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INLAND TRADE BETWEEN MISSOURI AND MEXICO.

Presented to the Senate of the United States, Jan. 3, by Mr. Benton of Missouri.

Answers of Augustus Storrs to queries addressed to him by the Hon. Thomas H. Benton, Senator in Congress from the State of Missouri, upon the origin, present state, and future prospect, of Trade and Intercourse between Missouri and the Internal Provinces of Mexico.

Question 1. Do you know whether a commercial intercourse has been carried on between Missouri and the internal provinces of Mexico? If so, at what time did it commence?

Answer. Messrs. McKnight, Beard, and others, of St. Louis, were the first adventurers in this trade, in the year 1812. Their misfortunes and sufferings are well known to the American people. In 1817, Mr. Chouteau, of the same place, successfully accomplished the expedition. But the government of Spain viewed with extreme jealousy an intercourse of other nations with her American dependencies; and the different American administrations, no doubt, in conformity with instructions from that court, threw in its way every discouragement and obstacle in their power. Personal danger, and the risk of introducing goods, amounted almost to a prohibition. The revolution, however, which eventuated in the independence of Mexico, entirely altered its policy in this respect. Subsequently to that event, Messrs. Glenn, of Ohio, and Becknell, of this State, were the first who went out in the year 1821. They were received with hospitality by the citizens, and with much courtesy and friendship by the officers of government. Since that time, a small capital has been annually employed in this trade.

Q. 2. Have you been engaged in that intercourse yourself? If so, at what time, and with what accompaniment of men, horses, and carriages?

A. I was engaged in that intercourse during the last summer. The company consisted of eighty-one men, who had one hundred and fifty-six horses and mules; twenty-three four-wheeled vehicles, one of which was a common road wagon, and one piece of field artillery. The company adopted rules and regulations for its government; which rules created three offices, and specified the duties of the incumbents. They also regulated the conduct of the members towards each other, and their intercourse with the Indians.

Q. 3. Over what route did you travel?

A. From the western limit of Missouri, near Fort Osage, our course to the Arkansas River was W. S. W.; thence, up that river considerably north of west, 240 miles; thence, 40 miles due south, to the Semerone river; thence, up the Semerone nearly a due west course, 100 miles; thence, W. to Taos, the first Mexican settlement which this course reaches. Allowance must be made for numerous deviations from these general courses, occasioned by the winding of streams.

Q. 4. What was the face of the country, and the means of subsistence for men and horses?

A. The face of the country, through which this route passes, is open, level, and free from impediments, to the base of the Rocky Mountains. The character of the soil, the growth of timber, and the appearance of the water courses, between the Missouri and the Arkansas, are essentially different from the character which they assume beyond that river. The soil is extremely fertile, of a dark colour, and loose. The timber is the same with that of Missouri, with the exception of a peculiar kind of ash, which I have not witnessed elsewhere. It grows thickly immediately on the banks of streams, and sometimes extends a short distance upon the bottoms. The consequence of the richness and looseness of the soil, and there being very little sand or gravel in its composition, the banks of the streams are steep, and the channels deep, and often miry. On the one side of the route was the Big and little Blue rivers, and the Kansas; and on the other, the Oregan, the Neucio, and the Verdigrise. Their tributaries are numerous, almost beyond precedent; and many of them appear as large as their principals, at an equal distance above their junction. The position of the ground often causes them to pass beyond each other, and interlock. The wagons often meet with detention, it being absolutely necessary to dig the banks with spades and hoes, and in some instances, to cover the bottom with sap and brush. The prairie here, in the month of May, is adorned with a great variety of flowers, and, probably, presents one of the most distant and beautiful views on earth. The grass having attained growth, is high; and, in the bottoms, in some places, several inches taller than a person's head, on horseback, when returned. On approaching the Arkans-

sas, bordering its bottom, are sand hills of an average width of seven miles. They are formed of pure sand, congealed by the winds, and which yields, from the pressure of the foot, like snow. In some instances, they are thinly covered with vegetation; in others, they are destitute of a single blade of grass for miles. My first view of them was distant, over a level plain. They were perfectly destitute of vegetation, and the sand of a yellow colour, which, under the reflection and gleaming of the sun, exhibited precisely the appearance of a dim flame of fire, fifteen or twenty feet in height. My eager inquiry for an explanation of the cause, was answered that they were sand hills, of which I had before heard much as a natural curiosity. Their shapes are various and fanciful; and the travelling over them is slow and laborious. On this side of the river, however, they only extend twenty-five miles above our usual point of striking the Arkansas; and they will hereafter be avoided by bearing a more northern course, which will strike the river above them. The route up the Arkansas is wholly over a dry, solid and level bottom, which is not intersected by gullies, and by only three creeks, which have gravel bottoms, and are crossed without difficulty. The only timber here is cotton wood, of which there are groves of large and scattering trees, at different intervals. On leaving this river we pass over sand hills ten miles; and thence over a high and perfectly level plain, to the Semerone. On this river there is no obstruction, except occasionally the inconvenience of sand. At the point where we leave the Semerone, is the first appearance of rocks and cliffs. We next fall on the Canadian Fork, at a distance of thirty-five miles. Its southern bank is regularly almost a perpendicular wall of rock, of a dark colour; and forty feet high; thence, there are small mountains, composed principally of the same kind of rock, rising out of the level prairie. These increase, both in frequency and height, to the base of the chain of the Rocky Mountains. Our course, however, avoids them, and thus far there is not a single bill of consequence, or which presents difficulty to the progress of a wagon. The distance across the mountain is forty miles, on a road considerably used, but in places of steep ascent.

I have before remarked a general difference in the face of the country, north and south of the Arkansas. Its northern bluff, however, adjoining the bottom, may more properly be taken as the line of demarcation. South of this line the whole country, to the foot of the mountains, is generally speaking, an arid sand and gravel. The rains are periodical, and not copious. The sand absorbs them as they fall, so readily, that there are neither runs nor gullies. The average width of Arkansas river is, at least, three hundred yards. Its water is muddy and turbid, like that of the Missouri, and it appears little less formidable than that river, although our wagons crossed it without difficulty. Its bottom is a pure quick-sand, which almost as naturally seeks an equilibrium as the water itself. If the current forces a channel, the sand immediately rolls in from every side, until it attains a level. Consequently, the bottom is uniform, and the water shallow. I have not observed the Semerone traced on any map, although its length and peculiarity deservedly entitle it to that distinction. Its source is in the mountains, west of the Arkansas, and it runs nearly parallel with that river upwards of 400 miles. In ascending it, there was no running, and very little standing water. We never failed obtaining it, however, by digging eighteen inches in the sand. When we returned, there was a strong current, and its banks were every where overflowed. Its water is strongly impregnated with nitric or saline qualities, and its bottoms exhibited numerous appearances of the same substance, in a state of incrustation. Its disengagement is not known, and there is almost an universal belief that it loses itself in the sand.

With regard to the natural means of subsistence, there is, probably, no other equal extent of wilderness in the world so well supplied. Deer are scarce, but buffalo, elk, and antelopes, are abundant. Buffalo meat is, generally, esteemed superior to beef; and that of the antelope, both in flavour and appearance, has a strong affinity to mutton. Our company had an ample supply of fresh meat, almost every day. The grasses, in the two descriptions of country before described, are as different as the soil. Between our settlements and the Arkansas, is the common tall prairie grass of Missouri. Beyond, the buffalo grass prevails wholly. It is short and fine. Its nutritious qualities and superiority for pasturage, are admired by all. I have no doubt that its introduction into our fields would be highly beneficial. Beyond that river, also, nearly all the rain of the year falls in July and August. The growth of vegetation commences only with the rainy season; therefore, on the first of July, annually, the uplands are brown with the de-

cayed-growth of the previous year. In September they are clothed with a new growth, which is fresh, and appears, beautifully verdant at that time of the year.

Q. 5. What time was occupied in going, accomplishing the object of the expedition, and returning?

A. Four months and ten days.

Q. 6. What kinds of merchandise are principally carried out to the internal provinces?

A. Cotton goods, consisting of coarse and fine cambrics, calicoes, domestic shawls, handkerchiefs, steamloom shirtings, and cotton hose. A few woollen goods, consisting of super blues, arroundings, pelisse cloths, and shawls, crapes, and bombazines, some light articles of cutlery, silk shawls, and looking glasses. In addition to these, many other articles, necessary for the purposes of an assortment.

Q. 7. What is received, and brought back, in exchange for merchandise carried out?

A. Spanish milled dollars, a small amount of gold and silver, in bullion, beaver fur, and some mules.

Q. 8. What amount in silver, mules, and furs, are returned in a given period—say for the year 1824?

A. In responding to this query, I shall include all the returns for merchandise, transported to Mexico, during the present year, although these returns will not be complete until the year 1825. One company, conveying 18,000 dollars worth of goods, did not leave this State until the 10th of November, instant, consequently, the returns will not take place until the next summer. Agreeably to this construction of the question, the returns, at the lowest estimate, will amount to 180,000 dollars. They consist, principally, in Spanish dollars and bullion. Exclusive of this, furs, taken in that country, by Americans, have already been returned, amounting, by actual sales, to 10,044 dollars.

Q. 9. Have duties been paid on the merchandise carried out? If so, to what amount upon the value of the goods?

A. The duty imposed by the government of the Internal Provinces upon dry goods, imported therein, and paid by the Americans, was 25 per cent. ad valorem. The Americans, universally, suspected that this duty was arbitrarily imposed by the governor of New Mexico, without law; and the following circumstances strengthened the suspicion.

1st. The ignorance of the best informed citizens of the province, of the existence of such a duty. 2d. The declaration of Don Manuel Alhama, a member of the Congress at Chihuahua, made to myself, that he had no knowledge of it, and that he entertained a full belief of its illegality. 3d. The custom house officer being called upon for his authority, could produce no commission or other evidence, of his being legally authorized to demand or receive it. The duty on the article of tobacco is four dollars per pound, being intended as a prohibition. It was endeavoured to be exacted from a gentleman of our company who took out a small quantity, for the use of himself, and others in his employment; but after some discussion and delay, it was relinquished. During my continuance in New Mexico, the governor told Mr. Anderson, of St. Louis, that probably, hereafter, the duty would be 50 per cent. The certain object of this increase is to place their commerce from the south, on a more equal footing with that of the Americans, and the measure, I have no doubt, is strongly urged by a few, who have, heretofore, monopolized the sales, and fixed the prices of the country. I would here take the liberty of stating my opinion that there is very little system or consistency in the political arrangements of this provincial government; and that without any just or enlightened views of the benefits of intercourse and trade, they look to temporary expedients rather than permanent and general results.

Q. 10. Are the inhabitants of the Internal Provinces favourable to the continuance of this commerce?

A. The affirmative of this question is beyond a doubt. Their profession of respect for our national character, and of attachment to our principles, is universal; and their actions are a sufficient proof of sincerity.—The door of hospitality is opened with a cheerful welcome, and every office of friendship and kindness, which might be expected from intimate acquaintance, is voluntarily proffered by a stranger. In all their principal towns the arrival of the Americans is a source of pleasure, and the evening is dedicated to dancing and festivity. Almost without an exception, likewise, they denounce the duty as an act of injustice and extortion, and openly lavish their censures upon its authors. Their accommodations are generally indifferent, but they deserve much praise for their kindness, urbanity and hospitality. Few nations practice these virtues to a greater extent.

Q. 11. Through what sea ports have foreign goods been heretofore imported to the internal provinces?

A. Vera Cruz, Wymos, Tampico, Acapulco, and San Blas; more than a year since the royalists have had possession of

the fortification which commands the harbour of Vera Cruz; which circumstance converted a part of its trade to Wymos.

Q. 12. Over what route, and by what means of conveyance, have foreign goods been, heretofore, brought into the internal provinces?

A. They were introduced from different parts of the Vice Royalty, and principally from Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico. The route is altogether over land, by the way of San Louis Potosi, Zacatecas, and Durango; and the goods, as well as every thing else transported in that country, are carried on mules. This manner of transportation is universal, on account of the roughness of the roads, and the want of valuable timber for vehicles and mechanical skill to construct them. The people bear arms in travelling from one village to another, and some risk is always supposed to attend long journeys.

Q. 13. Can the internal provinces be supplied with foreign goods upon any line of water communication?

A. I know of no communication by water, which, at present, offers sufficient inducement for the transportation of goods in that manner. The face of the map shows the Rio del Norte to be the natural means of communication between the interior and the ocean. For some distance below Santa Fe, it is navigable for boats of twenty tons burthen. But below the Pasa del Norte, I have certain information that its navigation is entirely interrupted, and prevented by sand bars. Its character there is similar to that of the Arkansas, where our route intersects it. The Rio Colorado of the Gulph of California, the next principal river of the internal provinces, penetrates the country more than eight hundred miles, but its whole course is through a wilderness, and a chain of mountains intervenes between it and the settlements. Roads must be made, settlements formed, and much time elapse, before its navigable advantages can become useful. The navigation of the Arkansas is very uncertain, although it might probably be ascended with boats, at certain periods of the year.

Q. 14. How near do the Arkansas, the Kansas, and the Red River, approach the town of Santa Fe?

A. It is two hundred and fifty miles from the town at the nearest points on the Arkansas; three hundred and ten to the nearest branch of the Kansas; and seventy to the waters of Red River. The latter river heads about one degree north of Santa Fe, and is a small run where we cross it.

Q. 15. Can goods be carried from Missouri to Chihuahua, and Durango, and offered in market as low as the merchandise brought to those places from Vera Cruz?

A. The data which I have, upon which to found an answer to this question, are not perfectly satisfactory. There are some circumstances, however, which tend to an elucidation. Previous to the introduction of goods into the province of New Mexico, by the Americans, they were very scarce there, and the prices extravagant. Very soon after, on account of the cheapness and superior quality of American goods, they ceased to import from the Vice Royalty, and the returns, for all their articles of exportation, have since been made in specie, instead of merchandise. Several persons in that province have different amounts laid by, which they do not pretend to sell, unless sometimes an opportunity presents of imposing them on hirelings, because they are reluctant to sell at such a loss as is necessary, under the present circumstances of their commerce. It is reasonable to suppose that the expense of carriage constitutes the only difference between the price of this province and the other internal provinces. If such is the fact, there is no doubt of advantageous sales below, especially in New Biscay and Sonora, which are favored with a much greater number of gold and silver mines than any of the others. One fact is still more conclusive. The Governor of New Mexico purchased, last summer, about 5,000 dollars worth of goods. I was informed that he intended to send them to the lower country, and that he had made application to an American gentleman resident there, to go down and superintend the sales. He probably had correct information relative to the prices and prospects of sales below; otherwise he would not have purchased with such an intention. Durango is 300 miles south of Chihuahua, and I doubt whether our traders can there enter into a successful competition with those from the coast. I think the quality of our goods will ensure them a preference in that market, when all the other inducements of purchase are equal.

Q. 16. Have European or East India goods been brought into the Internal Provinces, through the port of San Blas?

A. I did not hear the name of that port mentioned, during my continuance there. If goods are imported through it, I presume it is only in sufficient supply for the adjacent territory. Acapulco is the great mart of trade on that coast, from which goods are distributed by land and water.

Q. 17. Have any of the adventures from Missouri gone as far as the Provinces

of Sonora, or the other internal provinces bordering on the Gulf of California?

A. Never until last summer. About half of our company, not immediately realizing the profits they had anticipated, and believing they could effect better sales, went to New Biscay. They have not yet returned, and I have no intelligence of the result of their adventure.

Q. 18. What is the superficial content of the internal provinces in square miles, and their population, wants, and resources?

A. The best authority says, that the internal provinces contain 900,000 square miles. Their population may be fairly estimated at 620,000 souls. It is a fact which I believe is confirmed by experience, that a superabundance of the precious metals is unfavourable to the progress of improvement and the increase of happiness in any country. It weakens inducements to industry, diminishes the respectability which ought to attach to the occupation of husbandry, and tends to the corruption of morals and manners. It encourages idleness, by affording the means of livelihood without labour, and licentiousness and depravity are very apt to be the consequences of indolence. Industry, exertion, and enterprise, impart strength to the body and vigor to the mind. They quicken those faculties which render the citizen honest, active, and intelligent; and inspire those sentiments which carry the soldier through every toil for the safety of his country, and the glory of its arms.

No instance, perhaps, could be produced, more in point to verify these observations, than Spain. With opportunities of commerce, wealth, and power, equal to those of any other European nation, her situation is dependent, her government weak, and her army and navy almost a nullity. The influx of the precious metals has altered the former habits of the people, and by enabling them to live without resorting to manual employment, has destroyed the energy of her national character. The policy of the mother country has strongly co-operated with these causes to degrade the political condition of Mexico, and to discourage her manufactures. They have stifled that spirit of enquiry, and prevented the effects of emulation and the introduction of foreign improvements, which would have been the inevitable consequence of an unrestrained intercourse with other countries. I saw but one newspaper in the province of New Mexico, and they have no description of books, except a few religious works. They are profoundly ignorant of what is going on in the other parts of the world; and, I venture to say, that the military fame even of General Jackson, has never reached the ears of half a dozen persons in the town of Santa Fe. Maternal jealousy and ecclesiastical influence, have removed from the people every means of information, and prevented their improvement in every art and every science. Consequently, although necessity has limited their artificial wants, they have not, within themselves, all the necessary and conveniences of life. Iron is difficult to be obtained, and sells at 100 dollars per cwt. although the country abounds in ore. Woollen goods are scarce and dear, yet the internal provinces produce twice the quantity of wool necessary to clothe their inhabitants. All plates, dishes, bowls, water vessels, and every description of castines, are supplied by a substitute, manufactured from clay, by the civilized Indians. This ware is superior of its kind, and is the invention of the aborigines. They are almost entirely destitute of artisan's tools, of almost every description, and their implements of agriculture, such as carts, ploughs, harrows, yokes, spades, &c. are universally destitute of the least advantage of iron work. Their spinning is done by the sole use of a wooden spindule, operated by the twist of a thumb and finger. These particulars are in themselves too trifling for enumeration; but when considered in relation to the late administration of the government and the condition of the people, and the partial consequences to be deduced by statesmen, they become more important. From them, also, may be inferred the variety and extent of supplies demanded by that market. It will be remembered that I speak of New Mexico only, to which my personal observation was limited. Report speaks more favourably of the condition of the other internal provinces.

The natural resources of the country are abundant, and I regret that my means of information do not enable me to state them with precision. The exports of New Mexico consist of sheep, copper, tobacco, buffalo robes, and dressed skins, the two last of which articles she purchases from the Indians. She receives in return the wines and brandy of the Pasa, and specie. The trade leaves a clear profit in favour of the province, of more than 300,000 dollars. It has, for some time past, been obstructed and diminished by difficulties with the Indians. At present she maintains peace with all the adjacent tribes, which will render this commerce more brisk and profitable. New Biscay, Sonora and Sinaloa have numerous and extensive gold and silver