



Surveying the Santa Fe Trail

The Santa Fe Trail passed here at Nine Mile Point, where you are standing, and continued west across the state line. Imagine the sight of wagons loaded with trade goods and the sounds, smells, and voices of men and animals. In these earliest days of the Santa Fe Trail and the state of Missouri, not even a crooked fence line marked this western boundary of the United States. Travelers simply followed the slight trace of the trail, soon to be officially surveyed as the Santa Fe Trail.

The first survey occurred in 1825 after passage of influential Senator Thomas H. Benton's appropriation bill of \$30,000 to survey what Benton called the "highway between nations." Led by George C. Sibley, surveyor Joseph Brown and his chainmen coursed the trace, measuring distances with a 66-foot long chain made up of 100 links. Each link was 7.92 inches long. The surveyors moved across the prairie, laying down their measuring chain 59,680 times.

Sibley Survey Timeline

Senator Benton saw the importance of trade between Santa Fe and his home state of Missouri. He also knew that the route would have national and international implications, and that the nation that controlled it would gain power and influence. The Sibley Survey was undertaken, to a large extent, to solidify the young nation's claim to the Santa Fe Trail.

1821	1822	1823	1825	1825	1827	1850	1880
Mexico gains independence from Spain. William Becknell makes first successful trade trip to Santa Fe.	On his second trip to Santa Fe, Becknell takes the first wagons ever over the Santa Fe Trail.	Joseph Brown surveys the western border of the frontier state of Missouri.	George C. Sibley's survey party leaves Fort Osage on July 17 and reaches the Mexican border on September 11.	Party splits up on September 20; Sibley's group gains permission to continue the survey on Mexican soil.	Sibley resurveys the trail and makes corrections, especially in the modern Kansas City area.	New Mexico becomes a territory of the US.	Railroad arrives in Santa Fe; end of Santa Fe Trail era.

Tools of the Trade

Summary of Notes on the Santa Fe Road

Date	Daily distance measured in the field				Progressive addition of the distance above the starting point				Daily distance measured in the field				Progressive addition of the distance above the starting point				
	M	Ch	Link	ft	M	Ch	Link	ft	M	Ch	Link	ft	M	Ch	Link	ft	
July 16	1	21		1	21		1	21	1	21		1	21		1	21	1
July 17	2	6	50	9	37	50	9	37	1	23	22	1	23	22	1	23	22
July 18	11	50		21	7	50		21	7	50		21	7	50		21	7
July 19	2	8	20	31	2	71		31	2	71		31	2	71		31	2
July 20	6	26		37	33	71		37	33	71		37	33	71		37	33
July 21	1	29		100	71	71		100	71	71		100	71	71		100	71
July 22	11	52		116	27	71		116	27	71		116	27	71		116	27
July 23	6	29		126	69	71		126	69	71		126	69	71		126	69
July 24	5	67		160	27	31		160	27	31		160	27	31		160	27
July 25	7	23		136	2	59		136	2	59		136	2	59		136	2
July 26	6	37		160	53	59		160	53	59		160	53	59		160	53
July 27	3	65		166	41	49		166	41	49		166	41	49		166	41
July 28	12	63		157	3	49		157	3	49		157	3	49		157	3
July 29	3	10		177	16	20		177	16	20		177	16	20		177	16
July 30	12	19		189	1	45		189	1	45		189	1	45		189	1
Aug 1	12	1		201	6	45		201	6	45		201	6	45		201	6
Aug 2	12	1		213	12	45		213	12	45		213	12	45		213	12
Aug 3	12	1		225	18	45		225	18	45		225	18	45		225	18
Aug 4	12	1		237	24	45		237	24	45		237	24	45		237	24
Aug 5	12	1		249	30	45		249	30	45		249	30	45		249	30
Aug 6	12	1		261	36	45		261	36	45		261	36	45		261	36
Aug 7	12	1		273	42	45		273	42	45		273	42	45		273	42
Aug 8	12	1		285	48	45		285	48	45		285	48	45		285	48
Aug 9	12	1		297	54	45		297	54	45		297	54	45		297	54
Aug 10	12	1		309	0	45		309	0	45		309	0	45		309	0



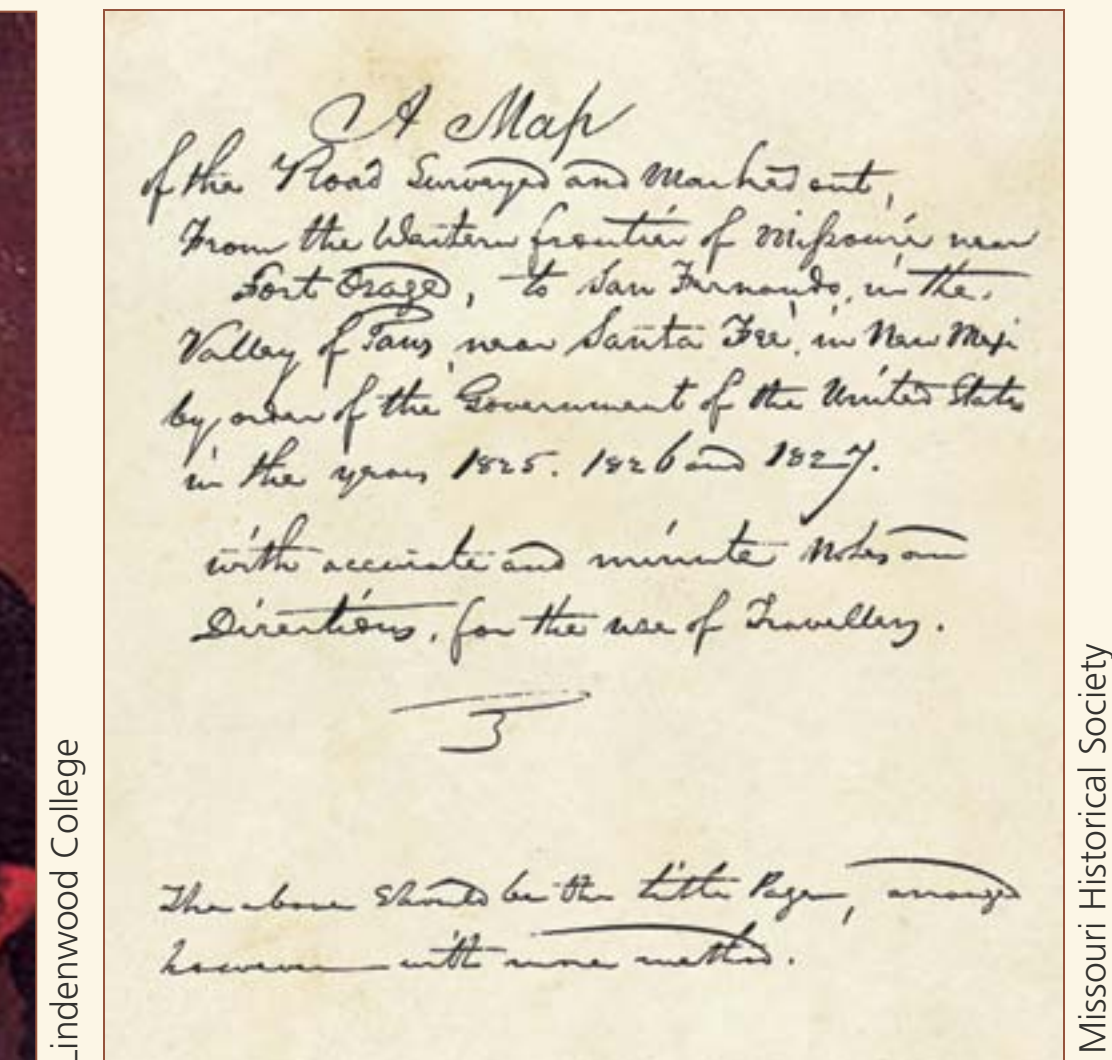
Star of the Republic Museum, Blinn College

Meticulous Work
Brown's survey notes were as important as the maps he drew. Measurements were ordered and precise.

Surveyor's Chains
Imagine measuring the hundreds of miles of the Santa Fe Trail with 66-foot chains.

1825 Survey Party

- Survey Commissioners** George Sibley, Benjamin Reeves, Thomas Mather
- Official Surveyor** Joseph Brown, experienced surveyor
- Hunter and Chainman** Joseph R. Walker, mountain man
- Indian Interpreter** William S. "Old Bill" Williams, trapper
- Pilot** Stephen Cooper, frequent trail traveler
- Laborer** Andrew Carson, brother of Kit Carson
- Supplier & Mail Carrier** William Becknell, Santa Fe Trail blazer



George C. Sibley
Leader of the survey party and its namesake.

Survey Report
Introduced in Sibley's own hand, the notes and maps from the survey trip were consolidated into one report and submitted to Congress.

Lindenwood College

Missouri Historical Society



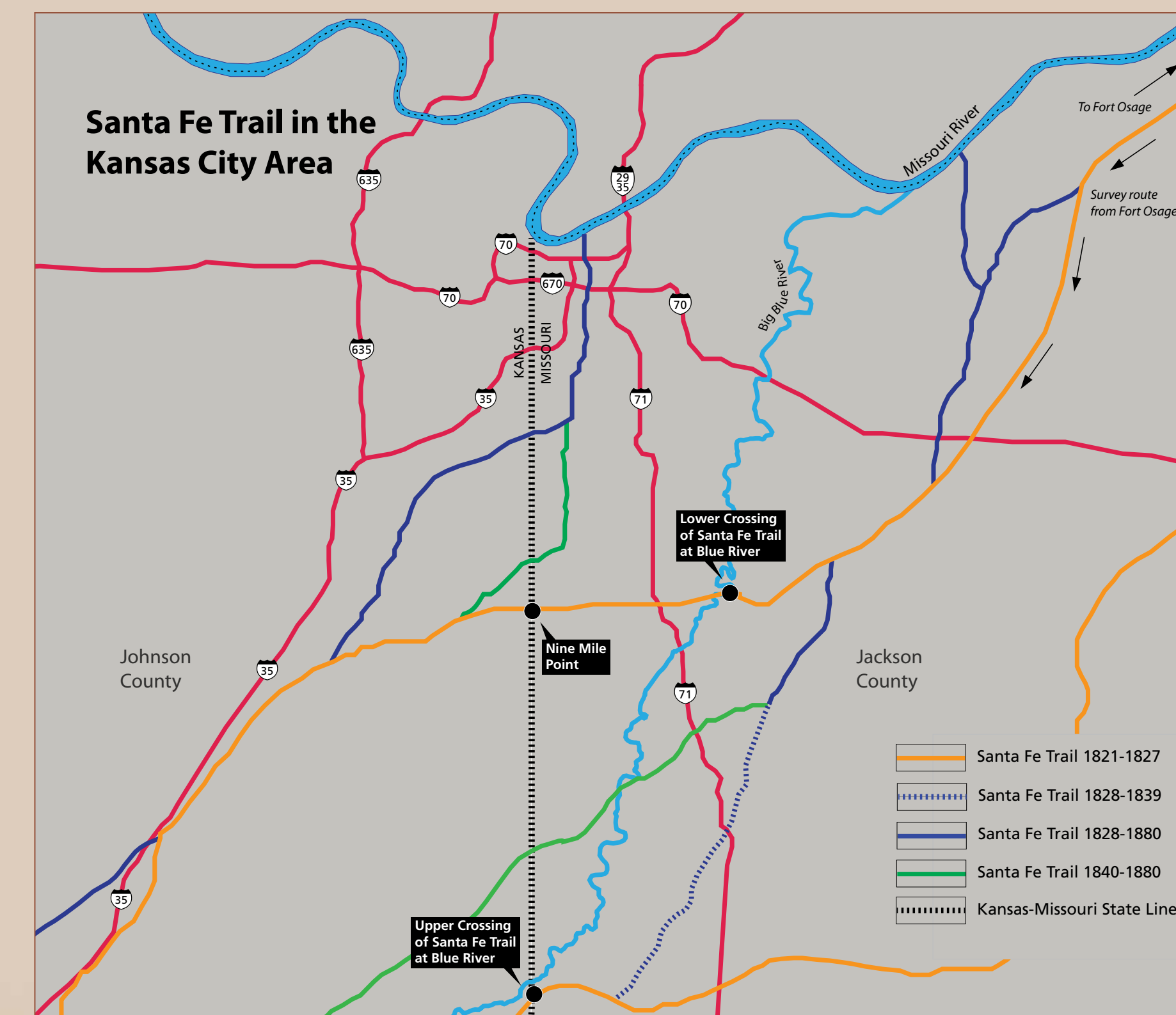
“A trace leading . . . toward Santa Fe”

While many things have changed in the Kansas City area since the early days of the Santa Fe Trail, the Missouri border remains the same. In 1823, from the center of the mouth of the Kansas River, surveyor Joseph Brown and his crew worked south using 66-foot surveying chains. They marked each mile point by raising a large dirt and rock mound, charting down the Missouri state line.

When the surveyors reached the nine mile point south of the mouth of the Kansas River, Brown raised a dirt mound as he had on the previous eight mile points. Then they continued surveying southward 10 chains (660 feet) to this place that Brown characterized in his field notes as “to a trace leading from Fort Osage toward Santa Fe.”

This citation in Brown’s field notes of this point located nine miles and 10 chains south of the mouth of the Kansas River (near today’s 79th Street and State Line Road) represents the earliest official government documentation of any location on the Santa Fe Trail.

The trace that Brown found here was created by the three wagons of William Becknell’s second trip to Santa Fe in 1822; the first wagons ever taken over the trail. By the 1840s Santa Fe traders abandoned this earliest route of the trail in the Kansas City area, favoring a new route out of Westport that crossed the state line about a mile north of here.



*on the State line, and exactly
Nine Miles South*
Sibley's 1827 notes

After crossing the Little Blue River and skirting to the southeast of the future site of Independence, the 1825 survey team crossed the Big Blue River in today’s Swope Park and continued about five miles west to cross the new Missouri state line here at this point nine miles south of the mouth of the Kansas River.

“Western boundary of State of Missouri, cross it just 9 miles south of the mouth of the Kansas River”

From Fort Osage	From Trees	Miles	Chs.	Miles	Chs.
		31	03	7	16
Western boundary of State of Missouri, cross it just 9 miles south of the mouth of the Kansas River.					

Joseph Brown’s 1825 Santa Fe Trail field notes

