

THE ROSE MASSACRE – AUGUST 1858

The Rose, Udahl and Brown wagon trains contained about 100 families who set out from Iowa on their way to California. With them was a huge herd of over 400 cattle being taken to establish a ranch in California. All went well until they decided to take the “new trail” reportedly ready for wagons. Actually, Lt. Beale had just taken an exploratory group over that passage six months before and was in Washington to advise the government on the costs of developing the new wagon road from Albuquerque to the Colorado River. An incompetent scout, Sevedra, offered to lead the group. He had been a big disappointment on his trip with Beale and proved to be an even bigger disaster on the Rose trip.

Finally, after unimaginable troubles including Indian attacks, loss of animals and starvation, they arrived at the pass in the Black Mountains called Tri-State Point. That is near the current old mining town of Gold Road on Route 66. This was the last stop before the river.

By now, the wagon train was exhausted and most were unable to continue, so the animals that were able, men who would build the rafts to cross the river into California and a few others went on to the river. They were thrilled to find good “knee high” grass pasture and trees they could fell to build rafts. It was, however, part of the Mojave Indian lands, and later accounts from the Indians' story says that the travelers' animals tramped on their gardens and the men cut their shade trees. Since gardening involved planting in wet, low areas in the spring along the water, the settlers may not have known or recognized the area as “gardens.”

At first the Mojaves were welcoming and interested in trade and getting gifts. Shortly, the social climate changed as more demands and little thefts became the norm. The white men started to pull their grazing cattle into camp and suddenly an attack was made. Mr. Brown, Sally Fox's step father, was killed immediately. He was the only fatality. Sally was struck in the chest by an arrow, but survived. The dress she wore that day is on display at the family orchard in Northern California. The party fled back to the mountains with great loss of cattle.

The Bentner family at that same time decided to leave the relative safety of the mountains and had headed toward the river alone. The presumption has been made that the Tonto Apaches were the group which attacked the family's wagon killing the parents and kidnapping the children. Local Mojaves were not disposed to attacks, but their relatives, the Piutes were. Historians say that the Mojaves did not use bows and arrows. Hence, Sally was purportedly shot by a Puite. Mojaves did have spears.

Discouraged remnants of the party returned to Albuquerque for the winter. They probably would not have made it without help from the Young party who had followed this group. They struggled to survive the winter and set out in the spring of 1859 using the southern route to Yuma.

Near the Zuni lands is an enormous rock outcropping called El Morro Rock. People have chiseled names and dates on that rock since the earliest Spanish explorers. Today one can see Sally and her sister's names carved in the rock. Sally also must have picked up walnuts near the Gila River which she carried to California and subsequently planted. The descendants of those trees exist today. The orchard is called "The Nut Tree." Since walnuts do not grow near Yuma, it is surmised that flood waters brought the nuts down the Hasayampa River to the Gila.

Mr. Rose bought a hotel in Santa Fe during the winter that the group stayed in Albuquerque. It is a landmark hotel even today on the old town square.

Because of the Rose Massacre, the U.S. Government decided that a fort was necessary to protect travelers on the new route. It was built April 1859 on the mesa overlooking the river and today's Nature Center. The layout for the Beale Wagon Road was subsequently changed to run from the mountains to the fort. Fort Mojave was manned until 1890 except for two years during the Civil War. It then became an Indian school until 1932. There are few remains of anything but curbs and irrigation ditches. The last owner, Ms. Le Clair, was ordered to tear down the remaining buildings. Subsequently, the mesa was returned to the Mojave Tribe. The Tribe pushed the concrete slabs over the side of the Mesa about 1980.