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Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2023 - Transportation in the Flint Hills

Windwagons

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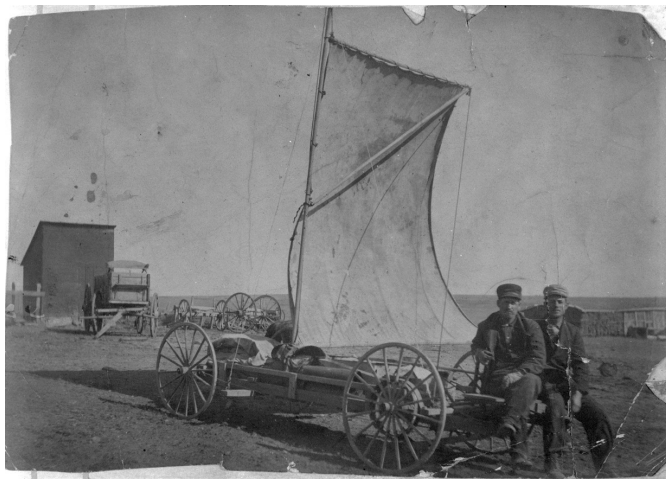
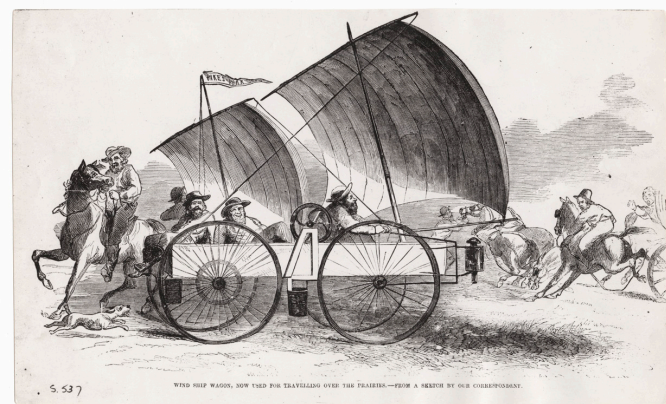
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Windwagon Sketch From Leslie's Illustrated
Windwagon, Logan County, Kansas
kansasmemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society

WINDWAGONS

In the Kansas territorial period, a few enterprising people sought to harness the famous Kansas wind for transportation across the prairie.

They built windwagons, sometimes called sailing wagons. The press gave them quite a bit of attention in 1860, says Kansapedia, the Kansas Historical Society's online encyclopedia of Kansas history.

According to Kansapedia, windwagons "were similar to an ordinary light wagon; weighed about 350 pounds; had a bed about three feet wide, eight feet long, and six inches deep; and were propelled by a sail or sails raised over the center of the front axle. When the breezes blew in the right direction the wagons were reported to skim over the prairies at about 15 miles per hour, with speeds at up to 40 miles per hour."

When a windwagon arrived in Council Grove, Kansas, in 1860, the Council Grove Press reported, "The veritable windwagon has at last arrived in this place from Westport, Mo., a distance of 125 miles, propelled all the way by wind. It has sails somewhat similar to the sails of the schooners on our western lakes. Who says now that the Santa Fe road is not a navigable stream? We expect soon to see this wagon making regular trips between this place and Westport. Running time 42 hours."

Other Kansas newspapers picked up the Council Grove story and ran it in their papers.

But wagons propelled by wind never caught on. Euro-American settlers continued to rely on horses and oxen to pull their wagons.