

Book Review

Wagons for the Santa Fe Trade—Wheeled Vehicles and Their Makers 1822-1880 by Mark L. Gardner. Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. 224 pages, illustrated, softcover \$19.95.

Reviewed by Rex Rideout

Mark Gardner has compiled an excellent, and perhaps the first ever, study of the development and construction of heavy freight wagons and carriages employed on the Santa Fe Trail. His book, *Wagons for the Santa Fe Trade Wheeled Vehicles and Their Makers 1822-1880*, Gardner covers the Santa Fe Trail trade from 1820 until 1880, when the freight wagons were supplanted by the railroad coming into the Southwest. A fair representation of wagons in general use is included in the book as well.

There was an astonishing enterprise of trade culminating with tens of thousands of wagons, each pulled by roughly a dozen mules or oxen and typically carrying five thousand pounds of freight. These were sent from cities in Missouri such as Westport, Kansas City, and St. Louis to Santa Fe, carrying over the years a total of tens of millions in pounds of goods. In one year alone, there were almost ten thousand that made the journey. Most of the wagons did not make the return trip east, but instead they were sold in Santa Fe along with the draft stock.

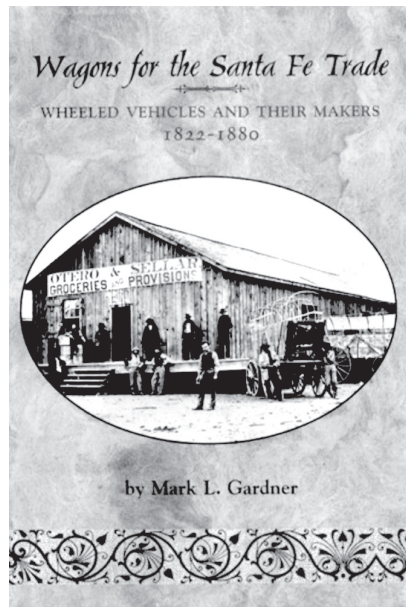
These wagons, which normally had to cross almost a thousand miles of prairie, mountain passes, and rivers, were severely tested the skill of the maker. Gardner describes—with details and drawings of construction—how the wagons were developed and improved over time from the Pennsylvania model to the Conestoga to the Santa Fe Trail wagon. Some were designed for special tasks or enormous capacity like the Stockton or Prairie Schooner and Joseph Murphy's "Monster" wagon. The book also includes a review of personal carriages, in particular the Dearborn, Rockaway, and spring wagons.

The methods of hitching draft stock, which are explained with illustrations, differ depending on whether the animals are oxen or mules and how many are employed, as well as the size of the wagon. There are also discussions of the merits of which animal to employ.

Gardner's extensive research included account books, U.S. industrial census, newspapers, archival materials, and rare photographs, and there are descriptions and photographs of power and hand tools used in the making of wagons. EAIA members will appreciate a comparison of manufacture with hand tools and power tools, as well as the varied sources of power. Gardner even follows the changes in construction over time, from one man making a complete wagon to assembly lines and parts shops. The makers' stores and warehouses in the west and the east are reviewed as well as prominent figures in the industry.

There is also a nod to the "Wind Wagon" of Westport, a wagon equipped with sails that sailed the prairie, said to be but a myth. Detailed drawings, patent applications, and personal accounts of sightings and misadventures sometimes bordering on hilarious suggest that the famous wagon may have not gotten far beyond the testing stage, but did in fact exist.

The wagons and the carting industry encouraged trade between the United States and Santa Fe, which proved to have a profound impact. Travel and established routes led more Americans to set up homes and businesses in the area, a course of events that ultimately led to war and the annexation by the United States of much of the southwestern parts of the nation. The book is well documented with footnotes and a complete bibliography. Anyone with an interest in animal-drawn rolling stock should have a copy of this book.



Rex Rideout is an EAIA member from Colorado.