

# GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD UPDATE

The newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails Association in Nebraska ~ June 2024

## NEBRASKA PUBLIC POWER DISTRICT R-PROJECT STATUS AND POSSIBLE IMPACT ON MORMON PIONEER TRAIL SANDHILLS RUTS

As of early June, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has postponed a meeting with Native American representatives to late June or early July. So we are in a temporary pause, which provides an opportunity to look more closely at the R-Project. While NPPD has proposed moving the transmission line ½ mile east of the initially proposed route, the line is not away from trail traces, leaving construction, routine maintenance and emergency access to damage fragile trail remnants. Also the reroute “around” O’Fallon’s Bluff leaves out the proposed transmission route over the historic Mormon Trail Sand Hill ruts. Gregory Franzwa justifiably labeled these “the famed Sand Hill swales of the Mormon Trail.”<sup>1</sup> More about these remnants later.

The *Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)* was released to revise sections of the *Final Environmental Impact Statement*.<sup>2</sup> The draft *SEIS* states ...

### **Reroute to Avoid/Minimize Effects on Historic Trails and Archaeological Site**

This alternative would reroute the R-Project to avoid the O’Fallon’s Bluff site, which is listed in the NRHP (undefined criteria), the Mormon Pioneer Trail’s Sand Hill Ruts Site, which is eligible for listing under Criterion A



*Mormon Pioneer Trail, Sandhill Ruts (center distance) and NPS Interpretive Sign; NPPD’s final route would be placed between the sign and the ruts*

Source: *SEIS*, p. 3-309

in the NRHP, and Archaeological Site 25LN113, which is potentially eligible for listing under Criterion D in the NRHP, all of which are geographically close to one another and, therefore, were considered together. The National Park Service National Trails Office (NPS Trails) suggested that to avoid and minimize effects on O’Fallon’s Bluff and the Sand Hill Ruts sites, the proposed transmission line route should be moved to the far eastern boundary of the routing corridor, as far from these known sites as possible. NPS Trails also suggested that crossing National Historic Trails

<sup>1</sup> Franzwa, Gregory M., *The Mormon Trail Revisited* (Tooele, Utah: Patrice Press, 2007), p. 114. William Clayton’s 1847 description might also be of interest [Clayton, William, *Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide* (St. Louis: Mo. Republican Steam power Press, 1848), p. 9].

<sup>2</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement on Issuance of an Incidental Take Permit and Implementation of a Habitat Conservation Plan for the R-Project Transmission Line*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, November 2018, <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0195> [Hereafter *FEIS*].

minimally and in a perpendicular manner and avoiding high potential sites and trail features, such as ruts, are ways to reduce effects.<sup>3</sup>

As an aside, a footnote in the *SEIS* adds, “O’Fallon’s Bluff is listed in the National Register of Historic Places but has not been associated with a specific listing criterion because it was listed prior to the development of specific listing criteria.”<sup>4</sup> The O’Fallon’s Bluff ruts have received the majority of the press on threatened historic trails; the Mormon Sandhills ruts and Birdwood archaeological site have not.

### Birdwood Creek

Archaeological Site 25LN113,<sup>5</sup> informally known as the Birdwood Creek Site,<sup>6</sup> is the reason Native Americans have become involved in the R-Project. James Fleecs is the owner of the ranch on which the site sits. As one of the impacted landowners, he was a party to the law suit against U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Fleecs submitted comments on the first Environmental Impact statement in which he described 25LN113:

An archeological survey was conducted in the Birdwood Creek area as part of a Sand Hills Archeology research project sponsored by the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (NeSHPO). Within the survey area, an archeological site (25LN113 (Field Site LW-14)) was identified on June 19, 2016, following the observation of several lithic

flakes found along a vehicle two-track located on a terrace along the east side of Birdwood Creek. This site is located directly under the area that is proposed to be crossed by the R-Project transmission line. The artifacts appeared to be eroding out of an area approximately 30-50 cm above a layer of volcanic ash, also identified within the two-track cut. Ground surface visibility at the time of survey was 75-100% within the two-track, but decreased to <25% in adjacent grass pasture, which was well vegetated.

Testing at the site following the initial discovery took place on June 23, 2016. Two 1x1 meter test units were placed southwest of the surface scatter found along the vehicle two-track. Materials, including lithic flakes (<1 cm-5 cm), chipped stone tool fragments (n=2), fire-cracked rock, and bone fragments (some burned), were located to depths of approximately 50 centimeters below the soil surface. This depth indicates a potentially intact and non-ephemeral archeological site. Some modern ferrous metal fragments were also located in the upper levels of the site, likely related to modern ranch operations. Although there appears to be some rodent disturbance and erosion at the site, it does appear to be largely intact and undisturbed. Functionally, the materials at the site indicate its past use as a campsite, with evidence of flint knapping and hearth-related activities

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Nebraska Public Power District Revised R-Project Habitat Conservation Plan (January 2024), Section 2.7.2.1 “Alternatives Evaluated to Minimize/Avoid Effects on Historic Properties”, p. 2-8 [Hereafter *SEIS*]. Available at <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0271> and <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0270>. Refer also to <https://www.fws.gov/project/r-project-transmission-line>.

<sup>4</sup> *SEIS*, p. 2-8n4

<sup>5</sup> 25LN113 is a archaeological site designation in the Smithsonian Trinomial System: 25 = Nebraska, LN = Lincoln County, 113 = site #113 within Lincoln County.

<sup>6</sup> In 1847 Brigham Young named this branch of the North Platte River “North Bluff Fork.” Perhaps to avoid confusion, settlers arriving later renamed it Birdwood Creek. See Clayton, William, *Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide* (St. Louis: Mo. Republican Steam power Press, 1848), p. 9; Clayton, William, *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide*, ed. Stanley B. Kimball (Gerald, MO: The Patrice Press, 1983), p. 53; Clayton, William, *William Clayton’s Journal: A Daily Record of the Journey of the Original Company of “Mormon” Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1921 – Published by the Clayton Family Association), p. 146; Whitney, Horace K. and Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *The Journey West: The Mormon Pioneer Journals of Horace K. Whitney with Insights by Helen Mar Kimball Whitney*, Richard E. Bennett ed. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), pp. 229-230



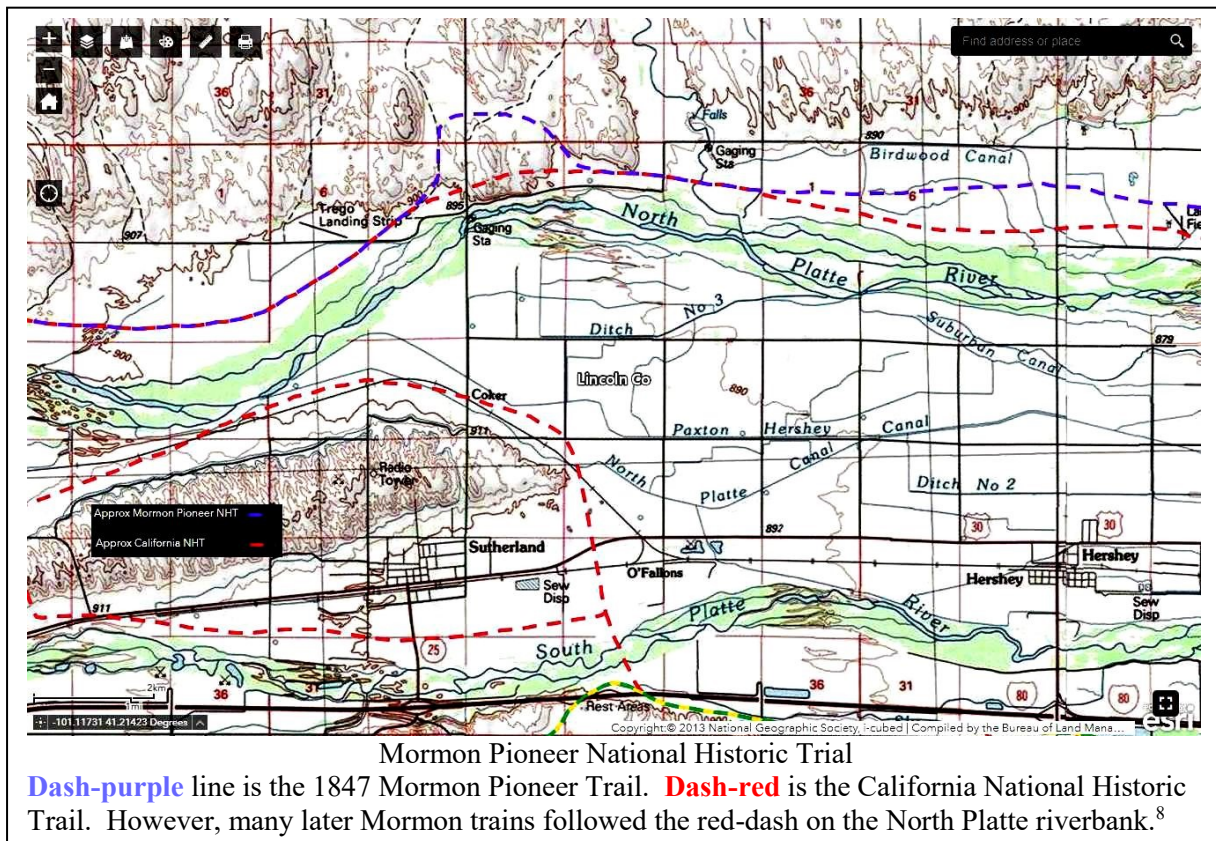
present. At this time, no cultural affiliation has been established.

Due to the limited ground surface visibility at the time of the survey, the exact horizontal extent of the site is unknown. Additional cultural materials (lithic flakes, quartzite projectile point, and bone fragments) were found approximately 100-200 meters south of the site at the same approximate elevation and landscape position, but it is unclear whether these are related to site 25LN113 without further testing. Time constraints prohibited full excavation needed to confirm depth of cultural materials in both test units. While augers used at the bottom of the both test units did not indicate additional cultural levels/materials, the exact depth below which the presence of artifacts ceased at the sites remains unknown. Additional investigations in the future are

recommended if soil disturbance will be located anywhere in the vicinity of archeological site 25LN113.<sup>7</sup>

### Mormon Pioneer Trail Sand Hill Ruts

The National Park Service National Historic Trails map – a part of which is shown below<sup>8</sup> – covers the approximately five mile stretch north from I-80 to the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail ruts alongside the North Platte which are on private land. Off I-80 take the Sutherland exit north. Shortly after passing over the railroad tracks turn east onto US 30. Go to the eastern edge of town and turn north on Prairie Trace Road. In about three miles you will cross the North Platte River. You will then pass a gravel road the hugs the north bank, just



<sup>7</sup> Fleecs, James, "With Many Concerns," FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265, [https://downloads.regulations.gov/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265/attachment\\_1.pdf](https://downloads.regulations.gov/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265/attachment_1.pdf); I am indebted to Tom Bryan, President of the Nebraska Archaeological Society, for bringing the Fleecs comments to my attention.

<sup>8</sup> National Park Service-National Trails, NPS ArcGIS OpenData Portal, <https://nps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=24fc463363f54929833580280cc1a751>.

beyond which, on the right, is a historical marker commemoration the ruts.<sup>9</sup>

On Friday 14 May 1847, the Mormon Pioneer Company lead by Brigham Young began etching Mormon ruts in the Sandhills that today are threatened by the R-Project. Orson Pratt waxed eloquent when he encountered the Sandhills:

About 11 the camp started being obliged to take a winding circuitous route over and among the sandy bluffs 3 or 4 miles when we again entered the prairie bottoms ... I ascended some of the highest of these hills, where a beautiful and extended prospect opened on every side. On the north, the surface of the country exhibited a broken succession of hills and ravines, very much resembling the tumultuous confusion of ocean waves, when rolling and tumbling in all directions by violent and contrary winds. On the east, the low level valley of the two forks of the Platte was visible to the junction, while the high peaks far below were distinctly seen resembling blueish clouds just rising in the distant horizon. On the south, the chain of bluffs beyond the south fork, stretched itself, apparently in one unbroken though gently undulating ridge, visible in extent from 30 to 40 miles, while the glistening waters of that river were here and there sweeping along its base. The bottom lands between the two forks continue in one unbroken level from the junction 18 or 20 miles west, where they gradually arise into broken hills, forming the high lands between these two affluents,

which are here about six miles asunder. On the west, the roily yellow waters of the north fork were making their way over and between innumerable beds of quicksand, while the rich, level, green, grassy bottoms upon each side, formed a beautiful contrast, extending for miles in length.<sup>10</sup>

Horace Whitney noted in his May 14 journal entry, “We travelled...over an uneven, rugged sandy soil, which was quite hard on our cattle & horses, as the wheels would sink quite deep into the sand.” adding, “There is no wood; therefore ware obliged, as usual, to burn buffalo chips” [emphasis in original]<sup>11</sup>.

### Back to the R-Project

The *FEIS* noted that “A segment of the Mormon Trail is evident in the study area and would be crossed by NPPD’s final route.”<sup>12</sup> NPPD revised the transmission line route to bypass (in their opinion) the O’Fallon’s Bluff ruts, the revised route rejoins the old route after crossing the South Platte (March newsletter, page 2)<sup>13</sup>. Later the *FEIS* clarifies ...

The Sand Hills Ruts segment of the Mormon Pioneer Trail is an excellent and relatively well-preserved grouping of historic trail ruts that is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A for its association with broader historical patterns of western migration. An

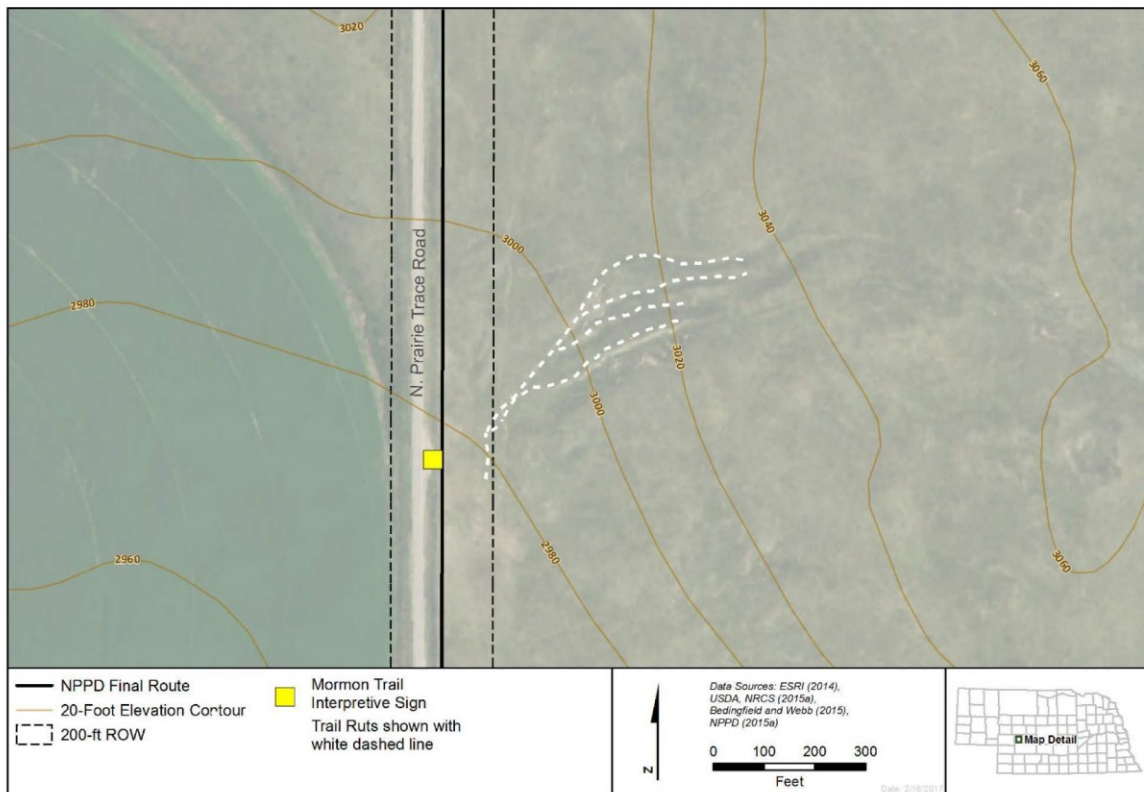
<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Hartley, William G., A. Gary Anderson, LaMar C. Berrett (eds.), *Sacred Places, Iowa and Nebraska: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), p. 305, for refreshing my memory on the route from I-80. Franzwa’s guidebook is great, but I find it difficult to use when picking up the trail at arbitrary points [Franzwa, Gregory M., *The Mormon Trail Revisited* (Tooele, Utah: Patrice Press, 2007), pp. 114-115].

<sup>10</sup> “Orson Pratt autobiography and journals, 1833-1847; Journal, 1846 February-July, 1847 May-July,” *LDS Church History Library*, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/45de59d3-2bec-47fd-a2f8-86021538309a/0/68> (accessed: April 13, 2024), p. 72; Jacob, Norton, *The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob’s Record*, ed. Ronald O. Barney (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), p.136n81 helped interpret Pratt’s handwriting.

<sup>11</sup> Whitney, Horace K. and Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *The Journey West: The Mormon Pioneer Journals of Horace K. Whitney with Insights by Helen Mar Kimball Whitney*, ed. Richard E. Bennett. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), p. 229.

<sup>12</sup> “National Trails,” *FEIS*, p. 3-270.

<sup>13</sup> The figure showing the revised transmission line route around the O’Fallon’s Bluff ruts appears in Appendix C, “Exhibit ‘I’ – Minor Adjustment to Line” in *SEIS Appendices*, <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0270>.



#### Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trial Sandhills Ruts

Four ruts/swales are visible in the distance from the interpretive sign shown in the photo on the first page of this issue.

Source: FEIS, p. 3-310

NPS interpretive sign is located on the eastern side of Pioneer Trace Road with an open viewshed toward the site to the east. The landscape is rural and undeveloped.

The Sand Hill Ruts segment is immediately adjacent to NPPD's final route area and some of the ruts extend into the eastern edge of the ROW (Figure 3.10-4). The transmission line would be installed on the east side and parallel to the eastern fence line along Prairie Trace Road, between the NPS interpretive sign and the currently unobstructed view to the east of the intact trail ruts descending the hill slope. One of the proposed transmission towers would be located close to the interpretive sign, and the overhead lines and their travelling shadows would be visible from this observation point in the direction of the trail ruts. The visual intrusion of the transmission line into the viewshed would have an adverse impact on the setting, feeling, and association of the

property. Because of the proximity of the overhead lines to the observation point, indirect effects may be auditory and atmospheric as well as visual. The introduction of the transmission line into this viewshed would detract from the visitor experience and historical interpretation of this property. Thus, Alternative A would have a high-intensity, long-term, indirect (visual, auditory, and atmospheric) impact on characteristics of this historic property that qualify it for listing in the NRHP.

The Nebraska SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] determined that Alternative A would "cause an adverse indirect effect" to the site, and that "the presence of the transmission lines would greatly diminish the historic property's location, setting, feeling and association by introducing adverse effect on its visual, auditory, and atmospheric integrity" (consultation letter from the Nebraska SHPO



to the Service, July 21, 2016). However, the interpretative site currently experiences noise from other sources, including traffic along Prairie Trace Road and center-pivot irrigation across the road.<sup>14</sup>

The figure on the previous page clearly shows the impact the R-Project would have on the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail Sandhill Ruts.<sup>15</sup>

The *FEIS* notes that the transmission line would be located within view of a “significant Mormon Trail” site and the interpretive marker. Two powerline towers would be approximately 250 south and 950 feet north of the trail. The wires between the two structures would pass overhead. Construction of the transmission line would dominate the view and “would be of high intensity.”<sup>16</sup>

### Fleecs’ Proposal

James Fleecs has proposed an alternative route using an existing corridor.<sup>17</sup> Quoting Fleecs ...

NPPD currently has many double circuit lines and a few already coming out of Gerald Gentlemen station where the R-Project starts. They use one pole and carry both a 345KV and an 115KV circuit as an example. They could easily upgrade the 115KV line to be a double circuit line, which would then carry the new 345KV(R-Project) and the existing 115KV line. The existing corridor could be utilized, environmental and cultural effects avoided and still accomplish NPPD’s objective of getting a 345KV line to Thedford. One of the main reasons they gave for not doing this was for line separation. I don’t think 15 miles of line separation from the current corridor running east of Gerald Gentlemen Station will be that much of a gain for the permanent negative impacts it will

cause for the life of the line. NPPD also stated in one of their public meetings that they now make the lines THREE TIMES STRONGER to withstand the ice storms. NPPD has also stated that double circuit lines are harder to maintain. This statement has some merit, but they already have plenty of existing lines such as these and they have thorough experience maintaining them. The accessibility of using the existing corridor for maintenance would be the biggest advantage as it follows existing roads.<sup>18</sup>

We feel that the well-thought-out recommendation by James Fleecs has merit, at the very least in pointing out the potential of using a pre-existing right of way eastward from NPPD’s Gerald Gentleman Power Station.

### That “Roadometer”

In 1847, near the Elkhorn River, the idea occurred to William Clayton that a some sort of mileage meter would be useful. He calculated the circumference of the back wheel of Heber C Kimball’s wagon and found it to be exactly 14 feet 8 inches. Realizing this multiplied by 360 was 5,280 feet or exactly one mile, he drove a nail into one of Mr. Kimball’s wheel spokes. Once every revolution it twanged against a saw blade, which he determinedly counted. Meanwhile Orson Pratt was appointed to record scientific data such as elevation, longitude, latitude, and weather – information useful to the flood of Mormon trains to follow. All of this could be done, but left distance travelled to guesstimation. It was obvious to Pratt that Clayton had the solution. Pratt approached Appleton Harmon, a master carpenter, to construct a device of Pratt’s design. On May 12, near North Platte today, the roadometer began counting the miles.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail, Sand Hill Ruts Segment,” *FEIS*, p. 3-309.

<sup>15</sup> “Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trial, Sandhill Ruts,” *FEIS*, figure 3.10-4, p. 3-310.

<sup>16</sup> “Mormon Trail Interpretive Marker (KOP 4) [Key Observation Point Number Four],” *FEIS*, p. 3-347.

<sup>17</sup> Fleecs, James, “With Many Concerns,” FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265, [https://downloads.regulations.gov/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265/attachment\\_1.pdf](https://downloads.regulations.gov/FWS-R6-ES-2014-0048-0265/attachment_1.pdf);

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, Richard E., *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), pp. 137-138, 145n67; Stringham, Guy E., “The Pioneer Roadometer,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1974), pp. 258-272.



From the Left: Tim Jensen, Don Engel, Dennis Mill, and (Kneeling) Jeff Uhrich with the New Cattle Guard Replacing the Old, Weather-Worn Guard.

Jeff Uhrich, retired Superintendent of Ash Hollow State Historical Park and OCTA member, continues to maintain the site of the California Hill ruts on property owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society (History Nebraska). In June Jeff along with Tim Jensen, Don Engel, and Dennis Miller installed new cattle guard panels donated by OCTA members Dixie and Glen Colson. Last October Bill Hill (all the way from New York!) and Jeff replaced the old, weather-battered trail marker with new National Park Service Oregon Trail and California Trail emblem markers and did other much needed maintenance (see November 2023 NOCTA newsletter). When Dixie and Glen saw the photograph of the likewise very weather-beaten cattle guard panels, Dixie notified us that they had replacement panels of just the right size to donate. Jeff swung by Colson place in rural Elsie, Nebraska, picked up the panels, painted them and along with Tim, Don and Dennis installed them while also mowing the parking area. The ruts area is now neat and tidy thanks to effort and generosity of several wonderful people.



The New Cattle Guard  
Its V-shape humans can squeeze through but not cattle.

All article photos by Diana Uhrich



## An Accident Near O'Fallon's Bluff



Source: Root and Connelley, *Overland Stage*, p. 183

Several years ago your newsletter editor was given a reprint of Root & Connelley's *Overland Stage to California*. It's a good read. Frank A Root was "Messenger in charge of the express and agent of the Post Office Department to look after the transportation of the mails over the great stage line across the plains and mountains to California." While William Elsey Connelley was "Author of 'The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory,' 'James Henry Lane, the Grim Chieftain of Kansas,' 'Wyandot Folk-Lore,' 'Kansas Territorial Governors,' 'Life of John Brown,' etc., etc.'" So proclaimed on the title page of their literary effort.

As told by these two participants, even the latter years of the westward migration could provide interesting tales and descriptions. Take for example the time a stagecoach came apart.

While coming east along the Platte, early one evening during the summer of 1863, not long after we had passed over O'Fallon's Bluffs, a rather singular accident befell us, while we were bowling along at the usual gait. Just after sunset the off front wheel of the stage—the one directly under the driver's seat—ran off the axle. Before any one on the coach

had time to even think, there was an exciting runaway. The team was full of life, and in its wild dash down the valley it seemed that it sped with almost the rapidity of a fast-mail train. I expected every minute to see the driver tumble headlong off the box; so held on to him as best I could with one hand, saving myself with the other. With my assistance he managed to keep his seat. For 200 or 300 yards or more the four horses fairly flew; they went so fast that the axle was kept from dragging on the ground. Finally the driver, by application of the brake, succeeded in bringing the team to a halt. Climbing down from the box, I ran back to find the wheel and the missing nut. I knew when the wheel rolled off and where it should be found, but it was some time ere I succeeded in finding the nut, which was accomplished by the aid of one of the coach lamps and a careful search. Inside the stage were five or six frightened passengers, but they all had to alight and help lift to enable us to get the wheel in place, so as to proceed on our journey. It was an unusual accident—the first and only one of the kind I ever witnessed on the "Overland"—and probably was due to the carelessness of the man who last adjusted the nut after greasing; but fortunately it only caused a little delay, and no one was hurt and nothing injured.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Root, Frank A. and William E. Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California* (Topeka, Kansas: Crane & Co., 1901; Reprint Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1970).



# Dobytown



South Side of Dobytown, 1863

Left to right: Piper & Robertson's store, boarding house, saloon and restaurant

Source: Root & Connelley, *Overland Stage*, p. 201

Nearly every military post in history had/has its neighboring establishment catering to the “relaxation needs” of the troops. Fort Kearney’s answer – completely unofficial of course – was Dobytown. The state historical marker near the site, tries to put a positive shine on the place when it states “Dobytown also served as the major outfitting point west of the Missouri River, the center of frontier transportation from 1860 to 1866, a Pony Express station and the first county seat of Kearney County.”<sup>21</sup> Root and Connelley had words for the metropolis. Two miles west of Fort Kearney was the worst place on the entire overland route. A town had been laid out and christened “Kearney City.” (It was called “Doby town” for short.) It was a place of perhaps half a dozen sod structures, just outside of the fort reservation limits at the west. The buildings were occupied almost exclusively by the worst kind of dives, and a number of the people were disreputable characters of both sexes. The soldiers quartered at the post who drank bought their whisky at “Doby town,” and the large numbers of ox and mule drivers going across the plains seldom failed to stop there a few moments, to fill up on “tanglefoot,” thus making it an immensely profitable business for those keeping such places. Freighters (the owners of the freight, especially) were always glad to get out of

“Doby-town” and did so as soon as possible. There was a great amount of thieving done in the vicinity, and ox and mule drivers and those who had any money and who spent a night there, would be frequently drugged with the vilest liquor, robbed, and often rendered unable to go on westward with their trains the following morning. Hence, freighters would try to arrange their journey so they would never be obliged to camp in the vicinity of that disreputable place.<sup>22</sup>

Later in the book the authors cite an *Omaha Bee* article.<sup>23</sup> We directly quote that article here.

Just west of the reservation [Fort Kearney] sprang up a collection of huts and hovels known as Adobe Town, sometimes shortened to “Dobey town,” and also called Kearney City. It is related that the place at one time had fourteen saloons, though there were only six families there. These saloons were, of course, sustained by the custom of travelers. A detailed history of Adobe Town would have a weird sort of interest, no doubt, if all facts could be brought to light. A little further west and near the river is a close thicket of cottonwoods, enclosing the spot where once stood a house. The place was on the old stage road, and was called “Dirty Woman’s Ranch,” with a due regard to the fitness of things. Travelers were often lodged here over night, and if those trees

<sup>21</sup> “Dobytown”, historical marker erected by Nebraska State Historical Society and Kearney County Historical Society, two miles west of Fort Kearney State Park on Nebraska Highway 50A (40.710944°N, 99.158167°W).

<sup>22</sup> Root and Connelley, pp. 206-207.

<sup>23</sup> Root and Connelley, p. 243

could speak they could tell some wild, weird tales.

After the close of the [Civil] war, in 1866, General Pope, commander-in-chief, visited Fort Kearney. He was much pleased with the location, and under his orders great improvements were made. A steam sawmill was set up, logs were brought from inland, and numerous buildings were erected. The next year General Sherman succeeded General Pope, and he made a tour of inspection of the Platte valley. While at the fort General Sherman rode out with Colonel Carrington, the post commander, together with officers and ladies of the fort, to view the country. As they rode through Adobe Town some one from within one of the squalid little houses hissed the party. Very soon after the general avenged the insult by ordering the abandonment of the post. An urgent protest from settlers who feared to be left without protection resulted in one company of troops being left at the fort, and from that time it remained a one-company post until it was permanently abandoned, in 1871.<sup>24</sup>



Oregon-California Trails Association  
Nebraska Chapter (NOCTA)

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Three previous editions of the NOCTA newsletter were published in August 2023, November 2023 and March 2024. If you would like to have any of these, just email the editor at [PlattsmouthHistorian@gmail.com](mailto:PlattsmouthHistorian@gmail.com).



## Mormon Trail History Forum

By Richard Bennett

The First Annual History Forum of the Mormon Trails Across Nebraska association was held in Omaha at the Mormon Trail Center on Saturday, 27 April 2024. Some 50 people attended. During the morning session, eleven speakers spoke on such diverse topics as the 1850 Mormon trail south of the Platte River, the Omaha Indians and the Mormon settlement at Winter Quarters, the 1862 Steam Wagon experiment, the history of the Mormon Bridge connecting Iowa and Nebraska, recent efforts by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to upgrade the Kanessville Log Tabernacle site in downtown Council Bluffs, the latest plans of the National Park Services for highlighting the 1847 Mormon Pioneer Trail across Nebraska, the history of the Florence Mill, the story of William Dykes as an early Platte County settler, and the reasons why the Mormons chose to stay at Winter Quarters (Florence) in 1846-48.

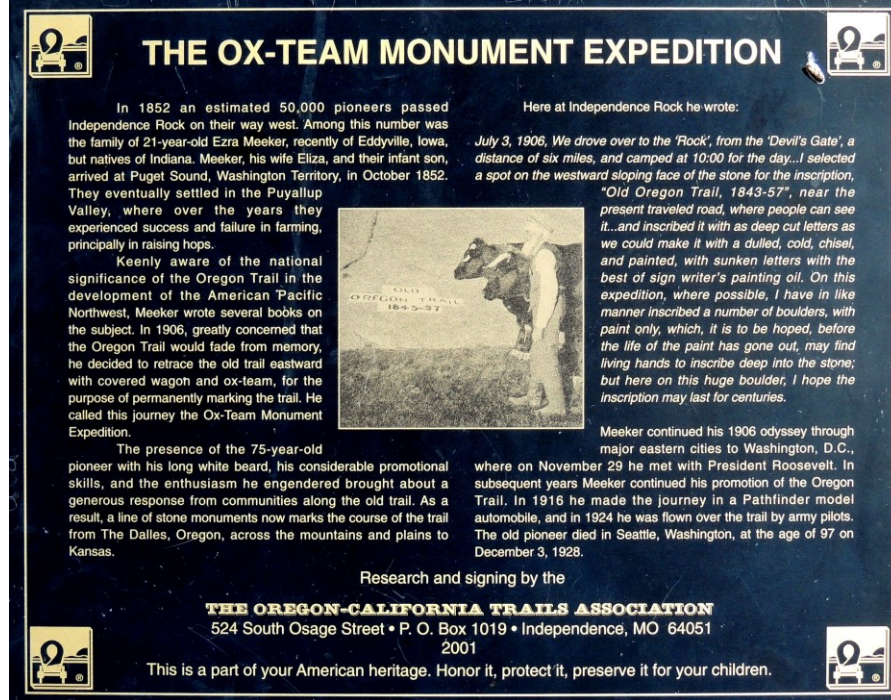
Of special interest was the presentation by the featured guest speaker and city planner, George Shaw, who spoke on "Florence: Cherishing its Past and Envisioning a New Future." George also guided the highly informative afternoon bus tour of the various Mormon trails to the Elkhorn River Crossing.

Next year's History Forum is tentatively scheduled for Grand Island, Nebraska in late April or early May.



<sup>24</sup> Davis, M.B., "Fort Kearney, Oregon Route," *Omaha Illustrated Bee*, 1899-12-24, p. 8.

## Help Find OCTA Markers in Nebraska



OCTA Makers are Gold on Black with OCTA Logo in Each Corner  
(This one is in Wyoming, not Nebraska)

NOCTA member Shannon Gibson is compiling a list of OCTA markers in Nebraska. Unfortunately neither OCTA headquarters nor the OCTA Nebraska Chapter has a complete record of OCTA's markers in the state. Those markers in Nebraska that are known were installed in the late 1980s and 1990s. A quick check of one of Randy Brown's books found ten:<sup>25</sup>

1. "George Winslow" grave = north of Fairbury, Jefferson County (SW¼, Sec. 21, T3N, R2E)
2. "Eubanks Ranch - 1864" = Oak, Nuckolls County (SE¼ NE¼, Sec. 6, T3N, R5W)
3. "Attack on Simonton-Smith Train" = south of Hastings, Adams County (NW¼, Sec. 24, T6N, R10W)
4. "Plum Creek Massacre" = south of Overton, Phelps County (SW¼, Sec. 10, T8N, R20W)
5. "Sarepta Gore Fly" grave = south of Overton, Dawson County (SE¼, Sec. 8, T6N, R20W)
6. "Rachel E. Pattison" grave = Ash Hollow Cemetery, Lewellen, Garden County (NW¼, Sec. 3, T15N, R42W)
7. "Paul C. Henderson Memorial Monument" = Oregon Trail Memorial Cemetery, Bridgeport
8. "Pierre Didier Papin" grave = South of Gering, Scottsbluff County (NE¼, Sec. 6, T20N, R55W)
9. "Robidoux Trading Post" = West of Gering, Scottsbluff County (SE¼, Sec. 7, T21N, R56W)
10. "Robidoux Pass" = West of Gering, Scottsbluff County (SE¼, Sec. 6, T21N, R57W)

If you know of any others, let Shannon know at [nashvegas27@hotmail.com](mailto:nashvegas27@hotmail.com) or email me at [PlattsmouthHistorian@Gmail.com](mailto:PlattsmouthHistorian@Gmail.com).

<sup>25</sup> Brown, Randy and Reg Duffin, *Graves and Sites on the Oregon and California Trails*, 2nd Ed. (Independence, MO: Oregon-California Trails Association, 1998), pp. 2-24.



## Mormon Trails Across Nebraska

The mission of Mormon Trails Across Nebraska is to promote, preserve, and publicize the existence of Mormon Trails across Nebraska Territory from 1846 to 1869, including, but not limited to, the Platte River Mormon Trail, The Oxbow Trail, and The Nebraska City Cut-off Trail.

Mormon Trails Across Nebraska aims to foster educational opportunities with schools, museums, county historical societies, and other organizations through both traditional means and various forms of social media. Promoting tourism, preserving existing trail ruts and swales, as well as creating and distributing appropriate trail signs along roadways and other areas within Nebraska are the fundamental aims of the association.

Check Facebook for "Mormon Trails Across Nebraska"

### OFFICERS

PRESIDENT: *Fred Roeser*

TREASURER: *Tom Bryan*

SECRETARY: *Erick  
Wadsworth*



### MEETINGS

Annual Membership Meetings are held via ZOOM in the in the Fourth Quarter of the year.  
The link is emailed one month before the meeting.

TO JOIN, fill out the form below  
& send with a check in the amount  
of \$35.00 payable to:  
Mormon Trails Across Nebraska  
2652 Prairie Place  
Columbus, NE 68601

Name

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Address

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City, State, Zip

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Phone

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E-mail

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All member information is used for association purposes only and will not be released to any third party. We respect your privacy.