

Independence, Missouri

Founded in 1827 near where the Missouri River flows into the Mississippi, the town of Independence grew rapidly as a trading post. By the 1840's, it was the most popular "jumping off" point for pioneers to prepare and



stock their wagons with supplies before heading out to Oregon or California. There was generally a festive air in Independence in the spring. The newcomers collected information and misinformation, made friends and enemies, changed proposed destinations, and behaved in general as though they were on a picnic.

Because of the fear of Indian attacks (which was largely unfounded), emigrants often tried organize a traveling party here, because no one wanted to head west alone.

By mid April, the prairie outside Independence was packed with emigrant campers-- often over three square miles worth. It was so crowded, one emigrant spent four days just trying to find his friends.

When it was finally time to go, everyone wanted to get started at the same time--and the result was often a huge traffic jam. Even worse were greenhorns from cities back east, who had never before yoked an oxen or driven a mule team. They tipped their wagons, bumped into trees and couldn't even get their animals to go in the right direction.