A HISTORY OF CIMARRON COUNTY

By William E. Baker*

The history in which Cimarron County has had a part now comprises many volumes. All that can be done in this paper is to name a few of the more important historical events.

First in time of age is our dinosaur quarries. Had this caravan, at the close of the Jurassic Age, some 155,000,000 years ago, have made this trip from where Oklahoma City now stands to the present site of Cimarron County, they would have passed through, and would have seen an entirely different world. The caravan at that time, would at least a part, and possibly the greater portion of the way, have been traveling down hill and following water courses flowing to the west. In the western part of the county they would have come upon a barrier in the way of a large inland sea, geologically called the Logan Sea. This sea extended some 400 miles to the west and nearly 700 miles north and south, covering nearly all of Colorado, Wyoming, the north two-thirds of New Mexico, the western part of Cimarron County, a portion of western Kansas and Nebraska, the southwest corner of South Dakota, the southern part of Montana, eastern Utah and Arizona. Around the edge of this majestic sea were numerous islands and extensive swamp lands, covered with a luxurious growth of tropical vegetation. This would have been a far cry from what you see today. In the waters and marsh lands around the edge of this sea you would have seen the Dinosaur or Reptillian Age in its fullest. Cimarron County's part of this ancient geological history is made manifest by three outstanding dinosaur quarries and six smaller pits in the northwest part of the county, from which many thousands of fossil bones have been removed under the supervision of the late Dr. J. Willis Stovall of the Oklahoma University. Over 15,000 of

* This "History of Cimarron County" has been adapted for publication in The Chronicles from a paper by William E. "Uncle Bill" Baker, read before members of the Oklahoma Historical Society Tour, meeting at Boise City, Cimarron County, on June 5, 1953. "Uncle Bill" Baker is widely known for his interest in the history of Cimarron County, especially the archeology of the region and the sites that reveal the pre-historic period. A native of Indiana, he came at the age of twelve years with his parents to Oklahoma Territory in 1890, and settled on a farm near Guthrie where his father planted an orchard and operated at nursery. Beginning in 1897, Bill Baker taught in rural schools for ten years, and subsequently made a special study of agriculture and stock raising. In 1922, he was appointed through the Extension Division of Oklahoma A. and M. College to the position of County Agent in Cimarron County, in which position he accomplished a great work in the development of this "last pioneer county in Oklahoma." At the Achievement Day Dinner on April 8, 1952, the University of Oklahoma and the University of Oklahoma Association presented the Distinguished Service Citation on "William Ellmore Baker in recognition of his services to the people and their lands in Western Oklahoma, his original thinking on agricultural problems and soil conservation, his contributions to archeology, and his vision and faith during twenty-five years as County Agent of Cimarron County."—Ed.
these bones have been taken from one of these quarries on the highway some 8 miles east of Kenton. The most important of these is the almost complete skeleton of a Brontosaurus, some 65 feet long together with numerous other fossil bones.

Next to mention in geological time, several million years later, are petrified logs identified by geologists as the father of the giant redwood now found only in California. One of the outstanding examples of this species is on a hillside on the north side of the Cimarron River, 17 1/2 miles west and 13 north of Boise City. Remnants of this tree indicate that it at least was a few hundred feet high and several feet in diameter.

Next for discussion in our meeting today is the Early Man who occupied North America, at, or just following, the close of the Glacial Age. This ice cap came down from the north into the United States as far as southern Nebraska. This period, known as the rainy or pluvial period, following the last cap, has been timed by geologists at from about 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. During this period, the Columbi elephant, the camel, the ancient horse, the giant ground sloth and the large Taylori bison, all of which became extinct and disappeared many thousands of years ago, roamed the Great Plains here in abundance. Many fossil remains of these now-extinct animals have been found in Cimarron County.

Associated with the bones of some of these now-extinct animals have been found flint spearpoints, which are the oldest evidence of human habitation and which are recognized as those of the Early Man of America. These implements now, by a recently developed manner of dating known as Carbon Radio Activity, have been given an age of 10,000 to 12,000 years old.

These flint artifacts represent several different types in shape and flaking techniques, indicating quite conclusively that they represent several different cultures. The Archaeological Association has given those different cultures names as follows: the Clovis fluted points, the Folsom fluted, the diagonal parallel flaked points, the horizontal parallel flaked points, the Plainview points, the Eden points, the Scott Bluff points, the Gypsum Cave points, the San Dia points, the Borax Lake points, the Sliver Lake points and the Pinto points. In fact, we have an almost embarrassing number of named ancient cultures. Personally, I believe the time will come when two or more of these cultures may be merged into variations of the same culture and thereby lessen the number of ancient cultures as now listed.

I have in my collection over 1,500 of these ancient pieces either whole or broken and over half of these flint artifacts have been found here in Cimarron County.

For some unknown reason, these people seem to have migrated from this area along with the disappearance of the Columbi ele-
phant, the Taylori bison and other extinct animals. The next
definite evidence of human habitation in Cimarron County is what
archaeologists call the Basket Maker’s Culture Number Two. That
you may more fully understand the genealogy of the recent, or
sedentary Indians of the Rocky Mountains dating back to a little
over 2,000 years ago, the following classification has been given
them by archaeologists: First, Basket Maker’s Culture Number One,
a little more than 2,000 years ago; Second, Basket Maker’s Cul-
ture Number Two, about 2,000 years ago; Third, Basket Maker’s
Culture Number Three, or post basket makers, a little under 2,000
years ago. Following the Basket Maker’s Cultures, their descend-
ants began the Pueblo Cultures. Archaeologists have changed the names
of their descendants we see today and designated them as Pueblo
Cultures numbers One, Two, Three, Four and Five, the last, or
Number Five, being th Pueblos of today. Three Basket Makers
Number Two caves have been found in this county. In those we
found both ears of corn and shelled corn and stems from pump-
kins and small bits of pumpkins vines, proving that agriculture
had been carried on in Cimarron County during the time of Christ.
No other county in the state of Oklahoma has produced proof of
having been an agricultural county at that early date.

First of the white man’s history of Cimarron County was when
Coronado crossed it in 1541 on his return trip from the Quivira
Indian villages in north central Kansas. I know this route has
been questioned and contradicted by some writers. While several
others of the historians are as equally sure that when Coronado
on his return trip from the Quivira Indians he turned to the South-
west when he came to the Arkansas River. They state they turned
to the right and being led by Indian guides who led them by water-
ing places till they came in sight of landmarks which they recog-
nized as those seen on their outward journey. In my life the last
thirty-one years in this area and having traveled over this entire
area almost hundreds of times, I believe I can state advisably
that there is no other landmark in this area which can be seen so plainly
and at so great a distance from both the south on their outward
journey and the east on their return journey than the Rabbit Ears
in eastern Union County, New Mexico. If this is the landmark
they referred to they would on their return journey, have had to
approach it from the east through Cimarron County, as they could
not have seen it if they passed east of Cimarron County. This
would indicate to me that their Indian guides who were perfectly
familiar with the country followed very closely the watering places,
afterward followed by those establishing the Santa Fe Trail.

However, in a careful study of the English translation of the
three Spaniards who made this trip and wrote the only reliable
information describing their route, I do not see how this location
can be justly disputed. This information referred to is contained
in the 14th Annual Report, the Bureau of Enthnology, Smithsonian Institute, published in 1893. I have one of the very few copies of this publication now available.

Last and probably of the most interest to those assembled here today is the Old Santa Fe Trail and Camp Nichols.¹

During the life of the Santa Fe Trail from the time that McKnight, Beard, Chambers and others made the first trip in 1812 to its close in the late Seventies, there were various places on the Missouri river where the caravans assembled to start their trek across the prairies. I feel that the most complete and probably the most reliable information I have is to be found in the “Santa Fe Trail” by the Kansas State Historical Society, published in 1913. From this the following information is obtained.

While there were several early trading expeditions from various places to Santa Fe between the years 1804 and 1820 the expeditions that went out from Franklin, Missouri, mark the beginning of the important Santa Fe trade. This point was so used for a period for about ten years. Joseph C. Brown, during the years 1825 to 1827 inclusive, made a survey of the Santa Fe Trail via the Cimarron Cut off from Fort Osage, Missouri, to the Valley of Toas. About 1827, trading posts were established in Missouri, at Fort Osage, Blue Mills, and Independence. Independence soon became the recognized American headquarters of the overland trade to Santa Fe. About 1840, the town of Westport, three or four miles south of the junction of the Kansas and Missouri rivers, and Westport Landing became rivals of Independence, and by 1848 had absorbed most of the Santa Fe trade, becoming the center for the Trail’s business. The immigration to California, 1849-50, gave added importance to Westport, as fully half of the thousands of emigrants of those years outfitted there.

From Gregg’s Commerce of the Prairies, we gain the following information:² That Captain Pike in 1806 was sent on an exploring expedition up the Arkansas river with instructions to pass to the source of the Red river for which those of the Canadian were then mistaken. It was on this memorable trip that he discovered the mountain which now bears his name, “Pikes Peak.” Captain Pike however passed around the head of the latter and crossed over the mountains to the Rio Del Norte, (Rio Grande).

He was now in Mexican territory, but believing he was within the boundary of the United States, he erected a fortification for his company of fifteen men for their protection until the coming

¹For an account of “Old Fort Nichols” see George Rainey, No Man’s Land (Guthrie, 1937), pp. 76-84.
of spring when they could continue their journey. The Governor at Santa Fe learning of his presence there sent a force to invite him to Santa Fe for a council. Upon his arrival at Santa Fe, the Governor sent him and his party to Chihuahua where all their papers were confiscated and they were sent back under escort via San Antonio de Bexar to the United States. It was from the glowing account of this western country given by Captain Pike that the trade caravans to be organized to attempt the trips to Santa Fe. These first trips were entirely with pack mules and followed the trail of Captain Pike from a few miles east of Great Bend, Kansas, to near where Las Animas, Colorado, now stands and from here took a southwesterly course via Raton, New Mexico, and Toas to Santa Fe. After the Cimarron Cut-off was established this route above mentioned was known as the "Far Western Route."

The first wagon train to travel the Cimarron Cut-off of the Santa Fe Trail was in 1824, leaving the Arkansas River some place west of Kinsley, Kansas, and coming into the old trail again at Wagon Mound, New Mexico, passed through Cimarron County.

We learn from Josiah Gregg in his *Commerce of the Prairies* that commercial trade with the English in the east and the Spaniards in the southwest prior to 1804 was unknown. The first trade trip as recorded by Gregg was made by a French Creole, named La Lande, who ascended the Platte River to the Rocky Mountains in 1804 with a small amount of goods and with the aid of Indian guides found his way to Santa Fe, where he remained until he died. Another Indian trader, Pursley, wandering over the Great Plains in 1805, fell in with some Indians near the Rocky Mountains and with their aid, also reached Santa Fe, where he remained until he died. The next and first real expedition to make the trip was fitted out in 1812 by Messrs. McKnight, Beard, Chambers and several others, and by following the trail traveled by Captain Pike in 1806 to the mountains, made the trip successfully. This, then, was the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail and the trip made over the Far Western Trail. However, the rulers in Mexico had changed in the meantime, and the party, upon reaching Santa Fe, had their goods confiscated and they were placed in the Calobozos at Chihuauha, where they were kept for nearly nine years when the republican forces again came into power and the party was released from prison. Under this new ruler in Santa Fe, the real trade over the Old Santa Fe Trail began. A merchant from Ohio, Glen, made the trip in 1821. Captain Becknell and others from Missouri also made the trip in 1821. Colonel Copper and son made the trip in 1822 successfully. All of the afore mentioned used pack trains only and traveled over the far western trail. Captain Becknell again started with a caravan in 1822 and was the first to attempt the cut-off from the Arkansas River near Dodge City, Kansas, directly southwest to Santa Fe. In this he was doomed to failure, and the party had to return to the Arkansas River and follow the old
western route. It was from the year 1822 that the real trade with Santa Fe began.

Another outstanding epoch in the Santa Fe Trail was when wagons and carriages were introduced. Colonel Marmaduke and others, along with some pack mules, employed some 25 wheeled vehicles to transport $25,000 to $30,000 worth of merchandise. So far as history states, this was the first caravan over the Cimarron Cut-off. This cut-off enters Cimarron County 13 miles due North of Keyes and passes out into New Mexico 27 miles west in the center of the section line extending west from the south side of Boise City. From this date the trade grew by leaps and bounds. The trail became so popular that the government had it surveyed in 1826 and 1827 by Joseph C. Brown, giving directions and distances from one waterhole to another. This survey passed through Cimarron County.

From this time on, the trail became the most-used and noted trail in the United States. Records show that early in the Sixties, the trade had grown to such an extent that caravans started every few days. The trade in 1859 had risen to $10,000,000 annually. Between March and July it was reported that 2,300 men, 1,970 wagons, 840 horses, 4,000 mules, 15,000 oxen, 73 carriages and over 1,900 tons of freight left for New Mexico. In 1862, the trade had grown to the extent of 3,000 wagons, 618 horses, 20,812 oxen, 6,406 mules, 96 carriages and 3,720 men, with a freight cargo of over 10,000 tons valued at over $40,000,000.

The attacks of the Indians became much more frequent and in 1865 the government ordered Christopher (Kit) Carson to advance to the east side of New Mexico, where he was to erect a camp for the protection of the freight caravans. (I wish here to call attention to the fact that the War Department designates this as Camp Nichols and not Fort Nichols. Also, they maintain that it is in eastern New Mexico; however, its exact location is west one-half of Section 2, Twp. 3, north Range 1, ECM, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 4½ miles east of the New Mexico line.)

A brief synopsis of the building of this camp by Kit Carson is as follows. His orders from the War Department are given below:

Department of New Mexico,
Assistant Adjutant Gen.'s Office
Santa Fe, New Mexico
May 7th, 1865

"Colonel Christopher Carson with Major Albert H. Pfeiffer and Company C and L of his regiment, and Company F, First Cavalry Volunteers will proceed from Ft. Union, New Mexico, starting on the 20th inst. to Cedar Bluff or Cold Springs on the Cimarron route to the states, where, at or near one of these places, Colonel Carson will select and establish a camp. The object of establishing this camp is to have troops at that dangerous
part of the tour in order to give protection to the trans passing to and from the States. The details as to how this force can best affect its object is left entirely up to Col. Carson."


Acting upon these instructions, Carson proceeded from Fort Union with troops delegated to this expedition, and selected a site on the rocky bluff of a small stream which debouches into the Cimarron River and just off the great Santa Fe Trail. This location was about half way between the crossing of the trail at the Carrumpa and Cold Springs.

The soldiers, some 300 in number, slept in tents and dug-outs within the enclosure. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes were especially prevalent along the trail, and every two weeks, as the wagon trains collected from the west at Camp Nichols, an escort of soldiers would accompany them to Fort Dodge or Fort Larned and return with wagons west-bound.

Each morning the ten Indian scouts would quietly ride away, to return at sunset. Two pickets were kept out during the day, one two miles west, and the other about the same distance to the east, mounted always on fast horses, and at night sentinels were posted near the camp. No Indians, however, ever ventured to attack the camp, though a few miles down the trail they continued their raids.

This routine life lasted until the later part of September, and then orders came to return to Fort Union.

Thus closed the chapter of the occupation of Camp Nichols.

The camp was never occupied by the soldiers after this date. From the best information available, it appears that the Indians were either conquered to a considerable extent or treaties were made with them which caused a cessation of their raids upon the caravans about the time of the completion of the camp.

Incidents on the Trail in or near Cimarron County.

The trip of Captain Becknell and others mentioned earlier in this narrative in which they attempted to explore and lay out a more direct and shorter route to Santa Fe experienced untold hardships and resulted in failure. In 1822 Captain Becknell and others with about $5,000.00 worth of goods started from Missouri and followed the same route he had followed the previous year until he came to a point a few miles west of where Dodge City now stands. Here he crossed the Arkansas river and took a southwesterly course in an effort to avoid the rocky and treacherous roads over the mountains. No American having ever been over this portion of the Great West had no thought but that he would find water at reasonable intervals the same as the other trails then in use. With
nothing more than the stars of heaven and possibly a pocket compass to guide them, they struck directly southwest towards Santa Fe. No preparations were made for a water supply, and after two days of wandering over these barren plains the suffering of both men and beasts became almost unbearable. The party was at last reduced to the cruel necessity of killing their dogs, and cutting off the ears of their mules in the vain attempt to assuage their burning thirst with the hot blood. This only served to make their condition worse. In this condition they determined to return to the Arkansas river but were no longer able to undertake the task. They would undoubtedly have perished in those arid regions, had not a buffalo, fresh from the river side and with stomach extended with water, been discovered by some of the party and the hapless animal was immediately killed and the water contents of the stomach greedily devoured by the party. One of the party afterwards remarked that nothing ever passed his lips which gave him such exquisite delight as this filthy beverage.

Some of the stronger men retraced the trail the buffalo had followed until they came to a stream with abundance of good water. This was the Cimarron river, and had they have known it they were at a point from which they could have continued their journey with abundance of water from there to their destination. However, being ignorant of what lay ahead of them they got a supply of water and returned to the Arkansas river and proceeded over the Far Western Route to Santa Fe.

The first deaths recorded on the Santa Fe Trail in or near Cimarron County was that of McNees and Monroe in 1828. This was at the crossing on the Carrumpa three miles west of the Oklahoma-New Mexico line, in New Mexico. Gregg gives the following account:³

Two young men, McNees and Monroe having carelessly lain down to sleep on the banks of a stream, since known as McNees's creek [now Carrumpa] were barbarously shot with their own guns, as it was supposed, in very sight of the caravan. When their comrades came up, they found McNees lifeless and the other almost expiring. In this state the latter was carried nearly forty miles to the Cimarron river where he died, and was buried according to the custom of the Prairies.

Evidently McNees was buried on the banks of the Carrumpa and Monroe about ten miles west at the Willowbar crossing north of Keyes, Oklahoma. Just as the funeral ceremonies were about over, six or seven Indians appeared on the opposite side of the Cimarron river. It was quite possible that the Indians were friendly and entirely unaware of the murder of McNees and Monroe. Some of the party wanted to invite them to a parley but others yearning for revenge fired upon them killing one of the horses. This brought the Indian to the ground where he was immediately riddled with

³Ibid., pp. 183, 184.
bullets. Almost immediately another discharge of several guns killed all but one of the Indians who managed to make his escape and bore the terrible news of the catastrophe to his tribe.

Gregg continues:

These wanton cruelties had a most disastrous effect upon the prospects of the trade; for the exasperated children of the desert became more and more hostile to the 'pale faces' against whom they continued to wage a cruel war for many successive years. In fact this same party suffered very severely a few days later. They were pursued by the enraged comrades of the slain savages to the Arkansas river where they were robbed of nearly a thousand horses and mules.

The next year, 1829, the following incident occurred. While Gregg gives a short report of this battle a more complete one is given in Inman's *Old Santa Fe Trail* from which most of the details here given have been taken. These details were formerly written by a Mr. Bryant of Kansas who was one of the party:

"On the first day of September, those of us who had remained in Santa Fe commenced our homeward journey. We started with one hundred and fifty mules and horses, four wagons and a large amount of silver coin. Northing of an eventful character happened until we arrived at the Upper Cimarron Springs [now Flag Springs eight miles north of Boise City] where we intended to camp for the night. . . . When we rode upon the summit of the hill the sight that met our eyes. . . . was a large camp of Comanches, evidently there for robbery and murder. We could neither turn back or go on either side of them on account of the mountainous character of the country, and we realized, when too late that we were in a trap. There was only one road open to us: That right through the camp. . . . The chief met us with a smile of welcome, and said in Spanish, 'You must stay with us tonight. Our young men will guard your stock, and we have plenty of buffalo meat.' Realizing the danger of our situation, we took advantage of every moment of spare time to hurry through the camp.

"Captain Means, Ellison and myself were a little distance behind the wagons, on horseback; observing that the balance of our men were evading them, the blood thirsty savages at once threw off their mask of dissimulation and in an instant we knew the time for a struggle had arrived. The Indians as we rode on, seized our bridle-reins and began to fire upon us. Ellison and I put spurs to our horses and got away, but Captain Means, a brave man, was ruthlessly shot and cruelly scalped while the life blood was pouring from his ghastly wound. We succeeded in fighting them off until we had left their camp a mile behind. [This would have placed them about one half mile west of where highway 287 crosses the Santa Fe Trail nine miles north of Boise City.] Darkness having settled down we went into camp ourselves. . . . We corralled our wagons for better protection, and the Indians kept us busy all night resisting their furious charges. The next day we made but five miles; it was a continuous fight, and a very difficult matter to prevent their capturing us. This annoyance was kept up for four days; . . . they continued to thus harrass us until we were almost exhausted from loss of sleep. After leaving the Cimarron we once more emerged on the open plains and flattered ourselves we were well rid of the savages; about twelve o'clock they came down on us again, uttering demoniacal yells, which frightened our horses and mules so terribly, that we lost every hoof"

4Ibid.
One of the party, a Mr. Hitt in attempting to recapture some of the horses was captured by the Indians but managed to escape after being wounded in sixteen places on his body. They succeeded in killing one of the Indians but the Indians continued to charge them where they were barricaded behind their wagons, until two hours after dark. In the dead of night, carrying what silver they could and leaving the rest they crept away traveling nearly north to the Arkansas river where they buried the silver on an island and after untold hardships and almost starvation they reached the settlement. The next spring they returned and found the silver they had cached uncovered by high waters fully exposed to any one passing that way.

From Josiah Gregg's report, are the details of his first trip over the plains in 1831: "After following the course of the Cimarron two days longer we came to the place called the Willow Bar (crossing ten miles north and one mile west of Keyes) where we took the usual mid-day respite of two to three hours to afford the animals time to feed and our cook to prepare dinner." Here they had a skirmish with a band of Indians with no casualties on either side. Gregg states that the next day they encamped near the "Battle Ground" famous for a skirmish with a caravan of traders, accompanied by a detachment of Mexican troops under the command of Colonel Vizarra, had in 1829 with a band of the Gros Ventres tribe. The united command had encamped on the south bank of the Cimarron where the previous year the burial catastrophe had occurred. (The burial of Monroe and the killing of six or seven possibly friendly Indians.) Gregg does not say, but I believe this encampment must have been made the following noon-day period as the caravan was averaging about ten miles per day and the trail at near ten miles up the river from Willowbar leaves the Cimarron river and takes a southwesterly course towards Upper Cimarron Springs. If this reasoning is correct Monroe lies buried some ten miles west of the Willowbar crossing on the south bank of the river, also where the battle between the Mexicans and Indians occurred. In this battle one Mexican captain and two or three privates were killed.

Josiah Gregg and his party left Independence, Missouri, on his first trip to Santa Fe, May 15, 1831. On the night of July the 3rd, they camped at McNees Creek, now known as Carrumpa, and the location where McNees was killed and Monroe, fatally wounded in 1828. The next morning the 4th of July was celebrated by the party, being the first 4th of July celebration ever held in the state of New Mexico. The following quotation is from Gregg in his Commerce of the Prairies:

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5 Ibid., p. 229.
7 Ibid., p. 234.
Scarce had gray twilight brushed his dusky brow, when our patriotic camp gave lively demonstrations of that joy which plays around the heart of every American on the anniversary of this triumphant day. The roar of our artillery and rifle platoons resounded from every hill, while the rumbling of the drum and the shrill whistle of the fife, imparted a degree of martial interest to the scene which was well calculated to stir the souls of men; there was no limit to the huzzas and enthusiastic ejaculations of our people; and at every new shout the dales around sent forth a gladsome response. This anniversary is always hailed with heart-felt joy by the wayfarer in the remote desert; for here the strife and intrigues of party spirit are unknown: nothing intrudes, in this wild solitudes, to mar that harmony of feeling, and almost pious exultation, which every true hearted American experiences on this great day.

A monument has been erected at this location by the American Legion of New Mexico commemorating the first 4th of July celebration ever held in that state.

As they were proceeding on their march from McNees Creek, they observed a horseman approaching, who was soon identified as a Mexican Cibolero or Buffalo Hunter. These hardy devotees of the chase usually wear leathern trousers and jackets, and flat straw hats; while, swung upon the shoulders of each hangs his carcage or quiver of bow and arrows. The long handle of their lance being set in a case, and suspended by a strap from the pommel of the saddle, leaves the point waving over the head, with a tassel of gay parti-colored stuffs dangling at the tip of the scabbard. Their fusil if they have one, is suspended in like manner at the other side, with a stopper in the muzzle fantastically tasseled.

It was from this Cibolero that they learned that fate of that intrepid hunter, scout, and Indian fighter, Captain John Smith. Captain Sublet together with Captain John Smith and others had left Independence nearly a month in advance of the Gregg party. None in this party had ever been over the Trail before and after crossing the Arkansas river, tracks left by former caravans were not sufficiently plain to be followed with any accuracy. The party became lost and wandered around for several days until all the horrors of death from thirst stared them in the face. At last Captain John Smith resolved to follow one of the buffalo paths in hopes of it leading him to water. He set out alone as his nature was, to ever been a stranger to fear. Gregg says of him: "And, if but one half of what has been told of him be true—of his bold enterprises—his perilous wanderings—his skirmishes with the savages—his hair breadth escapes, &c.—he surely would be entitled to one of the most exalted seats in the Olympus of Prairie Mythology." Many other historians have paid tribute to this brave and pioneer scout and hunter of the west. No one knows the miles and hours traveled by Captain Smith but finally he came to a stream with a sandy bed but no water. Being familiar with this type of stream in the west in which often there is an under flow of water not far beneath the surface, Smith immediately dug a hole some two feet deep in the sand and obtained a seepage of water. As soon as a sufficient amount

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8 Ibid., p. 235.
has seeped into the excavation he stooped over to get the much needed drink. As he did so his body was pierced by an arrow. The Indians who were in the party that killed Captain Smith gave the details of his death. They said although mortally wounded he arose and struggled to the last, killing two or three of the Indians before he was subdued. Since the party was lost, no one knows just where Captain Smith died but it was on the Cimarron river some place north and east of Elkhart, Kansas.

The Strong Ranch lying north of Boise City on the south side of the Cimarron River is of historical interest. The old "ZH Ranch" bunk house, being the oldest house in Cimarron County, is on this ranch and the Upper Cimarron Springs (Flag Springs) is also on this ranch. William Strong migrated from New Mexico with his family to Cimarron county and acquired the old ZH ranch in 1894. His youngest son, Cy Strong, still owns and operates this ranch. Uncle Mike Ryan, a relative of the Strongs, as a boy of sixteen years of age made various trips with freight caravans over the Santa Fe Trail acting in the capacity as night ox watchmen. His duty was to look after and care for the oxen when they were not in service, driving them to water and back and looking after them of night time and rounding them up for the teamsters when they were ready to yoke them up for the day's work. He related that in 1860, he was with a caravan eastward bound following closely another caravan operated by the Armijo Brothers of Las Vegas, New Mexico. The Armijo Brothers were large operators, and owned many wagons and teams which they used in freighting goods from Missouri to Santa Fe. Uncle Mike relates that when his party reached the Upper Cimarron Springs they found five dead Mexicans of the Armijo caravan which had been murdered by the Indians. They buried the five unfortunate victims there at the springs. Uncle Mike in the latter years of his life erected a small rock house at Flag Springs (Upper Cimarron Springs) where he lived until he passed away many years ago. While this incident is not recorded in history there are many people still living here who knew Uncle Mike during his many years of life in Cimarron County, and I have never heard of one that doubted his truthfulness. No doubt that during the fifty odd years the trail was in operation and the thousands of caravans passing over this trail hundred of miles from settlements or possible means of communication of any kind, that many other battles were fought and lives lost which have not been recorded in history.

Before closing this narrative there is one more thing of historical interest which I feel would be beneficial here. Most writers and all the drawings I have ever seen depicting manner of caravans forming a circle when going into camp shows each wagon following another. Gregg gives an entirely different version of the pro-

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cedure used in forming the camp. He states that the caravans traveled four lines abreast. This was in case of attack the train would be more compact and better able to resist the invasion. Also it was more easy to form the inclosure when camping at night. But best I give it in Gregg's own words. I quote:10

As the caravan was passing under the northern base of the Round Mountain, it presented a very fine and imposing spectacle to those who were upon its summit. The wagons marched slowly in four parallel columns, but in broken lines, often at intervals of many rods between . . . . As our camp was pitched but a mile west of Round Mound those who lingered upon its summit could have an interesting view of the evolution of 'forming' the wagons in which the drivers by this time had become very expert. When marching four abreast, the two exterior lines spread out and then meet at the front angle; while the two inner lines keep close together until they reach the point of the rear angle, when they swing suddenly out and close with the hinder ends of the other two; thus systematically concluding a right-lined quadrangle, with a gap left in the rear corner for the introduction of the animals.

Other places of interest in Cimarron County and along the Santa Fe Trail:

Willowbar Crossing on the Cimarron River, 1 mile west and 10 north of Keyes; Upper Cimarron Springs, now known as Flag Springs, 8 miles north and 1½ west of Boise City; Cold Springs Camp, 7½ miles west and 6½ north of Boise City; the Santa Fe Trail Autograph Album at Cold Springs Camp, where hundreds of names of the trail drivers were carved; the Black Mesa in northwest Cimarron County, rising 700 feet above the Cimarron River bed at its base; Robber's Roost, where the noted outlaw Coe and his band held out for some years; Indian pictographs carved on rock escarpments, and paintings in North Canyon and other places in the County; and the highest point in Oklahoma, 4,983 feet, on the Black Mesa near the New Mexico line. And many other places of minor historical interest to numerous to mention here.

10 Ibid., pp. 244, 247.