

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Stagecoach

So rapid has been the growth of the towns, that before you can sketch the last, a new one has sprung into existence. You can go to work on this and dash down a few features, when another glimmers on your vision. . .” These foregoing lines were written by the Rev. Walter Colton in the year 1850. They could still have been written in the year 1957.

Many of these factors affecting the growth of the mail and express business in California likewise stimulated the development of stagecoach travel in 1850. The most important influences were the great influx and widespread 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 the roads. In the Spanish and Mexican days, all travel was made on horseback over narrow trails. Roads first came into existence as immigrants, en route to the California valleys and mines through constant use gradually transformed the trails into passable highways.

According to Winther's "Stagecoach Service in California," the first stagecoaches in California appeared in the autumn in 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, 1851m this line, (Hall and Crandall) announced that they had extended the line to Monterey for which town a stage would arrive the following evening. Th Alta Californian, July 2, 1851, announced that the fare originally \$32, was further reduced to \$10 in October of that year. In January of 1855, the 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 \$1 from San Francisco to Redwood City, \$2 to San Jose, and \$5 to Santa Cruz and Monterey.

Claude Faw of Carmel, another enthusiast of California history, has supplied us with a list of stagecoach stops and the time and cost of stagecoach travel from Gilroy to Los Angeles, the territory of the Mission Trails area and original stage routes in Northern California. These coastline stage stations were established in 1872.

From San Diego to Los Angeles the time was 21 hours and the fare was \$12. From Gilroy to Los Angeles, a distance of 366 miles, it took 58 hours to make the trip and cost the traveler \$22.50.

The stage was drawn from Gilroy to San Juan in two hours, over 12 miles distance and the traveler paid \$5, to Natividad, 24 miles, four hours, fare \$6.50, to Salinas River (Los Choches), 52 miles, fare \$9, eight hours; Last Chance (also Walkers or Lowes), 76 miles, fare \$11.50. San Antonio (Jolon), 92 miles, 13 hours, fare \$14, Pleyto, 107 miles, 15 hours, \$14 fare, Nacimiento, 121 miles, 17 hours, fare \$15.50.

The 136 miles from Gilroy to Paso Robles took the old stages 19 hours and cost the traveler \$16. It cost \$17 to travel from Gilroy to Sant Margarita or San Luis Obispo, and additional \$4.50 to go to Arroyo Grande. Santa Barbara passengers traveled 265 miles in 41 hours for \$20, and to San Buenaventura, a distance of 293 miles, in 47 hours, for \$20. To arrive in Los Angeles from Gilroy the passenger traveled 366 miles in 58 hours for \$22.50. Stops were also made in the early days at Zuri(?), Foxens, Ballards, San Marcos, McCaffeys, Rincon, Santa Clara Valley, Sims, Mountain Station and El Cino on the way to Los Angeles and San Diego.