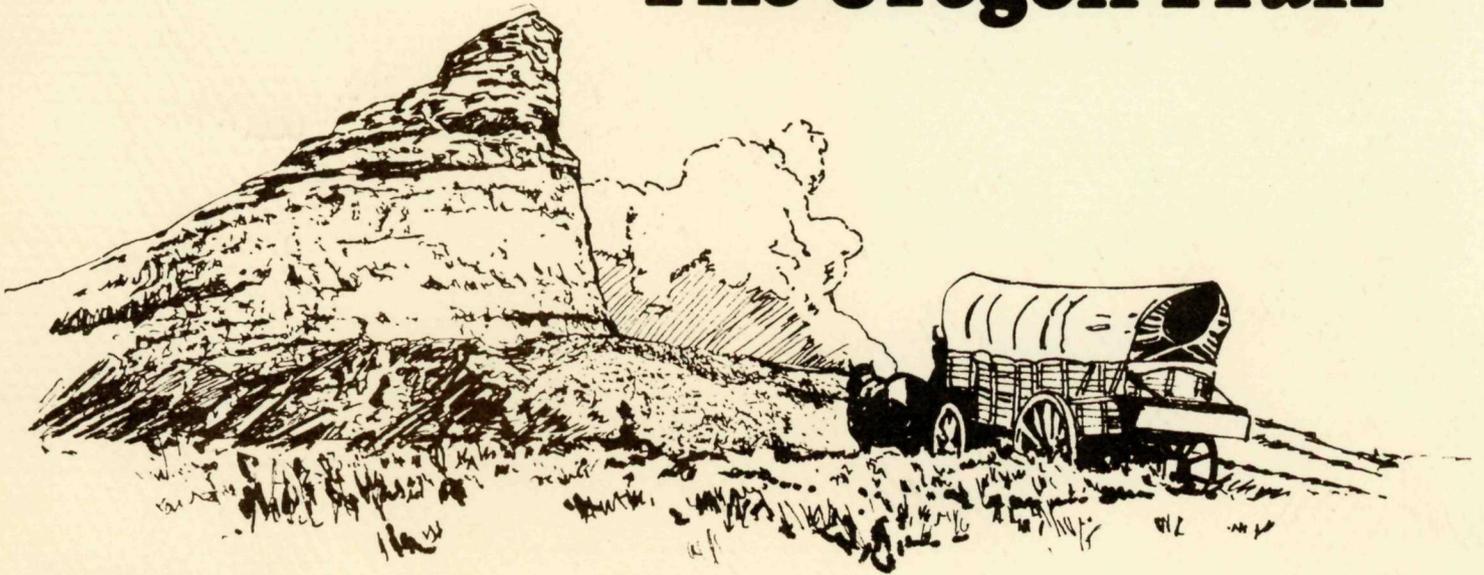


The Oregon Trail



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Eugene T. Mahoney, Director

THE OREGON TRAIL ROCK CREEK STATION, NEBRASKA TO FORT LARAMIE, WYOMING

You are about to embark on a journey across Nebraska crossing and re-crossing the "Oregon Trail". Only a few months ago we Americans have shared the excitement of watching men blast off from Florida in the "Columbia", circle the planet earth and safely land in California.

Perhaps because of these wonderful feats, it is difficult to comprehend that only a little more than one century ago California and Oregon were almost as remote to Americans as the moon and the planets are to most of us today.

Over this great artery and others journeyed restless fur traders, government explorers, and thousands of ordinary Americans, individuals and whole families in search of new homes, and dreamers whose destiny led to the founding of new communities -- all of them involved in a daring excursion that would change the course of American history.

You will visit some of the places of that era as your journey unfolds enroute to Fort Laramie -- others you will only hear of -- and hopefully it will encourage you to take time to read more detailed accounts of the courage it took to venture into a strange and forbidding land, drawn only by the promise of a better life. Pioneers on the Oregon Trail faced myriad obstacles -- the climate and terrain, the great distance, sometimes, hostile Indians, personal hardships and sickness, scarcity of food and water, to list only a few. Remember that most were amateurs in this wilderness, traversing the vast region beyond the Mississippi and that most of them did not merely pause and return, but stayed and populated the land, helping to build America.

*"Rock Creek Station" was the Nebraska Station No. 2 on the Pony Express Route. Nebraska Station No. 1 was southeast of here and known as "Rock House". The Pony Express Route entered Nebraska in the S.W. corner section (SW $\frac{1}{4}$ —Sec. 31—T.1N, R.5E of Gage county, crossing immediately northwestward into the S.E. corner section of Jefferson County. "Rock House Station", where the Oketo cut-off rejoined the main pony route, is in NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 15, T.1N, R.4E, about three miles northeast of Steele City. In (Root and Connelley), it is called Otoe Station.

"Rock Creek Station" later became notorious because of the infamous episode involving David McCanles and "Wild Bill" Hickok. Located in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 26, T.2N, R.3E, Jefferson County, and about six miles southeast of Fairbury. Other names for the station were Pawnee (Root and Connelley) and "Turkey Creek" -- (Burton). Nearby is Old Whiskey Run Ranch.

According to Dawson** in 1859 McCanley built a toll bridge over Rock Creek and a ranch on the east bank of the stream, and those structures became the pony station. This was built of hewn logs and are pictured in a daguerreotype photograph (Original in California State Library).

*Nebraska Pony Express Stations 3 and 4 were also located in Jefferson County. No. 3 -- "Virginia City" was located about 4 miles north of Fairbury in the NE corner, Sec. 27, T.3N, R.2E. Other names used were Graysons (Root and Connelley) and Whiskey Run (Allen). Lone Tree, in the middle of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 25, one mile south of Virginia City, crops up as an alternate site.

*Nebraska Station No. 4 -- "Big Sandy" was an important home station. The site lies within the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 15, T.3N, R.1E., about 3 miles east of Alexandria, in Jefferson County. The Nebraska City road joined the Oregon Trail, a short distance west of Big Sandy. According to Dawson, the owner and operator of the station was Dan Patterson who, in 1860, sold it to Asa and John Latham. Also associated with the site are the ranches of Ed Farrell and Daniel, the latter a post office.

The Jefferson County Historical Society members have worked diligently to make their whole county a living museum. Among important and interesting sites you may wish to visit at a later date when more time is available are Quivera Park, Smith Lime Kiln, Dripping Springs, Knobel Lime Kiln, and the George Winslow Grave Site.

The George Winslow Grave site is located nine miles northwest of Rock Creek Station and is one of the famous gravesites on the Oregon Trail. Although historians have estimated that 30,000 persons died on the trail between 1842 and 1860 (an average of 15 per mile), the actual number of marked and identified

gravesites remaining today is quite limited. Thus each positively identified and marked gravesite which has survived is respectfully honored. The George Winslow grave is one of these. Winslow died on June 8, 1849, and his grave was marked by others of his company. Winslow's sons returned to Nebraska in 1912 to erect a more permanent monument at the site, and the Winslow family still makes periodic pilgrimages to the grave.

**George Winslow wrote a letter to his wife from Independence, Mo., May 12, 1849. Mrs. George Winslow gave it to her grandson, Carlton Winslow, in whose name it was presented to the Nebraska State Historical Society, together with an excellent copy of a daguerreotype of George Winslow, taken in 1849. In the letter he writes:

"My dear Wife: We have no further anxiety about forage: millions of buffalo have existed for ages on these vast prairies, and their numbers have been diminished by reason of hunters, and it is absurd to think we will not have sufficient grass for our animals.

We have bought forty mules, which cost us \$50 apiece. I have been appointed teamster, and had the good luck to draw the best wagon. I never slept better in my life. I always find myself in the morning on my bed, rather-flat as a pancake. As the darn thing leaks just enough to land me on the terra firma by morning, it saves me the trouble of pressing out the wind; so who cares?

My money holds out very well. I have about \$15 on hand out of the \$25 which I had on leaving. We engaged some Mexicans to break the mules. To harness them they tied their fore-legs together and threw them down. The fellows then got on them and wrung their ears which is the tenderest part. By that time they were docile enough to take the harness. The animals in many respects resemble sheep; they are very timid, and when frightened will kick like thunder. They got six harnessed into a team, when one of the leaders, feeling a little mulish, jumped right straight over the other one's back.

I do not worry about myself -- then why do you for me? I do not discover in your letter any anxiety on your account; then let us for the future look on the bright side and indulge in no more useless anxiety. It effects nothing, and is almost universally the bugbear of the imagination.

The reports of the gold region here are as encouraging as they were in Massachusetts. Just imagine to yourself seeing me return with from \$10,000 to \$1,000,000. I do not wonder that General Taylor was opposed to writing on the field. I am now writing on a low box, and have to 'stoop to conquer'.

Your Loving Husband,
George Winslow. "

On May 16 this company of intrepid men, rash with the courage of youth, set their hearts and faces toward the west and began their long overland journey to California, and by night had crossed "The Line" and were in Indian country. Though slowed by frequent rains and mud they made their way up the Kansas River. With mud sometimes hub deep, and broken wagon-poles as a hinderance they reached the lower ford of the Kansas, just below the Rock Island Bridge at Topeka on May 26th, having accomplished about 50 miles in 10 days. The wagons were driven onto flat boats and poled across by 5 Indians. The road then became dry, and they made rapid progress until the 29th, when George Winslow was suddenly taken violently ill with cholera. Two others of the party also suffered symptoms of the disease. The company remained in camp three days and with the sick seemingly recovered, it was decided to push on. Winslow's brothers-in-law, David Staples and Bracket Lord, or his uncle, Jesse Winslow, were in attendance of George Winslow, giving him every care possible. His condition improved as they travelled and on June 6th they reached the place where the trail crosses the Nebraska-Kansas state line. Mr. Gould wrote: **

"The road over the high rolling prairie was hard and smooth as a plank floor. The prospect was beautiful. About a half-hour before sunset a terrific thunder shower arose, which baffles description, the lightning-flashes dazzling the eyes, and the thunder deafening the ears, and the rain falling in torrents. It was altogether the grandest scene I have ever witnessed. When the rain ceased to fall the sun had set and darkness closed in."

(Their location was just east of Steele City, Jefferson County.)

To this storm is attributed George Winslow's death. The next morning he appeared as well as could be expected, but by 3 o'clock his condition worsened, and the company encamped on Whiskey Run. He failed rapidly, and at 9 a.m. the 8th of June, 1849 he died. For George Winslow the trail ended here.

From Rock Creek Station the tour will head out for Fort Kearny. Westward from Jefferson County the trail crosses Thayer County, cuts northwest across Nuckolls County, slices across the southwest part of Clay County, enters Adams County just south of Highway 74 then swings northwest to a point just south of the Platte River before entering Kearney County.

While enroute to Fort Kearny numerous important sites will be by-passed to keep your tour on a reasonable schedule. Picture in your mind one of the exciting chapters along this segment of the Oregon Trail, the famed Pony Express, lasting just eighteen months, from April 3, 1860 to October 24, 1861.

Through the ages to come, the Pony Express will live in the minds of man. And with it should live the history of the three men, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell who founded, owned and operated it. The gallant riders who became immortal because of their perserverance, fidelity to purpose and personal sacrifice will forever be one of the great expressions of free enterprise in America.

*At a cost of nearly \$100,000 the express was put in operation between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. About 500 horses of superior stamina, including Kentucky breed and California Mustangs, were purchased for \$175 each, far in excess of the figure for ordinary horses of the time, that being from \$25 to \$50. More than 80 riders of the Express, "young, skinny fellows unmarried" were employed at beginning wages of \$50 per month plus board. About 190 Pony Express stations were established, complete with station keepers, stables, animals and equipment.

The earlier stations, which served stage coach passengers and provided spare teams, were located at approximately 25 mile intervals so that nearly 50 percent of the needed Pony Express stations were stage stations already in existence and were destined to see double duty. This left about 95 brand new stations to be established, since the limit of the horse going at top speed was in the neighborhood of 12 to 15 miles. As a general rule, every second Pony Express station was a previously established stage station. The new ones were thrown together hurriedly and stocked for the new service.

In the beginning, each rider rode three mounts for a total distance of around 45 miles to a "home station." Then he would carry the mail going in the opposite direction to the previous home station.

Mail was sent by the Pony Express originally for \$5 per half ounce, but later this amount dropped to \$2 and then to one dollar per half ounce. It was carried in four flaps on the corners of a leather mochila which was thrown over the pony rider's saddle at each relay station. The riders started from St. Joseph and Sacramento on a once-a-week basis, but later this was stepped up to two times a week.

The original goal for the approximate 2,000 miles was 10 day delivery. The fastest time on record from terminus to terminus was 7 days and seventeen hours recorded while delivering by special relay the inaugural address of President Lincoln to California citizens. In this event, the Pony Express is credited as being a very important factor in cementing the new state of California to the threatened union in 1860-61.

In 1912 Robert Harvey of the Nebraska State Historical Society and President of the Oregon Trail Commission made the first systematic effort to identify stage stations, Pony Express stations, and the general course of the Oregon-California Trail through Nebraska.

Over the years since the 1912 trail marking, interested individuals have shown a deep concern in properly identifying sites along this great road west. Among them was Joseph G. Masters, Omaha who with others made an effort to identify the Old Pony Stations.

In 1959 Merrill Mattes, then Regional Historian, Region Two, National Park Service, Omaha and Paul Henderson, a History Enthusiast and Overland Trail Authority from Bridgeport, Nebraska undertook a study to fulfill the lack of an adequate narrative of the Pony Express in Nebraska at the request of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Mattes and Henderson made a field trip over the trail between Fort Kearny and the Wyoming line in October 1959. All data then available was further analyzed and additional interviews conducted with persons having special knowledge of the subject. From information gleaned from many, including Messrs. Harry Williams and Paul Jenkins of Gothenburg; Mr. Warren Doolittle of North Platte; and John Oliver of Bridgeport, Nebraska, a scholarly text was completed in time for the Pony Express Centennial in 1960. This entire text by Mattes and Henderson was printed in Nebraska History, Volume 41, Number 2, June 1960 and is reprinted in a Booklet available at the State Historical Society.

*Nebraska Station No. 5 -- "Millersville" is located about 2 miles north of Hebron in Thayer County. It was operated by George B. Thompson and called "Thompson's Station". (Root and Connelley)

*Nebraska Station No. 6 - "Kiowa" is located about 10 miles northwest of Hebron, Thayer County in the S.E. corner of NE¼, Sec. 16, T.3N, R.4W, Jim Douglas was the station keeper. The old trail reached the Little Blue River about one mile east of this station and followed along its left bank to beyond Spring Ranch.

***Nebraska Station No. 7 — "Oak Grove":** The mail contract for 1861 indicated but does not name this station. This is the last Thayer County station, the site being about one and a quarter miles southeast of Oak, in the NW¼, Sec. 15, T.3N, R.5W. Al Holliday served as station keeper, while a "Majors and Waddell Store" was reported to adjoin. Little Blue Station, 4 miles northwest, was probably a later stage station. Among contemporary ranches in the vicinity were Roper's, Emory's and Eubanks. E. S. Comstock owned the Oak Grove Ranch.

The Narrows

Forty-two miles west of the George Winslow grave the emigrants approached a troublesome portion of the trail known as "The Narrows". Just northwest of the town of Oak (Nuckolls County—approximately 1 3/4 miles). Here the Oregon Trail was squeezed between the Little Blue River and a stretch of high, rugged bluffs which were impassable for wagons. The trail became so tight through portions of this area that there was room for only one wagon at a time to pass through this narrow strip between the bluffs and the river. Until the Indian Wars of 1864 the area was only a minor Oregon Trail landmark but in 1864 the NARROWS suddenly assumed a much more sinister meaning, for the geography presented the Indians with an ideal spot to ambush an emigrant train, a freight train or a stagecoach.

In August of 1864 the telegraph line into Fort Kearny crackled with messages of depredations up and down the Platte Valley. But here, there was no telegraph communication and that August, Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians of Nebraska seized the opportunity presented by the withdrawal of Federal troops from the west during the Civil War to make a concerted effort to drive the encroaching white settlers from their land. During August, 1864, nearly every settlement and way station between the Big Sandy and Julesburg (400 miles) was attacked. Settlements and isolated farms were abandoned or destroyed, and travel ceased on the Oregon Trail for several months. A local family name Eubanks was attacked in the vicinity of the Narrows.

**The Massacre on the Little Blue occurred on Sunday, August 7, 1864. The attack seemed general along the Little Blue, extending east within a mile of Kiowa Ranch (Thayer County). At this point one of the Eubank boys was killed and scalped. Two of the Eubank boys were killed and scalped nearby. It was stated that nine of these were killed. William Eubank and the others were killed, (also nearby) — all on August 7, 1864. The wife and child of Mr. Eubank junior were carried away in captivity. Mrs. Laura Roper was also carried away by the same band, and another little Eubank child was killed because it would not cease crying.

Some six months later the two women and child were brought in by the Indians to an Army Post near Denver, receiving the ransom which the Government offered for all white women and children captives.

Among those killed on this day was W. R. Kelly at the Oak Grove Ranch, and a Mr. Butler. A Mr. Ostrander received a wound that soon afterwards caused his death; and George Hunt, a County Commissioner of Saline County, received a bad wound in the leg.

The bodies of Mr. Kelly and Mr. Butler were placed in a small smokehouse by the surviving settlers, who had not time to bury them in their flight. These bodies were found by the Indians a day later, who set fire to the building and cremated them. They also burned the ranch buildings, which were built by Charles and Preston Butler in 1859. These buildings were two in number, 40 x 22, the main building being two stories in height, constructed of hewn logs with a clapboard roof.

The Emory stagecoach incident happened on the 9th of August, 1864. Emory was driving westward along the trail and about 5 or 6 miles east of the Narrows he spied ambuscaded Indians in a clump of willows just as he was about to descend a long, steep hill. Turning his horses around, he started on his race for life with his nine passengers. The Indians broke cover and chased him shooting their arrows into the stage, and would have been successful in capturing the stage and its occupants had not George Constable's freight train hove in sight. Perceiving the flying stagecoach, with the Indians in close pursuit, he immediately corraled the train, into which protection Emory drove the stagecoach, thus saving themselves from the Indians. Mr. Constable was killed a few days later, on the divide between Elk Creek and the Little Blue River, by the Indians, and his body was buried on the breaks of the river."

(For years, large quantities of crockery, metal and other objects remained as visible evidence of the wreckage of burned wagons — but through the years most have vanished).

(Note: A present day visitor will find viewing the site quite difficult due to a combination of restrictive terrain and lack of access. Alterations in the course of the river and the subsequent erosion along the

bank have cut into the Narrows and obliterated the Oregon Trail. Dense vegetation now lines the river bank and bluffs, and unlike the Oregon Trail days, there are now few vantage points from which a visitor may view the Narrows. The best place from which to see the Narrows is located at a point along the Oregon Trail, just off the graveled county road one-half mile west of the little town of Oak.)

***Pony Express - Nebraska Station No. 8 — "Liberty Farm"**

The origin of this most interesting name is obscure. The site of this home station is within the NE¼, NE¼, Sec. 32, T.5N, R.7W., just one-half mile northeast of Deweese, in Clay County, on the north bank of the Little Blue River. It is marked by Nebraska Monument No. 26. In 1859 Allen reported: "Jct. of Fort Riley Road 19 miles from Oak Grove, U.S. Mail Station No. 12, 1½ miles east of this place." This junction is marked by Nebraska Monument No. 26½. Successive station keepers in 1860-61 are named as James Lemmons and Charles Emory. In 1864 Indians burned out J. M. Comstock here. Liberty Farm was succeeded by the Pawnee Ranch.

***Pony Express - Nebraska Station No. 9 — "Spring Ranch":**

There was a Spring Ranch destroyed by Indians in 1864. Evidence is not conclusive that this was a Pony Express Station since it is not mentioned in the Mail Contract, but it is in the logical spot distance-wise between Liberty Farm and Thirty-Two Mile Station, a long 25 miles apart. It may coincide with the Lone Tree Stage Station (Root and Connelley). Nebraska Monument No. 29 places the ranch in the N½, SE¼ SE¼, Sec. 8, T. 5N., R. 8W in Clay County. The trail left the Little Blue River a few miles beyond this point.

Thirty-one wagon miles up the trail from the Narrows and located in Adams County about 6 miles south of Hastings on U.S. 281 and east one-half mile on a graveled county road is the important Simonton-Smith gravesite and ruts.

During the Indian raids of August, 1864, another wagon train was suddenly attacked by warriors of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. This was the Simonton-Smith train, eight wagons and eight men enroute from St. Joseph, Mo. to Denver with a consignment of hardware. On August 7th, the train was attacked and all eight men were killed. The bodies and smoking ruins of the wagons were discovered by two young couples out for a ride from Thirty-Two Mile Station, five miles to the west.

The riders rushed back to the station and gave the alarm. The dead were evidently buried several days later by troops from Fort Kearny, but as a local historian cautions, "so many have claimed credit for this humane act that it appears beyond any doubt they are the most thoroughly buried people in the vicinity."

Marked by a simple wooden post, the site is located on the edge of private farmland. Directly south of the grave marker, on the opposite side of a small farm pond, is a short 300-yard stretch of clearly defined Oregon Trail ruts. Though these ruts have eroded somewhat, they are well stabilized by ground cover. The ruts may be seen by taking a short walk south from the gravel county road along the edge of a field.

*"Thirty-Two Mile Station", is the site of another of the series of way-stations established during 1858 and 1859 along the Oregon Trail to serve the growing numbers of stagecoaches and freighter wagons which were joining the emigrant trains along the great roadway west. Named for its distance from Fort Kearny, Thirty-Two Mile Station never consisted of more than one long, low log-building. In 1860 it became a Pony Express Station (Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 10). In 1861 it was a "Home" station for the Overland Stage, where hot meals were served to travelers. The station operated by George A. Comstock was abandoned in August of 1864, its proprietors and visitors fleeing to Fort Kearny for safety, and the Indians subsequently burned the station to the ground. 32 Mile Station, site of Pony Express Station (Nebraska No. 10 — Sec. 6, T.6N, R.10W — Adams County) is now in the middle of a plowed field, just off a county road. A small marker at the side of the field commemorates the site. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places as an archeological site.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 11 — "Sand Hill" was located one and a half miles south of Kenesaw within the (SE corner of NE¼, Sec. 10, T.7N, R.12W), on the crest of the divide between the Little Blue and Platte River drainages. The name refers to the difficult sandy wagon road which called for double-teaming. This station also appears as "Summit Station" (Root and Connelley), "Water-Hole" in (Allen), and "Fairfield" in (Chapman's interview with William Campbell). In 1863 it was described by Root as "one of the most lonesome places in Nebraska". This station was another casualty of the Indian Wars of 1864.

Two miles north and two and a half miles west of Kenesaw, Nebraska is the Susan Hail grave site. Susan Hail was a young emigrant wife from Missouri who died suddenly on June 2, 1852, at the age of thirty-four. The speed of her demise led to the legend that she had drunk from a water source poisoned by Indians. A more probable cause is cholera or dysentery caused by drinking water polluted from being too near a campground or a buffalo wallow, for both those diseases can kill rapidly. Her grave was immediately marked, and the same legend holds that her grieving husband returned all the way back to St. Joseph, where a headstone was obtained and brought back to the gravesite in a handcart (some stories say a wheelbarrow). Ironically, Susan Hail's husband, who did somehow ensure that she would not be forgotten, is himself unknown.

In addition to the gravesite, this site is important for other reasons. Susan Hail is buried at the precise spot where the Oregon Trail broke over a small rise and came in view of the Platte River. The Nebraska City-Fort Kearny road passed north of this site about a mile and a half, joining the main Oregon Trail a little more than six miles west. There were several alternate roads in this vicinity. This was one of the great moments in the experience of the emigrants, for the first leg of the journey was now almost complete. Arrival at the Platte River meant that they were within striking distance of Fort Kearny, the first sign of civilization in this remote country. The Platte River was broad and flat, with little or no timber, quite unlike its appearance today. Perhaps because the broad flat treeless valley during spring flood once resembled a sandy seashore, early travelers called this spot "The Coast of Nebraska". (Also it is noted some writers of the day wrote about the white canvas topped wagons moving through the deep prairie grass resembling "Ships at Sea" as they moved across miles of waving grasses).

Both northwest and southeast of the Susan Hail grave (Sections 18 and 19) are fairly extensive grassed over Oregon Trail traces, made by the passage of thousands of animals and wagons as they descended the low sandy hill towards the river.

Note: It has been recommended as early as 1975 by Historian Merrill Mattes and as recently as a March 1981 comprehensive report on historic sites and trail segment status by the National Park Service, United States Department of Interior, that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should seek adequate funding to purchase approximately thirty acres of pasture land. This site which would be an unmanned park administered from Fort Kearny State Historical Park, fifteen miles to the west would be called "Coast of Nebraska" as proposed by Merrill Mattes and the National Park Service.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 12 "Kearney Station"

This was a home station, kept by M. H. Hook, and marked the end of jurisdiction of E. A. Lewis, St. Joseph Fort Kearny Division Superintendent. The site is found within the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 18, T.8N, R.13W., about one and one-half miles northeast of present Lowell, Kearney County. Burton refers to "Kearney Station, in the Valley of LaGrande Platte," seven miles from the Fort of that name. This station had numerous other identities, among them Dogtown or Valley City (Root and Connelley); Junction City (Andreas***); and Hinshaw's Ranch (Harvey Map of 1862).

The townsite of Lowell, mentioned by Mattes and Henderson* is a famous Kearney County frontier town that by today has dwindled to only a few houses. The Lowell school one of the last governmental institutions remaining in this old county-seat, closed its doors in the 1960's and by now has vanished from the scene. At its peak Lowell was a bustling community and for its short span was one of the most important towns in central Nebraska. A United States Land Office was located there and until its removal to Bloomington in 1874, it among other things, drew large crowds. It was (according to Andreas***) an important shipping point for cattle from the plains of the southwest. Its streets were, for a few years at least, continually thronged by all of the frontier types, and many times the town was the scene of disturbances from the half drunken cowboys, roughs and gamblers who at times frequented the four saloons in operation. A local group has recently marked a site known as "Boot Hill" near Lowell.

Fort Kearny records disclose that near this vicinity the U.S. Army kept a herd of subsistence beef cattle corraled during the 1860's and these cattle became a prime temptation to roving Indians. A few miles west on the trail, emigrants would have their first glimpse of the flag flying above Fort Kearny's parade ground, well before the buildings came into view. Six years after Fort Kearny was terminated another community, Newark, came into existence upon the great trail. Only a few remnants of the town remain. Even the little church has been moved away to a cabin site just northwest of Fort Kearny Park near the Platte River. Newark, first occupied in 1877, once boasted a grocery, dry goods store, furniture store, one hardware, an implement dealer, a grain elevator, a lumber yard, a hotel, livery barn, schoolhouse, two coal yards and a large railroad depot as it was situated on the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad which crossed the Platte River a little more than a mile east of the Fort where it made a junction with the Union Pacific Railroad at the site of present day Kearney, Nebraska in Buffalo County. It is noted

nearly 200 carloads of wheat were shipped from Newark in 1881 (Andreas***). According to (Andreas***) a newspaper, the Newark Herald, was printed here from November 1880 to April 1882 by R. M. Hardman. In 1882 he moved the paper to Minden where when combined with the existing "Bee" it became the Kearney County Gazette.

Fort Kearny was truly "The Gateway to the Great Plains". It was here at the Fort where the throngs of emigrants from the jumping off places of the Kansas City areas, St. Joseph, Omaha-Council Bluffs and later Nebraska City came together to continue the great migration to South Pass and beyond. It was here also, that those emigrant throngs would start to visualize the mythical elephant. Although mammoths and mastodons did roam this land as recently as during the Ice Age of 20,000 years ago, they were speaking of one particular elephant, "The Elephant", an imaginary beast of great and fearsome dimensions which according to some, was but another name for going to California. The popular symbol of the great adventure was more than that, it was an inner feeling that having taken the plunge with courageous hearts, they were making a brave assault on the prairies, mountains and deserts. Merrill Mattes wrote in his book "The Great Platte River Road": "Thus, on his first day out of St. Joe in 1852, John Clarke quipped, 'All hands early up anxious to see the path that leads to the Elephant.' In 1849 James D. Lyon, ten miles east of Ft. Laramie, was defiant: "We are told that the Elephant is in waiting, ready to receive us. . . if he shows fight or attempts to stop us on our progress to the golden land, we shall attack him with sword and spear. . ."

No one has quite determined the origin of this imaginary beast, which was sometimes more vivid in their minds than the real rattler or buffalo herds. The elephant seldom appeared except when danger lurked, and even then he was only an occasional apparition. A Martha Morgan wrote, "I think I saw the tracks of the Big Elephant."

Fort Kearny was established by the U.S. Army in 1848 to protect the growing traffic along the Oregon Trail from the threat of Indian attacks, and was ideally situated to do the job. Today, it is a State Historical Park, administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Since the visitor will be enlightened at the park, additional space will not be taken on the Fort Kearny story.

***Pony Express Nebraska Station No. 13 — "Fort Kearny":** Although claims are made to this effect, it is improbable that Fort Kearny (spelled with two "e's" in the mail contract) itself had a Pony Express Station. True, the Holladay Stage Line from St. Joe and the Western Stage Line from Omaha (via the north side of the Platte and Carson's Crossing) made this Fort itself a major objective, and in 1859 Holladay had a log structure "40 rods west of the Fort." Pony riders conceivably paused here to pick up or deliver occasional military or civilian mail, perhaps at the sod post office. However, it is more likely that the Pony Station and stable itself was at Doby Town, two miles west of the Fort and just off the reservation. (Note: For these reasons of conflicting documents it is difficult to pin-point the exact location. In a government report by Sterrit M. Curran (later Captain Curran at Fort Kearny) there is no listing at Dobytown (Kearny City) on June 28th, 1860 of a Pony Express or Stage Station, however Curran did place a William F. Hays, as an agent for Russell, Majors and Waddell at someplace in the vicinity just one day prior to his visit to Hook's Station. He also listed a Peter Brady, a stage driver the same day he recorded Agent Hays and these were quite obviously not located with Dobytown).

The first Pony Express Station west of Fort Kearny was "Platts" Station No. 14. Platt's Station was approximately 5 miles southeast of Odessa and is named so in the mail contract. It is spelled (Platte by Root and Connelley). The "Seventeen Mile Station" (Burton), where his stage halted to change mules, was probably Platt's Station.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 15 — "Garden":**

Garden is probably the Craig's (of Root and Connelley), and may also be the Biddleman Ranch appearing on the Harvey Map of the Nebraska Trail, in 1862. It could also be the one known as "Shakespear", indicated by Dr. Clark in 1860. Its exact location is not known but apparently was located about six miles southwest of Elm Creek in Phelps County.

***Well known "Plum Creek"** was Pony Station No. 16 and everyone agrees on the name and the place, the SW corner of Sec. 8, T.8N, R.20W, about 10 miles southeast of Lexington. Nearby is a small cemetery where there are buried fourteen victims of an Indian attack on June 16, 1865. Other accounts and well documented by military records of Fort Kearny and telegraph copies put the date as August 7th, 1864 with eleven men as victims. Plum Creek was first noted as a good campsite and later became an Overland

Stage Station and Pony Express Station, which was located near the creek. After the Sioux Indian attack on August 7, 1864 a small garrison of troops were stationed at Plum Creek. On the Oregon Trail in these troubled days numerous small garrisons were established by troops sent from Fort Kearny to build new ones or fortify old road ranches as far east as Columbus and two on the trail between Rock Creek Station and the Platte River and west of Fort Kearny, at intervals all the way to Julesburg. On November 25, 1864, another stagecoach was attacked near Plum Creek, with two passengers being wounded. In August of 1867, another wagon train was attacked at Plum Creek. Sometime shortly thereafter, the station was attacked, burned and abandoned.

The small cemetery at Plum Creek is owned by Phelps County and for years a small legend panel and necessary cleaning maintenance has been provided by the staff from Fort Kearny State Historical Park. In addition to the 1864 victims, the cemetery is the burial site of Sarepta Fly, a twenty-four year old emigrant wife and mother who died in 1865. There is some question, apparently, if the Iowa men killed near Plum Creek on August 7, 1864, are even buried at the little cemetery. Some sources say these men were interred about one and a half miles east of this place.

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 17 — “Willow Island” is offered in (Allen) as a variant “Willow Bend”. 59 (Burton) refers to it as a “drinking shop at Willow Island Ranch.” The site is about six miles southeast of Cozad, Dawson County, on the N½, Sec. 8, T.9N, R.22W, near the south end of the Platte River bridge southeast of Darr. Some sources place Pat Mullaly’s ranch and station at this site. R.C. Freeman, an employee of Mullaly, followed Mullaly as owner and operator of the ranch. The log cabin on the site was purchased by Dawson County American Legion Post No. 77 and moved to the park in Cozad for the use of Boy Scouts. It was dedicated in September 1938 and marked with a plaque relating its history as a ranche on the Oregon Trail and as a Pony Express Station.

*Thirty-two miles west from Plum Creek is “Midway Station” Nebraska Station No. 18. Midway, an important home station located in the NW¼, Sec. 35, T.11N, R.25W, three miles south of Gothenburg, on private property known as the 96 ranch, whose owners have demonstrated a personal commitment to preserving it through the years. The remarkable cabin, built of heavy adzed timbers has been protected by construction of a concrete floor underneath and a shingle roof above, which protects the older cedar and sod roof from deterioration. Midway is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is believed to be the only extant Pony Express Station in the State of Nebraska still standing on its original location. It is maintained by the Nebraska State Historical Society, under a cooperative agreement with the owners of the 96 ranch. The station is not manned, and the average of six visitors per week who show up are escorted by the wife of the ranch’s foreman, who lives next to the station. Access is by a private ranch road, which is clearly marked “No Trespassing”. The general area of the station is located directly in the center of the working headquarters of a large ranch operation, and is surrounded by barns, silos, machine shops, storage sheds and a feed yard. It does not adapt well as a place to visit due to its location as mentioned, but as the area now exists, very few tourists avail themselves of it. It is regrettable that this very important station does not have better access. Another Pony Express Station stands four miles north of Midway, in the Gothenburg City Park. This is the structure that is heavily advertised as a tourist attraction along Interstate 80 and attracts a flow of 40,000 visitors annually. The Midway Station on the 96 ranch south of Gothenburg bears the circular bronze pony express plaque of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association plus another that states that on June 8, 1860, pony rider Jim Moore rode from Midway to Julesburg, Colorado, and back in record time, in an emergency situation caused by Indian troubles. David Trout was station keeper in 1863. Midway received its name, (Root and Connelley), because it was equidistant on the stage line from Atchison to Denver. It was also referred to as “Heavy Timber” (Allen), Smith’s East Ranch (Harvey Map of Nebraska — 1862) and as Pat Mullaly’s home station.

*The next pony station west on the Oregon Trail was “Gilmans” - Nebraska Station — 19. This station is indicated only by (Root and Connelley) and the U.S. Mail Contract. It is surmised to be near the SW corner of Sec. 21 T.12N, R.26W, in Lincoln County.

(Note: it is possible Mattes and Henderson meant Sec. 31, T.12N, R.26W, as there is no Section 21 within miles of the trail at this point, one being north of the river the other in the hills to the south). For more details — see “Pump on the Prairie” by Musetta Gilman — 1975 — she locates Gilmans Ranch at Sec. 4, T.11N, R.26W.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 20 — “Machettes”: This is a mystery station, the site being on the Williams’ Upper 96 Ranch, Lincoln County, four miles east of Fort McPherson. It is not mentioned

in Burton, Allen, Root and Connelley or other published authorities, nor can "Machette" be identified in any other available contemporary sources. However, say Mattes and Henderson, there is the weight of local tradition, reflected in this wording on a monument in the SW corner, SE¼, Sec. 19, T.12N, R.27W: "Erected by the people of Lincoln County, 1931, to commemorate the Pony Express riders. The log blacksmith shop nearby is the original building used for shoeing horses." Mr. Williams told Mattes and Henderson that the indicated "Blacksmith Shop" stood there as of their writing in 1960. Also it was reported to them that another larger two-story squared log building which used to stand there, was donated by Mrs. C. A. Williams and moved in 1931 by the American Legion to the city park in Gothenburg, on U.S. 30, several miles east and on the north side of the Platte River, where it now is a prime tourist attraction (1960). It was rebuilt as a one-story structure. The affixed tablet indicates that the original building was built in 1854 as a trading post and ranch house (by Machette?). In 1860-1861 (the tablet explains) it was used as a pony express station; from 1862-1932" as an overland station; dwelling, bunk house and storage house on the Upper 96 ranch."

Mattes and Henderson added -- that along with the lack of contemporary records of Machette's, there is the fact that the pony stations averaged fifteen miles apart, and it is just sixteen miles between Gilman's station, and Cottonwood Springs or McDonald's station (see below), the authenticity of both of which is unimpeachable. What then was "Machette's" doing in between? The structure now in Gothenburg seems to have much in common with the doubtlessly authentic Midway Station. If, then, of the same vintage, could the answer lie in supposing that "Machette's" was in existence in 1860-61 as a ranch but not actually as a Pony Express Station? Or, could the mysterious "Machette" actually be a corruption of "McDonald", and could the upper 96-Gothenburg structure actually be the original McDonald's station, transplanted sometime later after the 1860's to the upper 96?

(Note: To alleviate a portion of the mystery, it may be said that there was indeed a Machette documented as definitely being, at some point, in this vicinity of Lincoln County in 1860. One day before Government employee -- Sterrit M. Curran wrote about the Gilmans just east of here a few miles, Curran visited and wrote about Samuel Machette, a trader from Missouri and his young wife Susan Machette, 17 years old, on June 15th 1860. Samuel Machette as a trader must have had a substantial supply of all kinds of goods as he valued them at \$5,000. Also living with the Machettes were Lucy Riley, a cook, from Ireland and his clerk, a William H. Sexton from his native state of Missouri). See details -- mentioned in "Pump on the Prairie" -- Gilman -- 1975 --

***Nebraska Station No. 21 -- "Cottonwood Springs"** -- This place, or "McDonald's Ranch", was another station on the pony run and, like many others discussed here, doubled also as an Overland Stage Station, being midway between Fort Kearny and Julesburg. The site, marked by a monument, is on the east side of Cottonwood Creek in the NE¼, Sec. 15, T.12N, R.28W, on a graveled road less than a half-mile east of the latter (1864) Fort Cottonwood, which became Fort McPherson, and one mile southeast of the present Fort McPherson National cemetery. In 1860 Burton refers here to "The Foul Tenement" where he threw himself upon a mattress to sleep; but in 1863 Root says it was a "Home Station" and "nearly everything about the premises appeared homelike." In 1864 Capt. Eugene F. Ware reports:

Cottonwood Springs, when we arrived there, was one of the important points on the road. McDonald had a year or so before our arrival, built, as stated, a cedar-log structure store-building. The main building was about twenty feet front and forty feet deep, and was two stories high. A wing 50 feet extended to the west. The latter was, at the eaves, about eight feet high and fifteen feet deep in the clear. Around it in the rear was a large and defensible corral, which extended to the arroyo coming out of the canyon. It had been a good trading point with the Indians, and there was stage station there, and a blacksmith shop kept by a man named Hindman. In the stage station was a telegraph office. There was also on the other side of the road a place where canned goods and liquors were sold, kept by a man named Boyer, who had lost a leg, and whom the Indians called "Hook-sah", which meant "Cut-Leg". MacDonald had dug, in front of his store, and cribbed up, an inexhaustible well, which was said to be forty-six feet deep; it was rigged with pulley, chain, and heavy oaken buckets. MacDonald and those at the place had formerly had a good trade with the Indians, but now it was all ended, and they were in danger.

*Here is a two-story log building, with appendages. (A photo of this appears on page 64 of Ware.) The upper-96 Ranch was a two-story log building. Again, it is suggested that these might be one and the

same building, perhaps torn down and re-assembled at the latter point. It is not certain that the structure Ware describes was the 1861 pony express station, but it is a reasonable hypothesis. Pending further revelations Also -- Refer to "Pump on the Prairie -- Gilman -- 1975.

Note: (Cottonwood Springs -- Fort McPherson is a fascinating historical region, but sadly lacks adequate interpretation of this very important section of Lincoln County and how it relates to Nebraska history).

Fort McPherson was established in September 1863, when the U.S. Army foresaw the need for an intermediate military post between Forts Kearny and Laramie on the Oregon Trail. The purpose of the new fort was to protect the emigrants, stagecoaches, freighters, and railroad workers who were travelling the Great Platte River Road in ever-increasing numbers from the potential attacks of the Plains Indians who were growing more and more restive as the great funnel of western migration threatened their lands and way of life. The army's timing could not have been better, for the Indian uprising of 1864 followed closely upon the establishment of the fort. Fort McPherson became a camping, resting and refitting spot along the Oregon Trail as well as providing sanctuary during the Indian Wars.

Originally named Cantonment McKean, the post was subsequently known as Fort Cottonwood before being renamed Fort McPherson in 1866 in honor of the Civil War General James B. McPherson. The fort was abandoned in 1880, but not before 107 of its acres were rededicated in 1873 as the Fort McPherson National Cemetery. Intended as a burial ground for Civil War Veterans, the cemetery also holds the remains of veterans from the Indian Wars (including reburials from abandoned posts such as Forts Robinson and Kearny, Nebraska and Fort Laramie, Wyoming), the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. One monument in the cemetery marks the burial site of twenty-eight soldiers from the Grattan "Massacre" of 1854, whose remains were moved from Fort Laramie in 1891.

Between Cottonwood -- (Fort McPherson area) and O'Fallons Bluff, 26 miles west were numerous other important sites (see "Pump on the Prairie -- Gilman -- 1975).

*Nebraska Pony Express Station -- No. 22 -- "Cold Springs" -- This site, named by (Root and Connelley), would be in the NW corner, Sec. 20, T.13N, R.30W, vicinity of Box Elder Creek, Lincoln County, fifteen miles west of Cottonwood Springs, and two miles south and one mile west of present North Platte. It is easy to confuse this station with Jack Morrow's Ranch or "Junction House" (so named by proximity to the forks of the Platte), which was 12 miles from Cottonwood. (Root and Connelley clarify this point).

Masters has a Box Elder station "three miles west of Cottonwood Springs", named by Sheldon Davis. This short distance would not admit a Pony Express Station so close. Suggest read Gilman 1975 -- Pump on the Prairie.

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 23 -- "Fremont Springs": Although just when the explorer Fremont visited this place is another good mystery, the name was consistently used except by an obscure traveler of 1860 named Dr. Clark, who speaks of "Buffalo Ranch." This is spoken of as a home station, which seems reasonable in view of the fifty mile distance from Midway. This station was unlike its neighbors.

According to (Burton) "The building is of a style peculiar to the south, especially Florida, two huts connected by a roof-work of thatched timber, which acts as the best and coolest of Verandahs." The site was located about 1 1/2 miles south of Hershey.

*Nebraska Station No. 24 -- "Danseys": There was an early Indian Agent, Benjamin O'Fallon, for whom the Platte River Bluffs here were inexplicably named. The mail contract refers to "Dansey's" presumably the Pony Express proprietor. (Burton) speaks of "Halfway House" and (Root and Connelley) (Root) describes the section embracing O'Fallons bluffs as "undoubtedly the best place between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains for skulking indians to hide."

O'Fallons bluffs was a vexing piece of terrain which had to be negotiated, and thus became an important Oregon trail landmark. Here, a series of high, sandy bluffs crowded down to the south bank of the South Platte River, forcing the emigrants to make a wearisome three-mile detour up and over the rolling sandy hills. Compared to the relatively easy going which they had experienced so far along the broad valley of the Platte, O'Fallons bluff represented a time-consuming delay in their journey. About 1000 feet of well preserved ruts are visible and marked by excellent interpretive devices and legend signs on the east bound rest area, just off I-80, on the Nebraska Dept. of Roads site.

*Pony Express Station -- Nebraska No. 25 "Alkali Lake" -- Dr. Clark in 1860 calls this Pikes Peak Station. The station is indicated but is given no name in the Mail Contract. Otherwise the name "Alkali Lake"

is unanimous. The site like others in this area, has not been definitely located. It was located about two miles southwest of Paxton, Keith County.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 26 — "Gill's":** This was the point of the Texas Trail crossing of the 1870's. In 1860 it was called Gill's in the Mail Contract, but Sand Hill by Root and Connelley. Nobody else bothers to mention it; it was just another obscure relay station. It was about one and one half-miles south of Ogallala, Keith County.

***Nebraska Pony Station No. 27 — "Diamond Springs":** Nebraska monument No. 40, located .9 miles west of Brule, Keith County, on the side of U.S. 30, reads: "Diamond Springs .8 miles southwest." This was probably a home station, though it is uncomfortably close to Julesburg, which was also a home station. Two miles west of this place was the Beauvais Ranch, with buildings of hewn logs, which enjoyed considerable fame through the 1850's and 1860's. With such an establishment handy, why shouldn't it serve as a station? This question is not completely answered.

Beauvais is at one of the famous South Platte River Fords, variously identified as Upper Crossing, Ash Hollow Crossing, Fort Laramie Crossing and Old California Crossing. The emigrant crossers here went across Old California Crossing and over the plateau to reach Ash Hollow on the North Platte River, but the Pony Express did not follow this route.

East of North Platte, Nebraska the Platte River had split into its two major forks, with the South Platte running generally west and south towards Denver and the North Platte towards Fort Laramie and Casper, Wyoming. Sooner or later, the emigrants were forced to cross the South Platte in order to reach and follow the North Platte River towards South Pass, the gateway over the Rockies. Although several crossing sites were used over the years, the most important one was at California crossing, fifty three miles west of O'Fallons Bluff, for that crossing led directly to Ash Hollow, the best approach to the North Platte River. The wide sandy South Platte always presented a formidable obstacle to emigrants and freighters. The crossings were accomplished by the "cold turkey" method, with men, teams and wagons plunging into the river and swimming, floating or struggling across the waters and quicksands as best they could. Inevitably, there were many wrecks, drownings, and deaths from exposure because in May and early June when the emigrants reached the river, the South Platte was swollen from melting mountain snows.

On the north bank of the South Platte River, the emigrants then faced another obstacle, called California Hill. This necessitated a climb of 240 feet in elevation in just over a mile and a half, in order to reach the plateau between the North and South Platte rivers. This was the first major grade faced by travellers, and it was given perhaps undue notice because they had yet to see any really steep terrain such as they would encounter farther west.

Oregon trail ruts leading up California Hill are plainly visible today, in some places more prominently so than others. Neither the ruts nor the crossing site are interpreted or marked except for the small monument along U.S. 30.

The Pony Express continued on up the south side of the south Platte River and ***Colorado Pony Station No. 1 — "Frontz"** station is just two miles east of present Julesburg, in Sedgwick County, Colorado. Variants are "South Platte Station" (Root and Connelley) and "Butte Station."

***Colorado Pony Express Station No. 2 "Julesburg"** — this site is not to be confused with various other later Julesburg's, is the original Old Julesburg. It is well marked, and is one and one half miles southeast of Ovid, In Sedgwick County, Colorado. The place was named for Jules Reni, who had the inevitable trading post. (Root and Burton) both offer rather vivid descriptions of the unsavory establishment. Old Julesburg was a very busy place, primarily because it was at the junction of the main roads up the South and North Platte rivers, respectively called the Pikes Peak or Denver road, and the California Road or Overland Trail. The stages and Pony Express used the latter route, here fording the south Platte (wide and rough during spring runoff) to a point just above Lodgepole Creek, then following that stream westward to a point three miles east of present Sidney, then crossing Lodgepole and heading north. This route was surveyed by Lieutenant Bryan of the topographical engineers in 1858 and was called "Jules Stretch." Old Julesburg was sacked by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in February 1865. The site of Fort Rankin (later called Fort Sedgwick), a mile or so west of Old Julesburg, should be noted. From here the Pony Express re-enters Nebraska. ***Nebraska Station No. 28 — "Nine Mile Station":** This site is about two miles southeast of Chappell, in Deuel County. The site is in Sec. 26 T.13N., R.45W.

***Nebraska Station No. 29 — Pony Express Station — "Pole Creek No. 2":** Oddly enough, this is named in the U.S. mail contract, but yet no traveler mentions it. Its location is vague, being in the vicinity of

Lodgepole, roughly half way on the twenty four mile stretch between nine mile and Pole Creek No. 3. It is possible that it may be identical with the site of a ranch occupied here by E. Farrell in 1865.

***Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 30 "Pole Creek No. 3":** — This site in NW corner, NE¼, Sec. 35, T.14N, R.49W. was on the north side of Lodgepole Creek on the old St. George Cattle Ranch, about three and one-half miles east of Sidney, Nebraska. Old maps identify this as the Stage ranch of Roulette and Pringle, with well fortified buildings part dug out, part sod and part logs. The Ford must have been at or near this point. This place had importance as the junction of the Old California Road and Stage route heading for the North Platte, and a new stage route heading due west for Bridger Pass and Salt Lake City. (This is the "Lodgepole Route" which later became the Union Pacific Route to Cheyenne). (Burton's) description of "Lodgepole Station", although serving him as a Stage station, may be taken as a rare contemporary description of a Nebraska Pony Express Station:

"The Hovel fronting the creek was as built like an Irish shanty, or a Beloch Hut, against a hill side, to save one wall, and it presented a fresh phase of squalor and wretchedness. The mud walls were partly papered with "Harpers Magazine", "Frank Lieslie" and "New York Illustrated News"; the ceiling was a fine festoon —work of soot, and the floor was much like the ground outside, only not nearly so clean. In a corner stood the usual "bunk", a mass of mingled rags and buffalo robes; the centre of the room was occupied by a rickety table, and boxes, turned-up on their long sides, acted as chairs. The unescapable stove was there, filling the interior with the aroma of meat. As usual, the materials for ablution, a "dipper" or cup, a dingy tin skillet of scanty size, a bit of coarse gritty soap; and a public towel, like a rag of gunny bag, were deposited upon a rickety settle outside. There being no "lady" at the station on Lodge-Pole Creek, milk was unprocurable. Here, however, began a course of antelope venison, which soon told upon us with damaging effect. (Burton was forever complaining about the terrible food at these stage stations).

***Nebraska Pony Station (un-named) No. 31** - This station does not appear on official records, and the existence of something here is mentioned only by Mrs. Carrington, in 1866, who tells of a "Government Well" to furnish water for the mail stations. Reconnaissance of the site has revealed evidence of structures. There had to be a relay station somewhere along the 25-miles between Pole Creek No. 3 and Mud Springs. This site was about 3 miles south and one mile west of Gurley, Nebraska on U. S. Highway 385.

***Nebraska Station - Pony Express - No. 32 - "Mud Springs"** - This site is located about 12 miles southeast of Bridgeport, in Morrill County. It is within a one-acre tract donated by Mrs. Etta A. Scherer as a small park. This was a home station, the first since Julesburg. Archeological search of the building remains confirms the ground plan made of the site by Lt. Caspar Collins in 1864. The Pony Station and Stage Station are doubtless identical. Troops from Fort Laramie occupied Mud Springs in February 1865, and had a lively battle with Indians retreating from the siege of Julesburg. James McArdle was the station keeper.

Three historic wagon routes northward from mud springs to the vicinity of Courthouse Rock have been identified. After many years of confusion on this point it now appears that the Pony Riders used the left fork to Pumpkinseed Crossing and Courthouse Rock, passing southwest of this landmark. It should be noted that the main trail used by the covered wagon and stage coaches passed to the north of the Rock. Information leading to this discovery may be credited to John Oliver who came to this neighborhood as a boy in the 1880's and knew James Moore, who had been a Pony Express rider.

***Nebraska Station - Pony Express - No. 33 - "Courthouse Rock":** Most pony stations were also used as stage stations or trailside ranches, but because of the requirement of an approximate fifteen mile interval, many pony relay stations had to be built "from scratch". Good examples of this are the unnamed station near Gurley and the Courthouse Rock Station. Courthouse Rock Station was five miles south and one and a fourth miles west of Bridgeport in the NE corner, SE¼, Sec. 31, T.19N., R.51W.

Meanwhile off to the east, after negotiating the climb up California Hill, the emigrants traveled for 18 miles across the high tableland between the South and North Platte Rivers before dropping into the North Platte valley through Ash Hollow. Ash Hollow, one of the major landmarks on the Oregon Trail was labeled, "the Gateway to the North Platte Valley." In addition to being a physical landmark, Ash Hollow was one of the most famous campsites on the entire trail, for it offered wood, pure water, and grass for the stock. Entrance to Ash Hollow was by way of Windlass Hill, where the Oregon Trail dropped from the high tableland into the ravine which formed Ash Hollow. This 25° slope of 300 feet length was the first

really steep grade encountered on the Oregon Trail, and the impression it made upon emigrants was particularly vivid. The hill was usually negotiated by rough-locking the wagon wheels and using ropes to carefully lower the wagons. An 1849 emigrant complained that it took three hours to safely descend the hill. Nine miles northwest of Ash Hollow is the site of Blue Water Battlefield. The small cemetery at the mouth of Ash Hollow is the resting place of the remains of Rachel Pattison, an 18 year old emigrant wife who died in 1849 of cholera.

Fifty miles west of Ash Hollow is the gravesite of Amanda Lamin, a twenty-eight year old emigrant, born in Devonshire, England, who died of cholera in 1850. The grave was marked with the inscription "Amanda, consort of M. J. Lamin" which has given rise to much speculation and several legends concerning Amanda's real status in life. The gravesite stands on a small knoll overlooking the North Platte River, and was marked by the State of Nebraska in 1912. It is in the middle of private pastureland. About a mile to the west, Courthouse Rock, becomes visible on the western horizon. About a mile east of Amanda Lamin's grave are a unique set of Oregon trail ruts crossing private land. These are not as dramatic ruts, such as those seen at Rock Creek, California Hill or Ash Hollow, but they have a special quality of their own. Wagons spread out almost a half a mile in width as they crossed this land and left a wide swath of shallow ruts which now appear as a series of gentle ripples crossing the pasture, much as if an emigrant train had crossed this land during the rainstorm and left shallow tracks of dozens of wagons which pulled through the boggy ground. The Amanda Lamin gravesite is a little over seven miles west of where Highway 92 turns right after crossing the river at Broadwater, NE and is in a pasture to the right of the highway. There are no markers along the road pointing the way. Another reference point to enable one to locate this site is that it is just a few hundred feet west of the junction of U.S. Highway 385 with State Highway 92 and not quite a half mile north of Highway 92.

Courthouse Rock was first noted by Robert Stuart in 1812, and quickly became one of the great guiding landmarks for fur traders and Oregon Trail emigrants. Located seven miles west of Amanda Lamin's grave in Morrill County, it is a massive sandstone protubrence south of the Oregon Trail which was variously likened to a courthouse or a castle. A smaller feature to the east was called the jailhouse or jail rock. In the words of an 1841 traveller, "it rises in an abrupt quadrilangular form, to a height of three to four hundred feet, and covers an area of two hundred yards in length by one hundred and fifty broad. Occupying a perfectly level site in an open prairie, it stands as the proud palace of Solitude, amid her boundless domains."

Courthouse Rock is four miles south of the Oregon Trail, but emigrants, diaries record many curious and energetic travellers who took the time to visit and climb the rock. From its base, Chimney Rock is visible fourteen miles to the west, the next guiding landmark on the trail. Appearing today, just as it did to the emigrants, it is protected by the city of Bridgeport and the Nebraska State Historical Society, each of which owns eighty acres of land. The State Historical Society has a seasonal interpretive trailer at the site during the summer months. Courthouse and Jail Rock are on the National Register of historic places, and are reached by Highway 88.

In 1866, William Henry Jackson, a bullwhacker for a freighting company using the Oregon Trail, paused on a small knoll ten miles west of Courthouse Rock, and drew a sketch of the panoramic view of the North Platte Valley to the west, including the famous landmarks of Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff. Jackson later achieved fame as a pioneer artist and photographer of the west, and this sketch, which he turned into a water color painting in 1931, is now one of his most famous. In the painting Chimney Rock is visible to the left, and Scotts Bluff is in the distance at the far right. Jackson used some artistic license in drawing those landmarks, for Scottsbluff is not visible from the site.

Chimney Rock, four miles west of Jackson Pandrama and fourteen miles west of Courthouse Rock was the most noted landmark on the Oregon Trail. Captain Benjamin Bonneville described it in 1832 as a "singular phenomenon, which is among the curiosities of the country. It is called the chimney. The lower part is a conical mound rising out of the naked plain; from the summit shoots up a shaft or column, about one hundred and twenty feet in height, from which it derives its name. The height of the whole. . . is a hundred and seventy five yards. . . and may be seen at the distance of upwards of thirty miles." Chimney Rock is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic site. Eighty three acres of land surrounding the base are owned by the state of Nebraska and managed by the State Historical Society, which maintains an interpretive trailer along Highway 92, about one and a half miles north of the rock.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 34 — “Chimney Rock” was located between the landmark and the river, but just where is not definitely known. There are two traditional sites, both now obliterated along with emigrant graves by modern road graders and gravel quarrying. Mr. Oliver quoted James Moore to the effect that the pony station was at Facus Springs, about nine miles northwest of Bridgeport, where the pony cut-off rejoined the main trail (near the center of Sec. 24, T.20N, R.52W). Burton’s stage station here was north of Chimney Rock, “near a spring on a hill”, which seems to match the Facus Spring site. The second possible site, which coincides more with the distance given in the U.S. mail contract, is further west, being two miles south and one mile west of Bayard (SW corner, Sec. 5, T.20N., R.53W.).

*Nebraska Pony Station No. 35 “Ficklin’s Springs”: Shumway is in error in calling this “The Scottsbluff Station”. The name is blank on the 1861 mail contract. This station was named for Benjamin F. Flicklin, described as “Route Superintendent”, with managerial charge of the entire line between St. Joe and Sacramento. The site, with visible surface remains, is marked on State Highway 86, one mile west of Melbeta in Scotts Bluff County. This was another Pony Station built expressly by the men who laid out the Pony Line, and not primarily a Stage Station. It was located in the NW corner, SW¼, Sec. 13, T.21N., R.54W.

Later, however, like most of the other stations described, it was used as a telegraph station, and for a brief period in 1865 was occupied by troops who dug breast works. In 1871, according to Shumway, the sod structure, was appropriated by Mark M. Coad for his open range cattle ranch. Foundation stones are in evidence today. Burton refers to a ranch called Robidoux’s Fort, somewhere between Chimney Rock and the pass at Scottsbluff (which is clearly identifiable as today’s Mitchell Pass). Could this ranch (which is in no way to be compared with Robidoux’s Trading Post of 1849 at Robidoux Pass, fifteen miles or so further west) have been the Ficklin’s Spring establishment, a Pony Express Relay Station? It is not unlikely that one of the Robidoux clan of 1849 would have re-established themselves on the main trail in later years.

*Nebraska Station — Pony Express · No. 36 — “Scottsbluff”: The story of old Fort Mitchell, 1864-1868, about two and one-half miles northwest of Mitchell Pass at a bend of the North Platte River, has been given to readers of Nebraska history in detail. On the other hand, almost nothing is known of this Pony Express Station believed to exist in this same approximate location in 1860-1861. When the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry contingent from Fort Laramie built Fort Mitchell they do not seem to have been aware of a Pony Express station or any previous structure at the site. At least the military records fail to disclose any such recognition. On the other hand, the “Odometer Book of the Survey for the Fort Kearny, South Pass and Honey Lake Wagon Road, 1857” in the National Archives specifically refers to “old houses, once mail station and trading post of the American Fur Company.” In any event, the 1861 mail contract definitely shows a Scott’s Bluff Station twelve miles west of Ficklin’s and fifteen miles east of Horse Creek. Allen has his “U.S. Mail Station” of 1859 as “3 miles west of the Gap”. This puts it quite near if not right at the Fort Mitchell site.

Scottsbluff is the last of the famous landmarks along the Oregon Trail in Nebraska. An 1849 emigrant with a flair for words left the following description of his reactions as he approached the great landmark: “The bare hills and water-worn rocks on our left began to assume many fantastic shapes, and after raising a gentle elevation, a most extraordinary sight presented itself to our view. A basin-shaped valley, bounded by high rocky hills, lay before us, perhaps twelve miles in length, by six or eight broad. The perpendicular sides of the mountains presented the appearance of castles, forts, towers, verandas, and chimneys, with a blending of Asiatic and European architecture, and it required an effort to believe that we were not in the vicinity of some ancient or deserted town. It seemed as if the wand of a magician had passed over a city, and like that in the Arabian nights had converted all living things to stone.” (Quoted in Merrill Mattes — Scottsbluff National Monument, Nebraska,) (Wash: NPS Historical Handbook series No. 28, 1958) pp. 25-26.

Scottsbluff is a National Monument, with 2988 acres administered by the National Park Service.

Five miles southwest of Scottsbluff National Monument is the area of Robidoux Pass. It is privately owned and used for cattle range. Robidoux Pass, the key to the original Oregon Trail route through Scottsbluff, is a broad U-shaped opening in the semi-circular line of bluffs composing the Scottsbluff chain. The ordeal of the climb to its summit was mitigated by abundant water and wood, two commodities that had been quite scarce along the Great Platte River Road, with the exception of Ash Hollow.

The pass took its name from Joseph E. Robidoux (a name famous for its variances in spelling), an early trader who established a trading post and blacksmith shop here in 1848. At that time, Robidoux’s Post was the first habitation encountered west of Fort Kearny on the Oregon Trail. Emigrants camped

here taking advantage of the plentiful wood and water, and rented Robidoux's blacksmith forge for .75 cents an hour in order to make minor repairs to wagons and equipment and to shoe horses, mules and oxen. Robidoux also offered a small selection of supplies to the emigrants, and whiskey at \$5 per barrel. His prices were usually considered exorbitant. After the Mitchell Pass Route was established in the early 1850's Robidoux's trade declined and the post was abandoned. One hundred eighty acres of Robidoux Pass are on the National Register of Historic Places, and Robidoux Pass is a National Landmark.

Horse Creek Treaty Grounds.

Fourteen miles west of Robidoux Pass, the largest assemblage of Plains Indians in history, approximately 10,000, occurred in 1851. This was a Peace Council called by the Federal Government to protect the traffic along the great road up the Platte River as the Indians became nervous and resentful of the growing army of emigrants on wheels. Most of the Plains tribes were represented, to the surprise of the Government. Since the huge accompanying horse herd needed forage, the treaty council was moved from its original location at Fort Laramie to the mouth of Horse Creek, where ample grass was available. There the first Fort Laramie treaty was signed, establishing tribal grounds and giving the emigrants the right to travel the trail unmolested — it lasted about three years.

*Nebraska Pony Express Station No. 37 — "Horse Creek": This station is named in the Government Mail Contract and is further identified by Allen in 1859 and Burton in 1860. Located about two miles northeast of Lyman on the west bank of Horse Creek, it may be found in the center of Sec. 25, T.23N., R.58W., Scotts Bluff County.

Burton vividly pictures Horse Creek Station, which doubled for Stage and Pony Express Stations:

"Presently we dashed over the Little Kiowa Creek, forded the Horse Creek, and, enveloped in a cloud of villainous mosquitoes, entered at 8:30 p.m. the station in which we were to pass the night. It was tenanted by one Reynal, a French creole — the son of an old soldier of the Grand Arme'e, who had settled in St. Louis — a companionable man, but an extortionate; he charged us a florin for every 'drink' of his well-watered whiskey. The house boasted of the usual squaw, a wrinkled old dame, who at once began to prepare supper, when we discreetly left the room."

*Wyoming Pony Express Station No. 1 — "Cold Springs" — the point where the Oregon Trail — California Road — Pony Express Route leaves Nebraska is in a field usually growing sugar beets — just west of the County Road between Lyman and Henry, in Scotts Bluff County.

Little is known of "Cold Springs Station, believed to be about two miles southeast of Torrington, Wyoming. Burton describes this point, about 12 miles west of Horse Creek Station, as the place where "in 1854, five Indians, concealing themselves in a bed of a dwarf arroyo, fired upon the mail wagon, killing two drivers, and one passenger, and then plundering it of \$20,000 dollars."

*Wyoming Station — Pony Express — No. 2 "Verdling's Ranch" — In 1859 Allen speaks of Beauvais' Ranch; in 1860 to Burton it was Badean's. The latter name seems most nearly correct since this was certainly the establishment of James Bordeaux, one time proprietor of the Fort Laramie Trading Post, eight miles further west. In 1854 he manned a trading post at this point for the American Fur Company when there occurred nearby the misunderstanding with Sioux Indians which led to the extermination of Lieutenant Grattan and twenty-eight soldiers. In 1860 the place consisted of "A single large store, with out-houses full of small half-breeds."

*Wyoming Pony Express Station No. 3 — "Fort Laramie": Fort Laramie, the extensive remains which are now protected as a National Monument, was one of the great military posts of the trans-Mississippi-West, flourishing from 1849 to 1890. One might suppose that this would therefore be one of the important Pony-Express stations of 1860-1861. However, very little light is thrown on this subject by the meager official records.

There were stations at Bordeaux's (Verdling's) and Ward's (Sand Point), nine miles east and west respectively from the fort.

This suggests that there was a Pony Station somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the post itself. (As in the case of Fort Kearny, it may not have been within the immediate garrison area). That the Fort Laramie Station was some distance west of the fort area is suggested by this passage from Burton, keeping in mind the fact that for every Stage Station there were, on the average, two Pony Stations:

“The hours and halting-places were equally vilely selected: for instance, at Forts Kearny, Laramie, and Bridger, the only points where supplies, comfort, society, are procurable, a few minutes of grumbling delay were granted as a favour, and the passengers were hurried on to some distant wretched ranch, apparently for the sole purpose of putting a few dollars into the station masters pockets.”

Surviving buildings at Fort Laramie which existed in 1860-1861 include the imposing frame two-storied officers quarters called “Old Bedlam”, the stone magazine, and the adobe-stone sections of the Sutler’s Store. The stone portion of the latter structure is known to have been used as a post-office in the 1850’s when John S. Tutt, Post Sutler, and Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder served as postmasters. Whether it was the post office in 1860 is unconfirmed. It is known that it served as the post office during the 1870’s and the 1880’s. In any event three Fort Laramie buildings still standing saw the Pony Express riders come and go. Thus Fort Laramie National Monument is one of the principal shrines of the Pony Express route.

REFERENCES

- * The Pony Express: Across Nebraska from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie by Merrill Mattes and Paul Henderson - 1960.
- ** For Dawsons’ Pioneer Tales of The Oregon Trail — 1912.
- *** Andreas — History of Nebraska — 1882.

