

Meet Don Antonio Jose Chavez



Real People! Real Stories!

Santa Fe Trail Hall of Fame

Don Antonio José Chávez
(circa 1810 – 1843)

- Trader, Freighter, Merchant and Politician
- Descendant of founder of Santa Fe
- Family was large sheep ranchers and involved in the mining industry
- Family prominent in Politics
- Member of one of the most prominent families in New Mexico
- Murdered on the Santa Fe Trail

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Don Antonio José Chávez belonged to an old Spanish family that had been prominent in New Mexico since it was created as a province in 1598. His paternal grandfather, Don Pedro, arrived in New Spain in the late 1500s and left Zacatecas with the Juan de Oñate Expedition to colonize New Mexico, and was one of the founders of Villa Santa Fe in 1610.

Don Antonio was the second of four sons born to Don Francisco Xavier Chávez, who had large holdings of land and livestock. The Chávez family was involved in sheep-raising, gold and silver mining, and commercial freighting and trade, traveling the Santa Fe Trail and El Camino de Real. The Chávez family traveled the Santa Fe Trail to Independence and beyond, and returned with goods to be sold in New Mexico and farther into Mexico.

The Santa Fe trade continued without interruption until the year 1843, when there was planned military activity along the Santa Fe Trail by the armed forces of Texas, who claimed the north boundary of Texas to be the Arkansas River. In November 1842 it was reported in Santa Fe that Texan forces were planning to attack Mexican traders passing over the Trail, in the coming spring. Giving little heed to that rumor Don Antonio José Chávez started from Santa Fe, destined for Independence, in February 1843. He took with him five servants, his personal conveyance, two wagons and fifty-five mules. He carried some twelve thousand dollars in gold and silver, and some bales of furs. Severe weather was encountered, the month of March proving unusually cold. The men were frost-bitten, and all the mules save five perished in the storms. By the 10th of April, Chávez had come to the waters of Owl Creek in present-day Rice County, KS. There he was intercepted by a company of fifteen men commanded by one John McDaniel who had organized his band on the frontier of Missouri for the purpose of attacking the Santa Fe caravans under the supposed direction of the Texans. Chávez was made captive and taken off the trail. He was robbed, and his effects were divided among the group, seven of whom immediately set out for Missouri with their portions of the spoil. The others decided to murder Chávez, shooting him in cold blood. They then packed their loot upon Chávez's mules and also departed for Western Missouri. Information of what they had done soon came to the Missouri authorities, and several of them were arrested. Some of the guilty escaped, including three of the actual murderers. But John McDaniel was tried at St. Louis and hanged for his crime. The United State was caught up in the middle of an international conflict between Mexico and Texas which threatened the important trade with Mexico. The action taken and swift justice to punish the murderers helped resolve the situation.