

# An Epicenter of International Commerce



Santa Fe, Oregon, and California National Historic Trails

McCoy Park  
Oregon-California Trail 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 necessities 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.*

—Frances Parkman Jr, 1846

Independence in the 1830s-40s 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. Saddled with all of the necessary 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.

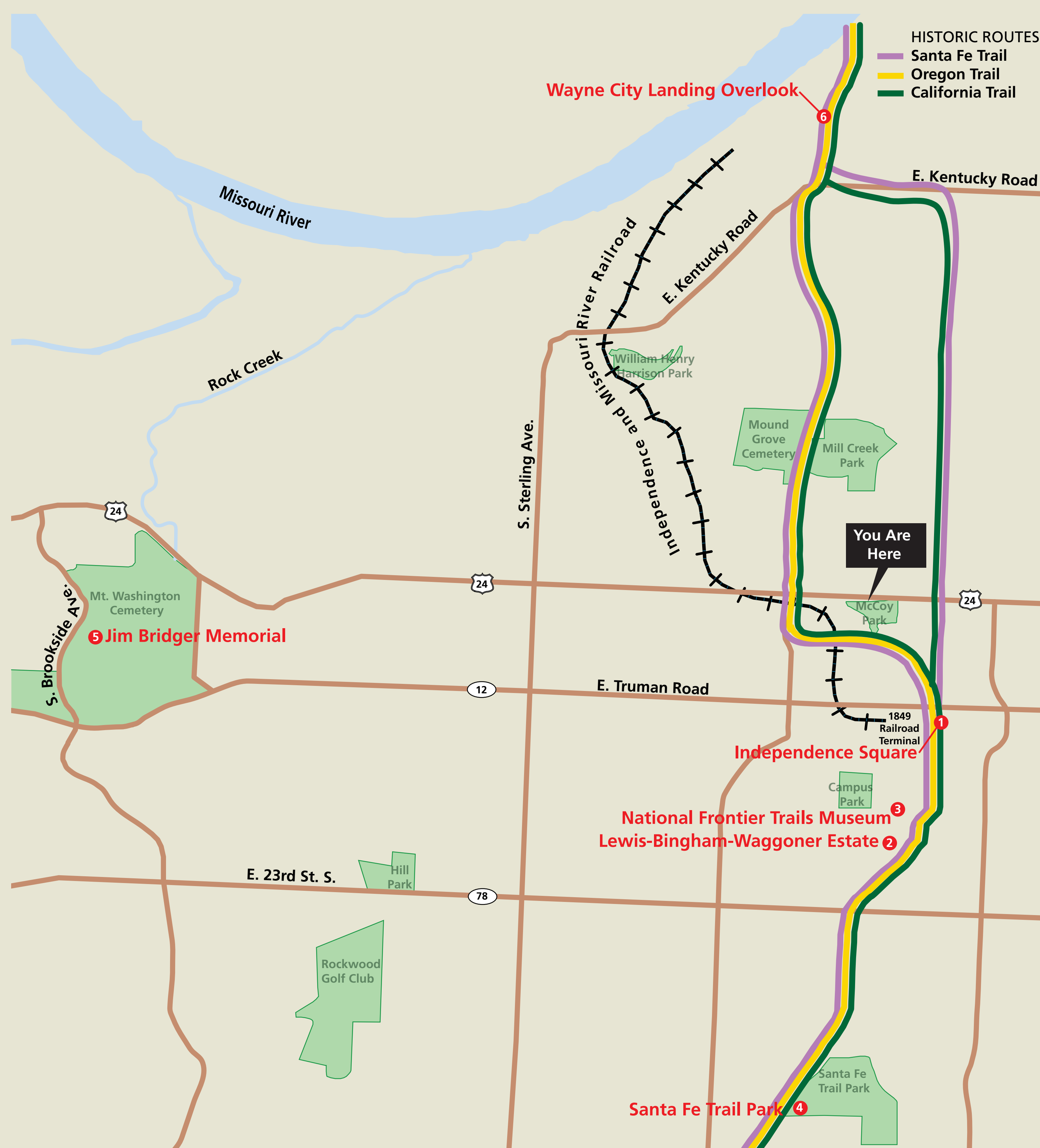
## For more information, please visit:

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



**1** 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.



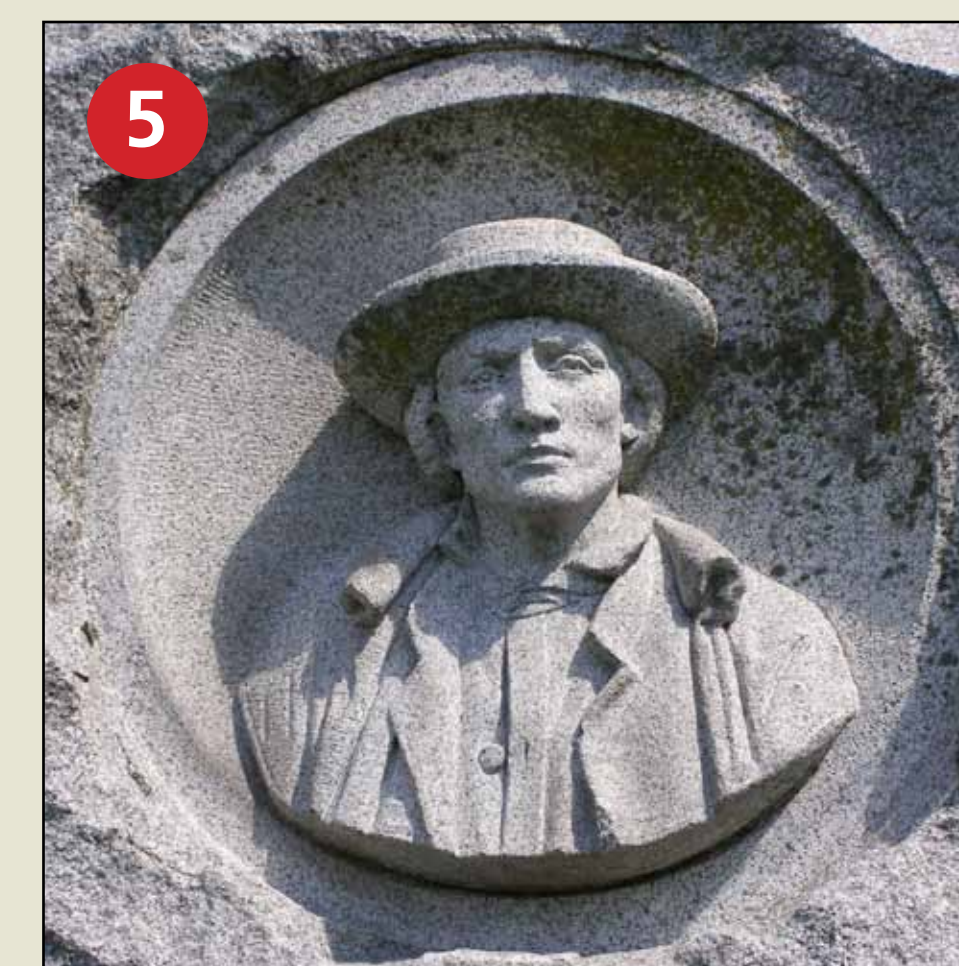
**2** Lewis-Bingham-Waggoner Estate - The home of artist-politician George Caleb Bingham, this house was later occupied by the Waggoner family who operated the flour mill across the street. Look for shallow swales on the south side of the property.



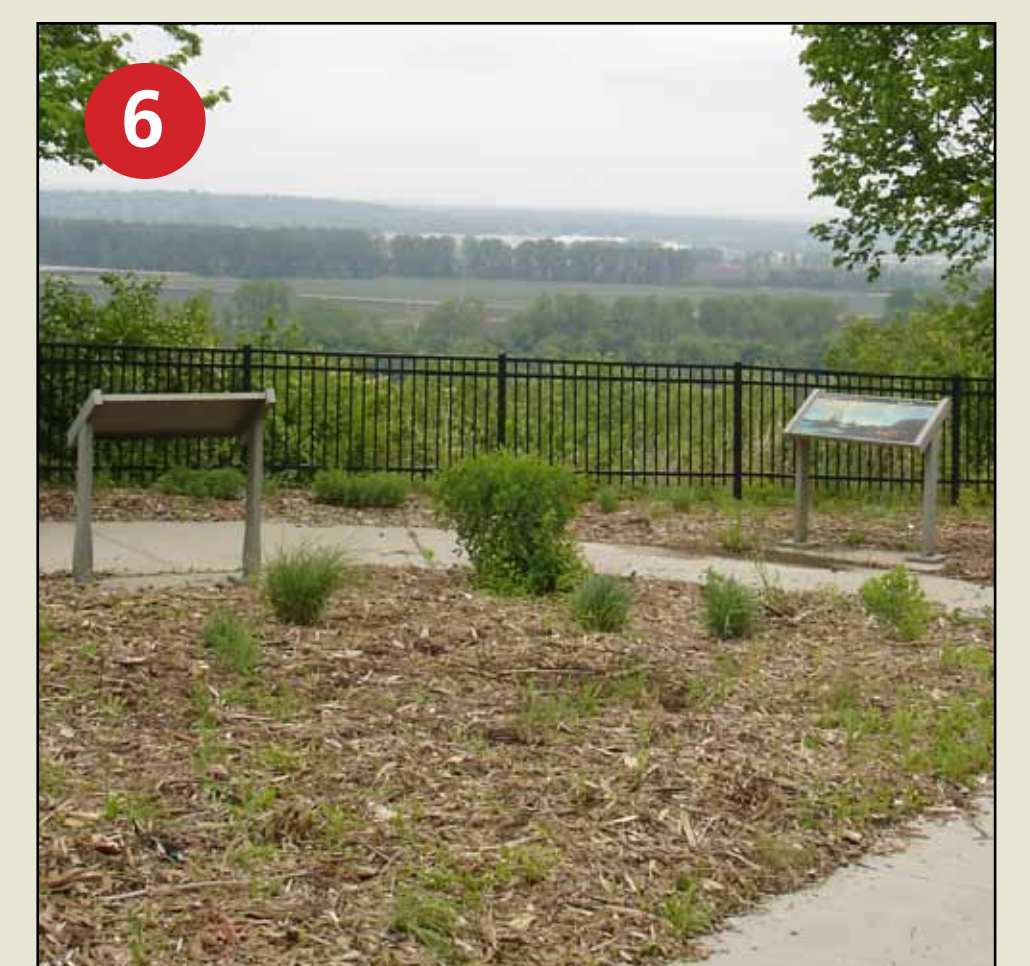
**3** National Frontier Trails Museum - Located on the site of a spring used by traders and emigrants prior to their departure, the museum has exhibits on the Santa Fe, Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Lewis and Clark national historic trails.



**4** Swales: grassed over wagon ruts



**5** Jim Bridger  
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.



**6** 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.