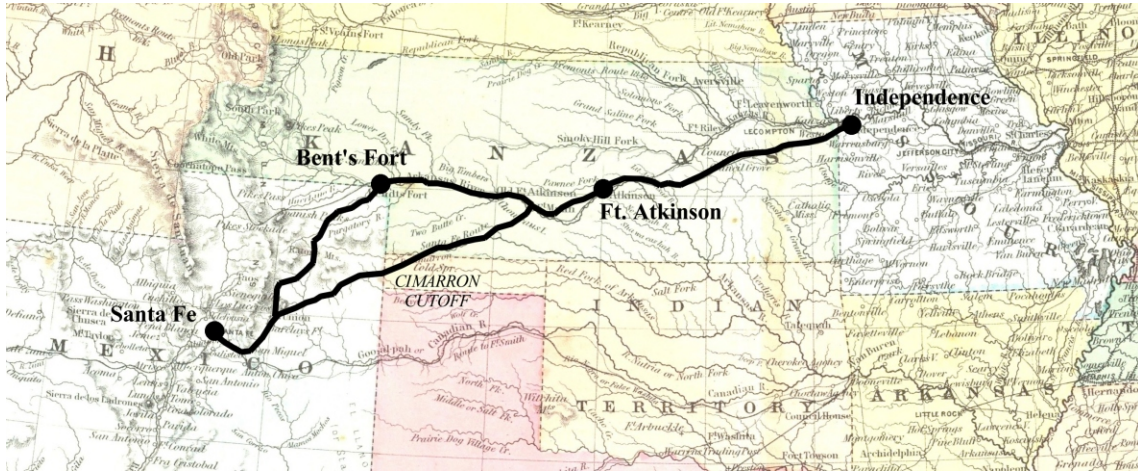


Santa Fe Trail Mail



Following the announcement of Mexican independence, William Becknell departed Missouri on a trading expedition to New Mexico. He arrived in Santa Fe in November 1821 after following the route which became famous as the Santa Fe Trail. This route, originally touching at Bents Fort in what is now Colorado remained the primary commercial, mail and military route to the Southwest for decades. The Cimarron cutoff, a shorter route over less mountainous terrain was also used.

The trail connected at Santa Fe with the Chihuahua Trail, the Spanish period El Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro (Royal Road to the Interior Lands), which provided an entry port for international trade to central Mexico. Mail from traders was carried privately to Missouri by returning merchants.

In 1846 Doniphan's Expedition followed the Bents Fort route to Santa Fe as part of the American invasion force in the Mexican War. After General Kearny's forces occupied Santa Fe on August 18, 1846, he established a civil and military government in New Mexico as well as a military express office in Santa Fe. Civilian and military mails were carried by military expresses, contracted for by the military, that operated irregularly over the Santa Fe trail. Typically, such letters entered the mails at Fort Leavenworth or Independence, Missouri.

On May 11, 1850 Waldo, Hall and Company was awarded a contract for a monthly mail on the route between Independence and Santa Fe. The first westbound trip departed Independence on May 11, 1850. The contract was given to Jacob Hall from August 18, 1854 and service improved to semi-monthly on July 1, 1857.

After several route contract changes, re-assignments and attempts at alternate routes to serve New Mexico, a weekly service on the route was begun on July 1, 1862. From July 1, 1866 Sanderson, Barlow and Bradley were the contractors with the terminus changed from Independence to Junction City, Kansas. The route was shortened gradually with the westward advance of the Union Pacific railroad. The eastern terminus for the route was changed to Fort Harker in 1867, then to Hayes City, and then to Phil Sheridan in 1869.