



~ **Part 9** ~

**Reflections on a Common Theme  
Trails Found  
in Our Communities**

To Read More about  
Solomon Valley History  
visit our website at  
[www.hw24.org](http://www.hw24.org)

---

## **Trails Found in Our Communities**

### **CLOUD COUNTY**

by Joan Nothern

#### **Road Boosters in Glasco Worked to Bring This Historic Trail Through Their Town**

In 1914, the Red Line/Solomon Valley Highway was chosen as part of the Midland Trail, one of the first coast-to-coast routes across the country. Originating in Washington D.C. and reaching the Pacific at either Los Angeles or San Francisco, the Midland Trail appealed to early motorists who were tough and adventurous. The 1916 Midland Trail Tour Guide provided this advice in order to be equipped for the road:

Any car in good shape mechanically, not overloaded with supplies and driven with ordinary care and consideration for its weaknesses as a machine, may with safety go anywhere East or West in our country today. To equip a car for such a trip, it is only necessary to have it in good repair, to provide tools for such repairs as may be made on the road, and with a coil of soft iron wire, a good small shovel, an ax of small size, good tire chains, a light rope or steel wire 25 to 50 feet in length, a set of steel triple blocks and a steel pin an inch in diameter and three feet long, with a sharp point. These items of equipment should have permanent places provided about the car for carrying them and will be found useful quite as often in the East as in the West.

In 1926, when "named highways" were given numbers to simplify road navigation, the Midland Trail from Manhattan to Limon Colorado was designated U. S. 40 North. In 1936, when split numbers were eliminated, the road we know was renamed US 24.

As you can see, much of the 2-lane route that defines the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance was once the famous Midland Trail.

Fifty-six years before the birth of the Midland Trail, in the spring of 1859, the Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company (L&PPX) ran the first stage coaches to the new gold-rush town of Denver. Stage stations were numbered 1 through 27, with Leavenworth #1 and Denver #27. Station #10 was located about eight miles northwest of where Glasco now stands. (Later, this location was known as Welcome.) This stage line was started by William Russell of the famous freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell. The stages started westward on the existing military road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley, then blazed a new trail across western Kansas into Nebraska to meet the Republican River and followed it southwest to its source near present Hugo, Colorado. (This route information from an article, "The First Stagecoaches to Denver," by SV24 member, Dorman Lehman.)

Horace Greeley documented his experience on the L&PPX. On May 29, 1859, he described the journey from Station #9 to #11. He wrote, "We have crossed many streams to-day, all making south for Solomon's Fork, which has throughout been from two to six miles from us on our left, its narrow belt of timber constantly sending out longer or shorter spurs up the creeks which feed it on either side."

He continued, "On rising our first ridge this morning, a herd of buffalo was seen grazing on the prairie some three miles toward the Solomon; soon, more were visible; then others. At length, a herd of a hundred appeared on the north—the only one we saw on that side of our road during the day."

Glasco members of the SV-24-HA are working on providing signage to mark L&PPX Station #10. This historic stage route was used less than a year.

## **MITCHELL COUNTY**

by Linda Clover

### **Cawker City's Unique Trail**

There is really a trail you can follow today in Cawker City. It is called the Twine Walk. Paint was used on the sidewalk leaving the Ball of Twine to create the look of unraveled twine. The trail is along both sides of Wisconsin Street, which is Highway 24. This curly-cue trail leads visitors to paintings in storefront windows. The paintings were created by former local artist Cher Heller Olson as a way to spruce up the empty store fronts as businesses closed. These copies of masterpiece paintings are different from the originals; ours all have twine some place in each painting. It might be hidden (an earring becomes a Ball of Twine), or there might be a ball of twine just placed someplace in the painting.

This trail along the sidewalks of Cawker City gives children a way of getting rid of excess energy as they are traveling and unable to move around. Parents certainly appreciate this stop, besides the fun of walking or skipping to see the paintings, a learning experience is gleaned along the way by the variety of artists represented and their famous works. Visitors on the trail learn about art without even realizing it. Our versions of the masterpieces make the originals seem rather plain without the added twine. Just imagine Mona Lisa with twine and take the trail following the path on the sidewalks of Cawker City.

## **OSBORNE COUNTY**

by John McClure

### **Osborne's Shady Bend Bike Trail**

"Where do you ride a mountain bike in Kansas," you're asked in a mocking tone with one eyebrow raised? You hear this regularly when people find out you're a mountain-biking enthusiast from the Sunflower State. While it's true our state can't boast of mountainous terrain or vast public lands laced with trails, the surprise answer to the question is, "Lots of places!" Necessity truly is the mother of invention and Kansas mountain bikers have learned to be very creative about carving sweet little sections of single track wherever the opportunity presents itself.

Osborne's Shady Bend Bike Trail is a perfect example of one of these "trails of opportunity." It was born when two Osborne bikers exploring deer trails started connecting some of them to make loops. Today the Shady Bend Bike Trail twists and winds for 4 miles through a timbered area that hugs the south fork of the Solomon River just west of town. It features terrain gentle enough that novice riders don't feel overwhelmed but challenging enough when you pick up the pace that more experienced riders will go away smiling when they're through. The trail is also great for hikers. In warm weather the tree canopy provides cooling shade, yet after the leaves fall the bare limbs break the chill winds and trap the sun's warmth down at ground level. Wildlife encounters on the trail are the norm with regular sightings of mixed woodland and river aquatic animals from whitetail deer and wild turkeys on down to squirrels and song birds.

The Shady Bend Trail is located in a setting with a long history as a recreational area. In the 1930s the WPA built a stone and concrete dam on the Solomon that created a broad lake whose waters covered the present site of the trail. The dam survives but the lake only lasted a few years before being filled by the river's heavy silt load. Today the old lake's footprint is the basis for a variety and quality of outdoor recreation experiences typically associated with much larger communities. In addition to the trail, outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy the challenge of the nine hole, grass green, Shady Bend Golf Course. If shooting sports are your passion, the Osborne Gun Club Shooting Range offers shooting lanes for archery, pistols, small bore and high-powered rifles, along with high and low house traps for the shot gunners. Baseball fans will appreciate "America's National Pastime" on the well-groomed fields at the Sanders Baseball Complex. Finally, for the young and for the adventurous at heart, check out the historic Osborne Boy Scout Cabin. This rustic limestone structure features a massive stone fireplace in the "Great Room" and a fireman's pole for quick descents from the sleeping loft when taking the stairs doesn't generate enough excitement. The cabin is headquarters for our local scout troops and a hub for regional scouting activities. The building is also available to rent for family gatherings and organizational events.

The Shady Bend Trail is easy to find. Follow Osborne's Main Street west out of town past the Sanders Baseball Complex and the Scout Cabin. Keep going west on the rock road past the turn to the Golf Course clubhouse. This rock road runs along the north bank of the Solomon River and will take you to the shooting range. Just before arriving at the shooting range gate there is a mowed pull out on the left side of the road at the trail heads. Let the fun begin!

Once on the trail there are a few simple rules to help assure that all users have a safe and enjoyable experience:

1. Always show respect to other trail users
2. Bikers yield to hikers
3. Stay on the established trail
4. Bikers always wear helmets
5. If you pack it in, pack it out
6. No motorized vehicles

For anyone new to off-road biking, here are some things you need to know. Your bike should be in good working condition and set up with components designed to be ridden off the pavement. If you aren't sure about your equipment, have it checked by a reputable bike shop. Ride within the limits of your ability. Mountain biking is supposed to be a challenge, so give yourself time to develop your skills. Never pass up a chance to ride with more experienced bikers. Watching their technique in clearing tough sections of trail will help you become a better rider fast. Drink plenty of water to keep your body hydrated for the workout. If the trail is muddy to the point you're leaving ruts most of the way, pull out and come back when conditions are better. Ruts are hard on the trail and lots of mud is hard on your bike. Finally, don't worry about getting lost on Shady Bend Trail because it's designed so no matter which option you choose, keep following the maintained trail and you'll come out right where you started.

For more information about Shady Bend Trail, biking equipment or other biking opportunities in the area, call me (John) at the shop, Blue Hills Bikes, (785) 346-2715. If you're planning to come ride the trail, give me a heads up and I'll do my best to slip away to come ride along.

"See you on the trail!"

## **ROOKS COUNTY**

by Gail McComb

### **Trail to Nicodemus**

Mabel Bartlett wrote the following in the "History of Lanark Township": "In 1880, Marion Bartlett's family were living on the southeast quarter of section 8-6-17 in Lanark Township (Rooks County). The road left the (North Solomon) river at Portis and came over the ridge by our place and on to Nicodemus. We saw a number of the Negro families who were on their way to Nicodemus. They would stop and ask how much farther it was, they were so tired, then ask for water, never for food. They were very polite, always hat in hand, but they were terribly poor, all of their possessions on an old wagon, further crowded by a number of children. I remember one had to walk, hoping that by keeping the load light as possible, they could reach their destination."

This trail probably followed the ridge between the North and South Forks of the Solomon River, and apparently turned south from Bow Creek into Stockton, and then westerly through Webster and on to Nicodemus.

On May 23, 1883, the Western News reported: "Four prairie schooners passed through town [Stockton] yesterday to Nicodemus, Graham County. They were colored people from Missouri, and had good horses and good outfits."

### **Wagon Trail West of Stockton**

The wagon trail west of Stockton town site ran due west for 2 ½ miles along the section line until it came to a steep hill from the north, wound south around the hill, crossed Boxelder Creek, then avoiding a steeper hill, traveled between the steep hill on the north and a large spring on the south near the river in a southwesterly direction, and then proceeded westerly.

When the Missouri Pacific Railroad arrived in Stockton on November 19, 1885, the hopes were the railroad would proceed on west to Webster, Nicodemus, and Hill City to join the Union Pacific

Railroad and on toward Colorado. In that event the only practical right-of-way would be the location of the wagon trail, keeping it above the South Solomon River flood plain.

There not being enough width for a wagon road and railroad between the hill and the spring, an alternate site was considered for the wagon trail. Unfortunately, the railroad west of Stockton never materialized for lack of funding due to the drought of 1890 and the Panic of 1893.

With the advent of the automobile, in 1914 the wagon road was relocated on the section line over the steep hill and then due west 21 miles and 4 miles south to the Bogue intersection, passing two miles north of Webster and three miles north of Nicodemus. There was another road, known as the Webster Cutoff, which went to those two towns, but this was not the main highway. The highway route later became known as the White Way in 1917, then Midland Route from 1918 to 1926, U.S. 40N from 1926-1936, and finally U.S. 24 in 1936. In 1960 the route of U.S. 24 west of Stockton was moved to the south to pass close to Webster Lake and the town of Nicodemus.

## **GRAHAM COUNTY**

by Lowell Beecher

### **Register Rock**

A lonely, south-facing outcropping of native limestone along the South Solomon River in rural Graham County bears mute testimony to the earliest days of the area's history. Incised into virtually every available ledge "face" of exposed rock are initials and dates—symbols left by men who visited the site, some before the 900 sections of unorganized Graham County territory achieved county status in 1880.

While Graham County waited almost to the end of the 1880s for rail service, counties to Graham's north, east, and south were earlier served: WaKeeney was favored by the Kansas Division of the Union Pacific; Stockton was the western terminus of southern branch of the Atchison, Colorado and Pacific, then leased to the Missouri Pacific; and the western terminus of the northern branch of the Atchison, Colorado and Pacific had track at Lenora in Norton County.

When the Kirwin Land Office began issuing homestead, preemption, and timber culture papers, and Graham County received a massive influx of settlers, their creature needs for staples, communications, and building materials demanded attention. To satisfy those needs, a complicated system of freight wagons, along with lighter stagecoaches and "hack" conveyances, which focused on a Wakeeney-to-Norton-through-Lenora schedule and a daily Millbrook-to-Stockton mail run, entered Graham County from the north, east, and south.

Freighters from Stockton paused to rest their animals at a protected space immediately north of the Solomon River on their tortuous trek into Graham County. Dates and initials from the 1880s through 1917 were inscribed by countless unknown men over several decades at "Register Rock," a historical site adjoining the trail, but one destined to be lost to history through natural erosion. One hundred thirty years have witnessed the loss of most of the inscriptions; another lifetime will see all that remain disappear.

### **The Ellis Trail to Nicodemus**

by Angela Bates

This trail did not begin in Ellis, but Ellis became the last stop on the railroad for those who traveled from former plantations and farms in Kentucky and other states to the Promised Land of Kansas. The destination was an all-black town, settled by African-Americans, most of whom were former slaves from the South. Nicodemus, named after an African prophet, was platted on the north bank of the South Solomon River, in Graham County. Many African-Americans followed this trail, but the largest group migration came from Kentucky in 1877. The Ellis Trail was the last leg, just over 35 miles, of nearly a thousand-mile trek from central Kentucky.

After a long, three-day trip on the train from Sadieville, the 350 anxious settlers arrived at the depot in Ellis, 16 miles west of Hays. When they looked north to the barren prairie and rolling hills stretched out before them, they were told they had yet a two-day walk to a town they would call home. Two days over rough and uncharted land; a land with no roads, only a few deer trails and open spaces scattered with buffalo bones and chips. The short grass, yucca plants, and prickly pear cactus that dotted this "great American desert" of northwest Kansas was a drastic change in scenery compared to the lush forest and prairie of central Bluegrass Kentucky.

As the group of settlers stepped forward toward their unseen home, they did so with great anticipation. They walked, following town promoters W. R. Hill and Rev. Roundtree who carried their belongings and supplies in wagons and used a compass to guide them. They traveled straight north nearly 10 miles until they stood on top of steep limestone bluffs. It must have taken hours to navigate down the steep bluffs with wagons in tow, to their resting spot known as Happy Hollow. There they rested before going on. They spent the night on the banks of the Smoky Hill River before rising early to move onward. They walked and followed the wagons through ravines, and up and down other steep bluffs until the land gave way to the southern slope of the great Solomon Valley. Near a large hill just south of the present town of Damar, they looked across the valley and saw smoke rising just north of the Solomon River. Less than a few hours away, Nicodemus stood out against the bright fall sky and setting sun. After fording the shallow Solomon River, they rose across its banks and stood firmly on the town site of Nicodemus, their new home; a home where they could govern themselves and experience real freedom. The long journey from Kentucky had finally ended, but the last 35 miles from Ellis was the most arduous but certainly most anticipated and exciting. This trek of the journey is known as the Ellis Trail.

This trail was used until the railroad built west from Plainville and established the towns of Damar and Bogue. Today, one can take the black top north out of Ellis to the town of Palco. Take a right as you enter town and then a left by the elevators through town on the main road. Left at Highway 18. 10 miles to Damar. Just past Damar take a right onto blacktop 2nd Rd. Four miles north to Highway 24, then left two miles west to the historic town of Nicodemus. For maps of the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus, contact: Nicodemus Historical Society (785) 839-4280.

## **SHERIDAN COUNTY**

by Marjorie Deibert

### **Western Cattle Trail**

One of the biggest things in the history of this part of the country was the Texas cattle drive. Tens of thousands of the longhorns were being driven through the county every season. The history of the cattle drive dates back to the years immediately following the Civil War. Texas at that time was full of cattle but they were scarce at the north. Cattle were wanted for the feed lots of the corn belt and, after the buffalo had been exterminated and the Indian subdued, cattle were needed to stock the ranges of the west and northwest. Joseph G. McCoy of Abilene was the originator of the drive; and the cattle at first were driven to Abilene, which was for a time the western terminus of the U.P. Railroad. Later the drive was being extended farther west to those points, and because as the settlers filled up the plains of central Kansas they refused to allow the cattle to be driven through their settlements and sought and obtained legislation pushing the traffic farther west.

The "dead line" as established by the legislature of 1879, beginning at the boundary of the Indian Territory, ran up along the east side of Clark and Ford counties to the Arkansas River to Dodge City, and thence along the east side of Finney, Lane, Gove, Sheridan and Rawlins counties to the Nebraska line; no driving was allowed east of this line. The effect of this regulation was to direct the stream of cattle to Dodge. Here some of them were shipped to eastern markets over the Santa Fe road, and those destined for more northern points continued on their way up the trail. The Santa Fe and Union Pacific were then the only railroads in the country and after leaving Dodge no settlements were met with till the neighborhood of Buffalo Park was reached. The editor of the Buffalo Park Express kept a partial record for 1880. In one day of that year 11,600 head arrived at Buffalo Park. Thirty thousand came in one week. By July 8 the arrivals numbered 89,220 and by August 5 there were 165,220. After this date no more figures were given, but as the run of range cattle usually continues till fall, it is evident the record is far from complete.

Sheridan County was created in 1873. The Western Trail came up from Dodge through Gove, through Sheridan, up to Ogallala, Nebr. and Red Cloud Indian Agency.

**The Dodge City Trail** (1876-1895) also known as "The Western Trail" started just south of the Nueces River and ended in Ogallala, Neb. The little cemetery on top of the hill in Ogallala tells part of the story of the cowtown in its heyday.

The following is from W. P. Harrington, *The History of Gove County, KS*, reprinted for Gove County Historical Association by News Chronicle Ptg. Co. Scott City Ks, 1973:

The trail entered Gove Co. 6 miles west of the southeast corner of the county and struck across country in a direction slightly west of north, to Buffalo Park. The old trail can still be traced for a part

of its course across the county, wherever it has not been obliterated by the plow; it is particularly plain just south of the Hackberry where it sweeps by the base of "Round Top," a high rocky point that cowboys and settlers alike used as a local landmark.

Note: This article was submitted by SV24 board member Shirley Popp, who added the following postscript: Marjorie Deibert is the late Mother of Shirley Popp, Hoxie, Ks. Marjorie had a passion for western history, and delved into it as she and her husband Glenn traversed the country from Texas to North Dakota on the "custom cutting trail." As I've been doing a little research of my own, I've discovered that this Western Trail may very well still be seen today about ½-mile west of our ranch in southeast Sheridan County.