



THE STAGECOACH

By Bonnie Miller

Gold was discovered in 1848 and in less than eighteen months the new frontier of California had achieved statehood. By 1852 it was obvious to even the stodgiest of Easterners that the upstart young state of California, far off in the West, was there to stay. Serious commerce could be capitalized upon. Two such enterprising businessmen were Henry Wells and William Fargo. On March 18, 1852 from the lofty Eastern vantage point of the Astor House in New York, they formed a company to do business in the West.

A few months later the gentlemen opened their offices on Montgomery Street in San Francisco. The Wells, Fargo & Co. was born, establishing itself as one of the West's most innovative, dependable and ultimately prosperous companies born of the gold rush era.

A San Francisco business directory listed the extensive services provided by the new company, for the transportation of "*gold dust, bullion, specie, packages, parcels & freight.*" They used stagecoaches to haul the cargo. Eventually that cargo



The Concord stagecoach was considered the height of luxury for early California travelers.

WELLS, FARGO COMPANY STAGE PASSENGER RULES

- Abstinence from liquor is requested, but if you must drink share the bottle. To do otherwise makes you appear selfish and unneighborly.
- If ladies are present, gentlemen are urged to forego smoking cigars and pipes as the odor of same is repugnant to the gentler sex. Chewing tobacco is permitted, but spit with the wind, not against it.
- Gentlemen must refrain from the use of rough language in the presence of ladies and children.
- Buffalo robes are provided for your comfort in cold weather. Hogging robes will not be tolerated and the offender will be made to ride with the driver.
- Don't snore loudly while sleeping or use your fellow passenger's shoulder for a pillow; he or she may not understand and friction may result.
- Firearms may be kept on your person for use in emergencies. Do not fire them for pleasure or shoot at wild animals as the sound riles the horses.
- In the event of runaway horses remain calm. Leaping from the coach in panic will leave you injured, at the mercy of the elements, hostile Indians and hungry coyotes.
- Forbidden topics of conversation are: stagecoach robberies and Indian uprisings.
- Gents guilty of unchivalrous behavior toward lady passengers will be put off the stage. It's a long walk back. A word to the wise is sufficient.

expanded to include passengers in addition to the mail or other precious items such as payroll under armed guard. No matter what the parcel, the carrier somewhere along the route was always a stagecoach, giving rise to one of the greatest iconic images of the West.

The company aggressively acquired or contracted with existing stage lines throughout the West. Sometimes they developed and constructed new routes. Contrary to popular belief, the company actually owned only a very few of their own wagons. It is believed that greater than seventy-five percent of their stage service was contracted out to local providers.

By 1857 the company had created the Overland Mail Company and was providing mail service across the continent, predating the famed Pony Express. In 1864 they acquired the Pioneer Stage Company and took over trans-Sierra operations during non-winter months.

Trains were introduced to California in 1856, but the trans-continental rail road was not completed until 1869. The Wells Fargo Company, as they had come to be known, was not to be outdone by the iron horse. Rather, they shifted operations to include rail service for the long hauls and stage service for the short runs. These changing business strategies allowed the company to remain prosperous with each new development in the West.

A customer could confidently bring their gold to a Wells Fargo assay office, or put payroll on a stage for delivery to the next town. The company always delivered, guaranteed. If the stage was held up and the payroll lost, the company made good on the loss. They sent their own investigators such as in the case of Black Bart, or hired outside investigators such as the famed Pinkertons. It was this reliability that gave clients faith in the company.

Traveling by stagecoach was mostly a byproduct of the mail operation. From the business of mail and express delivery it was only natural to expand to carrying passengers. Without the money from government mail contracts, stagecoaches probably would not have operated solely for the benefit of passengers. But people had to move about from one location to another. When travel to, from and about California became necessary, stage travel out West became a booming business. Travelers sought

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WELLS, FARGO & CO.,

OFFICES, { No. 16 Wall Street, New York.
{ No. 114 Montgomery Street, San Francisco.

October, 1852.

(see next page.)



A Concord stagecoach leaving Valley Springs, date unknown.
Photo courtesy of the Historical Society.

out the mail companies for transportation, much as they had turned to the express stages for expedient delivery of mail. It took only three weeks to deliver a letter from New York to San Francisco, and people wanted to catch that ride.

The Concord

It is believed that the first Concord Coach arrived by sea at San Francisco as early as 1850. The giant covered wagon, pulled by a six horse team was produced by the Abbot-Downing Company of Concord, New Hampshire. The luxurious coach proved to be far superior to the common spring wagon.

The coach was two stories tall, weighed 2,500 pounds and could carry sixteen passengers. It quickly became known for its modern innovations, attention to detail and for providing a pleasant ride. The Abbot-Downing Company used only the finest materials to manufacture the fine coaches. In reality, it meant that the wheels were protected by dust flaps, and leather seats and a smooth ride were promised to the traveler.

The Concord, by itself, weighed a ton or more, but was strong enough to carry nine passengers inside the coach. Sometimes as many as a dozen more, plus luggage, would ride on top. Yet its very weight and top-heavy design gave it a tendency to get bogged down in mud, making it less desirable for travel during winter months. Many Concord coaches had to wait out the winter in barns while traditional

wagons resumed business.

The coach's most important innovation was a superior suspension system. It was based on two leather bands called thorough braces, which were strips of strong leather stacked and bound together. The coach was suspended on these braces. While the old spring wagons bucked over the road ruts, the new Concord cushioned the ride. The riders felt the coach swing and sway on the leather straps.

The swinging and swaying ride, rather than the bumpy experience of a wagon, is what prompted Mark Twain to describe the Concord as "a cradle on wheels" in his 1872 story *Roughing It*.

"Our coach was a great swinging and swaying stage, of the most sumptuous description—an imposing cradle on wheels," said Twain.

Most travelers took exception to Twain's glorious account of his travel in the Concord. Twain had enjoyed the luxury of only three people in a coach designed to hold sixteen passengers. The bumpy roads and chance of bad weather assured that travel by stage would be anything but comfortable. When a stagecoach reached an impassable section of road or steep mountain pass, passengers were required to get out and walk. Even worse, they were also required to get out and push the coach if it got stuck. But it was the fear of bandits that fostered the greatest discomfort to the traveler.

The threat of highwaymen or holdups was not new to a stage traveler as holdups were just as common in the East as they became in the West. Stages were threatened in the East especially during the Civil War. Southerners attempted to interrupt mail traffic by waylaying stage routes, much as bandits robbed stages in the West. But the stakes were much higher in the West, what with the possibility that the stage may carry payroll or strongboxes full of gold.

Many tall tales and true stories have been written about stage robberies. In actuality few were truly held up at gunpoint. Of the thousands of stage rides between 1870 and 1884, the Wells, Fargo Company stagecoaches were only robbed 347 times. And 226 of those robbers were brought to justice.

Stagecoach travel proved to be an exciting adventure for many travelers such as Twain. The traveler was exposed to beautiful scenery and enjoyed generous hospitality along the way. New towns quickly grew up along the stagecoach routes, many which shaped the modern roads and routes that we know today.

The Travel Truth

The Wells, Fargo Company honestly tried to make the travel as comfortable as possible for the passengers. Yet for both the passenger and the company, the goal was to deliver the cargo in as short a time as possible. To help travelers endure their ordeal together, coaches were posted with rules for the passengers. Experienced overland travelers knew otherwise. In

TIPS FOR STAGECOACH TRAVELERS,

Omaha Herald, 1877

- Never ride in cold weather with tight boots or shoes, or close-fitting gloves.
- Bathe your feet before starting, in cold water, and wear loose overshoes and gloves two or three sizes too large.
- When the driver asks you to get off and walk, do it without grumbling. He will not request it unless absolutely necessary.
- If a team runs away, sit still and take your chances; if you jump, nine times out of ten you will be hurt.
- In very cold weather, abstain entirely from liquor while on the road; a man will freeze twice as quick while under its influence.
- Don't growl at food stations; stage companies generally provide the best they can get.
- Don't keep the stage waiting; many a virtuous man has lost his character by so doing.
- Don't smoke a strong pipe inside, especially early in the morning.
- Spit on the leeward side of the coach.
- If you have anything to take in a bottle, pass it around; a man who drinks by himself in such a case is lost to all human feeling.
- Provide stimulants before starting; ranch whisky is not always nectar.
- Don't swear, nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping.
- Don't ask how far it is to the next station until you get there.
- Never attempt to fire a gun or pistol while on the road, it may frighten the team; and the careless handling and cocking of the weapon makes nervous people nervous.
- Don't discuss politics or religion, nor point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed.
- Don't linger too long at the pewter washbasin at the station.
- Don't grease your hair before starting or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable "tater" patch.
- Tie a silk handkerchief around your neck to keep out dust and prevent sunburns.
- A little glycerin is good in case of chapped hands.

1877 the *Omaha Herald* expanded on the company's rules, creating their own "word to the wise."

In reality, chapped hands were probably the least of a passenger's inconvenience. The tight conditions were truly exhausting. The coach held three bench seats. The two back seats faced forward while the front faced back. The middle seat had no backrest, requiring passengers to rest against a mere leather strap. Three passengers were assigned to each seat, allocating just fifteen inches of seat space per person.

While Twain endured only two other passengers on his journey, his coach was also filled with over two thousand pounds of mail. As the number of passengers increased in a coach, they were required to carry their personal baggage on their laps and store mail pouches under their feet. The swaying motion of the carriage brought on motion sickness for some, compounded by the constant banging of their head against the roof or sides of the coach. All of these conditions led one passenger to state that the only decent seat on the coach was the driver's.

The overland trip from East to West took twenty-two days under the best conditions. The stage traveled day and night, stopping only to change or rest the horses. Passengers disembarked at every stop to stretch their weary limbs, but if they failed to get back on they may have had to wait up to a week for another stage with room to take them on. Until towns and way stations were built, services along the route were poor leaving the passengers with little food for the journey.

Regardless of the discomforts and inconveniences, travel across the country in a stagecoach was in high demand. In 1868, Wells, Fargo purchased thirty of the Concord wagons, representing one of the largest orders ever for the manufacturer. Yet travel by coach was still expensive. In 1867 the cost to ride in a Concord stage from Omaha to Sacramento cost \$300.

Calaveras County's Express Offices

It is doubtful that this quality coach often saw the dust of the California gold country as its luxurious service was reserved for long distance routes. The remaining short hauls were contracted out to local companies. In Calaveras County most of the express services were conducted through contract haulers, while Wells Fargo operated fifteen offices within the county.

Not all stage operators could afford the steep cost of a Concord, either. The price to deliver a new Concord to California ranged from \$1,200 to \$1,500 each. This cost represented an enormous investment for a smaller company.

The height of the express business occurred between the years 1852 to 1918. During that time, Wells, Fargo and Company operated hundreds of offices in California offering express services and connections to the smaller towns. The locations and dates of operation within Calaveras County were:

Angels Camp 1853–1918
Big Trees 1875
Camanche 1863–1888
Copperopolis 1861–1897
Jenny Lind 1859–1872
Milton 1873
Mokelumne Hill 1853–1912
Murphys 1856–1898
San Andreas 1853–1912
Sheep Ranch 1880–1894
Telegraph City 1864–1871
Vallecito 1853–1883
Valley Springs 1885
Wallace 1883
West Point 1887–1894

In 1905 Wells Fargo separated express delivery from their banking operations, and the following year they survived the San Francisco Earthquake. They rebuilt their headquarters on the same location that they still occupy today in that city. In the Mother Lode, numerous buildings that served as their offices still exist as evidence of yesteryear. The stagecoach is as much a part of the West as the telegraph, the rifle or barbed wire. More than the railroad, the stagecoach represents both the glamour and hardship of Western expansion.

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Historical Society's last Charter Member passes on

CARMENNE CILENTI POORE, 1917–2012

Carmenne Cilenti grew up on her family's ranch between Mountain Ranch and Rail Road Flat. While her family worked in the logging business she attended the Banner School just up the road. Pupils drank from a community cup, something that would be frowned upon today. Her family baked their bread in an Italian bread oven out back. She learned cooking skills that served her well for the rest of her life. Some of her fondest childhood memories recalled Saturday night dances at neighbors' homes. "It was not too dull living in the country," she explained in 2002.

In November of 1939 her father held a turkey shoot. The charming George Poore won three turkeys that day and stole her heart. Carmenne and George were married the following year by the Honorable Judge Smith who would become a lifelong friend to them.

George was working as the superintendent of the Calaveras Cement Company in San Andreas. The couple lived at the company house for their first four years together where two sons were born to them. Soon thereafter they returned to the Mountain Ranch area to a place of their own. Electricity had not reached the remote locations yet, so they made do with a gas cook stove and unpleasant coal oil and gas lamps. What little power they did need they obtained from a generator rigged to their tractor.

As the boys grew so did their activities, prompting them to move back to San Andreas in 1961. Carmenne and George were equally busy with community activities of their own. One project that they worked on was establishing and building the Grange Hall in San Andreas. Other organizations that they belonged to and were quite active in included the Farm Bureau, the Masons, and the Eastern Stars. George also worked on the effort to create a county hospital district, opening the way for the construction of the Mark Twain Hospital. George was on the first hospital board, and Carmenne was involved in the auxiliary.

One of the greatest accomplishments that the couple could claim was that they were an integral



Carmenne Poore was honored at the Historical Society's 50th anniversary party held in 2002.

part of the formation of the Calaveras County Historical Society. In 1962 a committee from the Grange explored the creation of a society for the preservation of the county's unique heritage. George was one of the first directors of the new society, and Judge Smith the first President. The society held its first regular membership meeting in Murphys in October of that year. It had been decided that anyone who attended that meeting and joined the society would be forever a charter member. George and Carmenne each signed the guest book as new members that night.

After 43 years of marriage George passed away yet Carmenne remained active in many of her interests such as the hospital auxiliary. Recently the Historical Society honored her for her status as the last Charter Member, and now that milestone is past. She leaves her two sons, eight grandchildren, fifteen great-grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren, and the successful Historical Society as her legacy.

Calaveras County Historical Society

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

April–June 2012

New Members

Charnette Boylan—San Andreas
Eric & Jo Ann Nelson—Vallecito
Patrick McGreevy—Glencoe
Karen Hawkins—Mokelumne Hill
Glen Evans—Antelope, California
Golden Chain Council of the Mother Lode
Richard Panzarino—Valley Springs
Mary Conway—Monterey
Clifford Edson—San Andreas

Donations

The Historical Society appreciates the following generous donations:

West Whittaker, Jr.—Book—*The Whittakers of Robinson's Ferry or The Secrets in the Wooden Box* by E. West Whittaker, Jr.

Rurik Kallis—photos of Southern Pacific engine #2521, once used for excursion from Lodi to Calaveras Cement Plant, now housed in Yuma, Arizona

Gary D. Lowe—Book—*The Original Big Tree—History of the Big Tree Exhibit of 1853–1855*

B. Noah Tilghman—Paperwork from Royal Gold Mines (check dated 1935, blank forms), metal corner marker from Royal Extension Mine

Debby Brooks—local cookbooks from Valley Springs, Angels Camp, Calaveritas, Copperopolis, and Mark Twain Hospital Auxillary