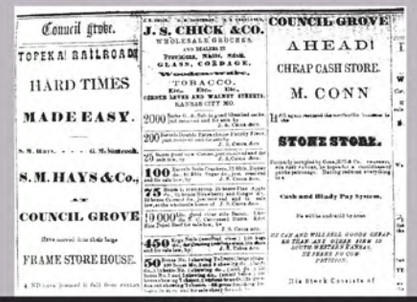
Conn Store

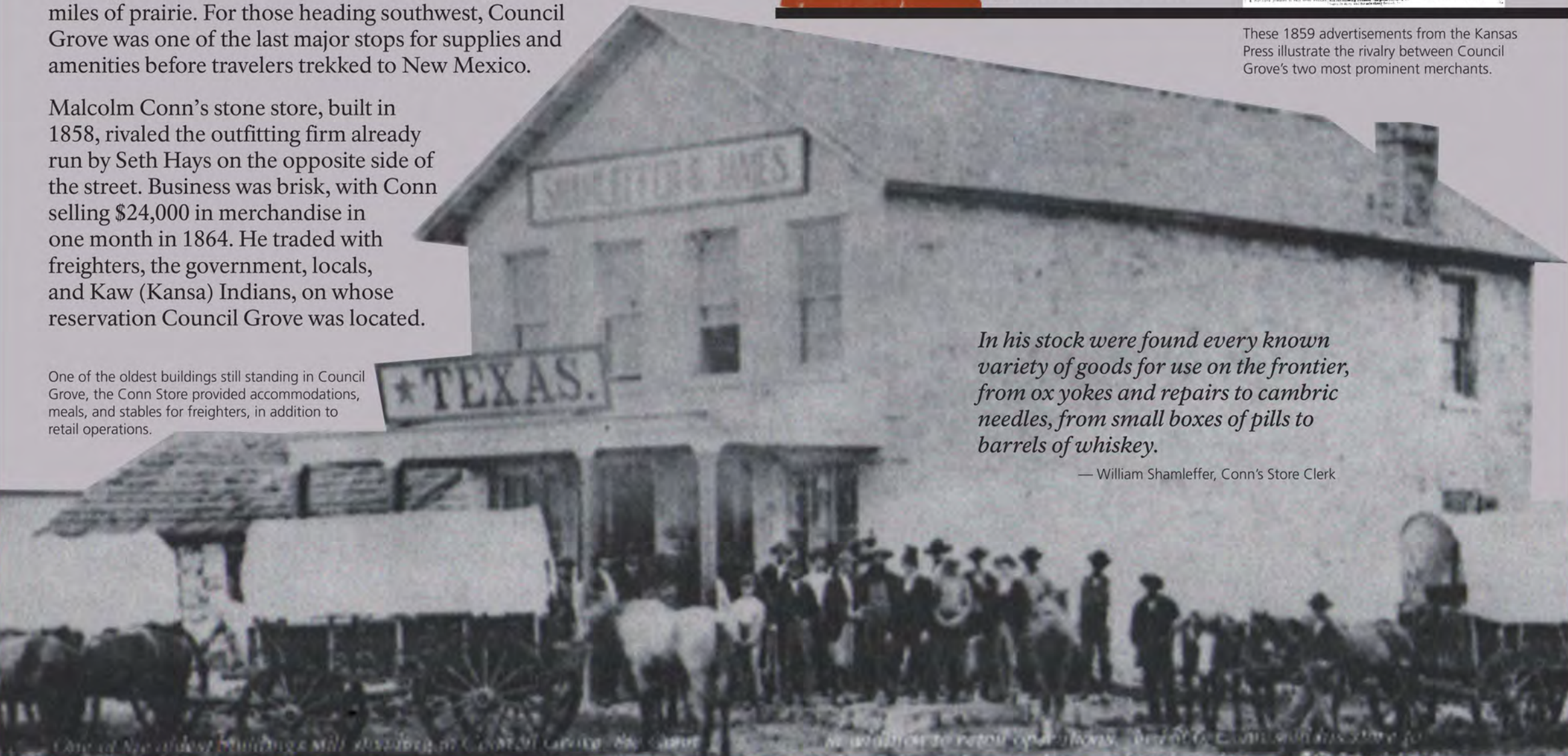
For traders on the Santa Fe Trail after 1858, the Conn Store was a welcome sight. At the store, traders heading east from Santa Fe to "the States" could purchase a meal or sleep in a bed for the first time after crossing 625 miles of prairie. For those heading southwest, Council Grove was one of the last major stops for supplies and amenities before travelers trekked to New Mexico.

Malcolm Conn's stone store, built in 1858, rivaled the outfitting firm already run by Seth Hays on the opposite side of the street. Business was brisk, with Conn selling $24,000 in merchandise in one month in 1864. He traded with freighters, the government, locals, and Kaw (Kansa) Indians, on whose reservation Council Grove was located.

Conn became a community leader, eventually serving as county clerk and treasurer of the Town Company, a corporation that platted and sold town lots. In 1866, Conn sold his store to Shamleffer & James, who took the store photo between 1867 and 1871.



These 1859 advertisements from the Kansas Press illustrate the rivalry between Council Grove's two most prominent merchants.



One of the oldest buildings still standing in Council Grove, the Conn Store provided accommodations, meals, and stables for freighters, in addition to retail operations.

In his stock were found every known variety of goods for use on the frontier, from ox yokes and repairs to cambric needles, from small boxes of pills to barrels of whiskey.

— William Shamleffer, Conn's Store Clerk

Rendezvous on the Trail

This was once a place of early morning racket, dust, and confusion as wagons bound for Santa Fe rattled and jockeyed for position to form a train. Soldiers, freighters, gold seekers, and adventurers collected here to join other travelers in caravans. Wagon masters shouted, "Catch up!" to the teamsters—then "Stretch out!" as the wagons began to move.

Trail Caravans

Trail travelers met here to organize into caravans before crossing the 625 miles of mostly treeless plains. Members elected officers and established rules of travel. Most years, freighting took place from May to October.

Why Meet Here?

There is a quantity of fine timber consisting of oaks, hickory, walnut. . .Each company coming out generally stop here a day or so to repair their wagons, rest the stock, get timbers for the remainder of the journey; these are lashed under the wagons.

—Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846

Trail Traffic

In the early 1820s, only pack trains and a few wagons headed west to Santa Fe, but, by 1846, traffic had increased dramatically. That year, the clang of a blacksmith's hammer echoed over Council Grove as he repaired wagons and shod horses, mules, and oxen.

In 1863, a local merchant recorded that 15,000 tons of freight valued at over $40 million moved through Council Grove, including:

3,072	3,000	618	20,812	8,046	98
Men	Wagons	Horses	Oxen	Mules	Carriages

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

National Park Service
City of Council Grove
Kansas State Historical Society

Council Oak

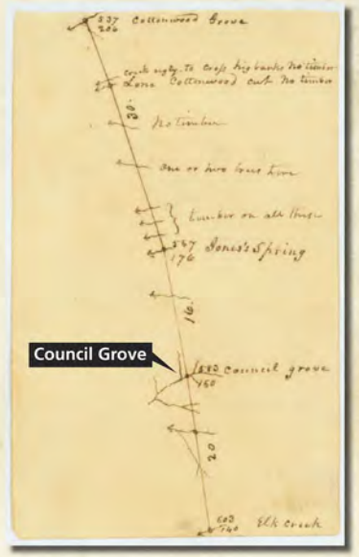
The remnants of the oak before you once witnessed a council between the Kaw and Osage Indians and representatives of the United States. The hunting grounds of the Kaw (Kansa) and Osage Indians were located here when Americans and Mexicans began hauling trade goods over the Santa Fe Trail in 1821. Four years later, in response to US traders and merchants who eagerly sought trade with Mexicans, the US Congress authorized treaty negotiations between US commissioners and the leaders of the Kaw and Osage.

They Met at Council Grove

At an oak grove at this site, US Commissioner George C. Sibley and two others met with Pa-hu-ska (White Hair), head chief of the Great Osages; and Ca-he-ga-wa-ton-ega (Foolish Chief), head chief of the Little Osages. Congress had authorized that a road be surveyed and marked from the western frontier of Missouri to New Mexico. A mountain man, "Old Bill" Williams, served as translator.

On August 10, 1825, they signed a treaty granting passage through Osage territory for citizens of the United States and Mexico in exchange for $800 in cash, plus ribbons, tobacco, calico, and other goods.

The Kaw Indians were hunting buffalo to the west when the treaty was signed. Sibley caught up with the Kaw at Dry Turkey Creek (a few miles south of the Santa Fe Trail near present-day McPherson) and signed an identical treaty with them six days later.



Sibley named the site "Council Grove." Traders continued to use the name when referring to the site, and later on, to the small settlement founded here by 1847. The community grew, and the town was incorporated in 1865.

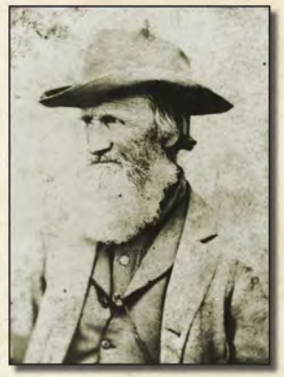
Seth Hays Home

Seth M. Hays was a shrewd, colorful, and successful trader, rancher, tavern owner, and publisher. Great-grandson of Daniel Boone, he first came here to trade with the area's Indians in 1847. His businesses became very lucrative. He built this home in 1867; it was elaborate for Council Grove at that time.

Hays witnessed many changes in Council Grove over his 25 years as a community leader: the Kaw (Kansa) Indians were relocated to their reservation in this area; the settlement he started grew into a town; and Kansas evolved into a territory, and then achieved statehood. Hays lived in this home until his death in 1873.

Residents of the Hays House

Seth Hays



Seth Hays moved here in 1867 after a long career as a businessman in Council Grove. Though he was a life-long bachelor, Hays adopted five-year-old Kittie Parker Robbins on the same day he recorded the deed to this home.

Aunt Sally

Sarah Taylor, "Aunt Sally," came to Council Grove with Seth Hays as his slave. With the admission of Kansas to the Union in 1861, she was freed, but chose to remain in the Hays household. She lived in her basement quarters and cared for her "family" until her death in 1872. She is buried in the Greenwood Cemetery, close to Seth Hays.

Miss Kittie

Hays' adopted daughter, "Miss Kittie," was the child of James and Caroline Robbins. Hays took her into his home as a foster child while she was still an infant, after her mother died during childbirth. Hays died when Kittie was only 11 years old, leaving her as his sole heir. She completed boarding school in Westport, Missouri, married, and settled in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

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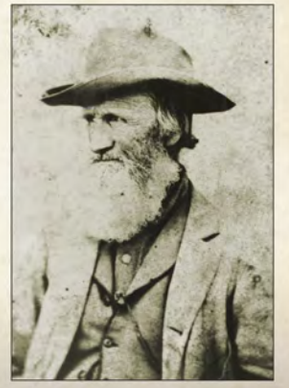
A Well-Furnished Store

Seth Hays came here in 1847 to trade with the Kaw (Kansa) Indians, who purchased guns, blankets, flour, and tinware from him. About 1857, he replaced his log store with this frame building, which served citizens and travelers as a trading post, courthouse, post office, printing office, and meeting and social hall. Business was lively: in a four day period in 1860, the Kaw Indians spent $15,000 here and across the street at the Conn Store.

The Santa Fe trade became increasingly lucrative. In 1863, Hays' former partner, G. M. Simcock, estimated that $40 million in freight was hauled in ox- and mule-drawn wagons through the town. In addition to supplies, the Hays House offered meals and rooms to weary traders on their eight-week trip between New Mexico and Missouri.



Seth Hays, a great-grandson of Daniel Boone, was Council Grove's first permanent settler. He helped to organize the town and to create a thriving trade center here during the Santa Fe Trail era.

Those who have occasion to stop at Council Grove, on the Santa Fe Road, will do well to 'put up' with Charles A. Gilkey [Hays' hotel clerk]... mine host of the Hayes House. [They]...cannot but help feeling quite at home.

Kansas Press, July 11, 1859

Hays' frame store in 1868.

Hermit's Cave

Down the steps and under the rock in front of you is a small recess. For a few months in 1863, it was home to a religious mystic Giovanni de Agostini. Born in 1801 in Novara, Italy, he was the son of a nobleman and received a fine education in preparation for the priesthood, but reportedly was forced to leave Italy after falling in love with a young lady. Here, in Council Grove, he was known as Father Francesco.

He left Council Grove with a Santa Fe Trail wagon train owned by Don Eugenio Romero and captained by Dionicio Gonzalez, walking the entire 550 miles to Las Vegas, New Mexico. There, he is said to have performed miracle cures, which attracted crowds. He retreated to a nearby mountain.

Initially called the Hermit of *El Porvenir* (the future), he lived in a cave on what came to be known as Hermit's Peak. The citizens of Las Vegas soon built him a small cabin, where he carved religious emblems, which he traded in town for cornmeal. The Hermit left for southern New Mexico and the Organ Mountains in 1867. He was mysteriously murdered in 1869.

He appears rather an intelligent man, speaks nine different languages. He has lived a Hermit some thirty five years.... Last winter he lived five months in a hollow tree near Westport, Mo. He refuses to eat bread or meat; his food consists of corn meal mixed with water or milk without cooking.

Council Grove Press, April 27, 1863

In his travels through Europe and the Americas, the hermit used several names, including Father Francesco, Matteo Boccalini, and his birthname, Giovanni Maria de Agostini.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico

Surviving Removal

This land was once part of Kaw and Osage homelands. In the early 1800s, the Kaws' domain extended well beyond today's state borders. In 1846, the federal government had forced the Kaw people onto a twenty-mile-square reservation surrounding Council Grove. About 1,000 people, struggling with disease and starvation, lived in three nearby villages. The Kaw lived here in the Neosho Valley for less than 30 years when, despite an impassioned plea to Congress by Chief Allegawaho in 1873, the US government relocated 600 Kaws to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

Life at Kaw Mission

[The Kaw Mission School] averaged about thirty pupils, all boys. The branches taught were spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic. None of them received instruction in the trades. The boys worked well on the farm."

Teacher Thomas Huffaker, 1905

In 1850, workers from the Shawnee Methodist Mission near Kansas City traveled 110 miles on the Santa Fe Trail to build this mission and boarding school for Kaw (Kansa) Indian boys. The mission opened in 1851, with funding from the US government. For three years, 30 Kaw boys called this building home and school.

Mission schools were part of the effort to assimilate American Indians into white culture and toward Christianity. However, the government reported that the operational costs were too high, and the school and mission closed in 1854.

While it was the Kaw Indians who gave the State of Kansas its name, the headquarters for the Kaw Nation is now in Oklahoma, where the tribe was removed to in 1873.

Photographs courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Last Chance Store

Perched on the edge of Council Grove, this building opened as a store during the 1857 trading season. Here was the last opportunity for traders bound for Santa Fe to purchase supplies before venturing into the homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, Kiowa, and Plains Apache Indians.

The security of the Council Grove settlement gave way to the semi-arid, open plains. Limited supplies were available at isolated trading ranches along the trail—the next supply station to the west took one to two days to reach from Council Grove.

Traders continuing west on the Santa Fe Trail were wise to consider this store's slogan: "Last Chance for Beans, Bacon and Whiskey" before leaving.

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

National Park Service
City of Council Grove
Kansas State Historical Society

Neosho Crossing

River crossings on the Santa Fe Trail were a tricky business. Ornery livestock and soft river bottoms compounded the hazards of easing a two- to three-ton wagon into the water and struggling up the opposite bank. The best crossings had a combination of shallow water, a rock bed, and gentle slopes.

The shallow ripples in the river indicate the natural rock bed where heavy prairie freighters crossed the Neosho River. During the trail era, the riverbanks sloped more gently to the water's edge than today.

The creek bank, which is short and steep, made some little detention in the crossing of the wagons, they had to double teams several times. It is amusing here to hear the shouting of the wagoners to their animals, whooping and hallowing; the cracking of whips almost deafening.

Second Lieutenant William D. Whipple, 1852

The Neosho is a quick-running stream, with a stony and gravelly bed, not over 30 feet wide at our crossing and not more than from 18 inches to 2 feet depth of water. On the opposite or west bank we found the small trading settlement of Council Grove. . .

Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846

This 1903 photo offers a glimpse of the original river crossing. Wagons that crossed here were laden with tons of cloth, tools, jewelry, guns, and even canaries, in wagons headed to Santa Fe and deep into Mexico. Silver, wool, mules, and hides were hauled to Missouri and the United States by eastbound traders.

Post Office Oak

The stump before you is all that is left of a grand old oak tree that was about 270 years old when it died in 1990. The tree, which once stood 80 feet high, was located in a campground used by Santa Fe Trail travelers.

The tree is said to have been used as a "post office" from the 1820s to the 1840s. In a cavity at the foot of the tree, travelers reputedly left messages about water sources, Plains Indian unrest, and other information.

In 1855, Council Grove's first postmaster was appointed. But, because there was no official post office, the postmaster simply distributed mail from a sack on the street, or emptied it onto the floor of a store where postal patrons claimed their own mail.

Communication is something that we take for granted today. During the Santa Fe Trail era, information moved much more slowly.

For instance, news of President Abraham Lincoln's April 14, 1865 assassination reached Council Grove on April 20 and Santa Fe fifteen days later, on May 5, 1865.

THE NEW MEXICAN

MANDERFIELD & TUCKER, "Tell my children to support the Constitution and the laws."—Douglas. [Publishers.

VOL. 3. SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO. MAY 5, 1865. NO. 14.

LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS,
ADVERTISEMENTS.
C. R. MOREHEAD & CO.,
WHOLESALE GROCERS,
AND
COMMISSION MERCHANTS,
LEAVENWORTH CITY, KANSAS.
CLARK, GRUBB & Co.,
BANKERS
AND
DEALERS IN EXCHANGE,
LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS.
CARNEY & STEVENS,
WHOLESALE GROCERS,
Corner Delaware street and Levee
LEAVENWORTH, - - KANSAS

Attention! Travelers!!

THE MAIL ROUTE FROM
EL PASO
TO
KANSAS CITY VIA SANTA FE
COMFORTABLE COACHES
and
FRESH ANIMALS

From the Denver News.

Assassination of President Lincoln

Washington, April 14, 1865.

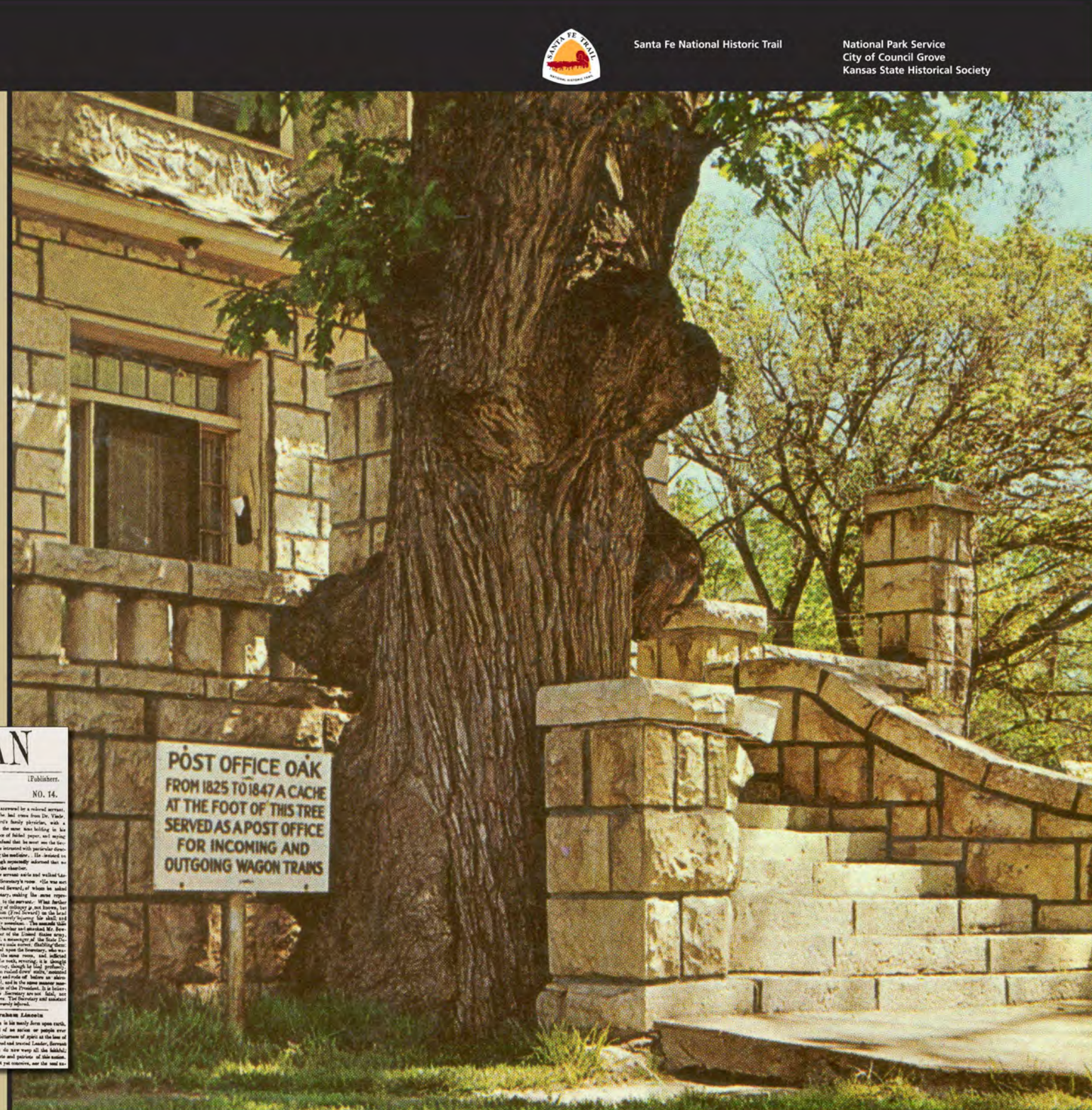
President Lincoln and wife with other friends this evening visited Ford's Theatre for the purpose of witnessing the performance of "Our American Cousin." It was also announced in the papers that General Grant would be present, but that gentleman took the late train for New Jersey. The theatre was densely crowded. Everybody seemed delighted with the scene before them. During the third act, and while there was a temporary pause for one of the actors to enter, the sharp report of a pistol was heard, which scarcely attracted attention, but suggested nothing serious, until a man, rushing to the front of the President's box, waving a long dagger in his right hand, exclaiming "sic semper tyrannis," and immediately leaped from the box, which was in the second tier, to the stage beneath, and ran across to the opposite side of the stage, making his escape amidst the confusion of the audience, from the rear of the theatre, and mounting a horse he fled.

The screams of Mrs. Lincoln first directed the fact to the audience that the President had been shot, when all present rushed to their feet, exclaiming "hang him." The excitement was at its highest possible description, and, of course, there was an abrupt close of the theatrical performance. There was a rush towards the President's box, when cries were heard of "stop him," "shoot him," "give him air," "the man has escaped," "he is mad," &c.

On a hasty examination, it was found that the President had been shot through the head and back of the temporal bone. Some of the brain was coming out; he was removed to a

And the call was answered by a colored servant. The man said he had come from Dr. Verdi, Secretary Seward's family physician, with a prescription; at the same time holding in his hand a small piece of folded paper, and saying in answer to a refusal that he must see the Secretary, as he was intrusted with particular directions concerning the medicine. He insisted on going up, although repeatedly informed that no one could enter the chamber.

He pushed the servant aside and walked Up towards the Secretary's room. (He was met there by Mr. Fred Seward, of whom he asked to see the Secretary, making the same representation he did to the servant. What further passed in the way of colloquy is not known, but the man struck him (Fred Seward) on the head with a "billy," severely injuring his skull, and felling him nearly senseless. The assassin then rushed into the chamber and attacked Mr. Seward, a paymaster of the United States army, and Mr. Hansel, a messenger of the State Department, and two male nurses, finishing them. He then rushed upon the Secretary, who was lying in bed in the same room, and inflicted three stabs on the neck, severing, it is thought, the jugular vein, and probably the carotid artery. The assassin then rushed down stairs, mounted his horse quickly and rode off before an alarm could be sounded, and in the same manner made to the rear of the President. It is believed the injuries of the Secretary are not fatal, nor those of the others. The Secretary and assistant are severely injured.

Abraham Lincoln

Lives no more in his manly form upon earth, and the faithful of an entire people ever wept in deeper bitterness of spirit at the loss of their most beloved and trusted Leader, Servant and Chief, than do now weep all the faithful, the philanthropists and patriots of this nation. The mind cannot yet conceive, nor the soul re-