerrillos, N.M.: Galisteo Press, 1971); Simmons, "The Santa Fe Trail . . . Highway of Commerce," in *Trails West*, ed. Donald J. Crump (1979; reprint, Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1983), 8-39.

40. Ron Briley, review of *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail; An International Incident, 1843*, by Marc Simmons, *Western Historical Quarterly* 19 (November 1988): 471.

41. Simmons, *Following the Santa Fe Trail*, 1.

and with customs officials at Santa Fe. In short the trader honed his skill at solving concrete problems. That skill, when combined with a ready willingness to face challenges, nourished the towering self-confidence and "consciousness of superior power" spoken of by George Brewerton.<sup>42</sup>

These sentiments concerning traders aside, Simmons's most enduring contribution remains his scholarship, his accurate reporting of routine daily trail activities punctuated with violent or noteworthy events and vibrant personalities. For example, he sets the record straight on two episodes in Kit Carson's life. Many historians and even a historic marker near Pawnee Rock, Kansas, record that Carson, when a greenhorn on his maiden trail trip, shot his own saddle mule while on guard duty one night. He mistook it for a lurking Indian. "The trouble is," Simmons asserts, "that same story in later years was told of Jim Bridger and other mountain men. . . . It was a stock yarn, ultimately fictitious, and related in fun."<sup>43</sup>

Henry Inman is brought down a notch in another tale involving Carson. The story Inman related is that one year, beyond the Great Bend of the Arkansas, a teamster's shotgun accidentally discharged, shattering his arm. Amputation was necessary. In Inman's account, it is a young Kit Carson who steps forward, whips the torn flesh to the bone with a sharp razor, saws through the bone, and cauterizes the stump with a searing hot king-bolt. But Simmons notes:

Actually, the little drama unfolded just as Inman describes it, except in one important particular. Richard Gentry, a prominent Missouri trader, was the surgeon and not Kit Carson. Writing in his declining years, the colonel took unlicensed liberty in altering his story, no doubt to heighten reader interest by bringing in Kit's celebrated name. This incident, as well as the mule tale, demonstrate the rigorous winnowing necessary to get at the truth about the trail and those who followed it.<sup>44</sup>

While Simmons was laying a sound scholarly foundation for trail studies, other historians turned their attentions to interpreting the trail in a more contemporary context. In the last decade the question of the importance of the Santa Fe Trail has taken on new meaning and urgency. Nationalistic and economic interpretations have been replaced by ethnic and sociological concerns.

Although most historians have been content to follow Susan Shelby Magoffin "down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico," recent scholars have begun to ask what happened to and in New Mexico once Susan, figuratively speaking, got there.<sup>45</sup> What about the people of the region? How did they change? What was the impact of American goods on their material culture? To what extent did they become involved in the trade and who were those who became involved? Conversely, how did things change, materially and politically, at the other end of the trail, in Missouri or even back in Washington, D.C.? And in a broader perspective can the Southwest, and by inclusion the Santa Fe Trail, be seen as a part of a European-centered world system in the nineteenth century? How does it compare with other regions similarly incorporated into this system; how is it different? What does this say about the trail itself?

David Sandoval, Thomas E. Chávez, and Susan Calafate Boyle are among recent scholars emphasizing the role of Hispanics in the Santa Fe trade. Not only do they seek to dispel the notion that the trail ran just in one direction, but also they want to flesh out the lives of these traders and their families. Many historians, beginning with Gregg, acknowledged that Mexicans engaged in trade with Missouri, but the very names of these men remained obscure. Pluralistic and multicultural perspectives of American history, increasingly prevalent and under attack in other fields, have now reached the Santa Fe Trail.

42. Simmons, *Along the Santa Fe Trail*, 37.

43. *Ibid.*, 50.

44. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

45. Susan Shelby Magoffin, of course, did not give the title *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico* to her diary. It was published as such in 1926; see footnote 9.

This new direction has been evident since the very first meeting of the Santa Fe Trail Association in Trinidad, Colorado, in 1986. In a presentation at that symposium, David Sandoval of the history faculty at the University of Southern Colorado asked, "Who Is Riding the Burro Now?" as he looked at "A Bibliographic Critique of Scholarship on the New Mexican Trader." He called on contemporary scholars to quit relying on biased nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources when investigating people and affairs in New Mexico after 1821. He maintained, "A legacy of misunderstanding based on ethnocentric perceptions followed by a legion of competing interpretations confuse the effort to find a clear sense of the New Mexican merchant."<sup>46</sup> He echoed this sentiment in a subsequent article, "Gnats, Goods, and Greasers: Mexican Merchants on the Santa Fe Trail." There he asserts that "New Mexican involvement in the Santa Fe Trade transformed New Mexican society from a Spanish imperial outpost to the gateway of international economic activity." He concludes that new historical theories of Mexican and American history point the way to revised understandings of the role of Hispanic merchants, but more inspired research needs to be done.<sup>47</sup>

DOWN THE SANTA FÉ  
TRAIL  
AND INTO MEXICO

*The Diary of  
Susan Shelby Magoffin  
1846-1847*

EDITED BY  
STELLA M. DRUMM  
*Librarian, Missouri Historical Society*



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Thomas E. Chávez's biography of Manuel Alvarez is one study that reflects such research. Chávez is director of the Museum of New Mexico's Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. From 1824 to 1856 Alvarez was involved in nearly every aspect of the Santa Fe trade and New Mexico public life, and Chávez faithfully illuminates his career. Thomas J. Steele, reviewing the biography for the *New Mexico Historical Review*, praises it, noting perceptively that it "is exactly the sort of book about New Mexico we need: a complete study, of one person, one place, one brief period, on one limited topic, decidedly deeper than it is broad."<sup>48</sup>

Most recently Susan Calafate Boyle has added to the literature of New Mexican participation in

the Santa Fe trade and the New Mexico perspective of the trade. Her study, *Commerciantes, Arrieros, y Peones: The Hispanos and the Santa Fe Trade*, was published by the National Park Service in 1994. Boyle touches several new aspects of Santa Fe Trail study by placing the trail in an almost global economic context, examining "how cultural and socioeconomic conditions contributed to the development and success of the . . . trade," and concentrating specifically on the activities of New Mexico merchants. While she traces some merchants in depth, notably Felipe Chávez, like Sandoval she calls for more study of major

46. David A. Sandoval, "Who Is Riding the Burro Now? A Bibliographic Critique of Scholarship on the New Mexican Trader," in *The Santa Fe Trail: New Perspectives* (1987; reprint, Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1992), 84.

47. David A. Sandoval, "Gnats, Goods, and Greasers: Mexican Merchants on the Santa Fe Trail," in *The Mexican Road: Trade, Travel, and Confrontation on the Santa Fe Trail*, ed. Mark L. Gardner (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1989), 22. Sandoval lists some studies of specific men or families, but finds they lack interpretive depth.

48. Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990); Thomas J. Steele, review of *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography*, by Thomas E. Chávez, *New Mexico Historical Review* 67 (January 1992): 77.

families and their business operations and techniques.<sup>49</sup>

David J. Weber, a historian, and Thomas D. Hall, who describes himself as a "historical sociologist," also have extended the theoretical framework of Santa Fe Trail studies in recent years. Weber, author of numerous works on the Southwest and New Mexico, raises questions about New Mexico's material culture and, by implication, cultural attitudes and allegiances as American goods poured down the trail, especially from 1821 to 1846. His context is broader than just the Santa Fe Trail, but he has asked about the impact of books, furniture, double-sash windows, manufactured cloth in abundance, ideas, and new technologies not only on the way people lived but on gender roles, kinship customs, and relations between rich and poor. His critics have not always agreed with his answers or even his premises, but he does suggest new vistas for Santa Fe Trail scholars.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas D. Hall considers some of these same questions in his study *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880*. Hall looks at the Southwest, including the Santa Fe Trail, as part of a worldwide phenomenon of the commercial, technological, cultural, and political annexation of peripheral regions and economies by nineteenth-century industrial or industrializing nations. He sees the Santa Fe trade as fostering class and ethnic stratification among New Mexicans, changes that affected political relations with the United States. But he de-emphasizes the effect of the trade on the outbreak of the Mexican War of 1846-1848, stressing that its origins are much more international in scope. "Mexico's northern frontier," he concludes, citing Weber's *The Mexican Fron-*

*tier*, "was, indeed, the periphery of the periphery." On a local scale, however, he admits ensuing population dislocations were profound.<sup>51</sup>

Besides the points raised by these contemporary scholars, other areas of Santa Fe Trail history are in need of basic research. Perhaps most fundamentally, no accounts of the impact of the trail on Native Americans or of how the Native American presence shaped the trail have been written. Charles L. Kenner's *The Comanchero Frontier: A History of New Mexican-Plains Indian Relations* addresses only one aspect of the subject and only one section of the trail.<sup>52</sup> Given current progress in Native American studies a comprehensive consideration incorporating the Native American perspective is feasible.

Women's lives and the Santa Fe Trail also require investigation. Much is known about some women who traveled the trail, primarily through their reminiscences or through the efforts of writers such as Marian Meyer, who published her findings on *Mary Donoho: New First Lady of the Santa Fe Trail* in 1991.<sup>53</sup> But what of women at either end of the trail? What did Mary Culver do after she heard of Romulus's death? How did the wives and families of traders manage on farms in Missouri or haciendas in New Mexico in the absence of their husbands and fathers?

Additionally, some old fields of study merit new cultivation. Despite the work of Alfred B. Thomas, John Francis McDermont, Noel M. Loomis, Abraham Nasatir, and others, the role of Spain on the Plains from 1598 to 1821 should be reinterpreted more as a comprehensive imperial thrust than as merely a prologue to America's westward advance. In much the same way it is also time to reevaluate the economic and social situation in Missouri and on the American

49. Susan Calafate Boyle, *Commerciantes, Arrieros, y Peones: The Hispanos and the Santa Fe Trade*, Southwest Cultural Resources Center Professional Papers no. 54 (N.p.: Division of History, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, National Park Service, 1994), ix.

50. See especially David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (1982; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 207-41.

51. Thomas D. Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 199.

52. Charles L. Kenner, *The Comanchero Frontier: A History of New Mexican-Plains Indian Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). Originally published in 1969 by the University of Oklahoma Press as *A History of New Mexican-Plains Indian Relations*.

53. Marian Meyer, *Mary Donoho: New First Lady of the Santa Fe Trail* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1991).

frontier with respect to the Santa Fe Trail up until at least the outbreak of the Civil War. We are farther from the studies of F.F. Stephens and his colleagues than they were from the final years of the Santa Fe Trail. And most importantly, a definitive general history of the trail, incorporating new voices and new sources, remains to be written.

The circumstances surrounding Romulus Culver's death suggest directions this new approach might take. Thirty-three years after Culver's murder in 1847 his son, W.L. Culver, sought to learn details of his father's death in Mora and burial at Las Vegas. He located F.P. Burke, who had formed "some slight acquaintance" with Romulus Culver in New Mexico that fatal winter of 1846-1847. He wrote to Burke, who replied:

What I will tell you now is the testimony of an American Lady that was in the same town [Mora] that night—and was also taken prisoner. I heard her give in the testimony myself.

After night they were surrounded by a band of Mexicans. They were going to fight the Mexicans at first but they told them if they would surrender they would not kill them but take them as prisoners. They not being very well armed concluded

## ADVENTURES IN THE SANTA FÉ TRADE

1844-1847

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THE ARTHUR H. CLARK COMPANY  
Glendale, California, U.S.A.  
1931

they would surrender. And as soon as they did so they were disrobed of their clothing and was brutally murdered principally I think with Mexican lancers [*sic*] and stones, their bodies bruised and covered with gashes. They then took them and threw them in a canyon or ravine and piled big rocks on them.

A U.S. Army contingent stationed at Las Vegas then marched on Mora, subdued or ran off the insurgents, freed the "American Lady," and recovered the bodies of the American traders. Burke recalled, "I was not in the fight at Mauro [*sic*] but saw [the bodies] after they were taken to Las Vegas and recognized Mr. Culver. Some were detailed to wash and dress the bodies, others to dig the grave. I was one that helped dig the grave."<sup>54</sup>

Who was the mysterious "American Lady" Burke mentions? How did the revolt at Mora materialize? Among the Mexican fighters, who was killed, captured, tried? As with so many incidents of Santa Fe Trail history, there are more questions than answers. The lure, fascination, romance, and significance of the trail lives on. KH

54. F.P. Burke to W.L. Culver, March 30, 1880, Culver Collection.