

The Road to Prosperity



Santa Fe National Historic Trail
National Trails System

National Park Service
3 - Trails West, Inc.
Board of Parks and Recreation
Commissioners - Kansas City, MO

William Becknell and five companions left Franklin, Missouri in 1821, to “trade to the west.” They returned with bags of silver and stories of opportunities for trading in Santa Fe. Other American and Mexican traders followed, and the Santa Fe Trail was born.

By 1830, as steamboats moved farther up the Missouri River, Independence replaced Franklin as the eastern end of the trail. By the late 1830s, Westport was also a departure point for wagon trains.

Trade extended beyond Santa Fe to Los Angeles and Chihuahua, and even on to Mexico City. Businesses to St. Louis, New York, London, Paris, and other cities—and countries—provided goods. Cloth, hardware, kitchenware, notions, dry goods, and even canaries, were shipped from Missouri to New Mexico. Eastbound traders brought back wool, silver coins, and Mexican horses and mules.

Traders, bullwhackers, guides, and others moved merchandise-laden wagons along the trail. Store owners, bankers, hotel owners, insurance agents, lawyers, wagon makers, riverboat owners, and many more provided services and goods in support of trade. Thousands of California- and Oregon-bound emigrants further fueled the local economy.



*Independence Wayne City Landing
Near the Start of the Santa Fe Trail
in 1842, by John Stobart*