

STORIES OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

Gray County, Kansas

Written by Juanita Trebilcock

Consultants: D. W. (Doc) Barton, Ingalls, Kansas, and Mrs. Anna Erskine, Cimarron, Kansas

References: "Hands Up" as told by Fred Sutton, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Publishers, "Conquest of Southwest Kansas" by Leola Blanchard, "Dodge City the Cowboy Capital" by Robert M. Wright, and a letter written by E. F. Soule

**Additional information added about certain people mentioned in this story*

The forks of the old Santa Fe Trail have been a topic of discussion for many people over the years. D. W. (Doc) Barton, who came here in 1872, when there were no other white men in this section of the country, says that the old trail forked at the Cimarron Crossing. He had a man working for him, who had been a Santa Fe Trail scout for several years. His name was Frank Biggers, and he worked for Mr. Barton for eight years. Mr. Barton says that this man told him many old Santa Fe Trail stories and pointed out many interesting places to him, one being the Cimarron Crossing.

Mr. Barton says the town of Ingalls is situated where the old Cimarron Crossing was located, and the city is nestled between the forks of that old trail. According to Mr. Barton, the trail turned out from the river bottom at the present site of Cimarron, Kansas, and traveled west along the prairie about a mile north of the river, until it was about four miles farther west. The trail then dropped back to the river bottom and followed for about two more miles west. It was here that the trail forked. One route crossed the Arkansas River and went Southwest over the prairie through the present counties of Haskell, Grant, and Morton toward Santa Fe, New Mexico. The place where that trail crossed the Arkansas River was known as the Cimarron Crossing. The other route left the river bottom at the forks of the trail, ran up north over the hill, and then turned west again to follow the river into Colorado, then down into New Mexico. The trail that crossed the Arkansas River at the Cimarron Crossing was known as the old Spanish Santa Fe Trail, while the other trail was known as the American Santa Fe Trail. It was a much newer trail than the other one, and used later because of the dangers of the shorter Spanish Trail. Mr. Barton says the Old Spanish Trail was not used after he came into this country and that so far as he knows, there was only one other crossing beside the Cimarron Crossing west of Dodge City in Kansas during those early days. It was just about three miles west of the Cimarron Crossing and known as the Upper Crossing. The crossing is still there today and is known as the Burns Crossing.

The trail from the Burns Crossing merges into the trail from the Cimarron Crossing,

about three or four miles southwest of the upper crossing. Mr. Terrence Burns says that the tracks of that trail could be seen quite plainly on his father's homestead when he (Terrence Burns) came here with his parents in 1881. At that time, he was about ten years old.

When Mr. Barton came into this country, he said there were the remains of two wagon trains along the Santa Fe Trail south of Cimarron Crossing. One was on the south side of the river, just opposite the forks of the trail. The other was about twelve miles southwest of there. He said there was evidence that Indians had attacked both wagon trains, and the people were massacred. As far as he knew, no one was left alive from the wagon train to tell the terrible story. Scattered over the ground were bones of man and beast, and many of the wagons were burned.

In 1875, George Emerson of Pierceville, with a yoke of steers and one wagon, gathered up bones from the prairie and sold them. Mr. Barton says that they told him about the remains of those wagon trains on the south side of the Arkansas River. Emerson salvaged the old chains and scrap iron from those ruins. He sold them for enough to start a freight train of thirty-five wagons between Dodge City and Fort Elliott, Texas, 200 miles south.

The authentic history of Gray County began in 1822 when Bear and Chambers were sent out on an expedition to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with cotton goods. They were forced to go into winter quarters on an island in the Arkansas River, not far from where Cimarron, Kansas, is now located.

In 1824, Congress passed a bill authorizing the marking of the Santa Fe Trail as far as the Cimarron Crossing on the Arkansas River, which was then the boundary line between the United States and Mexico. Whether or not the Santa Fe Trail was marked in any way, is not known.

Mr. Barton came into this area in 1872, a few months before the Santa Fe railroad was laid into Dodge City. Mr. Barton says that surveyors were laying the railroad right-of-way at that time through here, and grading was starting. After the railroad began through here, many other cattlemen came in. The cattlemen had to drive their cattle to Great Bend to ship them until shipping pens were built in Dodge City. There was not a structure of any kind at Dodge City until the railroad reached there. Fort Dodge was the nearest habitation when the Barton firm brought their cattle here from Texas.

Mr. Barton said he could remember that Robert M. Wright* had a contract to furnish wood to Fort Dodge at that time. He said that Mr. Wright would come out here on the Arkansas River, south to Bluff Creek, and many of the other creeks in the vicinity of Fort Dodge, getting wood for their fuel. There was no way for coal to be shipped in, so they needed to have a lot of wood.

When Mr. Barton came here, there were the remains of an old Fort at the forks of the Santa Fe Trail. It is said that it was an old Spanish station built here by the Spanish government to protect travelers and traders along the trail. Mr. Barton did not know the name of the station, or who it belonged to, as it was abandoned when he came here. Only parts of old dugouts, adobe walls, and corrals were here at that time. Mr. Barton said he could tell where an old well had been, but it was partly filled in and had not been used for some time. He did not know of any other well near here, but that there could have been. It was only a short way to water along the Arkansas River's sandy banks, so it wasn't a serious question to those near the river. There were no springs here at that time.

Ed Art, the stepfather of Archie Brown, homesteaded on the land south of the railroad track, where the present town of Ingalls is located. His homestead included the land where the trails forked at the Cimarron Crossing, and of course, that was the site of the old fort. He built his house a short way east of the crossing. Part of the house is still there, although it has been enlarged. Joe Goddard now owns the house and part of the land.

Gray County was created on 2 Mar 1881, absorbing Foote's County and the south half of Buffalo County. It was named in honor of Alfred Gray, ex-secretary of the State Board of Agriculture.

In 1882, A. T. Soule built his great irrigation ditch through western Kansas. It started just west of the present town of Ingalls and ended just east of Spearville, Kansas. It probably followed the route of the old Santa Fe Trail east for quite a ways.

The town of Ingalls was laid out in 1884 by A. T. Soule as headquarters for his workers on the irrigation ditch. A siding was put in by the Santa Fe Railroad. The town covered part of the homestead of Ed Art. When the city was laid out, he owned three-tenths of the city plat.

A. J. Anthony and Robert M. Wright, pioneers of the Old West, bought out the Cimarron Ranch, which was about twenty-five miles west of Fort Dodge in about 1876. The company from whom they purchased was heartily tired of the place and was eager to sell. One of the reasons for this was the trouble they had with the Indians. Although the Indians were supposed to be on reservations, occasionally, some would break away and cause a great deal of fright to the travelers and settlers. They would often cause much damage too. Indians had brutally murdered two men on the Cimarron Ranch while putting up hay, just a short time before Anthony and Wright bought the ranch.

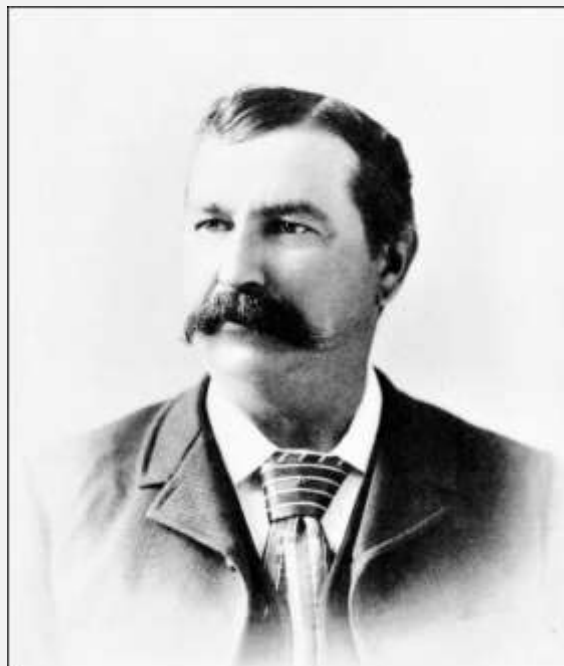
After they bought out the ranch, Indians frequently bothered Anthony and Wright. They saw some every day, and often the Indians would run off their stock.

Besides the ranch buildings, they also had a little store. They built a sod corral and kept two cows there. There was a sod building two stories high at one corner of it, used as a lookout. Soldiers used to come up from the Fort every few days and stay there watching for stray Indians coming around now and then. Once, the Indians ran Anthony and Wright's two cows down the hill from the north. The soldiers went out, and the Indians then left, but they had shot several arrows into the cows. The Indians finally burned the ranch along with several tons of hay.

Robert M. Wright later had a ranch in Ford County, about eighteen miles southwest of Dodge City. He was one of the founders of Dodge City and was the first mayor of the town.

Cimarron, Kansas, was the scene of a train robbery at one time. Bill Doolin* and his gang of outlaws held up a Santa Fe Train at Cimarron and robbed it of thirteen dollars. A posse of Marshalls started after him when he held up the train, and they chased him southward into Oklahoma. In that running fight, Bill Doolin was shot in the foot.

Additional Information
ROBERT M. WRIGHT



Photograph provided by Sam Shipley, Research Librarian for the Dodge City Public Library and the Kansas Heritage Center.

ROBERT MARR WRIGHT, son of Robert Wright (1801-1872) and Harriet Isabelle Caldwell (1809-1852), was born on 2 Sep 1840 in Bladensburg, Prince George's County, Maryland. In 1856,

at the age of 16, he left Maryland and settled near Saint Louis, St. Louis County, Missouri. There, at the age of 19, he married **ALICE J. ARMSTRONG** on 8 Nov 1859. Alice was born about 1846 in Louisiana, which means she was only 13 when they married. They were first cousins.

In 1862, Robert made a few trips out further west to Colorado and back. In 1865, Alice made the trip with him, as their third child, Elias, was born that year in Pueblo County, Colorado. They left Missouri permanently in about 1868 and settled on a ranch in Southwest Kansas, near Fort Dodge, where Robert managed the merchant store. In 1872, he became the Merchant store owner in the area that would later become Dodge City. He was in partnership with Charles Rath, and it was called "Rath and Company General Store." Most of their business was buffalo hides. Some records reveal they shipped 200,000 hides the first year. The store changed hands a couple of times, but Robert Wright continued to be a part of it. Eventually, the store became R. M. Wright and Company.

Robert Wright was president of the 'Town Company' that was started in late 1872. The area was not considered a town until Robert and the Town Company applied for a post office and named it Dodge City. Robert was its first postmaster. He was a member of the Kansas House of Representatives from 1875 to 1883 and became the mayor of Dodge City in 1885. In 1899, Robert was appointed Kansas commissioner of forestry and irrigation.

In 1880, on land 8 miles east of Dodge City and north of the Arkansas River, Robert planted many trees that soon became a beautiful park. The area became a small town named after him, Wright, Kansas. (*Wright, Ford County, Kansas, named after Robert Marr Wright, today is an unincorporated area in the northcentral area of Ford County. It began as only a stagecoach stop, but in early 1886, a post office was established there. It closed in 1893 but reopened in 1895. In 2020, the population was 125 people.*)

Alice passed away on 25 Dec 1892 while visiting her family in St. Louis, St. Louis County, Missouri.

Six children were born in the marriage of Robert and Alice Wright:

ROBERT HENRY WRIGHT was born on 15 Sep 1861 in St. Louis County, Missouri. He sometimes worked as a bartender and as a druggist. Robert married Katie Ursella Rule on 26 May 1897 in Dodge City, Kansas. Katie was born in May of 1873. Three children were born to this marriage; Henry, Robert Roscoe, and Lucille. Robert Henry Wright died on 21 Jun 1915 in San Juan County, Colorado.

CLARA BELLE WRIGHT was born in 1862 in St. Louis County, Missouri, and passed away on 21 Aug 1882 in Las Vegas, San Miguel County, New Mexico. She was only 20 years old when she died. Clara had been in delicate health for several years and had made the trip to the Hot

Springs, located in Las Vegas, a week before her passing. She was buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City.

ELIAS NELSON WRIGHT was born on 10 Feb 1865 in Booneville, Pueblo County, Colorado. He died on 27 Aug 1902 in Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas, and was buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City, Kansas.

JAMES EDWARD WRIGHT was born on 10 May 1867 in Missouri. He died on 1 Dec 1889 in Guthrie, Logan County, Oklahoma. The local newspaper explained that he was cut in the stomach at an early hour in a dance house and died later. Two men had sought revenge on James as he had been the one who requested their arrest. Kenneth Campbell was the one who did the cutting that killed James. He was buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City, Kansas.

CHARLES D. WRIGHT was born on 27 Feb 1870 at Fort Dodge, Ford County, Kansas. He died on 2 Jan 1912 in Dodge City, Kansas, and buried there at the Maple Grove Cemetery.

LUCILLE MITTIE WRIGHT was born in 1877 in Fort Dodge, Ford County, Kansas. She died on 6 Apr 1905 in Holden, Johnson County, Missouri. She was married but resumed her maiden name after receiving a divorce. Newspapers reveal Lucille studied photography while living in Kansas City and shot herself while visiting a friend close by in Holden. She had been in poor health. Burial was at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City, Kansas.

After Robert's first wife, Alice, died in 1892, he married **SALLIE OLIVE IVENS**, daughter of William Samuel Ivens and Mariah L. Walker, on 2 Jul 1907 in Monroe County, Tennessee. Sallie was born on 25 Apr 1875 in Tennessee. She died on 4 Mar 1966 in Dodge City and was buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery.

Robert and Sallie had one son:

CONNOR ROBERT WRIGHT, born 16 Mar 1908 in Madisonville, Monroe County, Tennessee. He married Leona Florene LaMunyon. They had one son, Lance Wright. Connor passed away on 2 Feb 1970 in Dodge City, Kansas, and burial was there at the Maple Grove Cemetery.

An excellent article about **ROBERT MARR WRIGHT** was written in 2009 by George Laughead. It explains that Robert had many dealings with the Earp's and the Masterson's in Dodge City. He was taking in \$200,000 a month during cattle season in 1880. But by about 1906, he had lost it all due to drug addiction. Robert started by being a successful stockman, contractor, merchant, freighter, politician, farmer, county treasurer, state forest commissioner, postmaster, representative of Ford County four times, and once a mayor of Dodge City.

However, in the end, he was living a frail retirement in the town he helped make famous. In

1913, he wrote and published a book titled, "DODGE CITY, THE COWBOY CAPITAL". It was republished in 2022.

Robert Marr Wright died on 4 Jan 1915 in Dodge City, Ford County, Kansas, and buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City.

Additional Information

BILL DOOLIN



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WILLIAM "BILL" DOOLIN was born in 1858 in Johnson County, Arkansas. He was the son of Michael Doolin (1808-1865) and Artemina Orlissa Beller (1820-1919).

In 1891, Bill Doolin became a member of Oklahoma's Dalton Gang. By 1892, he had formed his own gang called the Wild Bunch.

Bill Doolin married **EDITH MARIE ELLSWORTH** (1871-1928) in 1893. They had one son, **JAY WILLIAM ELLSWORTH DOOLIN MEEK** (1894-1980), and lived in Pawnee County, Oklahoma.

On 15 Jan 1896, in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Deputy Marshall Bill Tilghman captured Bill

Doolin, but Doolin escaped from the jail in Guthrie, Oklahoma territory.

Deputy Marshal Henry "Heck" Thomas and his posse shot and killed Doolin on 24 Aug 1896, in Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma.

On 14 Feb 1897 (*soon after Bill Doolin was killed*) in Payne County, Oklahoma, Edith (Ellsworth) Doolin married again to Samuel M. Meek (1847-1917).