



Bits of  
History  
Before  
Statehood

**AUG 4 1982**

## ***Santa Fe Trail Carried Many Wagons West***

While forts and trading posts were being established in Indian Territory, the western part of what was then known as "No-Man's Land" was being crossed by pack trains and caravans of wagons along the Santa Fe Trail between New Mexico and Missouri.

Capt. William Becknell took the first wagons on this route because he found it a shorter way than through Colorado. Trade was profitable, and Congress enacted a bill by Sen. Benton of Missouri to have a regular route surveyed.

Over the Santa Fe Trail traveled Conestoga freight wagons, built in Pennsylvania and shipped by steamboat to western Missouri. They carried up to 4-ton loads and were pulled by mules or oxen.

Merchandise and manufactured goods were hauled to Santa Fe, and the wagons were loaded with bars of silver or gold, bales of wool, furs and buffalo skins. By 1860 more than 62,000 mules were engaged in trade in New Mexico Territory.

A journey over the Santa Fe trail was exciting and often dangerous. Wagon trains were liable to attacks by Indian and white outlaws, so traders traveled together in large trains and sometimes were accompanied by a troop of soldiers.

Before the Panhandle territory became known as "No-Man's Land," the wagonmasters referred to the area as "Cimarron Desert."

Today, wagon ruts of many years past still may be found on farms and ranches, overgrown with buffalo grass or crops.