New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 61 | Number 3 Article 5

7-1-1986

Women on the Santa Fe Trail: Diaries, Journals, Memoirs. An Annotated Bibliography

Marc Simmons

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr

Recommended Citation
Simmons, Marc. "Women on the Santa Fe Trail: Diaries, Journals, Memoirs. An Annotated Bibliography." *New Mexico Historical Review* 61, 3 (1986). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol61/iss3/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Women on the Santa Fe Trail: Diaries, Journals, Memoirs. An Annotated Bibliography

MARC SIMMONS

"In those days the women dreaded, worse than death, the perils of the Western trails." So spoke Hezekiah Brake in setting down his recollections of an 1858 trip over the old wagon road to Santa Fe.[1] His words point to a fact of western history that has probably received too little attention—the disinclination of many nineteenth-century women to abandon familiar hearth and friends and go ajourneying toward the Pacific in pursuit of an elusive prosperity. Those who did, frequently at the insistence of husbands or fathers, faced the hazards and discomforts of trail life with uncommon fortitude.

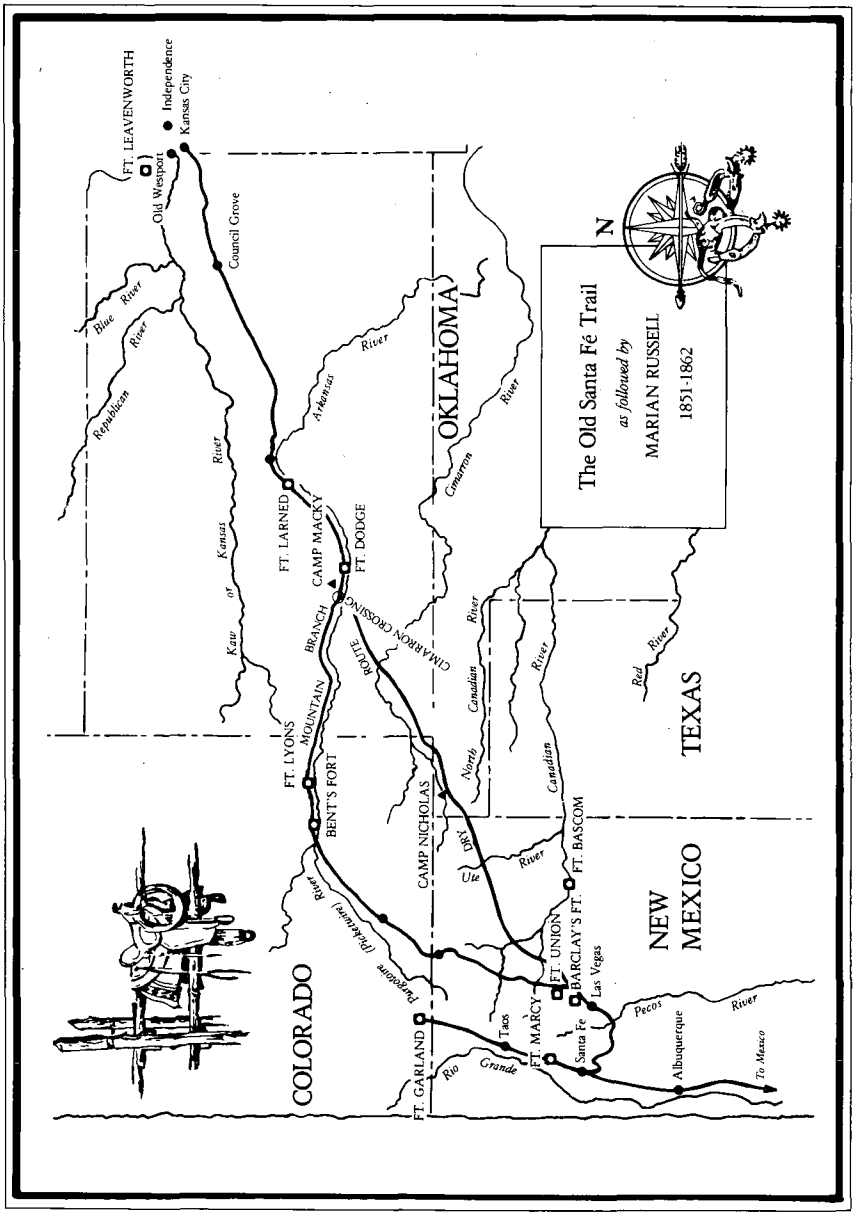
Historian Carl G. Gustavson has explained such matters in a general way: "Mothers, anxious for the welfare of their families, and grandmothers, compulsively knitting together the generations, have usually prayed, oftentimes in vain, for the security of a peaceful and ordered society."[2] Social order was best known for its scarcity on the plains and deserts of the early West, although the structure of a well-organized wagon train provided a temporary system for regulating the affairs of men and women. Peace, or more particularly, peace of mind, was even harder to come

---

Marc Simmons is the author of over twenty books, including *New Mexico: A Bicentennial History* (1977) and *Albuquerque: A Narrative History* (1982). He is the coauthor, along with photographer Joan Myers, of *Along the Santa Fe Trail* to be published next December by the University of New Mexico Press.

1. Hezekiah Brake, *On Two Continents, A Long Life's Experience* (Topeka: Crane & Company, 1896), 118.

2. Carl G. Gustavson, *The Mansion of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 196.



Courtesy University of New Mexico Press.

by on the open trail. Dangers innumerable threatened the best-prepared traveler, be it man or woman. Indian attack, storms and lightning, disease, prairie fire, buffalo stampede, rattlesnakes, swollen rivers with quicksandy bottoms, hunger and thirst were always ready to claim new victims.

Notwithstanding, there was a significant number of women who faced the westering experience with unquenchable optimism and, indeed, if diaries can be accepted as barometers of true sentiment, there were some who embarked with downright eagerness. The change of routine, the excitement of prairie travel, and life in the open air soon won over others who had started with dread and apprehension. Marian Russell, perhaps best representative of such women, discovered on the trail to New Mexico an exhilarating adventure that shaped the future course of her life.[3]

On the Santa Fe Trail, at least in the beginning, there was less reason for the appearance of women than on the Oregon or Mormon trails, which were mainly emigrant routes that bore entire families westward in search of new homes. Men who made the overland march to New Mexico in the quarter century after the trail's opening in 1821 were primarily merchants and drovers with a single purpose—to sell or deliver their wagonloads of goods and return by summer's end to homes on the Missouri frontier. That was a short-term enterprise, with all the attendant hardships and exposure to harm, so it held no place or attraction for women.

Indeed, few American women ventured upon the Santa Fe Trail before the mid-1840s. Among the earliest was eighteen-year-old Susan Shelby Magoffin who accompanied her new husband, veteran trader Samuel Magoffin, to New Mexico in 1846. That was a full two-and-one-half decades following the commencement of overland freighting. It should be noted, however, that prior to that time an undetermined number of New Mexican and perhaps Chihuahuan women with their husbands had taken the Santa Fe Trail, in reverse, to Missouri and back again. Unfortunately, since neither they nor their spouses kept travel diaries, next to nothing is known of their experiences.[4]

---

3. With regard to the ambivalence of women toward overland travel, see Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 25, 36. That some women were rejuvenated in health by a journey over western trails is demonstrated by Ruth D. Muehl, "'The Time of My Life': Women Who Loved the Trek," *American Heritage,* 37 (December 1985), 92–93.

4. For reference to what was probably the first party of Hispanic women to travel the Santa Fe Trail in 1829, see Marc Simmons, "New Mexico's Spanish Exiles," *New Mexico Historical Review,* 59 (January 1985), 75. Among women who preceded Susan Magoffin on the trail were "a Dutch woman" with her husband in 1841, and Soledad Abreu Leitensdorfer, wife of trader Eugene Leitensdorfer, in March 1846. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 427, 572–73.

Susan Magoffin arrived at Santa Fe in the wake of General Stephen Watts Kearny's conquest of New Mexico, an event that placed the western end of the trail in American hands. Change followed rapidly, with the result that traffic from the East assumed a new character and flavor. Notable among the altered circumstances was the growing presence of women who came faring forth either bare-headed, sunbonneted, or sombreroed like the men. With New Mexico now American soil, the reasons requiring their travel to the territory suddenly multiplied.

By the 1850s American traders and businessmen were increasingly taking up residence in New Mexico. Some married locally while others brought their wives from the East by caravan or stagecoach. Ernestine Huning, German bride of Albuquerque merchant Franz Huning, crossed the Santa Fe Trail in 1863 with her husband's wagon train. She and her ten caged canaries survived mischances of the journey, but not so her mother and younger brother who, three years later, set out to join her in New Mexico. They were killed by Cheyenne Dog Soldiers near Plum Buttes in central Kansas.[5] That tragedy was an echo of an earlier one on the trail. In 1849 Independence merchant James M. White and his companions were slain by Apaches at Point of Rocks, New Mexico. His wife Ann (Dunn) White and their small daughter Virginia were carried into captivity and later murdered.[6] Flora Spiegelberg, wife of another merchant, came late to Santa Fe in 1875. She faced nothing worse than the bad food served at stage stations on a much diminished trail, which in that year began at the new railhead in Las Animas, Colorado.[7]

In addition to merchants' wives, other categories of women became visible on the Santa Fe Trail after mid-century. Among them were the nuns, of several teaching and hospital orders, brought southwest by Bishop John B. Lamy. The journeys of sisters who came in 1852 and 1867 are especially memorable because of the difficulties they experienced with cholera and Indian attacks.[8]

Another class of women seen on the trail were the wives of military officers posted to the new garrisons established in the 1850s and 1860s. Many were not only intelligent observers but were highly literate, and

---

5. For two versions of the massacre, see Charles Christy, "The Personal Memoirs of Capt. Chas. Christy," *The Trail*, 1 (January 1909), 14–17; and Lina Fergusson Browne, *Trader on the Santa Fe Trail: Memoirs of Franz Huning* (Albuquerque: Calvin Horn, Publisher, 1973), 91–96.

6. The story of the White massacre has been told many times. A good recent summary appears in Donald Chaput, *François X. Aubry: Trader, Trailmaker and Voyageur in the Southwest* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1975), 83–86.

7. Flora Spiegelberg, "Reminiscences of a Jewish Bride of the Santa Fe Trail," *Jewish Spectator*, 2 (August 1937), 21–22.

8. J. B. Salpointe, *Soldiers of the Cross* (Albuquerque: Calvin Horn, Publisher, 1967), 202–04; and M. Lilliana Owens, *Jesuit Beginnings in New Mexico* (El Paso: Revista Católica Press, 1950), 26–45.

one suspects that the careful journals they often kept were meant as a pastime, to break the unending monotony of frontier duty. Marching with their husbands to a new assignment on the Santa Fe Trail, such ladies generally traveled in a well-appointed ambulance, a vehicle that in the West seems to have served as a mode of transportation as much for civilians as for wounded. Alice Baldwin described hers in these terms: "Our ambulance, made to order in Leavenworth, Kansas, was fitted up with comforts and conveniences. It had soft, upholstered seats that were extended when required and served as beds at night and as seats by day. The floor was covered with straw, over which rugs were laid to keep out as much of the cold as possible."[9]

Undoubtedly the largest group of women to brave the Santa Fe Trail were female relatives accompanying Colorado goldseekers who rushed to new discoveries in 1858 and 1859. Entire families flocked to the Pike's Peak district, many of them taking the Santa Fe route as far as Bent's Old Fort on the Arkansas River. At that point they left the main trail, which there dipped toward Raton Pass, and followed a branch road westward to the Rockies. In late May 1859 a party of traders, just arrived from Santa Fe, reported that on the trail between the Arkansas Crossing and Council Grove they had passed caravans with 220 women on their way to the mines.[10]

Among so many ladies, there must have been a few who jotted down a record of each day's experience by the light of a campfire. But if that be the case, their journals have been lost, or remain buried. Only the brief account of Julia Archibald Holmes has been published and that comes from her letters printed in period newspapers, her diary having failed to surface. Quite likely other women's stories from the Santa Fe Trail await discovery in the archives and early newspaper files of Colorado.

Where too, we might wonder, are the trail diaries or memoirs of the wives of New Mexico's early territorial governors, Indian agents, Protestant missionaries, or eastern-born lawyers? Surely, some of them were moved to take pen in hand and tell of their adventures in crossing the plains. Even at this late date, it is still possible that examples will be brought to light.

The bibliography offered here, therefore, ought to be regarded as a preliminary one. Additions are to be expected. Readers should be aware of two other bibliographies that are particularly germane to the subject. They are Jack D. Rittenhouse, *The Santa Fe Trail, A Historical*

9. Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *An Army Wife on the Frontier: The Memoirs of Alice Blackwood Baldwin, 1867–1877,* ed. Robert C. and Eleanor R. Carriker (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Library, 1975), 61.

10. [Kansas City] *Daily Western Journal of Commerce,* May 25, 1859.

Marian Sloan Russell, the author of *Land of Enchantment: Memoirs of Marian Russell Along the Santa Fe Trail*. Courtesy E. M. Stringfellow Collection, Pueblo, Colorado, Library District.

Bibliography (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), and Sandra L. Myres, "Army Wives in the Trans-Mississippi West, A Bibliography," in Teresa Griffin Viele, *Following the Drum* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 257–73.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aguirre, Mamie (May Bell) Bernard
"Spanish Trader's Bride," *Westport Historical Quarterly,* 4 (December 1968), 5–23. Sections of these memoirs, together with additional background on the Aguirres, are to be found in Yjinio Aguirre, *Echoes of the Conquistadores, History of a Pioneer Family in the Southwest.* Casa Grande, Arizona: privately printed, 1983.

At age seventeen, Mamie, daughter of Westport merchant Joab Bernard, married Epifanio Aguirre who was the eldest son of a prominent freighting family headquartered in La Mesilla, New Mexico. After the wedding in 1862, Mamie made the first of several crossings of the Santa Fe Trail, vividly recorded in her memoirs.

Alexander, Eveline M.
Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline M. Alexander, 1866–1867. Edited and with an introduction by Sandra L. Myres. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977.

Descriptions of life at Fort Union in the 1860s and an account of a trip from the fort to Trinidad, Colorado, on the Santa Fe Trail.

Baldwin, Alice Blackwood
An Army Wife on the Frontier: The Memoirs of Alice Blackwood Baldwin, 1867–1877. Edited and with an introduction by Robert C. and Eleanor R. Carriker. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Library, 1975. The material here first appeared as part of Alice Baldwin's *Memoirs of the Late Frank D. Baldwin, Major General, USA.* Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Company, 1929. See entry in Myres for Baldwin.

In September 1867 Alice Baldwin marched with her husband's troop to a new assignment at Fort Wingate, New Mexico. Departing from Fort Harker, Kansas, the command joined the Santa Fe Trail near Cow Creek and followed it westward via forts Larned, Dodge, and Lyon to Trinidad, Raton Pass, and Fort Union.

Boyd, Mrs. Orsemus Bronson (Frances Anne Mullen Boyd)
Cavalry Life in Tent and Field. New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894. Reprint edition with a new introduction by Darlis A. Miller. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Contains reference to soldier life at Fort Union and passing mention of travel on that part of the Santa Fe Trail between the fort and Trinidad, Colorado.

Clifford [McCrackin], Josephine
"An Officer's Wife in New Mexico," *Overland Monthly,* 4 (February 1870), 152–60. See entry in Myres for McCrackin.

Clifford accompanied her officer husband and the 125th Infantry on a march from Fort Leavenworth over the Santa Fe Trail, via the Cimarron Cut-off, to a new station at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, in 1866. For her kindnesses shown to the men she was given the title "The Mother of the Company." Dealing mostly with life at Fort Bayard, the article contains only scant mention of experiences on the trail.

Gauthreaux, Sister M. Kotska
["Journey to Santa Fe, 1867"] in Thomas F. O'Connor, "Narratives of a Missionary Journey to New Mexico in 1867," *Mid-America,* 19 (January 1937), 63–67.

Summary account of Bishop Lamy's crossing of the Santa Fe Trail with priests and nuns, including references to cholera and an Indian attack near the Arkansas Crossing.

Hayden, Mother Mary Magdalen
["Journey to Santa Fe, 1852"] in Mary J. Straw, *Loretto: The Sisters and Their Chapel.* Santa Fe: Loretto Chapel Fund, 1983, pp. 24–26.

This brief account, taken from Mother Mary Magdalen's "Practice Spanish Letterbook," tells of the first trip made by Sisters of Loretto over the Santa Fe Trail, in the company of New Mexico's Vicar Apostolic John B. Lamy. A few additional details are provided by the Mother in a letter to one of her schoolmates July 12, 1854, quoted in part in J. B. Salpointe, *Soldiers of the Cross.* Reprint edition, Albuquerque: Calvin Horn, Publisher, 1967, p. 203.

Holmes, Julia Archibald
A Bloomer Girl on Pike's Peak, 1858. Edited by Agnes Wright Spring. Denver: Denver Public Library, 1949.

Julia Holmes crossed the Santa Fe Trail, as far as Bent's Fort, with her husband and a party of Colorado goldseekers from Lawrence, Kansas. Her original journal has not come to light, but two long letters based upon it plus several letters written later from New Mexico comprise the body of this slim volume. Includes brief but excellent comments on trail life.

Huning, Ernestine
"Trip Across the Plains, Diary of Ernestine Huning," in *Trader on the Santa Fe Trail: Memoirs of Franz Huning*. Edited by Lina Fergusson Browne. Albuquerque: Calvin Horn, Publisher, 1973. Extracts from her diary appear on pp. 73–75.

As the bride of Franz Huning, Ernestine described her journey from St. Louis and Fort Leavenworth over the Santa Fe Trail to her new home in New Mexico.

Lane, Lydia Spencer
I Married a Soldier; or, Old Days in the Old Army. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1893; 2nd edition, 1910. Reprint edition with a new foreword by Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower. Albuquerque: Horn & Wallace, 1964.

Between 1857 and 1866 Lydia Spencer Lane made five crossings of the Santa Fe Trail riding in an army ambulance or freight wagon. Excellent details of trail life and conditions at Fort Union and Fort Marcy.

LaTourette, Genevieve
"Fort Union Memories," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 26 (October 1951), 277–86. An unpaginated offprint was published, in cooperation with the National Park Service, by Fort Union, Inc., Las Vegas, New Mexico, and copies are sold at Fort Union National Monument.

Daughter of the Fort Union chaplain, Major James A. M. LaTourette, Genevieve provides glimpses of army life at the tag end of the trail period.

Magoffin, Susan Shelby
Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico, The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846–1847. Edited by Stella M. Drumm with a foreword by Howard R. Lamar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926. Reprint edition by the same press, 1962. Reprint edition, Santa Fe: William Gannon, 1975. Reprint edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

This journal kept by the young wife of trader Samuel Magoffin on a trip to Santa Fe and northern Mexico during the Mexican War has long been regarded as the classic woman's account of the Santa Fe Trail. Excellent descriptions of the major trail landmarks and campsites.

Morris, Anna Maria
"A Military Wife on the Santa Fe Trail," in *Covered Wagon Women, Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1840–1890*. Edited by Kenneth L. Holmes. 5 volumes to date. Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1983–1985, II, 15–43. Eleven volumes are projected for the series. Later volumes may contain Santa Fe Trail journals.

This detailed diary was kept by Anna Maria Morris in 1850 while traveling from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe via the Cimarron Cut-off in the military party commanded by her husband, Major Gouverneur Morris. Reference is made to most of the major trail sites. She returned overland to St. Louis in 1853.

Roe, Frances M. A.
Army Letters from an Officer's Wife, 1871–1888. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1909. Reprint edition, New York: Arno, 1979. Reprint edition, with a new introduction by Sandra L. Myres, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

Of this large collection of letters from western posts, those written from Fort Zarah (ruins) and Fort Dodge, Kansas, and Fort Lyon, Colorado, by Frances Roe relate to the Santa Fe Trail.

Russell, Marian Sloan
Land of Enchantment, Memoirs of Marian Russell Along the Santa Fe Trail Dictated to Mrs. Hal (Winifred McGuire) Russell. Edited by Garnet M. Brayer. Evanston, Illinois: Branding Iron Press, 1954. Reprint edition, with new illustrations, map, and an afterword by Marc Simmons, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981. These memoirs, with variance in contents, first appeared serially in seven installments in *Colorado Magazine,* beginning with volume 20 (May 1943) and continuing through volume 21 (May 1944). The last issue included an afterword by Winifred Russell describing Marian Russell's death.

This is the most moving and detailed account of a woman's experience on the Santa Fe Trail. In addition to describing her five overland trips, Marian Russell has much to say about life in Santa Fe and at forts Union and Nichols.

Sanford, Mrs. Byron N.
"Life at Camp Weld and Fort Lyon in 1861–62, An Extract from the Diary of Mrs. Byron N. Sanford," edited by Albert B. Sanford, *Colorado Magazine,* 7 (July 1930), 132–39.

A short glimpse of daily life at Fort Lyon, with reference to the departure of a portion of the garrison on the Santa Fe Trail to fight the Confederate invaders of New Mexico.

Segale, Rosa Maria (Sister Blandina)
At the End of the Santa Fe Trail. Columbus, Ohio: Columbian Press, 1932. Reprint edition with a new "Life Sketch of Sister Blandina Segale" by Sister Therese Martin, pp. 1–10. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1948.

In 1872 Sister Blandina rode the stage from the railhead at Kit Carson, Colorado, to her new missionary station at Trinidad. In 1876 she continued by stage to Santa Fe.

Spiegelberg, Flora
"Reminiscences of a Jewish Bride of the Santa Fe Trail," *Jewish Spectator,* 2 (August 1937), 21–22; and *Jewish Spectator,* 2 (September 1937), 24–25, 44.

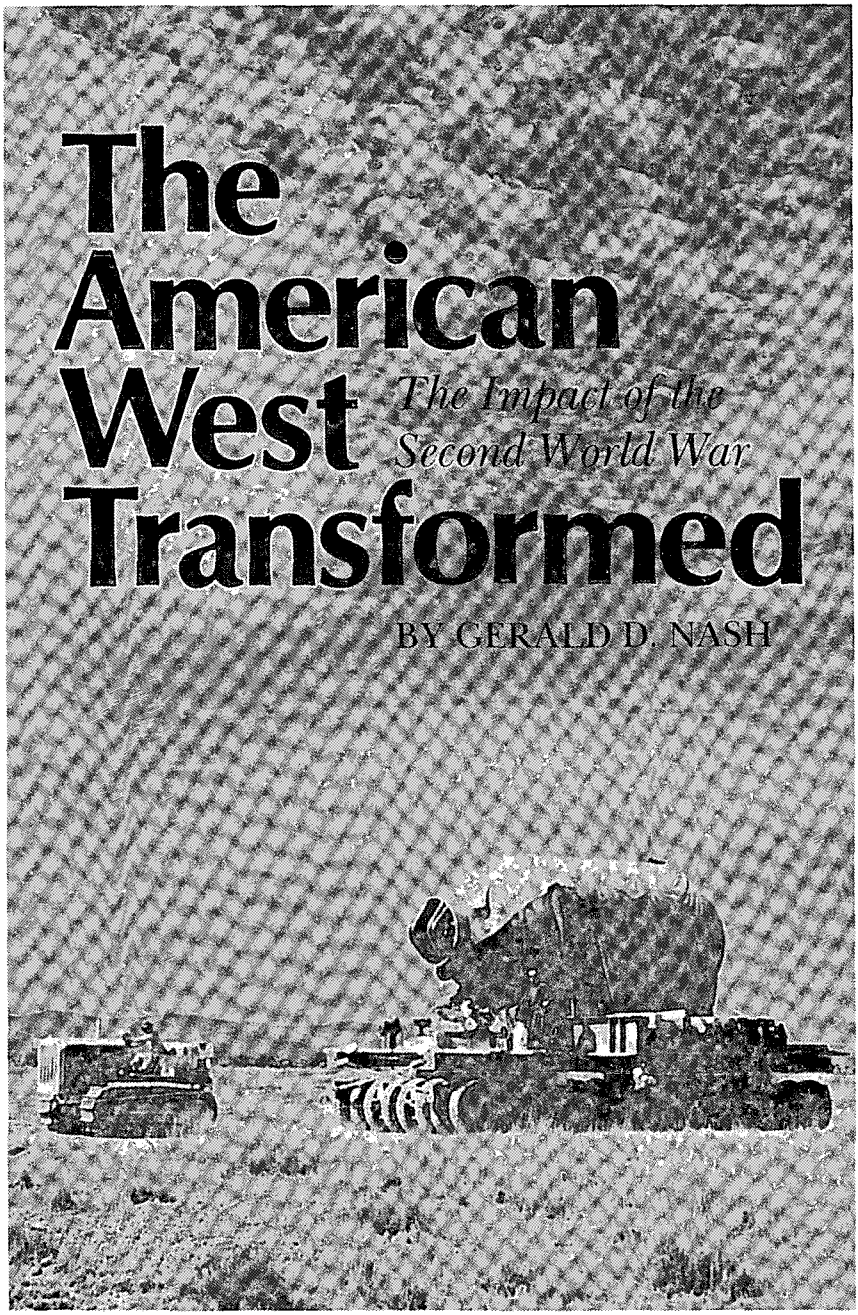
Account of a stage ride from the Las Animas, Colorado, railhead to Santa Fe in 1875, with a commentary on life in the territorial capital.

Wallace, Susan E.
The Land of the Pueblos. New York: George D. Hurst, Publisher, 1888.

In September 1878, Susan Wallace accompanied her husband, the newly appointed governor of New Mexico, Lew Wallace, to Trinidad by train where they transferred to a buckboard for a ride over the remaining portion of the Santa Fe Trail. Details of the trip are disappointly spare (mostly complaints about the discomfort). She does better in describing the appearance of Santa Fe.

Williams, Mrs. Ellen
Three Years and a Half in the Army; or, History of the Second Colorados. New York: Fowler & Wells, 1885.

Ellen Williams, whose husband was a member of the Second Colorado Volunteers, was in Santa Fe during the Battle of Glorieta Pass which took place at Pigeon's Ranch and Stage Station on the Santa Fe Trail. She offers a detailed account of the conflict, and refers briefly to her subsequent march with the volunteers from Fort Union to Fort Lyon.



The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War. By Gerald D. Nash. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. x + 216 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. $35.00.)