



2021: THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE OPENING OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

A SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE LENEXA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In 1821, William Becknell and his party set out from Franklin, Missouri, to establish an overland trade route with Mexico. On Nov. 16, 1821, they arrived in Santa Fe. Becknell's party established a connection that laid the path for the caravans and covered wagons that would beat the trail for more than 50 years.

From the time of its establishment all the way to the end of its use (1821–1880), the Santa Fe Trail ran its course right through Lenexa. Though “Santa Fe Trail Drive” follows a path similar to the original trail, the historic route ran about a mile to the southeast. The route is marked along various streets in Lenexa with brown metal signs maintained by the Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association.

The most significant Santa Fe Trail historic site located in Lenexa is Flat Rock Creek Park. It served as a campground and rendezvous location for travelers on the trail. Just a day or two out from the trail's starting point at Westport, the creek provided an area for overland travelers to get their bearings and organize caravans. In some cases, the campground witnessed the birth of new family members. In 1854, this was the case

for John and Mariah Davies as they camped at Flat Rock Creek. According to John's journal, it was the first night of their westward journey.

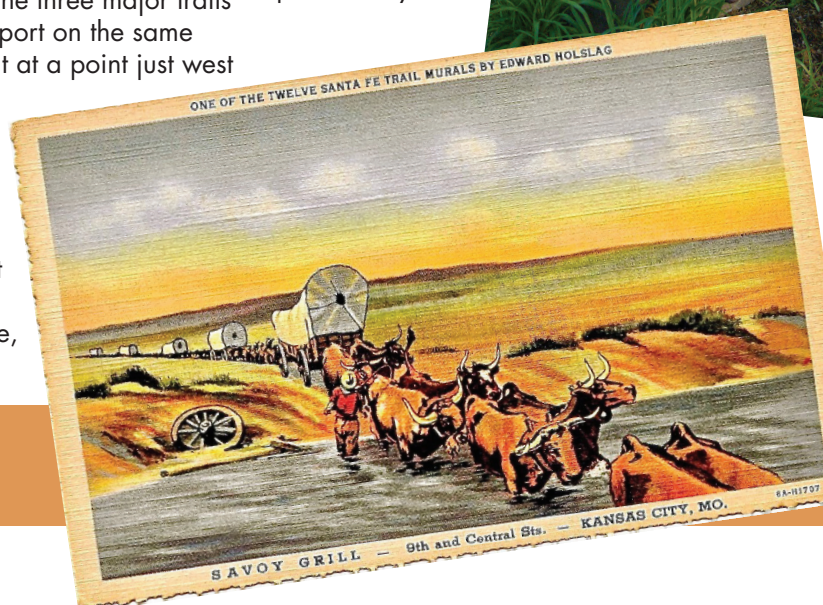
At the beginning of the 20th century, the Daughters of the American Revolution's Kansas Chapter began a campaign to create markers commemorating where the Santa Fe Trail passed through the state. One of these markers resides here in Lenexa in Bradshaw Park at the southwest corner of Santa Fe Trail Drive and Noland Road. Placed in the area in 1906, the marker has resided in several locations over the years.

Though the Santa Fe Trail was the first major overland trade route established, the portion of the trail that runs through Lenexa was the same road that fed into the Oregon and California trails. The three major trails all began in Westport on the same path and then split at a point just west of Gardner.

By the 1870s, the Santa Fe Trail faded out due to the emergence of the railroad. Right at the end of the overland trail's use,

Charles A. Bradshaw negotiated with agents from the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad (later Frisco Railroad) on a railroad right of way. Bradshaw agreed to cede his land on the condition that the railroad would maintain a depot on the land. This made sure trains would need to stop in Lenexa and not just pass through.

Bradshaw's foresight ensured that Lenexa would continue to be a stopping point on the flow of interstate commerce that started with its position on the Santa Fe Trail and continues to present day.



Learn more about the Santa Fe Trail, Oregon/California Trails and the founding of Lenexa with the Living Lenexa History video series at Lenexa.com/History.