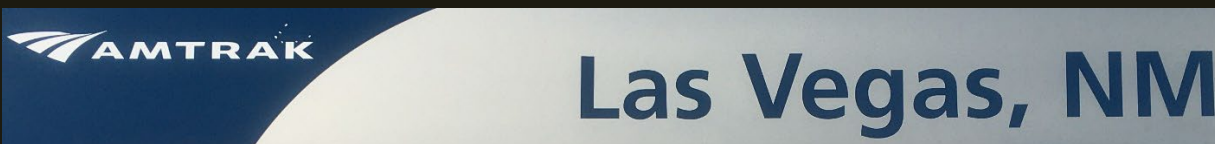




One of the most famous railroad “wars” occurred in 1878-1879 between the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway and the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad for access to Raton Pass and thus to Santa Fe, the Rio Grande, and ultimately El Paso, Texas, Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. The AT&SF got Raton Pass, and in exchange the D&RG got the Royal Gorge (Arkansas River) route and became the mountain railroad. The AT&SF built over Raton Pass and entered New Mexico under the name New Mexico & Southern Pacific Railroad, which reached Las Vegas, New Mexico (this location), in 1879, and met the Southern Pacific at Deming, New Mexico, in 1881. After 1908, the Eastern Railway of New Mexico (1908), together with the AT&SF’s Atlantic & Pacific Railroad (1883), became the AT&SF’s (now BNSF’s) primary transcontinental route. In 2006, the State of New Mexico purchased the segment of the NM&SP (1881) line between Raton Pass and Belen, where the ERNM (1908) mainline crosses the line, with the BNSF retaining operating rights. Amtrak leases passenger service over the line for its Southwest Chief trains between Chicago and Los Angeles.

Northwestward view of the AT&SF Depot and the NM&SP (1881) tracks in Las Vegas. The depot was built in 1898-1899.






Caboose on display near the AT&SF Depot.


Santa Fe Trail National Scenic Byway

End of an Era




Imagine the excitement when, on July 4, 1879, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad steamed into town for the first time. Suddenly you could travel from Kansas City to Las Vegas in days, not months. But the arrival of the railroad marked the end for one of the great overland trails. The Santa Fe Trail had been an important highway of commerce for almost 60 years, running between Missouri and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Travelers and traders had struggled to cover the arduous 900 miles, which often took two months or more. And now the trip could be made, in the comfort of a railway coach, in a few days.


Trail sites nearby



Las Vegas Plaza
From a rooftop on the north side of Las Vegas Plaza, General Stephen Watts Kearny proclaimed New Mexico as part of the rapidly expanding United States in 1846. A plaque commemorates the event.



Watrous
The Samuel Watrous store today is a private ranch home. It was an important rest stop and source of supplies for travelers on the Santa Fe Trail.



Wagon Mound
This landmark could be seen for miles and signaled to the woodsmen's trail travelers that they were only twelve miles from Santa Fe.

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad reached Las Vegas on July 4, 1879, ending the need for the Santa Fe Trail.

Queen of the West
Las Vegas, founded in 1835, and named for the meadows that surrounded it, was an important stop on the Santa Fe Trail. It quickly prospered due to the constant trail traffic, and by 1850, was the most important city between Kansas City and Santa Fe. It continued to prosper after the railroad arrived and into the early years of the 20th century. It was the "Queen of the West" boasting the finest hotels, restaurants, drinking establishments, mercantile houses, and opera houses.

ATCHISON, TOPEKA & SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY DEPOT

1898 - 1899

The arrival of the Railroad in 1879 had a profound effect on Las Vegas. For 30 years the main rail line through the Southwest made Las Vegas the region's headquarters for the A.T. & S.F.R.R. The structure is one of the earliest examples of California Mission Revival architecture in New Mexico.

