



# Colorful Characters

## Chapter 5 - by Kay Hively

**W**ith his first art teacher gone, George settled down to a more routine life, helping his parents run their business and attending school. He liked working in the Square and Compass where he met customers and learned all the news that came up and down the river.

There was much talk that Missouri would become a state. Everyone talked about that, and the newspapers were full of statehood talk. Almost every day politicians came to town and made speeches about the future of Missouri. George liked hearing the speeches and listening to the sometimes unruly crowd.

Another piece of news was about opening a new trade route to Mexico.

Because Franklin was a trading town, this was big news. This would make the overland traders happy, and the boatmen would have more business hauling goods for sale or trade in

Mexico. People said if the new route opened, traders would travel in their big ox carts in groups like a wagon train.

When he could, George spent time with the boatmen. These men worked hard, dressed in colorful clothing, and were wonderful storytellers. He admired their strength and good humor.

In 1821, Missouri became the 24th state in the Union, and William Becknell, a Franklin trader, opened



the Santa Fe Trail. Upon his return, Becknell told stories about all the money to be made in Mexico. Immediately, traders in their large-wheeled carts headed to Mexico and brought back large silver

dollars. These dollars were called "Mexican cartwheels" in honor of the big wheels on the ox carts that carried goods over the Santa Fe Trail.

Statehood and the opening of new markets in the Southwest brought great optimism to Franklin and the nearby towns. George and his family had many new customers in the Square and Compass.

But happy days darkened in 1823 when Henry Bingham died from malaria. Devastated by the loss of his father, George also worried about his mother.

She was not able to run the inn by herself, and she could not afford to hire help. After closing the inn, she opened a school for girls. Even though young ladies paid to attend, the school did not make enough money to take care of the Bingham family.

Closing the school, Mrs. Bingham moved her family across the river to a farm near the village of Arrow

Rock. To help his family, George worked for a cabinet maker. Later, at age 17, he became an apprentice with Rev. Justinian Williams, another cabinet maker and Methodist minister.

When he could, George went to Arrow Rock to spend time with the boatmen and visit the local newspaper office. He liked watching the printing presses and was able to get paper for drawing.

George practiced his art, using what he had learned from Charles Harding. Many times he wished for another art lesson, but he had no money for lessons.

Then one day, in Arrow Rock, the budding artist saw a familiar figure getting off a boat. George rubbed his eyes in disbelief.

## Next Chapter: Another Opportunity

### Things to Think About and Do

1. Have you ever been to a political meeting? Can you name your state's governor, your state senator and representative or your mayor? Who represents your state in the United States Senate?
2. The traders took supplies to Mexico and were paid with "Mexican cartwheels." These large coins were made of silver. What materials are used to make American coins? What is unusual about the 1943 penny?
3. Cut pictures of goods for sale in your community from the newspaper. How do you think those goods reach your community? What about goods made overseas? Compare and contrast trade in 1820 to today.

Learn more about the Santa Fe Trail by visiting the following Web sites:

- [www.santafetrails.com/](http://www.santafetrails.com/)
- [www.nps.gov/archive/beol/kids\\_sft.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/beol/kids_sft.htm)
- [www.42explore2.com/santafe.htm](http://www.42explore2.com/santafe.htm)

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