

Spring 1879, Russell , Co. Kansas

I was born near Grass Creek, Fulton County, Indiana, on January 24, 1826, to Robert and Catherine (Shafer) Torrence. When I was seven years old my father, who was in the dry-goods business moved us to Boonville, Missouri, to enter the Santa Fe trade. I made my first trip to Santa Fe when I was twelve, as my mother had passed. I continued the annual trips with my Father until I was seventeen. At that time we moved the operation to Independence. My Father was busy setting up a store , so I, along with some trusted employees took the caravan to Santa Fe.

In the spring of 1846 volunteers were called for to fight the war against Mexico. The outcome of this war would have an impact on the business, so I joined up at Fort Leavenworth. I became a recruit in the Missouri Mounted Volunteers. We elected Alexander Doniphan as our commander. We marched to Santa Fe and took it without a fight. We were then ordered to march into Mexico to link up with General Wool. We never found Wool, but met and defeated superior Mexican forces at Brazito and the Sacramento River. In our year we traveled over five thousand miles then all mustered out.

I returned to moving goods to Santa Fe. During these times of frequent Indian attacks we moved in large caravans for greater safety. In 1857 we moved the operation to Council Grove , Kansas. In 1860 while in Santa Fe I met and married a young Spanish widow. We were happy and prosperous until the Fall of 1867, when she was killed by savages while traveling on the Butterfield- Overland stage, near Monument Station.

In the summer of the following year, to exact revenge against the Indians, I signed on with Major George Forseyth , using the alias Edward Simpson, a friend who had been killed on the Road to Santa Fe by Indians. We trailed the savages north and up the Republican River until in the middle of September we were attacked as we were breaking camp. We made for a small island to make our stand. The savages formed a massed front and charged. The first charge was the worst of three that day. Each charge we accounted well for ourselves, killing around a hundred. All our horses were killed by snipers from the bluffs. Pack animals with our rations were stampeded, but luckily we saved our ammunition. Four of our number were killed, including our surgeon, and a young officer named Beecher. Another died after returning to Fort Wallace. After nine days we were rescued by the Tenth Cay. After a week back at Fort Wallace , I mustered out.

That fall our operation moved to Ellsworth Kansas. I had no more heart for Santa Fe, but kept on until 1871. Robert retired back to Council Grove after the "71 trip. I then sold everything except two wagons. I hired some good men and went to shooting buffalo for the hide market. By the Spring of 1875 , I had had enough of the buffalo ranges, and sold out to two of my employees.

By this time I had saved a goodly sum of money. I found a family who was ready to quit the plains and sold me 640 acres of land in the Wolf Creek valley, near East Wolf in Russell County, Kansas. I began buying horses and driving them to posts and selling them to the Army. In the Spring of 1877 I bought half interest in Pioneer Merchants with Harry Jack. I remain buyer for Jack & Torrence, and still sell horses to the army.

Your Humble Servant, John Torrence

