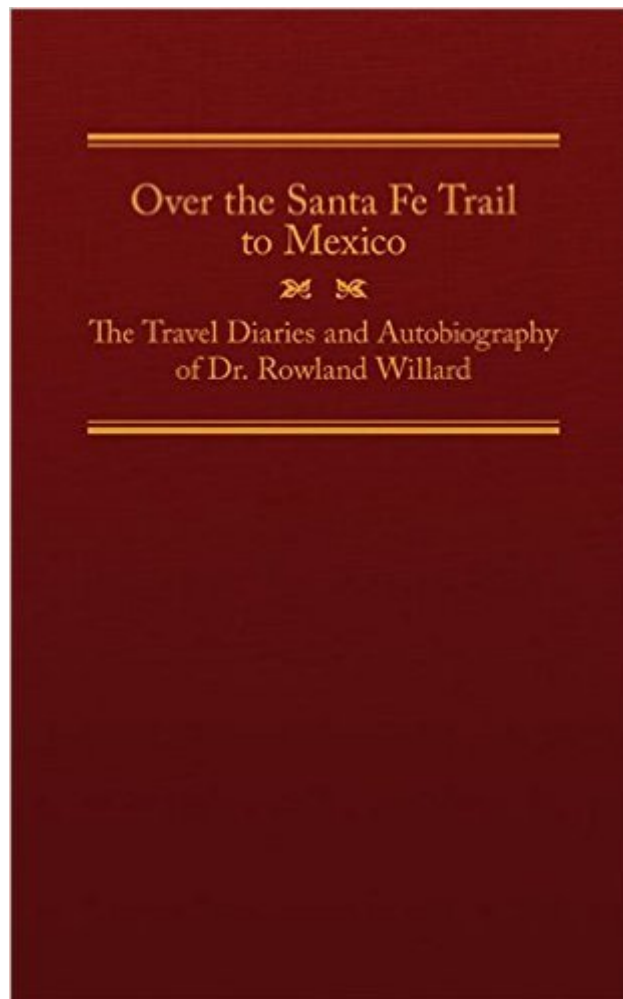


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Over The Santa Fe Trail To Mexico: The Travel Diaries And Autobiography Of Dr. Rowland Willard (The American Trails Series)



Synopsis

One of the first Anglo-Americans to record their travels to New Mexico, Dr. Rowland Willard (1794–1884) journeyed west on the Santa Fe Trail in 1825 and then down the Camino Real into Mexico, taking notes along the way. This edition of the young physician's travel diaries and subsequent autobiography, annotated by New Mexico Deputy State Librarian Joy L. Poole, is a rich historical source on the two trails and the practice of medicine in the 1820s. Few Americans knew much about New Mexico when Willard set out on his journey from St. Charles, Missouri, where he had recently completed a medical apprenticeship. The growing commerce with the Southwest presented opportunities for the ambitious doctor. On his first day travelling the plains of the Santa Fe Trail, he met the mountain man Hugh Glass, who regaled Willard with stories of his wilderness experiences. Conducting a physical examination of Glass, Dr. Willard provided the only eye witness medical account of Glass's deformities resulting from a grizzly bear attack. Willard referred to the mountain man as Father Glass, a testimony to his age. He visited Santa Fe, practiced medicine in Taos, then traveled south to Chihuahua, arriving during a measles epidemic. Willard treated patients in Mexico for two years before returning to Missouri in 1828. Willard's narrative challenges long-accepted assumptions about the exact routes taken by pack trains on the Santa Fe Trail. It also provides thrilling glimpses of a landscape densely populated with wildlife. The doctor describes "a great theater of nature," with droves of elk and buffalo, and "wolf and antelope skipping in every direction." With his traveling companions he hunted buffalo by crawling after them on all fours, afterward making jerky out of bison meat and boots out of their hides. Willard also details his medical practice, offering a revealing view of physicians' operating practices in a time when sanitation and anesthesia were rare. The Santa Fe Trail and Camino Real took Willard on the journey of a lifetime. This account recalls the early days of the Santa Fe Trail trade and westward American migration, when a doctor from Missouri could cross paths with mountain men, traders, Mexican clergymen, and government officials on their way to new opportunities.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very enjoyable read which will appeal to a wide variety of readers. Although I donâ™t have a medical background, I especially enjoyed the descriptions of Dr. Willardâ™s medical practices. Blood letting seemed to be a major treatment for a variety of ailments. With the exceptions of high rents, certain aspects of Santa Fe hasnâ™t changed much since the 1820s- nightly fandangos, chile with most meals, and interesting characters. I loved reading the description of Dr. Willard's examination of Hugh Glass, the mountain man - a story so riveting that Hollywood has created a movie about it "Revenant"! I think many readers, not just historians, will enjoy the descriptions in Dr. Willardâ™s travel journal â" visiting a Pueblo Indian village in New Mexico, the social stratification in Mexico, and the practices of a medical doctor in the first part of the 1800s. It's a fascinating book.

Susan Magoffin and Adolf Wislizenus move over! Rowland Willard is on the trail. Willard travelled the Santa Fe Trail and the northern portion of the Camino Real twenty years before this illustrious pair of diarists. Having recently finished his medical apprenticeship in Saint Charles Missouri, Willard was ready for adventure. He gathered his guns, threw his saddle over his horse and set off for Taos with the annual caravan. After a couple of months in Taos, he continued south to Chihuahua where he spent a little over two years practicing in the community and becoming friends with the local aristocracy. It served him well. With the expulsion of the Spanish he decided it was time for him to move on, and he headed for the coast and back up to Missouri. He claims to have smuggled \$2400 but deposited over \$7000 in an account at the Bank of New Orleans. That would

have been a nice income for just a couple of years. After he retired more than thirty years later, he took his diaries and wove them into an autobiography that not only makes a fine adventure but provides us with insight into the life of the times, stimulates our imagination and brings us face to face with the raw realities of frontier living. Joy Poole worked hard to transcribe Willard's™ texts and present them in an intelligible fashion with screeds of footnotes that will thrill the history geek and provide innumerable stimuli for future research.

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