

Down the Trail with Susan Shelby Magoffin

Eighteen-year-old Susan Shelby Magoffin made history when she traveled to Santa Fe in 1846. Not only was she one of the first American women to travel the trail, but she also kept one of the most detailed journals of daily experiences on the trail. Her trip also was historically important because she traveled during one of the busiest trade years and at the time of the Mexican War.

Susan's diary was published as a book titled *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico*. Her book gives us a picture of what everyday life on the trail was like. Susan had only been married to her husband, Samuel, for eight months when she decided to accompany his large merchant caravan

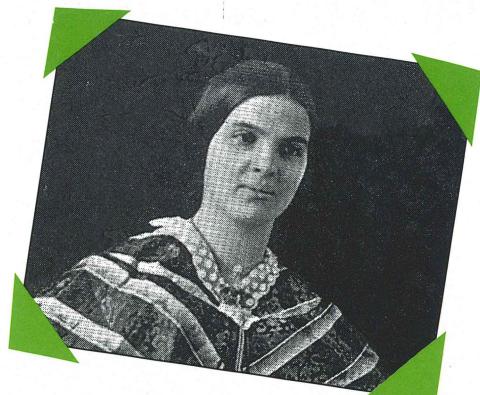
to Santa Fe. Because Susan was expecting a baby, Samuel provided her with as many comforts as possible including a private carriage, books, notions and servants.

Despite her husband's efforts to make her comfortable, Susan encountered many difficulties. Her carriage overturned on the steep banks of Ash Creek and thunderstorms blew her tent down more than once. She recorded these experiences but she also wrote of the beauty of her surroundings.

Susan's baby was born while the caravan was staying at Bent's Fort in Colorado. Sadly, the premature baby did not live. After reaching Santa Fe, the Magoffs took their caravan into Mexico.

"We struck our camp on the hill. There is a large mound just by us, from the top of which a splendid view is to be had. On one side, to the west, is a wide expanse of prairie; as far as the eye can reach nothing but a sea of tall grass is to be seen. I went up onto it at sunset, and thought I had not seen, ever, a more imposing sight."

Susan Shelby Magoffin



Try a Taste of the Trail

Want a "taste" of the Santa Fe Trail?
Here's a recipe for a soup eaten by Susan Magoffin on her trip. Try making it at home for your family or with your class.

Soak beans overnight in cold water, then slowly boil for most of the day until soft. Add corn and other ingredients, reserving salt till last. When you need to add water to the cooking beans, add hot water (putting cold water onto cooking beans toughens them). Serve the bean and corn soup with some grated Monterey Jack cheese on top.

Corn and Bean Soup

1 pint fresh corn, cut from ears, canned or frozen

1 pint pinto beans

2 quart cold water

1 onion, sliced

1 large clove garlic

1 cup red chile puree

1 tablespoon oregano

pinch cumin

2 teaspoons salt

Recipe from *Eating Up the Santa Fe Trail*, Sam'l P. Arnold, 1990.