The Fort Hays - Fort Dodge Road is depicted by a dotted line near the center of this portion of a "Map of Kansas," prepared in March 1870 by order of Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield.
The Fort Hays – Fort Dodge Road

by David K. Clapsaddle

Fort Dodge, established in 1865, was initially supplied by goods freighted from Fort Leavenworth down the Santa Fe Trail. However, with the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad, Eastern Division, at Junction City in June 1866 and at Fort Harker one year later, supplies were shipped to these respective railheads and transported by wagon to the Fort Zarah juncture of the Santa Fe Trail and on to Fort Dodge. By October 1867, the tracks of the Union Pacific pushed westward to newly founded Hays City. Thus, this little municipality became the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail, and nearby Fort Hays superseded Fort Harker as the supply depot for the distribution of military goods to the Southwest.

In the spring of 1867, Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock, commander of the Department of the Missouri, transversed Kansas with fifteen hundred troops, making a show of force to the southern plains tribes. During this campaign, Hancock, old quartermaster that he was, recognized the need for a road between Forts Hays and Dodge. Subsequently, Hancock, writing to Gen. Philip Sheridan, his replacement as commander of the Department of the Missouri, stated:

My impression is that the real route of travel for emigrants hereafter will be from Fort Hays or Harker (most probably from Hays) directly across to some point a little west of Dodge, crossing Walnut Creek and branches of Pawnee Fork, where the country affords excellent grass, good running water, plenty of wood, good roads—wood, water, and grass at convenient intervals.

Soon after, December 1867, Lt. Col. John W. Davidson, inspector general for the Department of the Missouri, wrote Sheridan proposing an itinerary for a seventy-five mile route between the two posts.

Fort Hays to Smoky..............................10m
Good water, grass, some wood & good crossing.
Smoky to Big Timbers............................8m
Wood, grass & water in pools, never failing.
Big Timbers to Walnut Creek......................7m
Good water, grass & wood in abundance, bad crossing, requires a one span bridge.
Walnut Creek to N. Pawnee......................12m
Wood, water, grass abundant. Very bad crossing requires bridge, probably two spans.
N. Branch to Middle..............................15m
Wood, water & grass abundant, bridge required.
Middle to S. Branch..............................15m
Abundant water, grass & wood, fair crossing. Corduroyed.
S. Branch to Ft. Dodge............................12m

Although Hancock referred to a road for emigrants, the route he suggested was first used by a stage company. Upon removal of the railhead from Fort Harker to Hays City, Barlow, Sanderson and Company was ordered by the U.S. Postal Department to initiate mail deliveries from Hays City to Santa Fe, New Mexico, effective November 1, 1867. Beginning at Hays City, the stage line ran to Fort Dodge and continued over the mountain branch of the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe. Stages departed from each end of the line on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the one way trip

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being completed in four-and-one-half days. Mail deliveries continued from Hays City through the summer of 1868 when the railroad was transferred to Sheridan and the stage headquarters was relocated at Pond Creek Station.  

Early in 1868, the route experienced a steady stream of military traffic, with freight deliveries being made on a regular basis. John Murphy, a teamster recalled:

In the summer of 1868, I was assigned to the post train at Fort Hays. This train was organized and equipped at Fort Harker and proceeded to Fort Hays... we were kept constantly on the road between Fort Hays and Fort Dodge. As the distance between the two posts was nearly 100 miles, it required about three days to make the trip each way. We were allowed no rest at the Fort Hays end of the trip.  

Thus was born the Fort Hays – Fort Dodge Road.

During the fall of 1868, traffic on the road dramatically increased in preparation for General Sheridan's winter campaign against the southern plains tribes. Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, still under suspension from court-martial action, was summoned by Sheridan to lead the Seventh U.S. Cavalry in this campaign. Arriving at Fort Hays from his Michigan home on October 30, Custer hurried down the road two days later to reassure command of his old regiment.  

Following Custer down the road were supplies for the campaign including four hundred thousand rations to be transported ninety miles beyond Fort Dodge to Camp Supply in Indian Territory. Six hundred unbroken mules from Kentucky and Missouri were shipped by rail to Hays and subsequently hitched, “kicking, squealing, and bucking,” to one hundred wagons. Driving four abreast, three-span of mules per wagon, the wagons stretched out for a full mile. Eighteen-year-old Billy Dixon, a teamster on the expedition, recalled:

The first day out we got to Smoky Hill River and camped for the night. We then pulled to Walnut Creek, and the third day brought us to Pawnee Fork. Between this place and what is now the town of Bucklin, Kan., we had a stampede that for real excitement beat anything I had ever seen. The mules ran in every possible direction, overturning wagons, and out-

fit colliding with outfit until it looked as if there would never be a pound of freight delivered at Supply. Many of the wagons were so badly demolished that they had to be abandoned and left behind. Their loads were piled on other wagons and carried forward.

Our route carried us past Saw Log Creek, Fort Dodge—there was no Dodge City at that time—Mulberry Creek, and thence to Bluff Creek.

We reached Camp Supply at the end of a twelve days’ journey. The supplies were unloaded on the ground and covered with tarpaulins.

Upon return to Fort Hays, a second such trip was conducted. To augment the regular troops in this campaign, General Sheridan called upon the governor of Kansas, Samuel Crawford, to raise a volunteer regiment of cavalry. Not only did Crawford recruit twelve hundred volunteers, he resigned his office to assume the command of the newly formed twenty-company regiment designated as the Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry. On November 5, ten companies of the regiment marched from Topeka to join the regulars in Indian Territory. Subsequently, the two remaining companies, D and G, traveled by rail to Hays City, marched down the road to Fort Dodge, and continued south to join the rest of the regiment.

On November 15, General Sheridan departed Fort Hays for Fort Dodge. Caught in a blizzard the first night out, the general “took refuge under a wagon, and there spent a miserable night.” Continuing down the road the following day, Sheridan reached Fort Dodge that evening in spite of persistent sleet and snow. Proceeding on from Fort Dodge, Sheridan set up headquarters at newly established Camp Supply constructed under the supervision of Lt. Col. Alfred Sully who had assumed command of the expedition. Seeking a more aggressive leader, Sheridan relieved Sully, placing Custer in command. With the full force of Sheridan’s confidence in his favor, Custer marched south on November 23 to confront the enemy. Four days later, the Seventh Cavalry struck Black Kettle’s Cheyenne village on the Washita. Fifty-three captives, all women and children, were taken.

From the Washita, Custer marched triumphantly to Camp Supply where he deposited the prisoners and returned south in pursuit of other victories. Meanwhile, the captives were marched on to Fort Dodge and up the road to Fort Hays where they were imprisoned in a pen-like structure. Custer remained in Indian Territory throughout the winter, completing a successful campaign which forced most of the Indians back to reservations. In April 1869, Custer marched to Fort Dodge and up the road with his own regiment, the Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry which had been put under Custer’s command, and two women (Sarah White and Anna Brewster Morgan) who had been rescued from Cheyenne Indians holding them captive. Accompanying the march were three Cheyenne warriors whom Custer had taken hostage to guarantee the safe return of the women. On June 13, 1869, some seven months after the Battle of Washita, the Cheyennes were marched back down the road and returned to their families in Indian Territory.

Deactivated in 1889, Fort Hays was transferred to the State of Kansas in 1897. Today the fort’s lands are dedicated to the Fort Hays Experiment Station, a golf course, and Historic Fort Hays, a state historic site. Original buildings remaining at the site include: the blockhouse, the guardhouse, and officers’ quarters. A marker identifies the location of the quartermaster’s complex which housed the supplies freighted down the road to Fort Dodge and beyond to Camp Supply. Here the road began. Two different routes departed the quartermaster’s complex, one circling to the southeast before leaving the post to the southwest, the other skirting the parade grounds to the northwest before turning southwest. About one-fourth mile southwest of the post, the routes merged into a single trail. Here, pronounced ruts can be observed in the pastureland now maintained by the Agriculture Experiment Station.

Four and one-half miles southwest of Fort Hays, the road reached Five Mile Hollow, so named for its distance from Hays City. Snuffer’s wagon train was caught in a blizzard while camped here in November 1871. According to Billy Dixon, the cook died, frozen to death while trying to start a fire in the bottom of a wagon. His efforts to burn the tailgate were in vain.
In the fall of 1868, Gen. George Custer and the Seventh U.S. Cavalry marched south of Fort Dodge in a campaign against the southern plains Indians. In late November, Custer and his troops attacked Black Kettle’s Cheyenne camp (facing page) taking fifty-three prisoners. The captives, all women and children, were subsequently marched to Fort Dodge and up the road to Fort Hays where they were imprisoned.

Untouched by cultivation, the hollow remains much as it did during the days of the road. Bisection by a slough and populated by a scattering of trees, this natural basin drains the prairie from all four directions. One can easily see why the hollow, with a ready supply of water and grass, became a camp site on the road.

One mile southwest of Five Mile Hollow, the road intercepted the Smoky Hill Trail. Near this junction Lookout Station was established by the Butterfield Overland Despatch in 1865. In April of 1867, General Hancock, seeking a council with the Sioux and Cheyenne, camped thirty miles west of Fort Larned, marched within one-half mile of their village. The Indians, with memories of Sand Creek fresh in their minds, slipped away under the cover of darkness during the night of April 14, fleeing northward across Walnut Creek to the Smoky Hill Trail. On the following day, fleeing warriors attacked Lookout Station. That evening, men from Big Creek Station, eight miles to the east of Lookout, saw the sky reddened with the reflection of fire. John Betts and Captain Barron hurried to Lookout Station to find:

...the station had been burned, the stock stolen and the cook nailed to the barn and the barn burned, and the bodies of the men badly burned and the stock driven off.  

During the following summer, the station was rebuilt.

22. Ibid., 102.

Just east of the Lookout Station location, a Butterfield Overland Despatch marker, erected in the 1960s by H. C. Raynesford, identifies the westward route of the Smoky Hill Trail. At the station site, several shallow depressions, evidence of the station’s buildings, can be observed. To the north a few hundred feet is a large entrenchment, the remains of the dugout barn used to stable the stage company’s animals. Between the two is one remaining rut of the Smoky Hill Trail.

Four miles farther southwest, the road reached the Smoky Hill River. Here, according to Colonel Davidson, was a “good crossing” as compared with the steep banks of other streams along the road. While there was no ranch at the crossing, William Holland of the topographical engineers, who surveyed the road in 1872, described a whiskey ranch east of the crossing and some distance north. Holland’s description is in keeping with Billy Dixon’s narrative. In the fall of 1870, Dixon engaged in buffalo hunting, accompanied by two skinners:

23. Davidson to Sheridan.
24. Along frontier roads, enterprising entrepreneurs established small pockets of private enterprise called road ranches, trading ranches, or in some cases, whiskey ranches. Most commonly known simply as ranches, the little businesses catered to the needs of travelers, selling groceries, hardware, ammunition, and a constant supply of spirits. To augment their income, ranch proprietors traded live stock and supplied forage. Ranches located at crossings often operated a toll bridge.
25. “Scout by William Holland of the Engineers Accompanying Co. F, Sixth Cavalry from Camp Hays to Fort Dodge,” Military Records, 1872, National Archives [hereafter cited as Scout by Holland].
... moved south of Hays City about ten miles and came to a boiling spring that flowed from an opening in solid rock. Here we decided to make our permanent camp for the winter, so we built a picket house and a big dugout, expecting to dry a lot of buffalo meat for market, but finally abandoned this scheme. Our camp was on a main-traveled road leading to Hays City. Freighters and hunters urged me to establish a road ranch or store, where such supplies as were used in that country could be purchased in reasonable quantities. Having some spare money, I stocked up with tobacco, whisky and a general line of groceries, and employed a man named Billy Reynolds to run the place for me, while I devoted my time to killing buffaloes. Many a jolly company gathered at the road ranch at the boiling spring. The sale of whisky was a common practice in those days, as whisky was freely used by frontiersmen, and its sale was expected as a matter of course. Other conditions were too hard and too pressing for the question of the morals of the traffic to be raised as it was in later years, when the country became more thickly settled, and an entirely new order of things was established.

I was well acquainted with Reynolds and liked him, having formed his acquaintance on the Custer expedition to Camp Supply in 1868 when he was a mule-driver. He was a friendly, whole-souled kind of fellow, and knew just how to treat men to get their trade. I made good money out of this venture until 1871, when the income abruptly and permanently ceased—during my absence Reynolds sold the whole outfit and skipped the country, without even telling me goodbye. I had been absent two weeks when I returned one day to find only the empty building. I never again heard of Billy Reynolds. I doubt that his robbing me was ever to his final advantage. Money obtained in that way never brought good luck, even in the Plains country, where men were judged by rougher standards than prevailed farther east.26

How long Dixon operated the ranch following Reynolds' departure is unclear. Probably not long after Holland's visit.

The Smoky Hill Crossing is still marked by nine separate cutdowns on the south bank of the river.27 One-eighth mile farther southwest a sharp rise in the prairie signals the departure of the road from the second bottom of the river. Here nine deeply carved cuts can be observed in perfect line with cutdowns on the south bank.

Big Timbers Creek, eight miles from the Smoky Hill River was characterized by Davidson as having "wood, grass and water in pools never failing." However, five years later, Holland noted only a few trees and a single pool. At the crossing, Monty Leach was appointed postmaster in 1877.28 Here Leach established a store. This provided the nucleus of a little community called Hampton, the official designation of the post office, so named for Joe Hampton the area's first settler. As the town grew, Richard Mulroy built a two-story house, and later the Mulroy family

26. Dixon, Life of "Billy" Dixon, 63-64.
27. Cutdown refers to that area of the stream bank "cut down" by travelers to reduce the grade and thus allow easier access to and from the stream.
28. Davidson to Sheridan; Scout by Holland; Robert W. Baughman, Kansas Post Offices (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1961), 86, 223.
established a hotel. Other businesses included the Noble Bros. Store and a blacksmith shop operated by Billy Metz. At a later date a school was organized. In 1878, a stage company founded by Bob Brooks and Capt. G. W. Edwards established headquarters at Hampton. In addition to mail deliveries between Forts Hays and Dodge, the company transported passengers operating two, three-seated rigs which accommodated six passengers each. The one-way trip, beginning at either fort consumed three days. The fare was six dollars. Following the Dull Knife raid in 1878, the stage service was halted for seven days, but was resumed under the escort of soldiers for a two-week period. How long the mail company remained in business is unknown, but not much longer than its predecessor operated by John Buffer for a two-month period in 1877. After Bob Brooks left the mail company, he established a general store at Hampton, succeeding two previous store owners. When nearby McCracken was organized with the coming of the railroad in 1886, the little town of Hampton died. However, Brooks' store remained in operation for three or four years following McCracken's founding.

At this location, the creek curved, necessitating two crossings. A cutdown leading up the south bank of the northern crossing is still much in evidence as are the cutdowns on both sides of the stream at the southern crossing, a few hundred yards to the southwest. Just south of the northern crossing is the Hampton Cemetery. The first burial in this cemetery occurred in 1879, when use of the road was coming to an end. The townsite of Hampton was located immediately south of the cemetery. Across the road from the townsite are foundation remains of the old schoolhouse. To the north of the foundation, several ruts can be seen leading from the southern crossing to the town site.

Walnut Creek, seven miles farther southwest, was the next stop on the road. Davidson noted in his 1867 report: "Very bad crossing, requires a one span bridge." At this crossing in the summer of the following year, General Sheridan stationed a detachment of troopers, dividing a force of eight hundred men between Walnut Creek and Fort Dodge prior to his winter campaign south into Indian Territory. When Holland visited the Walnut in 1872, the creek was flowing twenty feet deep, three feet over the corduroy bridge. Holland also reported a ranch located north and west of the crossing. The origin of the ranch, complete with a log store building topped by a lookout and enclosed in a stockade, remains moot. However, local lore says that the ranch originated under the proprietorship of a Mr. Fink. When Billy Dixon visited the ranch in 1871, the proprietor was Johnny Quinn. George Reighard, a teamster on the road during this period, remembered the ranch in four short words, "They sold mostly whiskey." In 1872, the ranch was taken over by Alexander Harvey. Born in Scotland in 1843, Harvey emigrated to Canada in 1859 where he engaged in merchandising. In 1861, he moved to Ogdensburg, New York, where he enlisted in Company A, Sixth U.S. Infantry. One year later, Harvey transferred to Company A, Sixth U.S. Cavalry as a bugler. Mustered out of the army in 1864, he reenlisted in February of 1867 in Company G of his old cavalry regiment. Stationed at Fort Hays in the spring of 1869, he was mustered out of the army with the rank of first sergeant in February of 1872 at Fort Dodge. During the following two years, Harvey operated the ranch catering to civilian travelers and settlers moving into Rush County. One local account describes a buying trip by Harvey to Hays City. Upon his return to the ranch, he found the store looted and the clerk shot to death. Billy Dixon recalled that Johnny Quinn was shot at the ranch in 1871. Was Quinn the clerk killed? Likely.

In 1874, Harvey was appointed postmaster at the post office designated by his given name. He also became notary public in the little town which developed at the crossing, also known as Alexander. In the same year, Harvey sold his store to pursue other interests; school teaching, farming, and real estate. In December of 1877, he married Mattie King of Decatur County, Illinois. Two years later, he was elected Rush County treasurer, and in 1880 he moved to Rush Center where he engaged in ranching.

When the railroad was built south of Walnut Creek in 1886, the little town of Alexander was moved from the north side of the creek to its present location. The original crossing was located one-eighth mile north of present-day Alexander. Here, local history buffs have dredged out the cutdown on the north bank. The cut-

31. Rush County Kansas, 197-98.
32. Davidson to Sheridan.
34. Corduroy refers to logs being placed in a transverse pattern to form the bridge, thus producing a ribbed effect. Holland mentions corduroy bridges also at the Pawnee and Buckner crossings.
35. Scout by Holland; Rush County Kansas, x. 109; Dixon, Life of "Billy" Dixon, 69; Kate Warner Krumrey, Sage of Sarsapar (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1965), 24.
37. Rush County Kansas, 109; Dixon, Life of "Billy" Dixon, 69.
38. Baughman, Kansas Post Offices, 2, 223; Andrews, History of the State of Kansas, 1586; Rush County Kansas, 112.
The earliest use of the Fort Hays - Fort Dodge Road was in 1867 as a stage route. Again, in 1878, a stage company was founded to deliver mail and transport passengers between the forts. The route, one-way, consumed three days.

down on the south bank has disappeared. Local lore contends it was filled with blowing dust during the 1930s. No trace of the ranche can be found.

Leaving Walnut Creek, the road passed southwest through Rush County and clipped the extreme northwest corner of Pawnee County before continuing into Ness County. In this three-county corner, much of the land remains uncultivated. Hence, wagon ruts can be found at four separate sites in a three-mile radius of this tri-county location.

From Ness County, the road proceeded southwest through Hodgeman County to the Pawnee Fork. This stream was identified as the north branch of the Pawnee River by L. Carl Woodruff, a topographical engineer who visited the area in 1852. Woodruff named the north branch Heth in honor of Lieutenant Colonel Heth, then stationed at Fort Atkinson. Davidson’s 1867 report noted that “[here was]... a very bad crossing, requires bridge, probably two spans.” Here, on April 13, 1867, General Hancock

camped with his troops en route to the three hundred-lodge village of Cheyennes and Sioux less than two miles upstream. Here, also, Hancock’s small squad of engineers built a permanent log bridge across the narrow but steep banked stream to accommodate the movement of his troops.*

In December of 1869, John O’Loughlin established a trading ranche at this location. Born in County Clare, Ireland, in 1842, O’Loughlin emigrated with his family to Dubuque, Iowa, in 1850. In 1861, O’Loughlin moved to Kansas where he found employment as a teamster with the quartermaster department at Fort Leavenworth, a position he maintained through December 1, 1869, when he left government service at Fort Hays. At the ranche, O’Loughlin began the operation of a toll bridge. Whether he used the bridge built by Hancock’s forces in April 1867 remains a moot question. However, Davidson’s December 1867 report makes no mention of a bridge in place at that time.”


40. “Letters Received by the Office of Adjutant General, 1867,” roll 562, microcopy 619, National Archives.

41. Virginia Pierce Hicks, “Notes on the Early History of the County,” Kansas Historical Quarterly 7 (February 1938): 55; Davidson to Sheridan.
O'Loughlin and his helper, James Brannan, constructed a number of dugouts from which they sold provisions, meals, and lodging to military personnel, buffalo hunters, and freighters. 46 Billy Dixon spoke of one such dugout in which he sought refuge during a blizzard in the fall of 1871:

Reaching a long divide, I dropped down the slope with my mules in a gallop, and luckily was soon in sight of a road-ranch kept by John O'Loughlin. I was scarcely able to speak when I drove up and found half a dozen men coming to meet me, all eager to hear the news from town, whatever it might be. In answer to their questions I merely shook my head. My jaws were set like a vice. I could not speak a word. They saw instantly my condition. Running into the dugout they began piling wood into the fireplace, and the room was soon as hot as an oven. I thawed gradually, burning like a live coal one moment and shivering the next as if I had a fit of ague. This was my first experience with killing cold.47

From the railhead at Sheridan, a road was developed running through Pond Creek and Cheyenne Wells to strike the main trunk of the Santa Fe Trail at Fort Lyon. Consequently, overland traffic on the Santa Fe Trail east of Fort Lyon was eliminated. Pushing westward from Sheridan, the Kansas Pacific (changed from Union Pacific by 1859) reached Kit Carson, Colorado, in early 1870. From Kit Carson, another road was developed running southwest to Las Animas, a little settlement established near Fort Lyon in 1869. 48 Regardless, the Fort Hays—Fort Dodge Road continued to serve as a supply line between Forts Hays and Dodge until 1872. In that year, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad reached Dodge City, eliminating the military need for the road. 49 Fearing a complete loss of revenue, O'Loughlin sold the ranch to George Duncan and moved to Dodge City. Early in the following year,
O'Loughlin opened a store in an abandoned dugout on the railroad right-of-way in present-day Kearny County. Here also in 1874, he was appointed postmaster. O'Loughlin, the principal figure in the founding of Lakin and the development of the county, became a well-known farmer-stockman maintaining holdings in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.66

George Duncan, O'Loughlin’s successor, was born in 1847 at Joliet, Illinois. At age sixteen, Duncan enlisted in the 117th Illinois Cavalry, being mustered out with the rank of corporal after serving two years and three months.67 At the ranche, which came to be known as Duncan’s Crossing, Duncan continued to operate the toll bridge while making considerable improvements to the property. The family of W. C. Simons, a noted Lawrence, Kansas, journalist, homesteaded near the crossing. Simons later recalled:

Duncan’s ranch was an interesting place, and I am surprised that I have never seen it mentioned in any of the sketches of these early days. It consisted of a big stockade made of logs set about two feet in the ground and standing perhaps seven or eight feet above ground. These logs had been hewn on the sides to fit close to make a real protection from Indians.

Forming one side of the stockade were the log buildings, a house of several rooms and a stable, all built to afford protection against hostile Indians. In the living room there was a table made of slabs which was hinged against the wall, and which when not in use hung against the wall, filling the space between the hinges and the floor. Under this table was a secret door leading through a tunnel to a dugout, some distance away, providing a last stand should the buildings be taken.68

During Duncan’s tenure, military traffic was rare, with one notable exception. In 1874, Gen. Nelson Miles marched the Sixth U.S. Cavalry down the road from Fort Hays to initiate his campaign into the Staked Plains of Texas.69 However, business prospered for a few more years as settlers began to homestead in the area of the ranch. Duncan added revenue to the ranch by producing lime. Lime burning, as the process was called, was time consuming and laborious, but profitable. Used for sanitary purposes, whitewashing, mortar and tanning, lime was much in demand on the frontier. In 1868, Calvin Dyche, furnished one thousand bushels of lime to Fort Dodge at $1.50 per bushel.70

Another source of income was derived from the sale of forage. One such sale occurred in July of 1874 when a woodcutter came to Fort Larned reporting that Indians had attacked Duncan’s ranche. In response, Capt. Joseph Kerlin led a detachment of the Sixth Cavalry from Fort Dodge on a forced march to the ranche only to find no Indians had been in the area all summer. However, the forced march had so exhausted the horses that Kerlin had to buy four hundred pounds of hay from Duncan to feed the famished animals.71

The year 1875 was an eventful one for Duncan. In that year, he was appointed postmaster at the Hodgeman post office located at the ranche, and married Hattie Cook. Two of Duncan’s children were born at the ranche.72 How long Duncan occupied the ranche is not known. However, he was there in 1878 at the time of Dull Knife’s raid when settlers in the area fled to the safety of his stockade.73 In 1880, workmen from the Mudge Ranch, a giant enterprise which extended from the Pawnee River to Sawlog Creek, removed the stockade for firewood. In the same year, the editor of the Buckner Independent spoke to the condition of the crossing: “The crossing at Duncan’s Ranch is in a horrible condition, and it is almost impossible to cross at that point.”74 Evidently, Duncan left the ranche in 1879. Ironically, also in 1879, he received homestead patents for adjoining forty-acre tracts, each from four separate quarter sections. Such a scheme allowed Duncan to incorporate all the holdings established at the crossing into a 160-acre claim. At age eighty-two, Duncan, then a resident at the National Soldiers Home in Leavenworth, returned to the crossing to attend the dedication of a monument erected by the Hodgeman Community Ladies Aid Society.75

Never cultivated, the ranche site remains much as it did in the 1870s except for the lack of water in the

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52. Baughman, Kansas Post Offices, 60, 190; Todd and Thompson, History of Brown's Grove, 25.
55. Book 81, Township 21, Register of Deeds, Hodgeman County Courthouse, Jemore, Kansas.
In 1869, a trading ranche was established along the military road offering meals, provisions, and lodging to military personnel, buffalo hunters, and freights. The sutler's (post trader's) store at Fort Dodge was the subject of this Harper's Weekly sketch.

river and absence of the giant elm trees which were killed by the Dutch elm disease in the 1970s. The cut-down leading to the crossing from the northeast is still very much in evidence. Less pronounced are the ruts leading up the south bank. The toll bridge was twice destroyed by flood waters. Following the first washout, Duncan replaced the bridge with a low water structure described by Simons as a "toll bridge of logs, simply corded in the stream, to fill the space, evidently having left an opening for a culvert." After the second washout, Duncan did not rebuild the bridge but lined the crossing with rock.97 Opposite the cutdown at the base of the south bank, a number of these limestone cages remain in place. Also remaining at the crossing are two dugout depressions and a lime kiln. The kiln, excavated some fifteen years ago, was originally nine feet deep with a diameter of twenty-four inches at the top graduating to sixty-seven inches near the bottom. The walls of the kiln still maintain a glazed ceramic finish, the result of fires from over a century ago.98

Thirteen miles from Duncan's Crossing, the road reached the stream identified by Woodruff in 1852 as the middle branch of the Pawnee and named Buckner in honor of Capt. Simon Buckner, then stationed at Fort Atkinson. As at the two previous crossings, Davidson noted the need for a bridge on the Buckner.99 A toll bridge was eventually constructed by some unnamed proprietor who presumably established the nearby trading ranche at some unidentified


89. Records of the Chief Engineer; Davidson to Sheridan.
date. The first mention of the ranch was made by Capt. George Armes of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry. Returning from Fort Dodge to Fort Hays, Armes was quartered on the night of May 20, 1869, in a dugout which he declared to be "a good protection from the Indians, who are on the warpath looking for a chance to secure scalps." Armes' single reference to the dugout is the only known description of the ranch's facilities. Holland's 1872 report confirms the presence of both the bridge and the ranch:

Going on down to the middle fork of the Pawnee, the trail ran down hill to the crossing through a steep dry ravine, although alternate roads to the right and left were also penciled in on the map. Here again was a corduroy bridge, as well as a ford in the rear of Buckner's ranch, which was very close to the creek south and west of the crossing.

At this juncture, mail couriers from Fort Hays transferred mail to riders from Fort Larned before continuing on to Fort Dodge. How long the ranch remained in operation after 1872 is unknown.

61. Scout by Holland.

This location has been substantially modified over the years by road construction and agriculture. However, long lengths of ruts can be found at intermittent intervals approaching the crossing from the northeast. The cutdowns on the north side of the creek have been destroyed, but several cutdowns can readily be observed leading up the steep slope of the south bank. At the ranch site one-fourth mile downstream from the crossing, no physical evidence of the dugout noted by Armes or the ford mentioned by Holland can be discerned.33

Sawlog Creek, located thirteen miles from Buckner Creek, was originally identified as the south branch of the Pawnee and named Schaff's Branch by Woodruff in honor of Lt. John Schaff, then stationed at Fort Atkinson.34 The creek's name was later changed to Sawlog because of the vast amount of timber which lined its banks and furnished Forts Mann, Atkinson, and Dodge with wood for both fuel and construction. Robert Wright further explained the name change.

The creeks, when the fort was first started, were all heavily wooded with hackberry, ash, box-elder, cottonwood, and elm. We cut 1500 cords of wood almost in one body on a little creek six miles north of the fort, all hackberry. There were a good many thousand

63. Scout by Holland.
64. Records of the Chief Engineers.
cords cut on the Sawlog, which stream is properly the south fork of the Pawnee, but the soldiers would go out to the old Hays crossing, chop down a big tree, hitch a string of large mules to it, haul it up on the bank near the ford, and, after stripping off its top and limbs, leave its huge trunk there. In consequence thousands of immense logs accumulated, making the place look as if a sawmill had been established; and these great trunks were sawlogs ready to be cut into lumber. The early buffalo-hunters called the creek Sawlog, which name it bears to this day. 65

Davidson’s 1867 itinerary speaks of the crossing as “Fair crossing. Corduroy.” 66 Evidently the army or stage company had installed a low water bridge at this point, much like the bridge built by Duncan on the Pawnee.

At this location, the original sandstone marker of the northeast corner of the Fort Larned Military Reservation has been elevated on a concrete base at its original location. Here, also, the property owner has erected a series of flag poles to mark the ruts which transverse the two-mile length of his pasture. Also intact are two dramatic sets of cutdowns carved deeply in both the north and south banks of the creek. Near the crossing is a dugout depression. Whether the dugout was used in conjunction with the road or by a later settler is unknown. However, dugouts were not uncommon along the road. David L. Spotts, returning to Fort Hays with Custer from the winter campaign of 1868—1869, recalled one such dugout north of the Pawnee Fork:

...we were going by a mound with some brush on it, when suddenly about twenty soldiers came out of the mound and we learned they were living in a dugout. It was quite different from the dugouts we had down at Fort Cobb and Cache Creek. There was a long, large and deep trench covered with logs, grass, and dirt...They are quite warm and comfortable in winter and also cool in summer. We are told that many of the settlers on the frontier live in dugouts of this kind..." 67

After the major expanse of the road had fallen prey to the plow, the Sawlog Crossing and the final stretch to Fort Dodge remained in use by settlers traveling from Jetmore to Dodge City. 68 In this area, much of it still uncultivated, many lengths of ruts can be found.

Fort Dodge, the terminus of the road, was situated twelve miles southwest of the Sawlog. There is no evidence of ruts in the immediate area of the post.

Neither do any of the quartermaster’s buildings remain which housed the supplies delivered down the road from Fort Hays. However, a number of original buildings remain at the fort which was deactivated in 1882. Those structures include two barracks which appear to be a single building, having been joined sometime after the post became the Kansas Soldiers’ Home in 1890. 69 Also in good repair are the commanding officer’s quarters, the hospital, a commissary building, and officers’ quarters.

During the summer of 1989, the Fort Hays—Fort Dodge Road was marked at the following sites: Fort Hays, Lookout Station, Smoky Hill River Crossing, Big Timbers Creek Crossing, Walnut Creek Crossing, Wagon Ruts location in Ness County, Pawnee River Crossing, Buckner Creek Crossing, Sawlog Creek Crossing, and the Kansas Soldiers’ Home (Fort Dodge). The markers, bronze plaques inscribed with Fort Hays—Fort Dodge Road, were individually inscribed with other information relative to each location. On August 6, 1989, these markers were dedicated at a ceremony conducted at Duncan’s Crossing. Rededicated in the same ceremony was the Duncan’s Crossing Monument erected in 1929. Needing repair after sixty years of exposure to the elements, the monument was reconstructed by a group of volunteers from the Larned area who also was responsible for the erection of the Fort Hays—Fort Dodge Road markers.

Participating in the ceremonies were Michael Morrow of Wichita, great grandson of George Duncan, and Marcella McVey of Lakin, granddaughter of John O’Loughlin. Many other members of the Duncan and O’Loughlin families were in attendance. Recognized also were twenty-six people who were present for the 1929 dedication of the Duncan’s Crossing Monument.

Speakers for the occasion were U.S. Rep. Pat Roberts from the First District of Kansas, and George Neavoll, an editor with the Wichita Eagle. Neavoll stated:

The rededication of this splendid marker and the dedication of 10 new markers lining the route of this historic roadway are reminiscent of another heroic effort earlier this century. That was the marking of the entire Santa Fe Trail route across Kansas by the Daughters of the American Revolution...Today we revere not only the Santa Fe Trail and all its many contributions to the settling of the West. We revere, too, the various side roads such as this one that make the trail complex not a single route but a historic weave across this beautiful land...This makes all the more important, then, the marking of this road for the benefit of generations to come.

An eleventh marker was placed at the Five Mile Hollow location in March 1990. 90

66. Davidson to Sheridan.
68. Krumrey, Saga of Sawlog, 25.
69. Strate, Sentiment to the Cimarron, 115-14.

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