

An Epicenter of International Commerce



Santa Fe, Oregon, and California
National Historic Trails

McCoy Park
Oregon-California Trails Association
City of Independence
National Park Service

Being at leisure one day, I rode over to Independence [from Westport, in May 1846]. The town was crowded. A multitude of shops had sprang up to furnish the emigrants and Santa Fe traders with necessaries for the journey; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from a dozen blacksmiths' sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired, and the horses and oxen shod. The streets were thronged with men, horses, and mules.

— Francis Parkman Jr, 1846

Independence in the 1830s-1840s thrived as a multi-cultural international center for commerce—French Canadians, Europeans, Spanish, Mexicans, Blacks, and American Indians mingled and traded goods on Independence Square.

Local freighters transported European and American-made goods (cotton, glass, iron) through the city from eastern and southern coasts over the Santa Fe Trail to Mexico, and returned with gold, silver, furs, wool, mules, and horses. Independence became known for its wagon factories, blacksmith shops, and yoke and harness making facilities.

Emigrants seeking land in Oregon or gold in California disembarked from steamboats at Wayne City and nearby landings. Others came overland by stagecoach or traveled in their own wagons.

Arriving in early spring, emigrants prepared for the journey of a lifetime. They had filled the hotels and boarded or camped on nearby farms. Now they could depart with their livestock nourished by spring grasses.



The Santa Fe Trail opened trade barriers from Missouri to Mexico, providing economic inroads into America that tendered riches all the way to Europe. Loaded with all of the goods that Independence readily supplied, emigrant wagon trains surged onto the Oregon and California trails—tramping across plains and over the Continental Divide toward the promise of wealth and land.

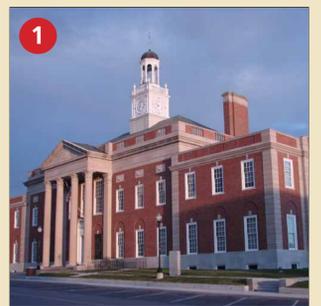
For more information, please visit:

- National Trails Frontier Museum
318 West Pacific Avenue
(816) 325-7575
www.frontiertrailsmuseum.org
- Harry S. Truman Library and Museum
500 West Highway 24
(816) 268-8200
www.trumanlibrary.org
- Midwest Genealogy Center
3440 South Lee's Summit Road
(816) 252-7228
www.mymcpl.org/genealogy
- Jackson County Historical Society
112 West Lexington Avenue
(816) 252-7454
www.jchs.org
- City of Independence - Tourism
111 East Maple Avenue
(816) 325-7111
www.visitindependence.com
- Oregon-California Trails Association
524 South Osage Street
(816) 252-2276
www.octa-trails.org/



Independence Square 1850

The heyday of international commerce lasted until 1850 when trail use began to decline. By 1869 the transcontinental railroad forged the new way westward.



Independence Square

Stores, warehouses, hotels, saloons, medical and law offices, and banks surrounded the Jackson County Courthouse, the governmental and administrative seat. Wagons departed with excitement and anticipation.



Lewis-Bingham-Waggoner Estate - The home of artist-politician George Caleb Bingham, this house was later occupied by the Waggoner family who operated the flour mill across the street. Look for shallow swales on the south side of the property.



National Frontier Trails Museum - Located on the site of a spring used by traders and emigrants prior to their departure, the museum has exhibits on the Santa Fe, Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Lewis and Clark national historic trails.



Santa Fe Trail Park
Caravans from Independence Square passed through this area, headed in a southwesterly direction. Wagon swales can be seen in the lot just south of the park, and beyond them additional trail swales can be found in the yards of homes.



Jim Bridger Memorial
Bridger (1804-1881) was one of the most famous western frontiersmen, explorers, and guides. Originally buried on his farm in present-day south Kansas City, he was reinterred at Mt. Washington Cemetery in 1904.



Wayne City Landing Overlook - Goods brought from St. Louis, Philadelphia, New York, and Europe by steamboat were transferred from river to rail and freight wagons to warehouses. Cargo was bound for Santa Fe or sold locally to residents/emigrants.