



Addresses at Annual Meeting 1940

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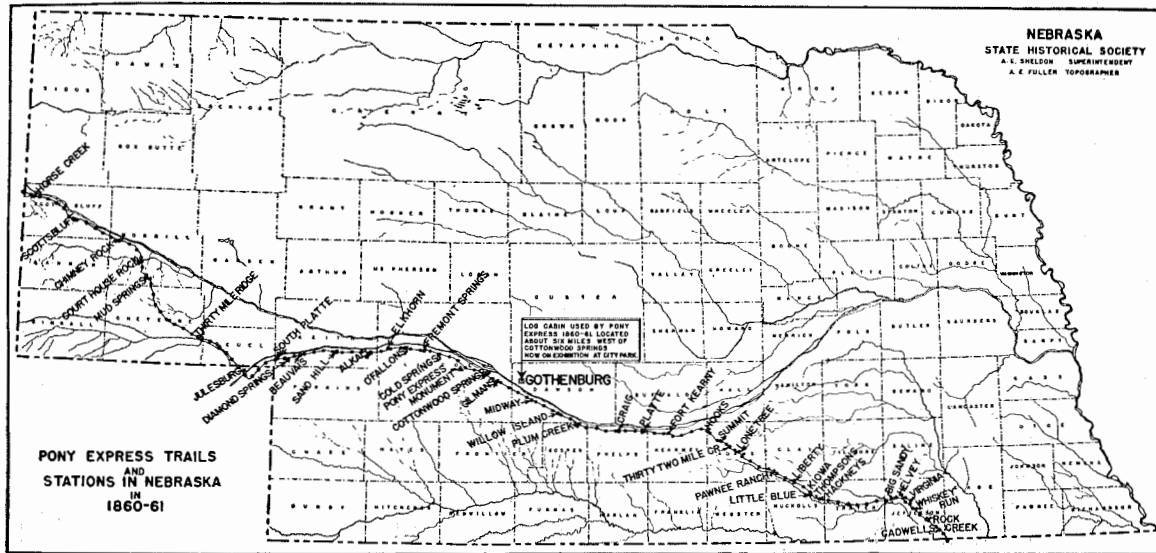
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Map drawn to accompany addresses on the Pony Express Trail at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, 1940



HON. FRED G. HAWXBY

The Trail-Making Urge*

HON. FRED G. HAWXBY, Lincoln

The subject assigned to me seemed very attractive and fascinating. However, while the literature and history of trails in America is prolific, yet those works deal largely with the location of these trails and the character of the pioneers who discovered and traveled them. They throw very little light on just what prompted and caused those adventurous souls to lay out and travel these unknown paths.

Our own state, located midway between two oceans in the heart of the great central Plains Region, traversed by the Platte River with its level valley, afforded a path of least resistance to those venturesome fur traders and hunters seeking a direct route from the Mississippi and Missouri Valley regions to the Rocky Mountains and the forest regions of the Pacific Northwest. The fact that the Platte Valley had become the natural route for so many of these transcontinental trails — which later welcomed the Pony Express, the Overland Stage coaches, the freighters' wagons, and finally the steel rails of the Union Pacific which in turn pointed the way to the air lanes later charted by the transcontinental air mail service — makes this subject of special interest to Nebraskans.

No theme furnishes more food for thought. No phase of our state history affords a stronger appeal to the imagination nor furnishes such a thrilling and romantic picture as the study of the causes and motives which prompted men to lay out these great trails penetrating unknown regions. To get at these causes for "the trail-making urge," more or less in every nation, involves a study of human nature and a knowledge of the history of civilization itself.

As a boy my first observation of trails was when with my father I watched the paths made by our domestic animals. They made a little trail first from the barn to the willow grove and about two rods east to a watering place. They took the path of least resist-

*Address at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, October 19, 1940.

ance, and I often wondered what instinct made them do it. Then again from the barnyard to the strawstack almost at the north end of our quarter section, where the horses and cows burrowed great tunnels to protect themselves from the winter. Another, back to where father had planted the chunks of rock salt. So you can see that the first urge toward trail-making was to satisfy the needs for food and comfort. To get at the causes of trail-making, however, involves more or less study of human nature and, necessarily, a knowledge of the history of civilization itself.

No one can make the most casual study of the growth and decline of nations and not be impressed with the necessity of good highways if a nation or people is to prosper and grow and develop its resources. This is true because production alone without means of distribution means waste in some localities and scarcity in others.

Of course the trail-making urge existed and grew in the hearts of men long before the advent of steam engines, steel rails, motor vehicles and airplanes. This urge, of necessity, grew out of the struggle of mankind to supply and to enjoy the fruits of their labor, with the least restriction of their right to live and rear their families, with the least number of rules tending to circumscribe their liberties. The desire of men to enjoy these privileges often led to migrations to new lands.

Haddon's analysis of the motives that have prompted these movements leads him to conclude that migrations are usually prompted or caused by an expulsion or an attraction, or both. The former nearly always results from a dearth of food or from overpopulation, and from tendency of unjust and arrogant rulers to restrict the liberties and rights of their subjects and to oppress them by harsh and unjust laws.

Sooner or later, migrations occur among pioneer people — people who live largely from hunting and fishing and from their flocks — when the increase of population in a country exceeds its normal food supply. Among hunting communities, the game may become so scarce from over-hunting or disease that it cannot support a stationary or even declining population. Hence, the urge and necessity to find a way and follow new paths, in order to migrate to new hunting-grounds.

Among pastoral peoples, the lack of water and sufficient grazing for their flocks was an ever-constant threat. As successive

droughts made pasturing unprofitable and as large areas of grazing land became arid, migrations on a large scale became inevitable. And these conditions constituted an urge to seek out a new road or trail over which their flocks could be driven to a land with better grass and more water.

These conditions were illustrated in parts of Europe and Asia in early times when the once attractive grazing on the steppes of Central Asia, by slow climatic changes, became barren and habitation was impossible. Hence the urge to seek and follow trails to the more fertile lands of the lower valley, where grazing could be found again.

People are loath to leave their fatherland. It usually requires something more than a mere attraction to cause them to migrate; and in the background, as a rule, is found the dominant force of expulsion. The lure of rich valleys offers to a pastoral people, on rugged steppes and plateaus, a promise of more abundant food and water for their flocks.

Often migrations become necessary for protection from attack by brigands and marauders, as was experienced by the people of Ancient Greece. Hence the walled towns and trails leading from one to another. The great trails and roads in Rome, extending throughout the Empire to connect the capital with its frontier colonies and possessions, gave rise to these splendid highways (illustrated in *Via Appia*) in order to rediscover and explore the riches of the new colonies and to reach the coast.

But in North America, the urge to migrations following the great trails into unknown regions sprang largely from the restless disposition of the winners of the West. This urge of our forefathers was not due to an inability to maintain existence in the Eastern states, and not alone to an expectation of speedy riches. But it seems that in America, more than any other place in the world, the pioneer settlers had a craving for land and more land. The tidewater region bordering the Atlantic, depending on lumbering and fishing, soon became irksome to hunters and trappers like Daniel Boone and George Rogers Clark, who crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains and blazed a trail into the forests of Kentucky and Tennessee.

As the hunter and trapper and missionary pushed constantly westward into the valley of the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri

rivers, their places were soon taken by the herders and ranchmen, who finally gave way to the settlers and farmers. Father Marquette, the pioneer missionary, followed the trappers and hunters into the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi region; and Father DeSmet (the "Black Robe" of the Indians), oftentimes traveled with the hunters and trappers and shared their camps with them, bearing his message of love.

Yet the craving for land was not the strongest motive that prompted these hardy pioneers to migrate. They rebelled against even the slightest degree of social or religious restraint. Their love of liberty, their sense of an innate right to civil and religious freedom, had much to do with these great migrations and the making of trails into virgin lands.

History unfolds a panorama of trail-making from Moses to the Dust-Bowl migrants of our own day. The history of America is the story of a succession of trails. With the decline of fur trading, the trapper and hunter gave way to the surveyors and soldiers.

Many contributing factors should be considered when we seek to determine outstanding causes of the rapid settlement of this region west of the Missouri River.

The vast territory beyond the Missouri, stretching westward toward the Pacific, remained practically untouched—the last American frontier. Powerful forces in the old world were operating to create a constant urge to find new lands. A potato blight laid waste the main food crop in Ireland in 1845, leaving thousands to perish of starvation. In the years that followed, hundreds of thousands made their way to America to settle on free land.

In Germany the Revolution of 1848 failed, and this was the impetus which, within the next few years, brought to America millions of Germans to escape military oppression and to seek in the new land the political and personal freedom denied them in their own.

The pressure of these great migratory movements which extended the American frontier westward, arose not only from lack of opportunity in the older sections of the country, but from the promise of finding virgin soil.

The discovery of gold, the rush to people the Oregon Territory and hold it for America, the race between Free Soil and Slavery adherents in Kansas and Nebraska, the coming of the U. S.

Army to protect emigrants and settlers from Indian attacks — all played their part. And so the Great Trails of the Northwest were made.

Along these trails went every type of conveyance, from the Mormon hand-cart to the freighting wagons of Russell, Majors and Waddell. Trails of adventure and romance; trails of danger and tragedy — but over them came the men and women who built the West.

Probably the discovery of gold in California in 1848, the gold rush in 1849 and later in the Black Hills, caused the most enthusiastic — almost hysterical — rush to the mountains in the hope of speedy riches from the mines.

But to my mind, in a larger and more universal sense, the yearning for freedom from social, political and religious bondage has prompted the age-long migration of heroic souls throughout the world. Such was the exodus of the Hebrew bondsmen from Egypt, the voyage of the Mayflower and the trek of the Boers. All these aspirations have urged men to lay out trails to new lands.

Religious enthusiasm may lead to a shifting of population, as was seen in the history of Buddhism, Islamism and Christianity, and great trails have been made by these religious migrants.

Movements of men, like movements of fluids, take the line of least resistance. Hence an open country is more liable to early occupation, as the labor of felling trees with crude implements is very great. River valleys supported the early settlers; mountains and swamps and deserts were natural obstacles. Therefore it is clear that a careful consideration of this subject involves a study of the work of the geologists, geographers and scientists. The evidences of the cause of migrations and trail-making are to be sought mainly in the physical characteristics of the people — their customs, aspirations, folklore and language. Such a treatment of the subject is prohibitive in a ten-minute talk. I have tried to mention only the outstanding causes for migrations and trail-making.

My attention was next called to trails while driving across Nemaha Valley to the westward from Father's farm. After leaving the timber on the west side I saw parallel tracks worn down deep into the sod. I found that was the trail followed by the prairie homesteaders to the timber along the Nemaha, there being

little heavy timber between the Nemaha and the Blue River at Beatrice.

Again, while driving to Peru, we observed similar deep trails leading from the Missouri River bluffs toward the Northwest. Upon inquiry, I was informed by my father that that was the Brownville, Fort Kearney and Denver trail, which soon merged with the Nebraska City Cut-off to reach the Oregon Trail in the Platte Valley near Grand Island. Over this trail my father freighted, hauling provisions from Missouri River points to the soldiers stationed at Central City in the mountains above Denver.

Again, while traveling on a bicycle from Britton, South Dakota, to Fargo in North Dakota, we pedalled in deep-rutted Indian trails leading from James River Valley to the lakes in the Sisseton Valley where the aborigines made frequent trips to hunt, fish, and obtain wood and fuel. On my return I encountered still deeper trails leading from Fort Sisseton, followed by the soldiers on their way to Fort Randall and other forts in North Dakota. These trails followed the paths of least resistance, usually along valleys in natural passes through the hills.

Twenty years after the close of the last century, the era of trail-making in America was drawing to a close. Its end was presaged when the first twin ribbons of steel ran over the plains. The last great movement of people in America came from the "Dust Bowl," where hundreds were driven from their homes by much the same forces of nature that sent the Mongolian tribes of the Asian steppes wandering over Eastern Europe. But, for these Dust-Bowl people, there was no new land, so they went on their *Via Dolorosa* toward the west into California. These people broke no new trail. Their caravans rolled over paved highways, neatly marked, witnessing the fact that the day of trail-making in America is over — the frontier is closed.

The Pony Express Trail: Its Dramatic Story*

HON. ARTHUR J. DENNEY, Fairbury



I come here today to speak on a subject that seems to me well worthy of our attention. I come to speak of the people who have built into Nebraska the qualities that make it a great state.

I wonder if, in this year of 1940, it isn't worth while to find out where we stand. We people of this state, we people of this county, like to think that we know something about our state and things past and things present and things we want to see in the future. I wonder if it isn't worth our time to find out just where we stand in connection with these heroes who have gone before?

The story of the Pony Express is one of the most dramatic stories that has ever been written in this world of ours.

In order to talk about this subject I have had to read, and in reading have found a lot of different opinions in the minds of those people who write of the Pony Express. But, assuming that you folks perhaps — some of you at least — might know less about this than I do now, I have gotten together some notes that I shall try to relate as the events happened in this dramatic period of our country's history.

I was amazed to find, when I went to reading the history of the Trail, that it lasted only about sixteen months. It was just a small incident compared to the whole history of this country, but so much was tied up — so much human endeavor, so much of human ideals, and so much giving up of things men value — in that short period of time, that I say it is the greatest drama we have had in this country.

*Address at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, October 19, 1940.

This Pony Express started on April 3, 1860, and only continued to October 20, 1861. The route that these men traveled covered a distance of approximately two thousand miles, and they made it in the amazing time of a little less than ten days. This was really fast for that time, because, until then, there were only a few trails. There was the Santa Fe Trail to the south, there was the Oregon Trail and some of these other trails that pioneers were getting things across the country on; but the stage coach, which had been the fastest transportation up to that time, took from twenty-one to twenty-three days going from St. Joseph out to Sacramento, California; and with the freighters and the ox teams (which was the way they handled the goods it was necessary to get out on the coast) I am advised they consumed some four or five months in covering that distance.

Well then, some man (or two or three men) had this dream — a fantastic dream, it was thought at the time. Fantastic! that anyone should have the audacity to say to the pioneers, the men and women who knew what it meant to traverse these regions, that one lone boy on a pony could get across this desert and up the mountains in the short space of ten days!

Well, it was like a lot of other things that people dream about. There wasn't anyone in the United States who thought such a thing was possible, and I don't suppose it was possible; still, they did it.

Mrs. Pursell spoke about that firm of Russell, Majors and Wadell. At that time they had been carrying on quite a trading business between the Missouri River and the coast, and from what I read one of those men (I believe it was Russell, but at any rate I will call him that) was talking with a senator from California who had been dreaming about some means of quick communication between the River and California, and in their discussion they decided that if someone with initiative just got busy with the idea of carrying this mail across the country, it could be done.

I can see in my mind the type of individuals they were as they rode their horses across this desert and had this dream: the one, a senator from California; the other, one who had gone through the hardships of pioneering and had been thinking about what this country needed. So he spoke up and said, "Our firm will handle this transportation."

Well, Mr. Russell came back to wherever their headquarters

were — I believe it was St. Joe, and he propositioned his partners, and they immediately said, "Oh, we can't do that — it will cost too much. It would simply ruin us financially!"

But finally, when Russell told his partners what he had promised, those men had a sense of honor — they felt they had to keep the promise. You know a lot of human foundations were laid in those early days when people thought they had to work out their own problems; when they believed that a man's word was as good as his bond; when they believed the only way anything could be accomplished was by their own hard endeavors. So finally the partners said: "In view of the fact that you have given your solemn word to carry out this project, we will proceed to carry it out."

And they say that within sixty days after they had determined the thing should be done, these ponies and these boys were speeding across the country (as one writer says, "like the wind!") and carrying the mail from St. Joe to Sacramento. They say that over five hundred horses were used during a short period of time — the very best horses that could be had in this western country — so good that as the boys rode across the plains and through the rivers and across the mountains, only one of them was killed by Indians. These horses were the best horses that could be had at the time, and carried the best men, and they would actually outrun the Indian ponies and get away. There were white men, too, on every hand, ready to chase after them and kill them if necessary to rob the mail; but those horses simply ran away.

It took over one hundred and ninety relief stations, it took over two hundred station attendants, it took eighty riders riding every day (forty each way) across the two-thousand mile trip these men were making; but the mail went through. The slogan that they unconsciously adopted was: "The mail must go through!"

In justice to that senator from California, I should add that for a long time he tried to interest Congress in getting some sort of federal appropriation to carry mail from the Missouri River to the coast, but he could get nothing done.

There is a difference of opinion among some of the writers whom I have consulted in regard to the exact amount of postage that was charged for this mail. They all agreed that five dollars for each ounce was the initial charge; then I find a difference in opinion as to what it dropped to. One writer says two dollars, an-

other says one dollar. Now, you know this company lost money when you consider the amount of postage that was collected, which I think was over \$100,000 in the first six months when 29,000 letters were carried. At any rate it was somewhere near \$3.50 per letter; and they say it cost these three men who invested their own money — not any government subsidies, not anything but their own money — it cost them \$38 a letter to get these letters across.

I want to say to you that we of 1940, in this age of speed, in this age when some fundamental human values seem to have been cast aside, when the spiritual qualities that have carried us on to the heights that we have glorified in this country of ours seem to have been too often cast by the wayside — we should remember that the intangible values and the lessons left to us by these boys of the Pony Express, and the very tangible values contributed by the men who initiated this service that brought about the final era of the settling of the western part of the United States — these things place us under an everlasting debt to Russell, Majors and Waddell. And it is to the shame of this nation that, after these men had spent (and lost) almost \$100,000 of their own money on this venture, after they had proved to a doubting Congress and to the doubters throughout this land that it was possible to traverse this great American Desert and these mountains to the western coast, the telegraph came — and the Union Pacific Railroad came. Yes, one writer says that although these men were financing themselves, with their own savings, yet, when the Union Pacific came, Congress saw fit to give to those Eastern investors the land and money to build that great railroad, and every individual who promoted that thing fared very well financially — yes, very well indeed!

Some one has said that this trip across the country during those sixteen months was a supreme test of American courage and endurance. These boys of the Pony Express faced the elements, the hardships — offered up their lives, if necessary — in getting across America and proving that this thing could be done. There are so many facts that could be brought to the American people, and particularly to us who are proud of having been born or reared in this great state of Nebraska. There are so many stories that people (ladies like Mrs. Pursell) could tell us of those hardships, that they ought, in my opinion, to be an incentive to us to live and to fight for such ideals in this year of 1940.

One of the most striking things that came to my attention during my endeavor to collect some facts in connection with this story was the obligation or oath taken by each one of these boys. I say "boys" because probably most of them were fairly young men. A fat man couldn't get a job there. I am sure I couldn't have gotten a job there, because the boys had to weigh less than one hundred and twenty-five pounds to ride the Pony Express. Each one of those men had to be physically fit. They had to be men who stood out in their communities as worth while, who had initiative, who had integrity, who believed in the United States of America, and who believed that this trail that they were blazing through this western country of ours would lead this nation to rise to the heights we have attained since.

Now, I have enjoyed that oath or pledge, because if there was one thing that appealed to me as much as anything else that has been left behind by the Pony Express, it is the thought that while those men and women were pioneering out here and organizing partnerships and corporations to build this land to what it finally became — even in that early day there were fundamental principles that helped our pioneers to carry on. And here's what they said, here's what they agreed to when they entered the service of the Pony Express:

"I do hereby swear before the great and living God that during my engagement and while I am an employee of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I will under no circumstances use profane language; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employee of the firm; and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all of my acts as to win the confidence of my employers. So help me God!"

It seems to me that if in 1940 we could have more Pony Express riders working for more people who dream of a future for this country, and who, instead of attempting to tear down this country from the heights it has reached — if, in their service and their dreams, more citizens would stand before God and swear to do their level best, honestly, in carrying out the terms of their employment, — then perhaps we could stand at this kind of gathering and again dedicate ourselves to the purpose of the pioneers and of

the boys who "flew with the wind" on those ponies in the years of 1860 and 1861.

I deem it an honor and privilege for a Native Son of Nebraska to stand before this group of members who at least are paying some attention to the memories of the past and, by so doing, paying honor to these men and women who blazed the trail in Nebraska.

You know, someone has said that some day the pyramids of Egypt will sink beneath the burning sands of the desert; that some day the works of art now adorning the galleries of the world will fade with the lapse of time; that the monuments of steel and cement now reflecting the blue of the heavens will some day tumble to wrack and ruin, but in that day the Spirit of Man who has built splendid qualities of character into his community as an outstanding citizen, as an outstanding pioneer, will go on until time shall be no more.

AN INSCRIPTION

This little book of stories true
 Is sent to bring the West to you:
 The hilltops crowned with goldenrod,
 The white buttes reaching up to God,
 The Pine Ridge, in whose shadows sweet
 The prairie and the mountains meet:
 The women and the men whose deeds
 Have braved the dangers, met the needs,
 And made the vacant, sunburned plain
 Blossom with homes and fields of grain.

* * *

So goes this book upon its quest,
 And may it bring *you* to the West!

A. E. S. (in an autographed copy;
 February 12, 1916.)

Childhood Memories of my Father's Experiences*

MRS. C. W. PURSELL, Fairbury

I love to talk about the experiences of my father and of the old times and pioneer days because that subject was always on his mind, and he talked of it a great deal. He told us many of his experiences in his early days in Nebraska, and especially those when he was riding with the Pony Express. Of course he wasn't an assigned rider at all—he was just a boy of twenty at the station. My grandfather, Joe Helvey, came to Nebraska in 1854, and in 1859 he caught the Pike's Peak fever and started there with his family, but they stopped on the Little Sandy about seven miles northwest of the present town of Fairbury. He set up a ranch there on the hill and shod horses and cattle for the caravans that went across "the Plains," as he always called the Military Road which extended through Nebraska City and around through our country.

My father was then just a young man and he was ready for all kinds of work that came up at the ranch—anything he could do he was always ready to do. And often these Express riders would come in all nervous and strained from some fight they had had on the way, and so weak they couldn't go on any farther. Always they found my father ready to go, with his horse all saddled and bridled. He rode on west to Big Sandy as a rule, but at other times he rode east to Marysville and down that way. I don't believe he ever did reach Saint Joe, but he went part way down that line. He called himself a substitute rider, for he was always ready to go when it was necessary.

The Pony Express was organized by three men—Russell, Majors and Waddell. They had over a hundred riders, and the best and speediest horses that could be found anywhere.

That country was terribly hilly and the hills are quite sandy; and once, coming down a hill at full speed, my father's horse fell and broke its leg. Of course he couldn't go any farther, and the next rider took the mail, and went on that road with many hardships, through the darkest night and the blackest clouds that ever floated in the heavens. They always had to be on the watch, and the mail had to go through.

My father drove the teams of oxen for nine years, and he drove the stage and freight from Leavenworth to Fort Laramie.

Father and Mother were married in Beatrice in 1864, and from the ranch on Little Sandy he went there by ox team. It took him two days to go and two to come back. Of course they had to sit on a board on the wagon. You don't know what hardships they had to put up with in the early days.

*Address at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, by the daughter of Frank Helvey, Stage Driver and Pony Express Rider.

At the first election held at Little Sandy — that was when they divided the county — it is said there were seventy-five voters — but I don't know where they all came from, because there were so few men around.

Later on my father carried mail on horseback. Oh, he carried the supplies on horseback from Meridian too. It really ought to be marked, because that was one of the real Pony Express stations, and Meridian and my father's ranch on Little Sandy were quite prominent in those days. And after that my father served as the first sheriff. Of course there was a sheriff before then, but later when the county was divided my father was the first to be elected. On July 12, 1861, when the massacre occurred, my father wasn't there, but he went there the next morning to help bury the dead.

We lived on the Indian trail, where they went up to the river. Often one hundred and fifty to two hundred went by our house at a time, and always stopped at our well to get water.

There are many interesting incidents I could tell you about the Indians. They never bothered us in any way at any time. Of course there was a time in 1864 when they went on the rampage, but they didn't seem to come as far east as our place.

My father has told me of many incidents in his early pioneer life, and he was always glad he helped to settle the country. He was born in Huntington County, Indiana, in 1840, and passed away July the 4th, 1919.

A Map Study of Nebraska Trails*

ODEN GILMORE, York

Due to its geographical location and its river valleys — particularly that of the Platte with its easy grades and level prairies — it was inevitable that Nebraska should be in the pathway of travel to the western coast.

After its acquisition from France thru the Louisiana Purchase, President Jefferson sent out the Lewis and Clark Expedition to learn something about the territory we had acquired. They left St. Louis May 14, 1804, came in sight of Nebraska on the afternoon of July 11, and camped for the night opposite the mouth of the Big Nemaha River down near Auburn. They recorded 556 miles of Nebraska "river front" — presumably along the Missouri. They followed the Missouri up thru the Dakotas and Montana, which was the first trail across the territory.

Wilson Price Hunt and Robert Stuart (partners of John Jacob Astor in the American Fur Trading Company), with others, passed up the Nebraska "river coast" early in 1811. On June 28, 1812, Robert Stuart, with five of Hunt's original party, started from Astoria on the Columbia River, where they had established a fur trading post, for the return trip. They followed the North Platte from where it emerged from the mountain foot-

*Address at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, October 19, 1940.

hills, and reached Nebraska in December, 1812. In what is now Scotts Bluff County they camped for the winter. In 1813 they came down the Platte, and thus blazed the trail which was destined to become known as the Mormon Trail—the first great highway to the West.

In 1819 Major Stephen H. Long and a party of twenty men proceeded up the Platte from its mouth to its headwaters. He left an extensive record, the outstanding feature of which was that the Platte Valley was a barren country, wholly unfit for cultivation and uninhabitable by people depending upon agriculture.

In 1830, Milton Sublette traveled over nearly the same trail Robert Stuart used in 1812. In 1832 Captain Benjamin Louis Bonneville, with a party of about 100 men and 24 horse-drawn wagons, started from Independence, Missouri, and proceeded northwest until they came to the Platte River near Grand Island and thus blazed what is known as the Oregon Trail and the Pony Express route. In 1860 a shorter route was laid out, running from Nebraska City almost directly west thru Otoe, Lancaster, Seward, York, Hamilton and Hall counties and into Adams, where it joined the original Oregon Trail. This was not only a shorter but a better route than the first, because of its easier grades.

By 1860, when this route (known as the Nebraska City cut-off) was laid out, there were many large settlements in the west, including Denver, the Mormon settlements at Great Salt Lake, and the Black Hills. Thus freighting became more necessary and important. Shipping by steamboat to Nebraska and taking this shorter route saved time and expense: small wonder, then, that it became extremely popular. I suggest to the historians of Nebraska that it be given the name it bore in my father's day: "The Old Freight Road." This is both descriptive and distinctive as compared with the Mormon, Oregon, and Pony Express trails. It was indeed a busy and important highway.

What are the Trails? As highways, they offer means of communication and transportation from here to there. As tracings on a map, they transport us from today back yonder; and, as we study that map, we conjure up pictures of the events that took place along such trails. We see the great heavy wagons, some with wide tires, some narrow; some with high wheels, some with low; most of them with white canvas tops which earned for them the name of "Prairie Schooners." Some were pulled by two to four yoke of oxen, plodding two by two. In these trains were anywhere from ten to twenty wagons, depending somewhat on the reputation of the wagon boss, or the business ability and financial strength of the contractors who owned the equipment and the freight they carried.

Where Highway No. 76 crosses the "Old Freight Road," the D.A.R. ladies of York have erected a monument—a large granite boulder. Looking southeast from this point you will see a broad valley of about eighty acres. This was known as "Six-Mile Hollow" and was a camping ground about

half way between Fouse Ranch (at the junction of Beaver Creek and the West Blue just east of the Seward-York county line), and the Smith ranch on Beaver Creek about four miles southeast of York. These ranches were about fifteen miles apart, which was an average day's journey for a wagon train—especially the ox trains. Some horse-drawn trains traveled faster. There were springs of cool water in Six-Mile Hollow in the early days, but dry these many years. And the floor of the valley was covered with grass, making it an ideal noon-day camping place. Perhaps some wagon bosses stopped their trains for half a day and a night to let their oxen fill up on grass after having traveled for days thru short-grass country.

Strewn along the trail from here back yonder are events of historical significance. As you go with me over these trails, visualize what we might accomplish. Perhaps we can encourage the writing of more stories of pioneer days and thus help to complete the record. Perhaps we can encourage the reading of history, with the zest we now find only in fiction. Perhaps we can encourage the establishment of museums in county seats or elsewhere, and in the larger schools and colleges where relics of historical value could be preserved.

These are tasks that should be done. A task to be done implies a duty to perform it.

The Pony Express Trail: Its Markings in Nebraska*

HERBERT L. CUSHING, Kearney

We have not yet accomplished the task assigned to me, namely, the marking of the Pony Express Trail through Nebraska. I might offer some excuses that you would accept as legitimate, but I shall not do that. I shall merely tell you that until there shall be a completion of this work I will continue to give to it such time as I can find. It is one of the delightful tasks which has been assigned to me in my lifetime.

I have come to love the Pony Express more and more, and when I travel along the highway where the markers have been placed and find that someone who seems to love them more than I do has removed one from the post where it was placed, I feel just a little bit wrathful. I presume, Judge, that there is some statute on the books of Nebraska that makes it at least a misdemeanor to remove a historical marker from its post, but I don't know that we could station enough officers on the trail to apprehend all those who do remove them.

In this work I have been very ably assisted by Mrs. Lottie E. Cunningham, the County Superintendent of Adams County, who has the trail marked along its entire route through Adams County; by Blanche Goodrich, County Superintendent of Nuckolls County; by Edwin Wieland, County Superintendent of Clay County; by Harry L. Williams of Gothenburg, who is supervising the work in Dawson County; by P. E. Extrom, County

*Address at Annual Meeting, State Historical Society, October 19, 1940.

Superintendent of Lincoln County; by Mrs. Ruth Warren, County Superintendent of Keith County; and many others. And in this work I have had the cooperation of the Rotary, Kiwanis and Cosmopolitan Clubs and other civic organizations.

Some of the things that I felt impelled to say have been said so much better by Mr. Denney, Miss Louise Johnson, and Mrs. Pursell that I shall close by simply quoting from Robert Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra" a little section of that poem which, it seems to me, expresses a thought closely akin to the inspiration that prompted the pioneers to make the sacrifices they did.

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!
For thence — a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks —
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail.
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me;
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

That must have been the spirit of the pioneers.