

# **MEMORIES OF THE OLD SANTA FE TRAIL**

## Gray County, Kansas

Written by Juanita Trebilcock

*As told by D. W. (Doc) Barton, Ingalls, Kansas, aged 86 years*

*For additional information, see the story... D. W. "Doc" Barton, Reminiscences*

Juanita Trebilcock began her story with the following: *D. W. Barton of Ingalls, Kansas, was the oldest inhabitant of Gray County and one of the first white men to settle in Western Kansas. His memory is excellent despite his 86 years, and he will vouch for the truthfulness of all the information he has given. Here is the story of the Santa Fe Trail as he told me what he knew of it.*

"I came to this part of the country in 1872, before any other white men had settled here. At that time, there were only a few bands of roving Indians. In addition, surveyors were making out the railroad, and Dodge City had not yet started.

I came here from Texas, bringing the first herd of longhorn cattle to Western Kansas. There was too much danger in following the old Santa Fe Trail across the Indian Territory, so I had to follow the Western or Pecos trail. I hit the Arkansas River at Pueblo and followed its course to the present town of Garden City. Government surveyors laid out a new trail and all travel passed over it. It joined the old Santa Fe Trail at the point where the old trail had crossed the Arkansas River to the south side. The crossing, known as the Cimarron Crossing, was the only crossing that I had ever heard of between Dodge City and the Colorado line, and I have ranged my cattle all over this part of Kansas.

The old Santa Fe Trail was very plain when I came here. Today, still seen, both north and south of Ingalls and in some places, nearly half a mile wide, it is showing its years of travel.

The Cimarron Crossing was south of the present town of Ingalls. Of course, the riverbed has changed since those days, but I can still point out the exact place where the crossing 'was made'. The other crossing, now known as the Burns' crossing, was about four miles up the river, and no doubt, many travelers crossed the river there.

There was an old Fort, stationed along the Santa Fe Trail at the southeast edge of Ingalls. Nothing was left of the Fort when I came here, except remains of the old corral, dugout, and basement. I do not know the name of the Fort.

An old Santa Fe Scout told me the name of the crossing, and the story about the Fort. His name was Frank Biggers, and he had gone with a large number of caravans as

scout and spy when the old trail was still in use. He worked for me for eight years, and I received a lot of information about the trail from him. If he told me the name of the fort, I have forgotten it.

I saw the Cheyenne Indians when they passed through here on their last raid through Kansas in 1878. They crossed the river just a little west of Charleston, Kansas. There was evidence that they crossed the Santa Fe railroad east of Pierceville, where there was a trestle built over a draw. No one saw them, but a dead Cheyenne squaw was left on the railroad track, and there were many hoof prints of ponies on each side of the track. They had all of their sick and helpless Indians with them. All were in famished condition. Since there were so many deaths and they did not have time to do away with the bodies, they left them by the wayside.

The old Spanish Santa Fe Trail ran southwest, from the Cimarron crossing on the Arkansas River, across the state of Kansas to the north fork of the Cimarron River. It left Gray County about six miles north of the present town of Copeland. It entered Gray County on the east following the Arkansas River. It ran along the river as far as Cimarron, Kansas. There, it angled north for a mile or so to get around the brakes located on the river's north side. At that time, the river course ran so close to the brakes that it was impossible to follow it. After going as far west as Ingalls, the trail angled back and crossed the river at the Cimarron Crossing. There was never a crossing between Cimarron and Ingalls because the brakes were so bad that a wagon train could not cross there. The new trail joined the old trail at the crossing and continued on the north side of the river as far west as Los Animas in Colorado. Many people traveled over that trail after I came here. If anyone is interested enough in the Santa Fe Trail, I am willing to start with them at Dodge City and take them over every bit of the Santa Fe Trail, into and through Gray County, as it was when I came here. The new trail is still visible in Gray County too.

The trail changed because the territory south of the Arkansas River was Mexican Territory and filled with many hostile Indians and Mexican desperadoes. It was too dangerous to travel on the south side of the river in Kansas. The new trail crossed the river at Los Animas, and then traveled south to Santa Fe, New Mexico.”

Juanita Trebilcock finished her story with the following: *The above story is written as nearly as possible in the way that Mr. Barton gave it. It was his story principally that I based the marking of the Santa Fe Trail on, and I have gone back and rechecked it by him. Other old-timers that I have interviewed referred me to Mr. Barton, saying they were not here early enough, or else they were not out on the plains enough to know anything about the trail. In addition, they came by railroad, instead of over trails the way Mr. Barton Came.*