

Conflict and Commerce on the Santa Fe Trail

The Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road

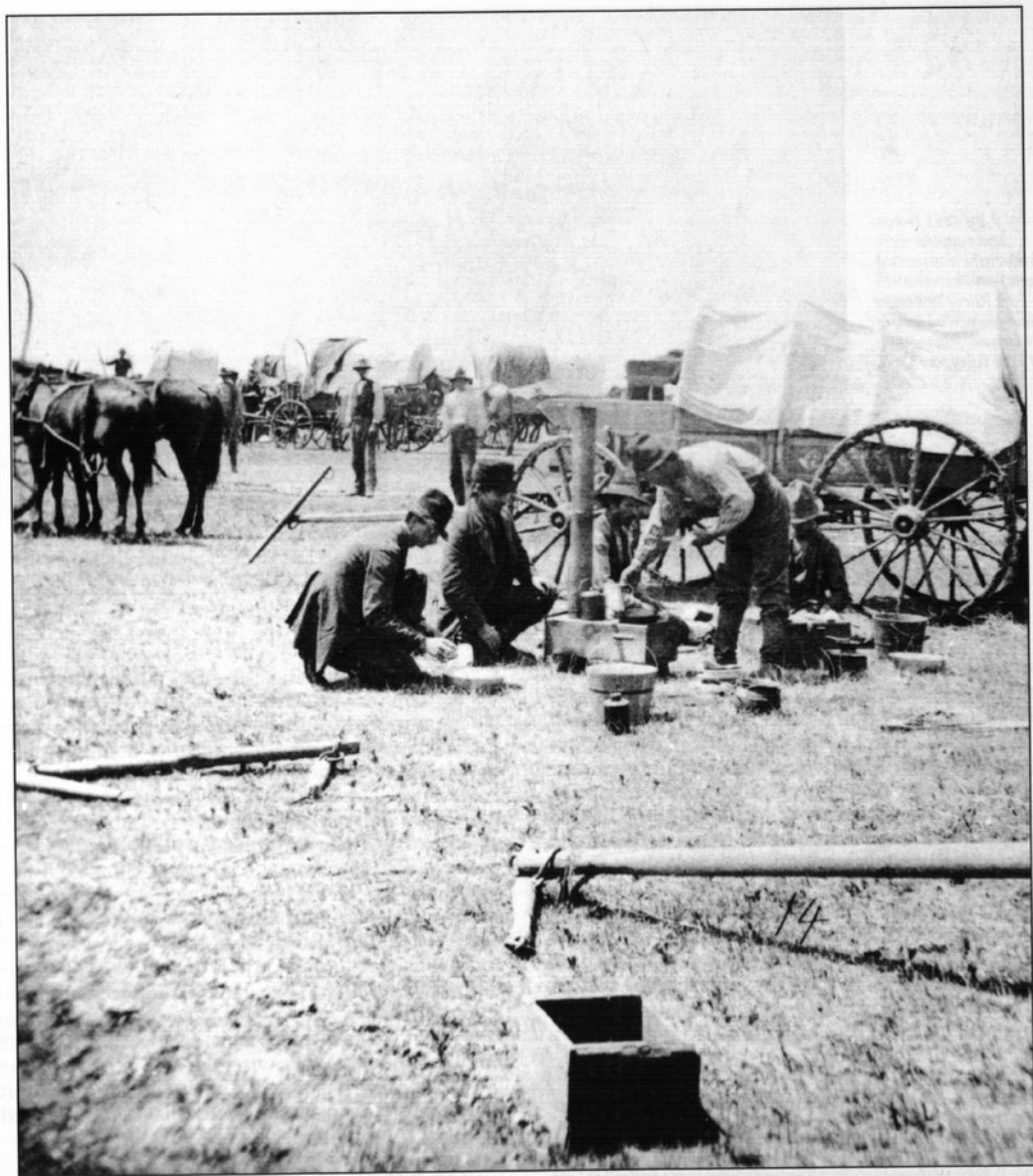
1860-1867

by David K. Clapsaddle

In the preterritorial days of Kansas, military expeditions from Fort Leavenworth to the Southwest struck the Santa Fe Trail at three different points east of Council Grove: the Round Grove campgrounds south of present-day Olathe; Soldier Creek west of present-day Burlingame; and Willow Springs in present-day Douglas County.¹ From each of these locations, the troops proceeded down the established route of the trail through Council Grove and on to the great bend of the Arkansas River at present-day Ellinwood in Barton County. From this point, the troops followed the river to the middle crossing in the present-day Cimarron-Ingalls area. There they either forded the Arkansas and followed the Cimarron cutoff to New Mexico or continued along the north bank of the river on the mountain branch of the trail. However, with the establishment of Fort Riley in 1853, the army began to consider a more direct route to New Mexico; and in 1855, \$50,000

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1. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 160, 558-59, 981-82.



Wagon train camp on the Santa Fe Trail, Barton County.

By 1861 troops and supplies were frequently transported from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley, and on to New Mexico by way of Fort Larned. Photograph of Fort Riley, ca. 1860.



was authorized for the construction of a road from Fort Riley to any point on the Arkansas deemed desirable by the secretary of war.²

On July 30, 1855, Lt. Francis T. Bryan, of the topographical engineers, departed Fort Riley with a survey crew and military escort to map out the new road to the Arkansas. Crossing the Solomon and Saline rivers, Bryan's party turned southwest to cross the Smoky Hill River and continued on to Walnut Creek and Pawnee Fork, tracing the latter to its headwaters before turning south to strike the Arkansas at recently abandoned Fort Atkinson. From Fort Atkinson, Bryan led the expedition up the north bank of the Arkansas to Bent's New Fort. Returning to Fort Riley, Bryan reported that bridges would be required at the Solomon, Saline, and Smoky Hill rivers.³

2. W. Turrentine Jackson, "The Army Engineers as Road Surveyors and Builders in Kansas and Nebraska, 1854-1858," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 17 (February 1949): 39. Between the 1853 establishment of Fort Riley and the 1860 advent of the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, indications are that expeditions from Fort Riley struck the Santa Fe Trail at Lost Spring. Morris F. Taylor, "The Mail Station and the Military Camp on Pawnee Fork, 1859-1860," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1970): 31.

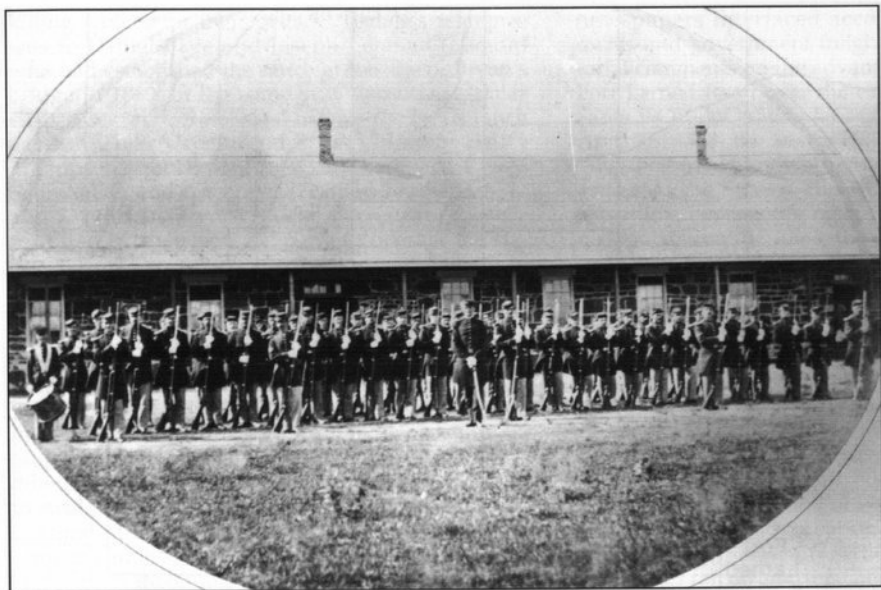
3. Jackson, "The Army Engineers," 40-42.

In the following February a \$38,000 contract was awarded to J. O. Sawyer for the construction of bridges at the three sites recommended by Bryan in addition to two small streams between Fort Riley and the Solomon, Sycamore and Armistead's creeks. Work on the bridges was completed by February 1857, and Bryan notified his superiors that the road from Fort Riley to Bent's Fort was "passable for trains of any kind."⁴

Ironically, the bridges were washed away in June 1858, and the route that Bryan surveyed was never used.⁵ However, it did serve as a precursor for the route that Maj. John Sedgwick used in his 1860 expedition against the Kiowas and Comanches. Leaving Fort Riley on May 15, the column crossed Chapman's Creek and proceeded westward up the Smoky Hill valley following the trail pursued by the gold seekers in 1859. At both the Solomon and Saline, Lt. J. E. B. Stuart, journalist for the expedi-

4. Quoted in *ibid.*, 44.

5. George A. Root, "Ferries in Kansas: Part VI—Smoky Hill River," "Ferries in Kansas: Part VII—Saline River," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 4 (February and May 1935): 21, 50.



Third U.S. Infantry,
Company C
at Fort Larned, 1867.

tion, noted the presence of ferries established by enterprising settlers following the destruction of the military bridges in 1858. On May 18 the expedition passed the little village of Salina and two days later camped on the Smoky Hill River at the site of Bryan's bridge. Lt. Stuart observed: "only foundation is left at rocky bottom ford." On the following day the troops completed an unusually long march of forty-two miles to Walnut Creek. There they rested for a day before continuing southwest on the established route of the Santa Fe Trail to Camp Alert at Pawnee Fork, soon to be renamed Fort Larned.⁷

With the outbreak of Civil War confrontations in New Mexico, the army continued to use the road from Fort Riley that Major Sedgwick had pioneered. In the fall of 1861 beleaguered troops from Fort Fillmore retreated up the Santa Fe Trail following their humiliating capture and subsequent release by

Confederate forces. Leaving the established route at Walnut Creek, they passed through Junction City in late October en route to Fort Leavenworth. In the following summer 130 rebel troops captured in New Mexico were marched along the same route to confinement at Fort Riley.⁸ Subsequently, the army made frequent use of the route by transporting supplies and troops from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley and on to New Mexico by way of Fort Larned. Percival Lowe described the first such trip:

The mule trains left Riley the tenth of September, 1862, each traveling independently, with instruction to camp on the Smoky Hill River at Salina, then a mere station, until I came up. There was a plain road, but little traveled, and this the first government train of any importance to pass over it.⁹

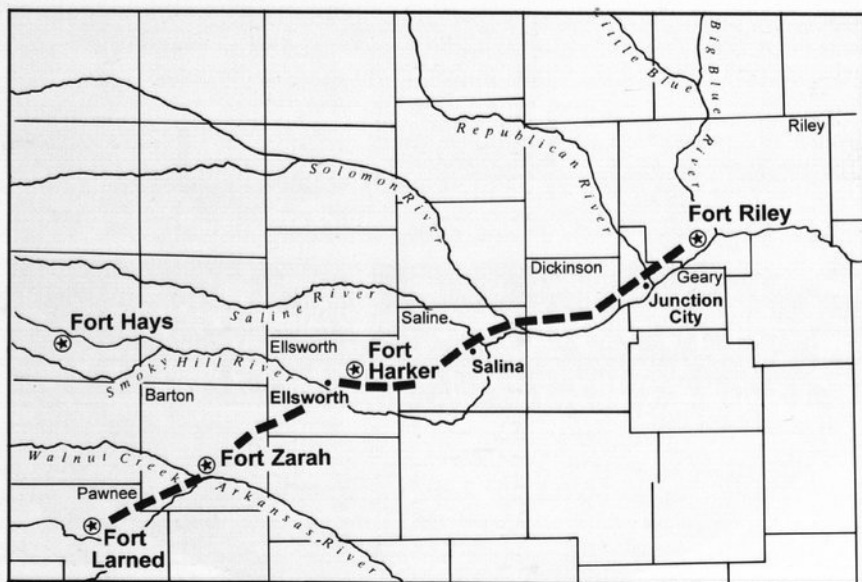
6. W. Stitt Robinson, ed., "The Kiowa and Comanche Campaign of 1860 as Recorded in the Personal Diary of J. E. B. Stuart," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 23 (Winter 1957): 390.

7. *Ibid.*, 390-91.

8. *Junction City Union*, October 24, 1861; June 12, 19, 1862.

9. Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon ('49-'54) and Other Great Adventures on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 209.

Fort Riley - Fort Larned
Road, 1860-1867.



Such was the origin of what H. L. Jones, deputy U.S. marshal at Salina in 1864, called the Fort Riley and Fort Larned Road.¹⁰

Observing the army's use of the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, the citizenry of Junction City began to

promote the route as a successor to that portion of the Santa Fe Trail east of Walnut Creek. To this end the *Junction City Union* proclaimed, "the route from the Missouri River to Pawnee Fork by way of Junction City and Salina is much shorter than by the Old Santa Fe Road, as has been fully demonstrated."¹¹ The efforts of the Union did not go unrewarded. By early August a mail contract was awarded to the Kansas Stage Company for weekly deliveries from Junction City to Fort Larned.¹²

Establishing headquarters in Junction City, the Leavenworth-based company located stations at the infant villages of Abilene and Salina and at the crossings of the Smoky Hill River, Cow Creek, and Walnut Creek. On the Smoky Hill, the station was situated at "a hunting ranch." Henry Tisdale, stage line supervisor, described the proprietors of the ranch as "Two young men [who] lived there by killing buffalo for their pelts and tallow, and by

10. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, v. 34, pt. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 149-50 (hereafter cited as *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*); James R. Mead, who came to the Saline valley in 1859, called the route "the old military road running from Ft. Riley to Larned." James R. Mead, *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859-1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 117. A. C. Spilman, Mead's contemporary and early resident of Salina, referred to the route as the Fort Zarah road. A. C. Spilman to George W. Martin, "Addenda," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1907-1908* 10 (1908): 667. Another Salina contemporary, Christina Phillips Campbell, described the road simply as the stage route. Julia Shelebarger Porter, "My Grandmother Christina Phillips Campbell" (Unpublished manuscript, Campbell Room of Kansas Research, Salina Public Library, Salina, Kans.); Lt. M. R. Brown, engineer with the 1867 Hancock Expedition, designated the route as the Santa Fe Road; Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General, 1867, roll 562, microcopy 619, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. While the route was nominally known as the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, the western terminus of the road was generally considered to be Walnut Creek, the site of Fort Zarah. West of Walnut Creek, the original route of the Santa Fe Trail continued on to Fort Larned.

11. *Junction City Union*, May 29, 1862.

12. *Ibid.*, August 9, 1862.

killing wolves for their pelts."¹³ Tisdale's reference was to Daniel Page and Joseph Lehman (Lemon) who had established the ranch at the site of Bryan's bridge in 1860. In the same year two other similar enterprises were established nearby, the Farris ranch east on Clear Creek, and P. M. ("Smoky Hill") Thompson's ranch southeast on Thompson Creek. Suel Walker and the Prater (Prather) brothers, C. L. and J. J., associated with the Farris ranch, were recruited by the stage company to operate the station at Cow Creek.¹⁴

In the absence of a military presence on the road, the stage company initiated services without the benefit of escort. Trouble came quickly, not from Indians as expected, but from a group of sixteen Southerners returning from the Colorado gold fields. On September 17, 1862, the freebooters plundered Salina, stealing twenty-five horses and six mules belonging to the stage company. Continuing down the stage road, they paused at the Farris ranch to steal more horses and several guns. At the Page-Lehman ranch, the brigands took seventeen stage company mules; and south of the Smoky Hill, they stopped an incoming stage. Holding Jim Hall, the driver, at gun point, they ripped open the mail sacks and scattered the letters to the wind. Unharnessing the mules, they rode away leaving the hapless driver and passengers afoot on the prairie.¹⁵

In subsequent weeks the army's use of the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road continued to mount. On September 27, 1862, the *Junction City Union* reported: "During the past week, eleven hundred head of horses and mules, and about one hundred wagons, have passed through our town, for Government service in that country." The same issue commented on the streets of the city being crowded with wagons loading corn for Fort Larned. Regardless of the army's extensive use of the road, civilian traders continued to use the established route of the Santa Fe Trail running southwest through Council Grove. Consequently, for the next two years, Junction City

newspapers interfaced accounts of troop movements and government freight shipments with editorial comments on the advantage of the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road over the established route of the Santa Fe Trail. Quoting J. C. Stedman of Santa Fe on April 25, 1863, the *Smoky Hill and Republican* stated "that nothing is known in Santa Fe of the superior claims of the Smoky Hill Route, or it would in a short time become the main traveled road." In like fashion, on June 13, 1863, the *Union* quoted Santa Fe freighter John C. Dunn: "the new road [is] the best for freighters between Leav. and Santa Fe by all means; being better supplied with grass, water, and fuel, and nearer by many miles."

By the fall of 1863 the Junction City newspapers' crusades ceased as rumors began to circulate about impending Indian raids to the west. A militia at Salina, organized on September 12, drilled daily on the streets of the little city under the command of H. L. Jones, duly elected captain; and as the threat of attack continued into the spring of 1864, many settlers left the Salina area, and stages ran on an irregular schedule.¹⁶

As anticipated, the Indians struck, not at Salina as expected, but at Walnut Creek where the Fort Riley - Fort Dodge Road merged with the main trunk of the Santa Fe Trail. On May 16 ten Cheyennes came to the trading ranch on the Walnut operated by Charles Rath. Taking Rath's Cheyenne wife, Making Out Road, formerly married to Kit Carson, they warned Rath of impending attack. On the following day, Rath, Lewis Booth, and postmaster John Dodds watched helplessly from the rooftop of Rath's store as Cheyennes drove away stock belonging to Rath, Dodds, and the stage company. Following the Indians' departure, Rath and his associates retreated to the safety of Fort Larned, and the Cheyennes continued up the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road to Cow Creek stage station where they killed Suel Walker. Barricaded inside the station, C. L. and J. J. Prater returned the fire, killing two Indians and wounding a third. Fearing the Indians would soon return with reinforcements, the Prater brothers fled the ranch and sped northeast toward Salina.¹⁷

13. Henry Tisdale, "Travel by Stage in the Early Days," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1899-1900* 7 (1900): 462.

14. Mead, *Hunting and Trading*, 59-60; A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 2 vols. (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 2:1274.

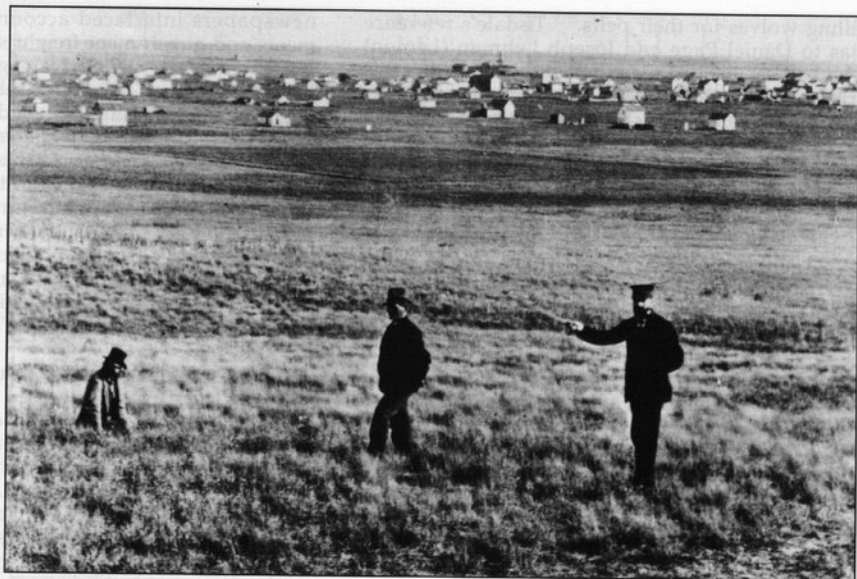
15. Mead, *Hunting and Trading*, 117-18; Porter, "My Grandmother"; "Extracts From Diary of H. H. Morrison" (Unpublished manuscript, 1859, Campbell House Kansas Research), 28; *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, v. 34, pt. 4, 149-50.

16. "Diary of H. H. Morrison," 70; Porter, "My Grandmother."

17. George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956) 146; Louise Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek Crossing," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1971): 143, 144.

Recognizing the military's use of the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, the citizens of Junction City began to promote the advantages of this route for Santa Fe's commercial traffic.

Photographer Alexander Gardner captured this view of Junction City in 1867.



At the same time, an unidentified courier carried the news of the attack to the stations and ranches between Walnut Creek and Salina. Hearing of Walker's death, settlers in the Smoky Hill area quickly congregated at the Page-Lehman ranch where they consulted through the night. Agreeing discretion to be the better part of valor, they packed up their possessions and departed to Salina where they found the citizens of the little village secluded within a makeshift stockade fabricated by a ring of wagons circled around the flag pole.¹⁸

On the following day, May 18, H. L. Jones, deputy marshal and militia captain, dispatched a courier to Fort Riley requesting troops; at midnight on May 19, forty-five soldiers arrived at Salina. At dawn, Jones, Lt. Van Antwerp, fifteen soldiers, and a posse of citizens rode west to inspect the damage.

Stopping at the Cow Creek station to bury Walker, they found all the ranches and stations between Salina and Walnut Creek sacked and deserted.¹⁹

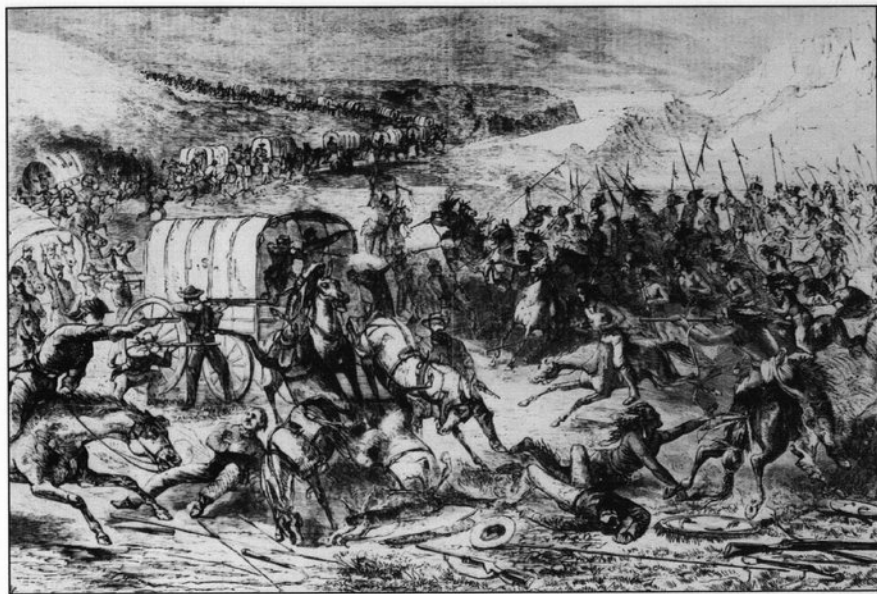
As fear continued to grip the little community, the good citizens of Salina ignored the sabbath of May 29 to initiate work on a stockade. That night they paused from their work to conduct a prayer meeting, but in the following days, work continued on the split log fortification which measured 100 by 125 feet. The militia drilled by day and stood guard by night.²⁰

On June 4, while the stockade was yet in construction, Jim Hall, the stage driver left afoot by the freebooters in September 1862, came racing into town with a wounded passenger in his coach. According to Hall, fifteen hundred Indians were in pursuit. Runners were sent to outlying areas, and women set to work molding bullets. After some time, Hall confessed that it was all a hoax and that the wounded

18. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1274; "Joseph Lehman" (Unpublished manuscript, Salina-Biography-Joseph Lehman File, Campbell Room of Kansas Research); *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, v. 34, pt. 4, 149-50.

19. "Joseph Lehman," 149-50.

20. Porter, "My Grandmother."



In spite of military troops patrolling the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, stage stations and caravans were subject to Indian attacks throughout the summer of 1864.

passenger had accidentally shot himself. Needless to say, Hall's admission was not well received.²¹

The stockade was completed by June 7, but fear continued to reign. Citizens slept in their clothes ready to flee to the stockade at a moment's notice, and members of the militia took turns standing guard both night and day.²²

In the wake of the May 17 raid, troops were sent to three strategic locations on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road: Salina, the Smoky Hill River, and Walnut Creek. At Salina, Lt. Clark was stationed at the previously built stockade with twenty-five men of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry. At the Smoky Hill, Lt. Allen Ellsworth was stationed with twenty soldiers from the Seventh Iowa and a like number from the Fifteenth Kansas Cavalry. The men were immediately employed in the construction of a blockhouse built with logs already cut and hewn on two sides found at the abandoned Page-Lehman ranch. The blockhouse

was to become the nucleus of an army post named Fort Ellsworth in honor of its first commanding officer. At Walnut Creek, Capt. Oscar F. Dunlap was dispatched with forty-five members of Company H, Fifteenth Kansas. The Walnut Creek post, originally called Camp Dunlap, was renamed Fort Zarah by department commander Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis in honor of his son Maj. Zarah Curtis who had been killed by William C. Quantrill's raiders at Baxter Springs in the previous year. Like its counterpart on the Smoky Hill, Fort Zarah's first permanent building under construction was a blockhouse.²³

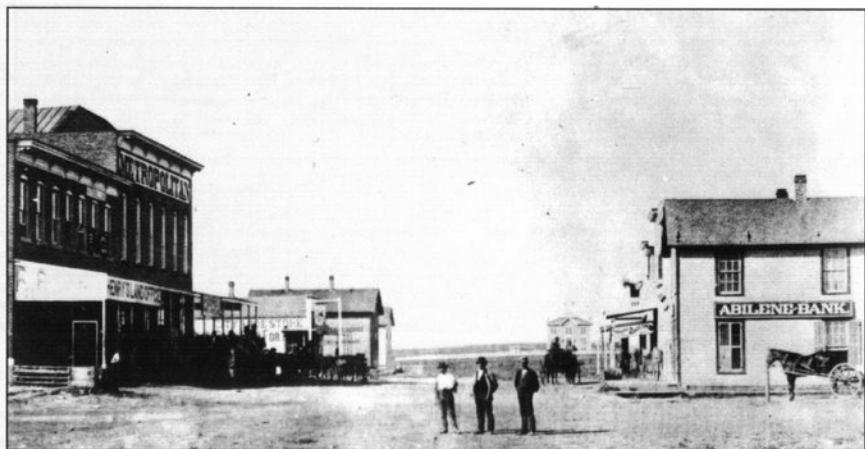
With the troops in place, a system of escorts was instituted for the stage coaches between the three sites. Members of the Seventh Iowa provided escort from Salina to the Smoky Hill and return; Fort Ellsworth soldiers patrolled to Walnut Creek and return; and Capt. Dunlap's troopers escorted the

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, v. 34, pt. 4, 402-4; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Co., 1896), 518.

In 1864 stage line service was initiated on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road. Abilene, shown in this 1870s photo, was one of eight stage stations established along the route.



stages between Forts Zarah and Larned.²⁴ Regardless of the troopers' presence, a party of Kiowas, Comanches, and Kiowas attacked two caravans within sight of Fort Zarah on July 18 killing ten teamsters, wounding five, and scalping alive two others.²⁵

When news of the attack reached General Curtis at Fort Leavenworth, he proceeded to Fort Riley to organize a four-hundred-man battalion composed of Company L, Eleventh Kansas Cavalry and four militia companies from nearby counties. Riding in the comfort of an ambulance, Gen. Curtis directed the column down the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road

reaching Fort Zarah on July 28.²⁶ There, no Indians were sighted, and the expedition continued on to Fort Larned, reported to be under siege. Kiowas had driven off 172 mules and horses at Larned on July 17; but by the time Curtis arrived, they had long since left the area. Dividing his command into three separate forces, Curtis deployed them to the north, east, and west of Fort Larned; but not a single warrior was encountered during the entire expedition.²⁷ Henry Booth, Company L's captain, later wrote: "the only attack made was on a plum patch at the mouth of Walnut Creek." Such sentiment, according to Booth, resulted in the expedition being called "Gen. Curtis' Plum Hunt."²⁸

On August 7, Indians struck Fort Ellsworth driving off forty to forty-five horses belonging to Company H, Seventh Iowa Cavalry and five mules, property of the stage company. Captain Booth and twenty Company L troopers, garrisoned at Salina, pursued the raiding party up the Saline River for some forty miles before giving up the chase.²⁹

24. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, v.34, pt. 4, 404.

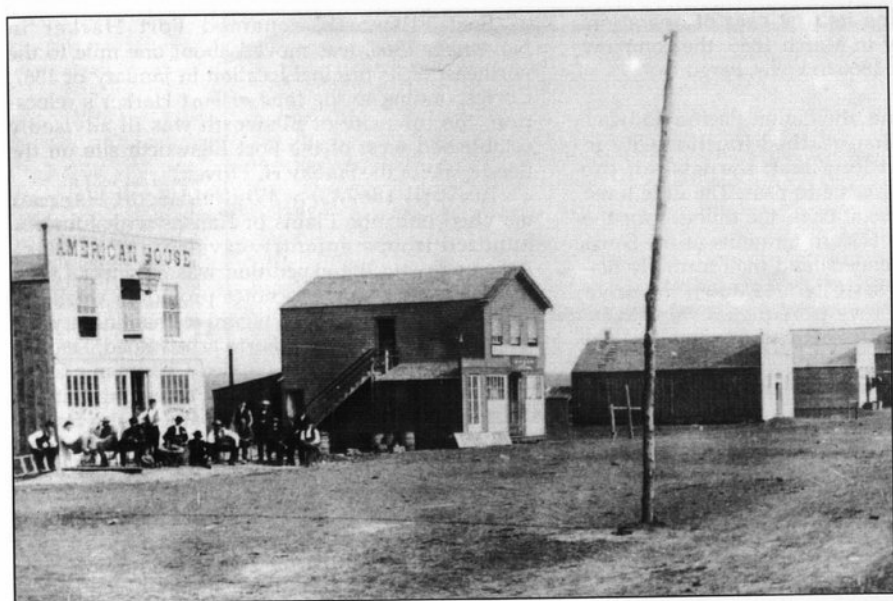
25. Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek Crossing," 145; the two men scalped alive were Allen Edwards of Des Moines County, Iowa, and Robert McGee (Magee), a youth of thirteen or fourteen years from Easton, Kansas. Both were transported to the Fort Larned hospital where they recovered following medical treatment. Twenty-eight years later, McGee, then living in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, billed Congress for damages received in the scalping incident. On April 1, 1973, several skeletal remains were discovered in graves disclosed by floodwaters of Walnut Creek at the Fort Zarah site. Subsequent investigation located a total of ten skeletons in two separate graves. Names associated with eight skeletons in one grave were: William Weddell of Brownsville, Nebraska; Perry Deabee and son Do, James Lassel, Robert Lucas, Lewis Simpson of Clay Center, Missouri; Talbot Edwards of Des Moines County, Iowa; and Enos Gardner, address unknown. The other grave contained the remains of two men presumed to be blacks from Leavenworth identified by first name only, Perry and Charles. Ray S. Schulz, "Identities of 10 bodies remain a mystery," *Great Bend Tribune*, April 29, 1973, and *Kansas City Star*, December 31, 1892.

26. George S. Burt, "The Wabauunsee Militia Company," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1909-1910 11 (1910): 604-7.

27. Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Larned on the Santa Fe Trail* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1985), 15-16.

28. Henry Booth, "Centennial History of Pawnee County" (Unpublished manuscript, Santa Fe Trail Center, Larned, Kans.).

29. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, v. 41, pt. 1 (1893), 233-34.



A stage station on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, the 1867 town of Ellsworth boasted four completed houses, three of which were saloons. When floodwaters of June 8, 1867, washed away the town, it was reestablished on nearby high ground. Photograph by Alexander Gardner, 1867.

Following the August 7 raid no depredations occurred along the Fort Riley Road until November 20. On the nineteenth, Captain Booth, by this time reassigned to Fort Riley as Inspector General of the Upper Arkansas, arrived with Lt. A. Helliwell at Fort Zarah to conduct a routine inspection. On the following morning Booth continued the inspection, sending his escort on ahead toward Fort Larned. Two hours later the officers departed Zarah in a light wagon thinking to overtake the escort within a few miles. About five miles west of Zarah, they were confronted by twenty-five to thirty Indians. Turning the wagon eastward, they made a charge back toward Zarah. Engaged in a running battle for two miles, both Helliwell and Booth suffered several arrow wounds. Finally, in an act of desperation, Booth crawled to the back of the wagon and threw out the valises containing dress uniforms intended for wear at Fort Larned. Distracted, the Indians stopped to examine the contents of the baggage, and the officers raced to the sanctuary of Fort Zarah.³⁰

30. Ibid., 934; Henry Inman, *The Old Santa Fe Trail, The Story of a Great Highway* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1897).

Subsequently, a relative period of calm returned to the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road as the Kansas Stage Company reopened the abandoned stations and resumed a regular schedule. The single exception occurred in February 1865 when a soldier was killed by Indians during an attack on a woodcutting party near Fort Zarah.³¹

The following June the Butterfield Overland Despatch (BOD) initiated freight service from Atchison to Junction City and westward over the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road to Fort Ellsworth. West of the fort, the BOD pursued a course north of the Smoky Hill River 527 miles to Denver. Stage service was added in September with eight stations established in the seventy-nine mile stretch between Forts Riley and Ellsworth: Fort Riley, Junction City, Chapman's Creek, Abilene, Solomon River, Salina, Spring Creek, and Ellsworth. Repeated Indian attacks west of Fort Ellsworth forced the BOD

31. Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 161.

out of business during its first year of operation. Sold to Ben Holladay in March 1866, the company was resold in October 1866 to Wells, Fargo.³²

In the meantime, the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, reached Junction City in June 1866. At long last, the wish of the Junction City citizenry came to pass. The little town near Fort Riley became, at once, the railhead for the Union Pacific and the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail. Freight, passengers, and mail formerly dispatched from the Kansas City area down the Santa Fe Trail via Council Grove were thence shipped by rail to Junction City and transported by wagon and stage on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road to the Santa Fe Trail juncture at Fort Zarah. Consequently, overland traffic on the Santa Fe Trail east of Fort Zarah came to a halt.³³

Corresponding to the arrival of the railroad at Junction City, the postal service contracted with Barlow, Sanderson and Company to deliver mail on a triweekly schedule from Junction City to Santa Fe. Replicating some of the stops operated by both the Kansas Stage Company and the BOD, Barlow, Sanderson established seven stations on the 120-mile stretch from Fort Riley to Fort Zarah: Chapman's Creek, Abilene, Salina, Pritchard's (Spring Creek), Fort Ellsworth, Well's Ranch at Plum Creek, and Fort Zarah. Later, the Cow Creek station originally operated by the Kansas Stage Company was reopened.³⁴

The new stage line experienced little difficulty with Indians thanks to the protection afforded by a company of the Thirty-seventh U.S. Infantry stationed at Fort Ellsworth under the command of Lt. Frank Baldwin. Baldwin assigned four or five men to each of the stations between the Smoky Hill and Walnut Creek. In addition, the stagecoaches were provided escort with troopers either riding atop the stages or alongside in wagons.³⁵

32. Wayne C. Lee and Howard C. Raynesford, *Trails of the Smoky Hill, From Coronado to the Cow Towns* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxtes Printers, 1980), 51, 58, 88, 91. In the summer of 1867, the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, reached Fort Harker, thus eliminating that portion of the BOD route that replicated the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road between Fort Riley and Fort Harker (Fort Ellsworth's successor).

33. Morris F. Taylor, *First Mail West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 115-16.

34. "Table of Distances from Junction City to Santa Fe as Given by Sanderson's Southern Overland Stage Company," *Junction City Union*, August 4, 1866; Taylor, *First Mail West*, 121-22.

35. Robert H. Steinbach, *A Long March: The Lives of Frank and Alice Baldwin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 24.

Fort Ellsworth, renamed Fort Harker in November 1866, was moved about one mile to the northeast of its original location in January of 1867. Corresponding to the time of Fort Harker's relocation, the townsite of Ellsworth was ill advisedly established west of the Fort Ellsworth site on the flood plain of the Smoky Hill River.³⁶

In April 1867 Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock marched onto the Plains of Kansas with fourteen hundred troops: infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Accompanying the expedition was engineer Lt. M. R. Brown whose precise notes provide a wealth of detailed information with regard to the itinerary followed on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road. Leaving Fort Riley, the expedition crossed Chapman's Creek thirteen miles west of the post. Proceeding thirteen miles further along the north bank of the Smoky Hill, the column crossed Mud Creek at Abilene. Brown noted that in the center of the little city was a town of prairie dogs. Beyond Abilene the expedition crossed the Solomon and Saline forks on a portable pontoon bridge built on canvas boats by Brown's engineering squad. At the Solomon crossing, nine miles beyond Abilene, the expedition was joined by Henry M. Stanley, correspondent for several eastern publications.³⁷ Stanley's journalistic observations provide a human and often humorous perspective of the expedition, complementing the accurate, yet tedious, accounts compiled by Lieutenant Brown.

Three miles beyond the Saline, the expedition camped at Salina described by Brown as a small town with muddy streets. Departing Salina the expedition crossed Dry Creek and proceeded on to Elm Creek where Ernest Hohneck's ranch was located. Impressed with the fare served up by Hohneck, correspondent Stanley was lavish in his praise:

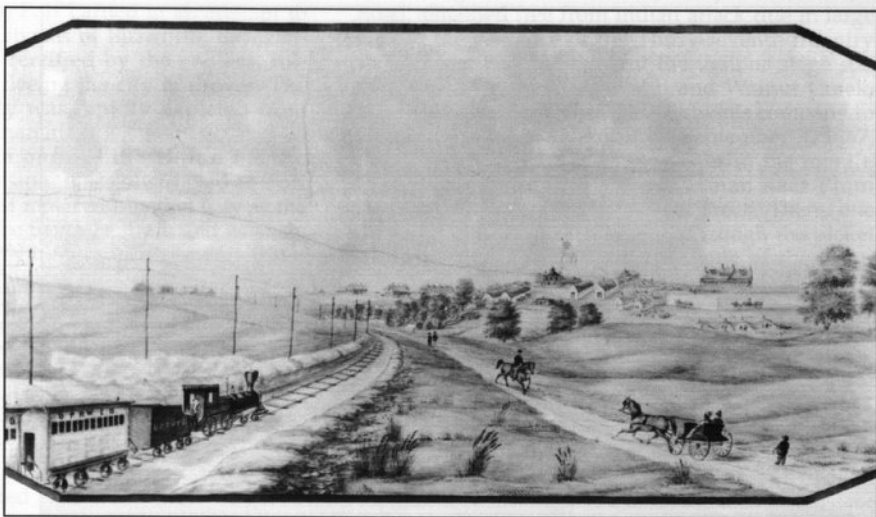
We stopped at Hohneck's ranche, our quondam friend, for dinner, who had already prepared, in the delightful anticipation of our visit, an elegant and plentiful repast, consisting of bona fide buffalo, deer meat, smoked ham and quinces. We enjoyed it amazingly, and therefore suggest to the belated travelers that they always stop at Hohneck's ranche when they come this way.

36. Lee and Raynesford, *Trails of the Smoky Hill*, 158; Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios and Posts Commonly Called Forts West of the Mississippi River to 1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 53.

37. Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General.

In 1867 the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, was constructed to Fort Harker, shown here in this 1867 sketch.

The little post replaced Junction City as the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail.



Hohneck proved himself a gentleman and a scholar, and it was with something akin to sadness that we departed from the adobe mansion that he had himself built on the wild waste of the desert.³⁸

Beyond Elm Creek the expedition pushed on to camp at Spring Creek, sixteen miles from Salina according to Brown's odometer reading. There the lieutenant noted the presence of the Barlow, Sanderson stage station commonly known as Pritchard's. The next stop, twelve miles beyond Pritchard's, was Clear Creek where Brown identified a "rancho on roadside."³⁹ This was the ranch originally established by the Farris brothers in 1860.

Six miles beyond Clear Creek the troops reached Fort Harker. There they went into camp on the north side of the Smoky Hill near the site of abandoned Fort Ellsworth.⁴⁰ As the men rested on the following day, Stanley had the opportunity to visit Fort Harker in its earliest days of development. His description was far from flattering: "a single square surrounded

by some wooden shanties . . . a great wart on the surface of the plain."⁴¹

On the following day the troops proceeded down the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road to Oxhide Creek. This little stream, according to A. C. Spilman, "furnished timber and water and was the first camping-place out of Harker."⁴² Crossing Oxhide Creek, Hancock's forces camped at Plum Creek, seventeen miles from Fort Harker. There Brown noted that the creek was dry in the summer but that water could be obtained from a spring at nearby Well's Ranch, a Barlow, Sanderson stage station.⁴³

The expedition departed the regular road at Plum Creek taking a west-southwestwardly direction so as to cross Cow Creek where there was an ample supply of wood. After camping at Cow Creek, the column turned south five miles to intercept the Santa Fe Road (Brown's designation for the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road) and continued on to Fort Zarah at Walnut Creek.⁴⁴ This diversion elimi-

38. *Junction City Weekly Union*, April 20, 1867.

39. Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General.

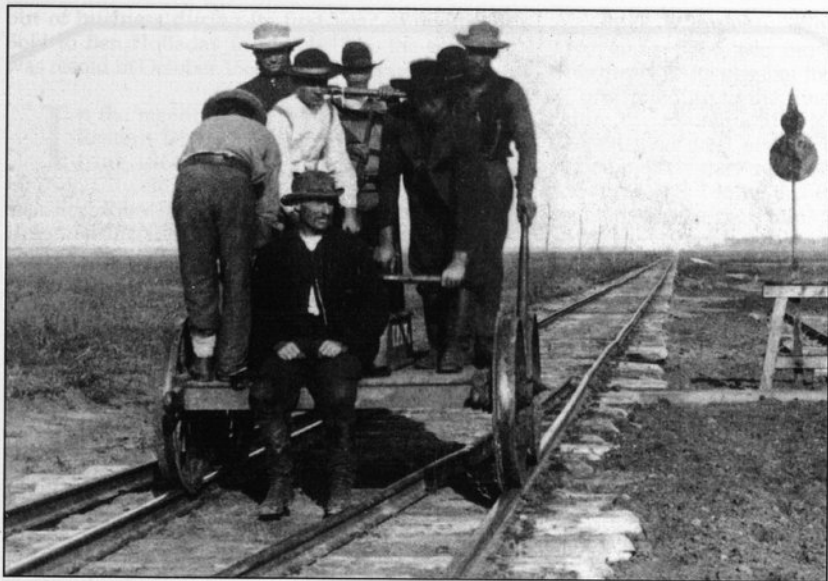
40. *Ibid.*

41. Henry M. Stanley, *My Early Travels and Adventures in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 4.

42. Spilman to Martin, 667.

43. Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General.

44. *Ibid.*



As the railroad progressed westward, overland traffic on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road came to a grinding halt. This 1867 Gardner photograph depicts tracks heading west from Salina.

nated the next stop on the stage route, Cow Creek, located twelve miles southwest of Plum Creek, ten miles northeast of Fort Zarah.

By the time of Hancock's arrival, Fort Zarah had experienced substantial growth since its establishment in 1864. Troops, no longer housed in dugouts, were quartered in a sod barracks measuring twenty-eight by fifty feet. The stone blockhouse, completed in 1865, never used as a defensive structure, was likewise used as quarters. Also added were a guardhouse and a sutler's store, both completed in 1865, and the Kiowa-Comanche Indian Agency operated by Jesse Leavenworth.⁴⁵ Nearby, Rath's trading ranch remained in operation as did the stage station on the south side of Walnut Creek.

Beyond Fort Zarah the expedition continued on to visit Forts Larned, Dodge, and Hays before passing through Fort Harker on the return trip to Forts

Riley and Leavenworth. At Fort Harker in May 1867, Stanley took note of nearby Ellsworth which boasted four completed houses, three of which were saloons. The other, a log shanty, served as a hotel. Stanley wryly observed that thirteen other houses were under construction and that the population consisted of forty men, four women, eight boys, seven girls, fourteen horses, and about twenty-nine and a half dogs.⁴⁶ The little town as Stanley knew it became history on June 8 when floodwaters of the Smoky Hill washed away half of the houses and the remaining buildings were left standing in four feet of water. However, within a matter of weeks, the town was reestablished on high ground a few miles west of its original site.⁴⁷

Subsequent to the flood, cholera of epidemic proportions struck the relocated city and nearby Fort Harker. At the height of the plague, the Eighteenth Kansas Infantry was mustered into service at the post on July 15, 1867. As the recruits began to fall,

45. Adolph Hunnius' sketch of Fort Zarah as it appeared in September, 1867, Adolph Hunnius Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Barry, "The Ranch at Walnut Creek," 145; Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General.

46. Stanley, *My Early Travels*, 89-91.

47. Lee and Raynesford, *Trails of the Smoky Hill*, 159.

Maj. Horace Moore marched his troops from the post down the road to Fort Larned in an attempt to escape the scourge. Citizens of Ellsworth, devastated by the flood and terrified by the cholera, followed Moore's lead, fleeing the city in droves. The population of the city was rapidly depleted from one thousand to less than fifty.⁴⁸

During the same period, the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, was constructed to Fort Harker.⁴⁹ The little post replaced Junction City as the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail; and as such, became the chief supply base and distribution center for the shipment of military supplies to the Southwest. In addition, the construction of permanent buildings at the post continued at a rapid pace. Consequently, the population of the post mushroomed, swelled by the influx of civilian employees, teamsters, and mechanics.⁵⁰

Nearby Ellsworth experienced a similar boom taking on all the notoriety associated with end-of-the-tracks towns. Daniel Geary, who settled in Kansas City in 1856, described Ellsworth during the late 1860s: "The village, except for some of the best business houses, consisted of tents, and every other tent was a saloon, regardless of where the count began."⁵¹ The best business houses that Geary noted were those associated with the two giant forwarding firms, C. H. Chick Company and Otero Sellars Company. Erecting huge warehouses, the firms served as wholesale outlets supplying Santa Fe traders, both Mexican and American. While Fort Harker remained the official railhead, the Barlow, Sanderson Company moved its headquarters to Ellsworth. To accommodate the ever-increasing traffic, an auxiliary road was developed running south from Ellsworth a few miles to connect with the regular Fort Riley - Fort Larned route emanating from Fort Harker.⁵²

48. Henderson Lafayette Burgess, "The Eighteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, and Some Incidents Connected with Its Service on the Plains," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1913-1914 13 (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1900): 535; Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 1:580.

49. Taylor, *First Mail West*, 121.

50. Theodore Weichselbaum, "Statement of Theodore Weichselbaum of Ogden, Riley County, July 17, 1908," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1909-1910 11: 565.

51. Daniel Geary, "War Incidents at Kansas City," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1909-1910 11: 289-90.

52. Miguel Antonio Otero, *My Life on the Frontier, 1864-1882* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 9-10; Campaign Map of Portions of the State of Kansas, 1872, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group 77, National Archives and Records Service; Taylor, *First Mail West*, 121.

During 1866-1867 the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road remained free from Indian attack due in large part to the presence of the Thirty-seventh Infantry stationed at Fort Harker and the various stage stations between the Smoky Hill and Walnut Creek. However, with the transfer of Baldwin's company to Fort Wingate, New Mexico, on September 3, 1867, trouble returned to the road.⁵³ Later in the month, Cheyennes killed and scalped a man near Plum Creek before pressing on to Cow Creek. There, one of the Cheyennes fired his pistol through the picket wall of the station house killing one of the occupants. The approach of a southbound stage frightened the Indians away, saving the other stage company employees from sure death.⁵⁴

This incident, which signaled an end to Indian depredations on the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road, may well have predicted the end of the road itself. In the following month Union Pacific trains were running on a regular schedule to Hays City; and by November 1 stage service was initiated to Fort Dodge and beyond to Santa Fe over the newly established Fort Hays - Fort Dodge Road. Shortly thereafter, freight wagons began to travel the same seventy-five-mile route.⁵⁵ Thus, overland traffic on the Santa Fe Trail from Fort Dodge eastward came to a grinding halt. Today the stage stations at Well's Ranch, Cow Creek, and twelve other locations along the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road are indistinguishable from the surrounding terrain. Even the military posts that stood sentinel over the road's 120-mile length have all but disappeared. At Fort Harker, only the guardhouse and three officers' quarters have survived to be incorporated within the city limits of present-day Kanopolis; and at Fort Zarah, two miles east of present-day Great Bend, no visible evidence of the post can be observed. By and large, the Fort Riley - Fort Larned Road remains unmarked except for a few faint ruts, slight tribute to the road that began service as a military route in 1860 and, for seven short years, served as a significant segment of the Santa Fe Trail. (KH)

53. Steinbach, *A Long March*, 33.

54. Taylor, *First Mail West*, 121-22.

55. *Ibid.*; see also David K. Clapsaddle, "The Fort Hays - Fort Dodge Road," *Kansas History* 14 (Summer 1991): 100.