

# This Day in History... March 29, 1827

## Founding of Independence, Missouri

On March 29, 1827, Independence, Missouri, was founded. Known as the “Queen City of the Trails,” it became the starting point for several trails that settlers took to travel West.

The area now known as Independence, Missouri, was initially home to the Missouri and Osage Native American tribes. Part of Spanish and briefly French territory, it became part of the United States in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase. When Lewis and Clark explored the West on their 1804 expedition, they collected plums, raspberries, and wild apples in an area that later became part of the city.

Independence, Missouri was officially established on March 29, 1827. It was named after the Declaration of Independence, and quickly grew into a major frontier town. It was the furthest spot westward on the Missouri River from which steamboats could travel. It soon became an important center for the growing fur trade and the starting point for merchants and explorers traveling West on the Santa Fe Trail, which was blazed in 1821. This 900-mile foreign trade route was unusual for the time, because it went overland, instead of by sea.



*Independence was a starting point for the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico.*

In 1848, the announcement of the discovery of gold in California led thousands to head West in hopes of making it rich. While there were several trails, many began their journey in Independence, following part of the Oregon Trail, and branching off along the 1,600-mile California Trail.

In the 1830s, Joseph Smith, founder of the Latter Day Saint movement, declared a spot in Independence as the site of the temple of the New Jerusalem. However, conflicts arose with locals and Smith’s followers were driven from the area in 1833, eventually leading to the 1838 Mormon War. Members of the movement would later return in the 1860s.



*The California gold rush led thousands to pass through Independence in the hopes of striking it rich.*



*Independence is home to Truman’s presidential museum & library and national historic site.*

Independence, Missouri was a relatively small town with a population of only a few hundred people. However, every spring, it was the jumping off point for thousands of people heading West on these trails. The town’s residents made a lucrative living providing these emigrants with the wagons and supplies they’d need for the grueling journey.

When trade routes began to shift to towns upriver, the town established the Independence & Wayne City Railroad (also known as the Missouri River Railroad). It was the first railroad west of the Mississippi River, but it went bankrupt in 1851. In 1850, the first overland mail route west of Missouri was established, running between Independence and Salt Lake City, Utah. Another route to Santa Fe was also established that year.

However, in the 1850s, tensions over slavery broke out between Kansas and Missouri and the area was considered unsafe, leading travelers to find a new starting point for their westward journeys. Independence was the site of two Civil War battles (the First and Second Battles of Independence). Despite significant efforts to build up the town, it was unable to regain its previous prominence, especially with the rise of nearby Kansas City – though Independence has remained the county seat.

In 1890, six-year-old future president Harry Truman and his family moved to Independence. He spent much of his formative years there, and would return frequently – his family home was later made into a national historic site and Independence hosts his presidential library and museum. Truman also popularized the phrase, “The Buck Stops Here,” which has been incorporated into Independence’s motto – “Where the Trails Start and the Buck Stops.”

Today, Independence is Missouri’s fifth-largest city with a population of about 115,000.



*Missouri statehood stamp picturing Thomas Hart Benton’s mural Independence and the Opening of the West. Commissioned for the Harry Truman Library, it depicts the city’s history between 1817 and 1847.*

The 2,170-mile Oregon Trail was initially established by fur traders and trappers between 1811 and 1840. Some of the earliest settlers to take the Oregon Trail began their journey in Independence in 1836. By the mid-1800s, an Act of Congress officially declared Independence as the start of the Oregon Trail.

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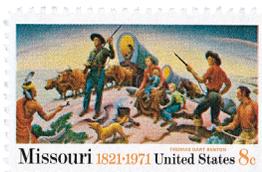


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