

Three Trails from Independence



Santa Fe, Oregon, and California
National Historic Trails

McCoy Park
Oregon-California Trails Association
City of Independence
National Park Service

People on steamboats loaded with goods traveled upstream on the Missouri River “highway” to Independence, where the overland journey on the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California trails began. Between March and November, steamboats passed by or stopped daily at the Independence landings of Blue Mills and Wayne City. With little commercial competition on the frontier, Independence dominated as the favored trail outfitting place until about 1850. Tens of thousands of fur trappers, traders, emigrants,

and gold seekers passed through Independence, coming from all over the United States and the world in search of new opportunities in the West. Commerce depended on goods made in the East being transported to Santa Fe. Merchants then hauled Mexican-produced goods, silver, and gold back to Independence via the 800-mile Santa Fe Trail. Travelers migrating to the West bought supplies for the five-month, 2,000-mile trek along the Oregon and California trails.

It is to this beautiful spot, already grown up to be a thriving town, that the prairie adventurer, whether in search of wealth, health, or amusement, [comes], about the first of May...they purchase their provisions for the road, and many of their mules, oxen, and even some of their wagons—in short, load all their vehicles, and make their final preparations for a journey across the prairie wilderness.

- Commerce of the Prairies, Josiah Gregg, 1844

