

Carrying The Mail In West's Woolly Days; Indians Curious

Literary Digest.

Indians to the right of him, Indians to the left of him; and Indians fore and aft. Ambushed! But the daring man on horseback, speeding across Western plains and mountains, did not pause. Out he whistled his pistol and, firing rapidly, yelling lustily, and spurring his horse to its utmost speed, he dashed through the cordon to safety. But the joke was on this rider of 1860. Later, W. J. Ghent tells us in "The Road to Oregon" (Longmans, Green), a history set merely because the curious red man wanted to know what the white man carried to make him go so fast. Pony-express riders, whose ranks included the great "Buffalo Bill," carrying the mail between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, came through many adventures un-

scathed, and rendered valuable service to their employers, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express company, organized by Russell, Major and Waddell. This firm was demonstrating to the government the practicability of the mail service it proposed. But another organization finally won the coveted contract. When the plan for the demonstration was agreed upon in 1860, we read: Preparations were rushed forward with the utmost vigor. Riders noted for their courage and hardihood horses were bought, after great care in their selection, for they must be strong and wiry and fleet enough to outrun any bands of pursuing Indians. Though some of the animals were California mustangs, most were, according to Root, "really not ponies but American

horses." Relay stations were provided; the numerous stations put up by the stage company between the Missouri river and Salt Lake City were utilized, and new ones erected until there was one for every twelve or fifteen miles all the way to Sacramento. On the announced date, April 3, the start was made simultaneously from St. Joseph and San Francisco. At the former city a delay was caused by the lateness of the Hannibal and St. Joseph mail train. But at dark the train arrived, the mail was delivered to the rider, and at 6:30 he sped down to the ferry, where he was taken across the Missouri. Landing, he dashed off into the darkness. Relays of men and ponies carried the mail forward to Sacramento, where the last rider took it with him onto the boat, and at 1:00 a. m. on the fourteenth, a matter of ten days, six hours and thirty minutes, it arrived in San Francisco. From here, ten days before, a rider had galloped to the boat which bore him and his mount to Sacramento. From there a rider had started eastward, covering the first twenty miles, including one change, in fifty-nine minutes. The run to Fort Churchill, twenty miles east of Virginia City, a distance of 185 miles, was made in fifteen hours and twenty minutes, and included crossing the Sierras in thirty feet of snow. It is a tantalizing fact that the identity of the first rider out of St. Joseph in this dauntless and spectacular service is disputed. Root says he was "Johnnie" Frey, one of the most noted on the company, but several others have been mentioned. Mrs. Louise Platt Hauck in "The Missouri Historical Review" for July, 1923, asserts, with what seems to be conclusive evidence, that he was a sailor boy, "Billy" (otherwise Johnson William)

Richardson. At the other end of the line the rider who started eastward from the boat at Sacramento was Harry Roff; but as to whether or not it was also Roff who began the journey at San Francisco there is no available word. The service was at first weekly, but was made semi-weekly by June. The time scheduled for the entire trip was ten days. Between telegraph stations, after the line reached Fort Kearney, the schedule was seven days, though with the coming of winter it was extended to fifteen and eleven days respectively. The route followed the well-beaten line of the covered wagons from St. Joseph to the present Horton, where it struck the military road to Fort Leavenworth and Atchison; then by Granada and Seneca to Marysville, where it joined the main Oregon Trail, which it kept, by way of the upper California crossing of the South Platte, at Julesburg, all the way to Fort Bridger. From there it followed the regular mail route to Salt Lake City, and then the Chorpenninng mail route of 1859 (south of the Humboldt river to Carson City) and the route south of Lake Tahoe to Placerville and Sacramento. Usually two men were maintained at each station to care for stock and to have everything ready for the relays. At the beginning each horseman rode a distance of from thirty to fifty miles, using three horses and keeping within the maximum of two minutes for each change of mail and mount. Later the distance traveled on each trip was extended from seventy-five to one hundred miles.

There was, however, no regularity as to the length of the ride. Whatever the circumstances, the mail had to go forward. East or West, we are told as we continue: If the arriving rider found the next relayman ill, or slain by Indians, he must go forward, or return as the case might be, until a relief was available. On one such occasion, young William F. Cody, the "Buffalo Bill" of a later time, made a continuous ride, on the western Wyoming stretch, of 320 miles, which was covered in twenty-one hours and forty minutes; and on another Howard R. Egan, riding west of Salt Lake City, kept to the saddle for a back-and-forth gallop of 330 miles. A yet longer non-stop ride is sometimes mentioned—of 380 miles made by Robert ("Pony Bob") Haslan along the Nevada section of the route. For their labor the riders were paid \$50 a month and board, though a few of them, noted for braving extra hazards, received as much as \$150 monthly. All of them had to face the perils of terrific storms, deep snows, flooded rivers, of losing their way, and being at-

tacked by Indians. Yet, though often pursued, they often managed, by their courage and resourcefulness and the fleetness of their mounts, to escape. The savages were sometimes a source of danger, even when they were not primarily hostile. "I want to say right here," wrote Granville Stuart in his "Forty Years on the Frontier," "that for nerve, courage, and fidelity there was never a body of men that excelled the pony-express rider." The letters were carried in four small leather bags called cantinas, about six by twelve inches in size, sewed to a square mochila, which was never placed on the saddle that one letter-bag was in front and one behind each leg of the rider. At the beginning the charges were \$5 for a half-ounce or fraction thereof, for the entire route, and \$3 a half-ounce from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, though with August quarter-ounce letters were accepted for the entire route at \$2.50 each. The Pacific telegraph, slowly pushing its way from the termini to a central meeting point, added considerably to the mail matter carried. At the last transmitting station from one end of the route, dispatches were carried to be put on the wires at the first transmitting station at the other end. From Genoa, Nevada, the arrival of the first westbound rider was telegraphed to Sacramento, while the eastern projection of the line was but slowly crawling along the north bank of the Platte toward Fort Kearney. In November, from a point opposite the fort it was carried across the river, and here, on the morning of the eighth, a dispatch announcing Lincoln's election was given to a western rider. Six days later, at Fort Churchill, twenty miles east of Virginia City, Nevada, its contents were telegraphed on to the coast. The best record made from end to end of the route was in the carrying of Lincoln's inaugural address, in March 1861, the total of 1,980 miles in seven days and seventeen hours.

After the pony express came the stage-coach, with a host of colorful characters familiar in American history. In the public eye the driver was the most important figure, and of him we are told: Mark Twain's picture of him, in "Roughing It," has doubtless something of truth, not only as to how the driver regarded himself but as to how he was regarded by his fellow employees. It seems, nevertheless, to have been somewhat overdrawn. According to Root, the drivers were, in the main, "warm-hearted, kind, and obliging." Many of them were competent to fill more important places. Some of them were well educated. All appear to have been fascinated by

their work, and none wanted to retire from it. They were of most ages, from adolescence up, and from every walk of life. Most drivers developed strong affection for the horses they drove, sometimes feeding and grooming the animals instead of permitting the work to be done by the stock tenders. The drivers usually ran for two or three "stages," or "drives" (twenty-five to thirty-five miles), though occasionally for twice the distance. At the end of the "drive" the horses were taken out, stabled and fed, and within twenty-four hours were started on the return run. The horses were the best obtainable. "It was the almost universal remark," writes Root, "of those who made the overland journey by stage—that they never saw such fine animals. Holladay was a great lover and a good judge of stock himself." Though government agents during the Civil War were buying up the horses most suitable for cavalry service, Holladay seemed never at a loss in obtaining the pick of the market. All the teams—four-horse and six-horse—were graded in size. Perhaps that great Democrat in President Hoover's cabinet, Attorney-General Mitchell, who voted for Hughes, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, has always thought that he probably would have voted for Andrew Jackson if he had been registered in 1832.—Ohio State Journal.



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