



## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 21, 2009

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
Georganne White, Curator  
Geary County Historical Society and Museums  
785/238-1666; [gwhite@gchs.kscoxmail.com](mailto:gwhite@gchs.kscoxmail.com)  
[www.gchsweb.org](http://www.gchsweb.org)

OR

Tracy Quillin, KHC Director of Communications  
785/357-0359; [tracy@kansashumanities.org](mailto:tracy@kansashumanities.org)  
[www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org)

### **Riverboats in the Flint Hills**

**Junction City, KS** – In October 1854, the steamboat *Excel* ventured into the mouth of the Smoky Hill River loaded with supplies for a new military fort. Among the boat's cargo was food, materials for the fort, and passengers that included H. D. McMeekin, a future representative of Kansas' First Territorial Legislature. The *Excel's* destination? Fort Riley, located in the heart of the Flint Hills. The *Excel's* trip was just one of two documented riverboat journeys along the Smoky Hill River. Other documented riverboat journeys took place on the Kansas River. Kansas' riverboat history complements the many American transportation stories featured as part of the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition *Journey Stories* on display October 2 – November 15, 2009 at the Geary County Historical Society and Museums, 530 N. Adams in Junction City.

In 1853, the development of Fort Riley as a subordinate depot 130 miles west of Fort Leavenworth extended the protection of the United States Cavalry to the bold souls who decided to try settling in the "new states and territories to the west." In the early days of Fort Riley, speculation about the navigability of the Smoky Hill and the Kansas, or Kaw, Rivers was divided.

--MORE--

A small number of boats traveled as far as Fort Riley or Junction City. Perl W. Morgan's *History of Wyandotte County Kansas and Its People*, 1911, lists the *Bee* as a popular passenger boat between Wyandotte County and Fort Riley in 1855. Morgan also states that settlers of the Ashland Colony came up from Ohio to Kansas on the *Express* in 1856, noting "The boat took them up the Kansas River to Junction City, where they were located. In the party were Henry J. Adams, Franklin G. Adams, Matthew Weightman, William Mackey and wife of Junction City." In 1858, Captain Beasley brought the *Gus Linn* up the Kansas River, piloted by W. W. Hicks, marking the second of the two occasions when the Smoky Hill River was traversed by riverboat.

Many boats that started out on the Kansas River were moved to the Missouri River or elsewhere. Governor Andrew Reeder contributed advice in a booklet for emigrants, which stated that steamboats had ascended the Kansas River as far as Fort Riley, but whether steady navigation would prove feasible was a disputed issue. The question was finally decided by an act of the Kansas Legislature on September 6, 1864. In the face of pressure from railroad interests, the Kansas River was declared non-navigable, giving the railroads the freedom to bridge or dam the river without restrictions. Thus ended Geary County's brief flirtation with steamboat travel.

To learn similar stories of transportation history, make the trip to the Geary County Historical Society and Museums in Junction City for the *Journey Stories* exhibition. Journey stories – tales of how we got here – are as American as apple pie. Why did our families come to America? Why did our ancestors choose Kansas as home? The exhibition explores four centuries of American history through images, audio clips, music, maps, and artifacts. Visitors will listen to stories of travelers and trace their route on an interactive map; read harrowing accounts of escaped slaves on the road to freedom; and use an 1859 guidebook to prepare for a westward trip on an overland trail.

**--MORE--**

The local companion exhibit to *Journey Stories, Junction City: on the Road to Everywhere*, produced by the Geary County Historical Society and Museums, explores the importance of transportation and migration in Junction City's history. Junction City sits at the crossroads of Native American trails, overland trails, and railroads, not to mention riverboat travel. Early aviation took flight in Junction City and today Interstate 70 brings new generations of travelers to the city.

"The *Journey Stories* and *Junction City: On the Road to Everywhere* exhibits will show the significant part Junction City has played in the larger history of our nation, particularly in the westward migration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century," said Georganne White, curator of the Geary County Historical Society and Museums. "The exhibits will also illustrate some interesting, but little-known, sidelights to our local narrative."

The Geary County Historical Society and Museums is one of six Kansas community cultural organizations to host *Journey Stories*. Other Kansas hosts include the McPherson County Old Mill Museum in Lindsborg, the Glasco Community Foundation, the Parsons Public Library, the Prairie Museum of Art and History in Colby, and the Atchison County Historical Society.

The *Journey Stories* exhibition is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Kansas Humanities Council, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Federation of State Humanities Councils. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress.

The Kansas Humanities Council sponsors the Kansas tour of *Journey Stories*. A non-profit organization, the Kansas Humanities Council conducts and supports community-based programs, serves as a financial resource through an active grant-making program, and encourages Kansans to participate in their communities.

For more information about *Journey Stories* and related exhibits and events in Junction City contact the Geary County Historical Society and Museums at 785/238-1666 or [www.gchsweb.org](http://www.gchsweb.org) or the Kansas Humanities Council at 785/357-0359 or [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org).