

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Stagecoach Rediscovered

About thirty years ago when my father, the late Frank P. Hayes, bought the Rancho San Francisco de las Llagas in Santa Clara County, one of the most fascinating acquisitions for the young members of the family was the remains of an old stage coach which stood in the ravine near the bunk house. It made a grand playhouse or at times the glamorous setting for a stage robbery for the boys.

There were no wheels upon this stagecoach. Where they had disappeared to no one knew, but all the other appointments were there, even to the pale blue upholstery with a tiny white rose in it. Over the faded red paint which covered the coach on the outside was printed in black "Pacific Express Company."

One day a collector drove into the ranch and my father gave him the stage coach much to the distress of his grandchildren. We never knew where it went, nor did we know the name of the man who [?] it.

While in San Francisco attending the Council of Western Museum's Conference, a talk with F.F. Latta, the curator of the Kern County Museum and retiring president of the Council, brought forth the surprising information that the old coach has been restored, wheels and all, and now was owned by Harry West of Shafter, a collector of old vehicles. But it was Mr. Latta who had first heard of the coach, had made the journey to the ranch near San Martin, loaded it upon his pickup and taken it to Bakersfield those many years ago. Mr. Latta reported that West had spent \$[?] in its restoration and that now it was a thing of beauty.

We find upon further research, spurred on by the surprise information given by Mr. Latta, that even the Rev. Walter Colton wrote in the year 1850, "so rapid has been the growth of the town, that before you can sketch the last, a new one has spring into existence. You go to work on this, and dash down a few features, when another glimmers on your vision..." Many of these factors affecting the growth of the express business in California likewise stimulated the development of stagecoach travel. The most important influences were the great influx and the wide spread of population, the rapid growth in industry and commerce, and the

persistent demands for more adequate means of transportation.

The stagecoach, a temporary though very useful institution, filled the breach until the railroad was built. There was, however, one very serious obstacle to the successful use of the stagecoach, the inadequacy of roads. In the Spanish and Mexican days all travel was made on horseback over narrow trails. Roads first came into existence as immigrants, enroute to the California valleys and mines, through constant use gradually transformed the trails into passable highways.

According to Winther's "Stagecoach Service in Northern California," the first stagecoaches in California appeared in the autumn of 1849. There was one between San Francisco and San Jose and one between Sacramento and some of the northern mining communities on the American River. It took nine hours in an old French omnibus drawn by mules and poorly groomed mustangs, to go from San Francisco to San Jose, and in 1851 the fare between the two places was \$16.

On July 2, 1851, this line (Hall and Crandall), announced that they had extended the line to Monterey, for which town a stage would leave San Jose every Monday and Thursday and would arrive the following evening. The Alta Californian, July 2, 1851, announced that the fare, originally thirty-two dollars, was further reduced to ten dollars in October of that year. In January of 1855, a year after its establishment, the California Stage Company for the first time extended its lines into the territory lying south of San Francisco, with the purchase of the interests of two other companies and began the run between San Francisco, San Jose and Monterey. It cost one dollar from San Francisco to Redwood City, two dollars to San Jose and five dollars to Santa Cruz and Monterey.

(More on Monday)