



## NEWS

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### Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History May 2 - 8, 1854 (2004)

During the first week in May, Anna Marie Goodell traveled up the Missouri on the boat *Sam Cloon*, which had debarked from St. Louis a week earlier and arrived on the 1<sup>st</sup> at the river port of Kansas, Missouri. Anna and friend Elizabeth Austin had left families in Vermillion, Ohio, to join their husbands who'd made claims near Puget Sound. Anna, 22 years old with a two-month-old baby, kept track in her diary of the six-day trip from Kansas up to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where they left the river to begin their overland journey. The river trip, about 200 miles by road today, lasted nearly a week due to the many ports the boat visited as it meandered from the Missouri to the Kansas side of the river. River men considered the Missouri particularly difficult to navigate. People also considered it particularly muddy, but they drank the river water anyway, often remarking on how many days it took for the dirt to silt out before the water was palatable.

The *Sam Cloon* spent the night of May 2<sup>nd</sup> stuck on a sandbar north of the city of Kansas. The next morning, "a beautiful morning," Anna noted, found them free. Before noon, they arrived at Ft. Leavenworth. The afternoon stop was Weston, Missouri, where she "saw a great many wagons and oxen and horses ready to start to California and Oregon."

Weston was the center of commerce for western Missouri, far more important than the twin towns of Kansas and Westport. In 1854, Weston boasted 5,000 residents and a Missouri river port second only to St. Louis. Today, Weston is frozen at it's point of glory by a combination of geology and politics. The river abandoned the town after an 1858 flood and the railroad builders of the 1860s bypassed it for Kansas City.

The *Sam Cloon* stopped at St. Joseph for an hour on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. "Don't get along very fast," noted Anna as snags of tangled trees clogged the river. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the boat left Iowa Point at Kansas's northeastern edge. The next day found them stalled by shallow water. "Dare not go any farther for fear of running aground, so the Captain has taken a small boat and gone to find a channel." They finally reached Council Bluffs on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Sarah Sutton's party was, in the first week of May, already 100 miles into their overland journey. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> they crossed the boundary into the new Nebraska territory. "Very cool morning. Froze ice over the pans of water.... passed over [the most] beautiful land that ever was seen but no timber." As they crossed the Nemaha River, the toll keeper told them he'd counted 10,000 head of cattle and 118 wagons ahead of them. Our imaginary image of the trails with their grassy wagon ruts leaves no room for more accurate pictures of a cow path trod by tens of thousands of cattle.

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Anna Maria Goodell, "Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854." Sarah Sutton, "A Travel Diary in 1854." Kenneth L. Holmes, editor. *Covered Wagon Women*, Volume 7, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) Pp. 35-37, 90-92.