

# STAGECOACHES

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# TO AND FROM CHERRY CREEK

## Pioneer Lines to Denver



By  
**S. A. Johnson**

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# STAGECOACHES ALONG CHERRY CREEK

By  
Charles A. Johnson

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## FOREWARD

*Stagecoaches Along Cherry Creek* deals primarily with the history of the first stage lines to reach Denver after its founding in 1858 and only indirectly with the history of Four Mile House. The story of the latter will be covered in another booklet by historian Bette Peters.

However, since stagecoaches often used the Cherry Creek Valley and stopped at Four Mile House before covering the last few miles to Denver, Mr. Johnson's history forms an important part of the recounting of events that transpired at this spot over one hundred years ago. We are happy to have this opportunity to publish this manuscript.

CHARLES WOOLLEY

Curator

Four Mile Historic Park, Inc.

*FRONT COVER - Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company Station at Denver. (From "Beyond the Mississippi" by Albert D. Richardson.) From the collection of the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library.*

## THE REGION IS SETTLED

The founding of Denver goes back to 1858 when a prospecting party led by the three Russell brothers from Lumpkin County, Georgia, discovered a small deposit of float gold on Little Dry Creek, an insignificant tributary of the South Platte not far from the latter's confluence with Cherry Creek.

The Russells' small find was soon to be ballooned out of all proportion to its actual size. Not over several hundred dollars-worth of gold was taken from the sands of Little Dry Creek. By the end of the summer, the placer had been exhausted and the Russells had been compelled to search elsewhere including the headwaters of Cherry Creek where they found particles of the yellow metal averaging 15 cents to the pan. Two of the three brothers, Green and Oliver, finally decided to return to Georgia and try again next year.

Despite this modest discovery, rumors soon spread to the Missouri River towns, six hundred miles to the east, that a major strike had been made in the Pikes Peak region. The truth of these stories had obviously very little basis in fact, but that seemed to concern no one. Street corner meetings buzzed with descriptions of egg-sized nuggets strewn along the South Platte and Cherry Creek. Tall tales became the common currency of conversation. Everyone, so it seemed, was making plans for an imminent departure to the new El Dorado.

Perhaps the unknown can do more to fire men's imaginations than the familiar or commonplace. Certainly, there was very little information of a reliable sort about the Pikes Peak region, or perhaps, more importantly, about the dangers and hardships of a journey across the plains.

Traders and trappers had traversed the banks of Cherry Creek for decades, but their reports were fragmentary. Some military expeditions had also marched by the stream on their journeys north or south along the escarpments of the Front Range. Major Stephen Long had passed this way in 1820 as had Fremont on his second "Pathfinder" expedition in 1843. But essentially, the region remained Indian country and nomadic bands of Cheyenne or Arapahoe often pitched their lodges at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte, oblivious of the great westward migration that soon would engulf them.

The great surge of emigration was not destined to take place until 1859, but, late in '58, the vanguard of settlers reached the confluence and established the first town companies. Montana City, the initial settlement, was founded in the fall of '58 by an expedition from Lawrence, Kansas. Streets were laid out in an orderly fashion, and fifteen or twenty huts hastily erected to provide shelter during the colder months. Montana City was near the present site of Denver's Overland Park golf course.

St. Charles and Auraria were founded soon after and faced each other on the east and west banks of Cherry Creek. Auraria was named for the Russell brothers' hometown in Georgia.

A fourth town company, destined to be the most important, was established by General William Larimer and his associates from Leavenworth, Kansas, during November of that year. Larimer's group carried in their pockets commissions from General James W. Denver, Governor of the Kansas Territory, authorizing them to establish "Arapahoe County," perhaps the largest domain of this kind ever conceived. (It stretched from the continental divide eastward for six hundred miles.) Larimer named his new town company, Denver City, in the General's honor. The fact that all these town companies squatted on Indian land seemed to bother nobody. Larimer pre-empted the site



PIONEER DENVER

of St. Charles (claiming that it had been abandoned) and proceeded to divide his new, 2200-acre kingdom into a grid work of streets and lots.

Larimer possessed the natural abilities of an ardent promoter, the essential prerequisite of anyone trying to turn a tumbleweed village into one of the nation's garden spots.

Larimer had no more than laid the foundation of his cottonwood-log cabin before his pen was scratching praises of the region in a letter to the Hon. H. B. Denman, mayor of Leavenworth. The sentences tumbled on top of each other as Larimer wrote:

"Gold is found everywhere around here . . . Upon all streams putting out of the mountains gold is found fully sufficient to justify, and upon the whole the success of this country if a fixed fact."

Fixed fact or otherwise, the General's claim would soon be put to test as thousands of eager gold seekers prepared to leave the Missouri River for the new "El Dorado" during the early months of 1859.

The emigrants seemed possessed of greater optimism than common sense, and were easy targets for unscrupulous outfitters in the river towns. Often employing runners on the steamboats, these avaricious predators described the journey as being easy; that there were adequate supplies of water, wood and wild game all the way (although the reverse was often true).

Two routes to the Pikes Peak region afforded the greatest safety.

Each lay along the two great watercourses leading to the central Rockies. To the south, the Arkansas River had guided wagon trains westward to Santa Fe during the first decades of the century. The Cherokee Indians had used the same route on their prospecting trips to California. To reach the confluence, travelers had followed the Arkansas to the present site of Pueblo and then headed north along the Fountain River. Crossing several other creeks, they had gained the divide that separated the Arkansas and South Platte drainage basins. From there it was a short distance to the headwaters of Cherry Creek.

To the north, the Platte River led due west from the Omaha-Council Bluffs area. It had served as a pathway for many years for the Oregon, Overland and Mormon Trails. The pioneers could easily reach the confluence by taking the south fork of the Platte in western Nebraska.

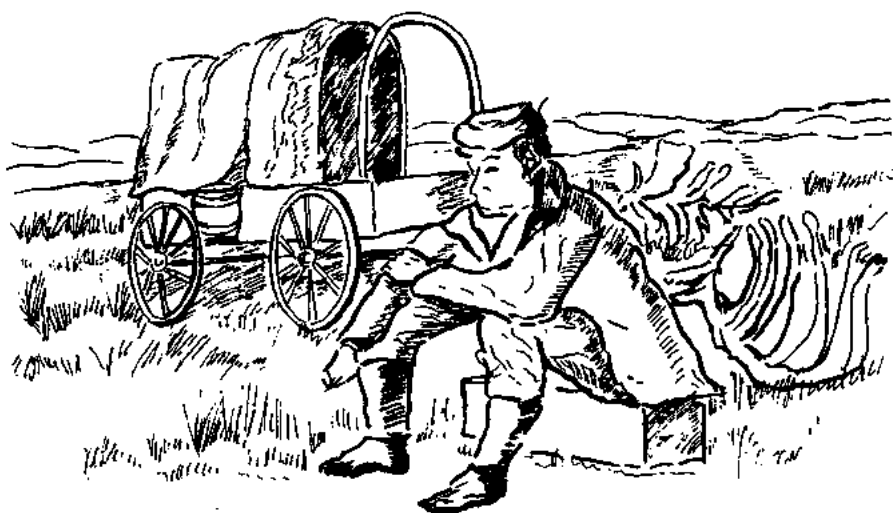
Regretably, a third route was promoted by certain Missouri River towns (principally Leavenworth) as the shortest, fastest path to the gold fields. From

Leavenworth the trail followed the banks of the Kansas River to its tributary, the Smoky Hill, and then proceeded westward along the latter to its source at the Kansas-Colorado border. At this point, the barren, flat topography failed to give any further clues for the best route to Cherry Creek, some 150 miles to the northwest — although one guidebook of the period erroneously estimated the distance as not over fifty miles. Emigrants following this alleged trail soon found themselves lost on the prairies of western Kansas or eastern Colorado. Food was scarce; water almost non-existent (particularly in the dry season) and firewood a rarity on these treeless wastes.

In Denver, General Larimer was one of the first to realize the dangers of the new route, mentioning in one of his letters that the last party to travel the Smoky Hill during 1858 had navigated the final stretch of the journey by compass. Fortunately, they reached Cherry Creek at a point about 23 miles above Denver.

Larimer's worst fears were soon realized in more dramatic terms. In a letter to his wife, Rachel, dated April 24th, '59, he wrote:

"It is supposed that fourteen men have starved to death on the Smoky Hill



*Stranded Emigrant on the Smoky Hill Trail*

route. Five out of party of nineteen have got in and think that the balance have perished . . . The trouble with this route is that after they leave the Smoky Hill, there has been no direct road and they wander off in every direction."

However, Larimer, the eternal optimist, added:

"The trains we expect, of some nine or ten wagons will make a good trail. (In other words, some wagons would eventually find the best route, and their wheels would leave deep ruts in the prairie for others to follow.)

The Rocky Mountain News soon reported other disasters on the Smoky Hill Trail. Emigrants were getting lost; running low on food. Some starved to death. They suffered from thirst; burned their wagons for fuel and slaughtered their oxen for food.

Undoubtedly, a major cause of these tragedies was the innocence of the emigrants. Many started their trips with dangerously overloaded wagons; others with provisions that would last for only a few days. Some even pushed hand-carts that carried all their worldly possessions.

For a time during that first grim year of the gold fever, there were as many wagons returning east as there were heading west. Those returning had found no evidence of the vast treasure of precious metal that was allegedly lying along every streambed within the region. Auctions were held every morning in the streets of Denver and Auraria for penniless emigrants trying to raise enough money for the long journey home. Rifles, pistols, clothing, boots, picks and shovels all went for prices that did not cover even one-tenth of their original cost. Many left the South Platte on foot carrying only a small pack on their back.

The '59 rush to the Rockies might have gone down as one of the era's greatest calamities, but, in May of that year, John Gregory found a rich lode near the present site of Central City, fifty miles west of the confluence. From that time forward there was no doubt that the Rockies possessed a fabulous bounty of precious metal.

During July of 1859, a small wagon train led by Samuel and Jonas Brantner, two emigrants of German ancestry from Ohio, set up camp among the cottonwoods where Four Mile House would be built. It is believed that the Brantners built the log portion of the present building during the late summer and fall of that same year.





*William Green Russell*



*Dr. Levi J. Russell*



*General William Larimer*

## THE FIRST STAGE LINE REACHES DENVER

General Larimer possessed a lively imagination. Penning a letter by the banks of Cherry Creek, he predicted that, upon a railroad reaching the region, "all the pleasure seekers, not only of the United States, but also of Europe, will flock to this point during the summer months as the most delightful pleasure trip on earth."

Notwithstanding such radiant predictions, Albert D. Richardson, correspondent for the Boston Journal alighted, dusty and tired, in Denver City from a Leavenworth-and-Pikes-Peak-Express-Company coach on June 6th of 1859.

"It was a most forlorn and desolate-looking metropolis," he wrote later.

Denver and Auraria contained about one thousand inhabitants and a cluster of three hundred log buildings, many of them unfinished and roofless, since they had been hastily erected for potential buyers who had, as yet, not appeared. Most of the buildings lacked wood floors, and there were very few glass windows.

Richardson sought lodging at the Denver House, the community's only hostelry. It was a long, low, one-story building with log walls. The windows and the roof were made out of white sheathing. The dirt floor was well sprinkled to keep down the dust. Gambling seemed to be the chief pastime of the denizens of this pioneer hotel, and it was pursued with unusual passion. City officials of the new town seemed just as tempted by the gaming tables as ordinary citizens. A probate judge bet and lost thirty Denver lots in the space of ten minutes — but since these were each worth about the price of a shovel, it may not have been as great a disaster as superficially indicated. The county sheriff did no better, pawning his revolver for twenty dollars to bet on faro. (One wonders if law and order suffered from such practices since Denver's days were enlivened by frequent shootings.)

The population was overwhelmingly male, and Richardson estimated that there were only five women in the whole region. The appearance of a bonnet on any Denver street usually caused pandemonium.

Among the infant city's greatest needs were better transportation to the east and regular mail service. Mail was currently reaching Denver on an infrequent basis via Fort Laramie, several hundred miles to the north.

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Before leaving Leavenworth, General Larimer had talked at length with William H. Russell, a partner in the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, about establishing a stage line between Leavenworth and Denver. He had promised Russell a number of shares of stock in his new company as an inducement.

Running stagecoach companies, however, was a risky business. Not only was the cost of operation high, but without a Federal mail subsidy, revenues did not usually meet expenses.

His freighting firm was already deeply in debt. Russell was reckless by nature and seemed perfectly happy to live from one financial crisis to another as though it were the normal course of a business day.

Undeterred, he organized the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express Company early in 1859. John S. Jones was his partner. Preparations were made to stock the line. Fifty-two, red and yellow Concord coaches were ordered. Horses and mules were acquired. Wagons and oxen were purchased to supply the stagecoach stops. Home stations were usually placed about forty miles apart with intermediate or "swing" stations at about twelve to fifteen mile intervals. Shelter at these stops was provided by canvas tents, but it was anticipated that more permanent structures would be built once the line was in operation.

Colonel William Preston, a seasoned frontiersman, was hired to lay out a new route for the stage company. Keenly aware of the shortcomings of the Smoky Hill Trail, Preston chose a route that had been pioneered by Fremont, the great "pathfinder." For the first 125 miles, the stage road still followed the Kansas River westward from Leavenworth, but at this point, near Junction City, the route headed in a more northerly direction, following the Solomon River for a distance and then the Republican River as it gradually arched to the southwest towards what is now Hugo, Colorado. From here the road crossed various small tributaries of the South Platte to reach the Cherry Creek valley near Parker. The last section of the road (from Hugo on) probably had been used as well by wagons coming over the Smoky Hill Trail.

All totaled, nearly one-quarter of a million dollars was spent in preparing the line for operation. It was estimated that operating expenses would run over \$1000 per day.

The Concord coaches used by the company were the best vehicle yet designed to haul passengers and express over the vast reaches of the American West. They seated nine passengers within their bodies but without much room

to spare. Fifteen inches of seat was allotted each traveler, and anybody unfortunate enough to be placed next to a fat person had very little elbow room. Luggage, mail and express packages were carried in boots, one behind the passenger compartment and other under the driver's seat. For their time, they were considered to be light and extremely sturdy vehicles. The quality of its ride varied with the weight of the load. Empty, it had a tendency to jolt and pitch; but carrying a full complement of passengers and baggage, its motion eased considerably. Still, little could dampen the shock as a wheel dipped into a gopher hole or bounced over a rock.

The first L. & P. P. coaches left the Planters' Hotel in Leavenworth on April 18th of 1859. Only two months had elapsed since the incorporation of the new company.

The trip was without serious mishap although the travelers encountered the sole survivor of a party that had faced starvation on the Smoky Hill Trail. It was a repellent tale of cannibalism. The first to die had been eaten by the survivors, but finally only one remained, and he had been forced to eat the remains of his own brother to keep from starving.

Sudden storms were frequently encountered on the plains, and one coach had overturned in a gust of wind, but with no serious injury to passengers or damage to the vehicle. The coaches arrived safely in Denver on May 7th at 4:00 p.m., having made the journey in nineteen days.

Despite its favorable beginning, the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express was destined to be a short-lived company. Coaches ran along the Republican River and down Cherry Creek for a little over a month. Faced by mounting financial losses and without a Federal mail contract, Russell and Jones purchased one from Hockaday and Liggett to deliver mails from St. Joseph on the Missouri to Salt Lake City. The contract stipulated, however, that Russell's coaches must use the Overland Trail along the Platte rather than the Republican River route. Mail to Denver now would be delivered by a branch line from Old Julesburg, located at the northeastern tip of Colorado. The last coach to traverse the Cherry Creek valley (and the future site of Four Mile House) arrived in Denver on June 6th.

This coach carried two distinguished journalists: Albert D. Richardson (already mentioned) and Horace Greeley, the famed editor of the New York Tribune.

Greeley long had been an ardent advocate of western migration, although after reading about some of the hardships he experienced in his travels, one wonders why.

Greeley had joined Richardson at Junction City. About the journey, he had commented wryly on the progress he seemed to be making towards the "primitive simplicity of existence."

At Chicago, chocolate and morning newspapers were last seen. At Leavenworth, he said farewell to room bells and baths. After Topeka, there were no more beefsteaks and washbowls (except of the tin variety). This was also the last appearance of a barber.

At Manhattan, Kansas, he had his final meal of potatoes and eggs and sat on his last chair. Upon reaching Junction City, he had his shoes shined for the last time and slept in his last bed. From then on, benches and bags or boxes substituted for chairs at mealtimes.

In passing through Leavenworth, he had noted the huge freight operation of Russell, Majors and Waddell; the vast number of wagons; the great herds of oxen and the regiments of drivers and other employees.

After leaving Fort Riley, the stage had crossed the Republican River by rope ferry. Greeley had observed that, for several days, they had been meeting wagons loaded with discouraged emigrants who were returning from the gold country.

Somewhere out on the western plains, Greeley and Richardson had narrowly escaped serious injury when their coach overturned going down a gulley. Greeley was cut on the left cheek and had a deep gouge in his left leg from the sharp corner of the stagecoach seat.

His injuries, however, were not serious enough to delay the journey.

The New York Tribune editor noted the huge number of buffalo on the prairies. For almost one hundred miles the landscape seemed quite black with them.

The question naturally arises why so many emigrants starved to death if there was such an abundance of wild game. One can only surmise that either the animals avoided the emigrants, or the emigrants did not know how to hunt bison — or a combination of both reasons.

A possible clue is provided by Richardson who had amused himself during the journey by firing at buffalo with his rifle. The buffalo responded to the journalist's shots with no more alarm than a horse to the sting of a fly, and it was soon apparent that, unless hit in the hindquarters, the beast was invulnerable.

Leaving the Republican River, the northern outskirts of the pine region were finally reached, and Greeley commented:

Soon they were at Cherry Creek and experienced a rapid ride down the valley. Greeley noted the large size of the cottonwoods and the sudden proximity of the Rocky Mountains.

"It was a pleasure to see last eve, the many parties of wayworn goldseekers encamped beside our way after their long journey through the woodless region, surrounding great ruddy, leaping fires of dead pitchwood and solacing themselves for their long privation by the amplest allowance of blaze and warmth."

# THE OVERLAND STAGE LINE,

FOR CARRYING THE

**GREAT**

Through Mails



FROM THE

**ATLANTIC**

TO THE

Pacific States

Ben Holladay.

Proprietor.

*Denver City Dec 6th 1864*

Received from *Miss Egbert & Co* in apparent good order, *One Letter and two Packages.* sold to contain *Gold dust analyzed at fifty five thousand (\$55,000) Gold or sixty two thousand (\$62,000) Silver in incoming notes.*

MARKED "Northrup & Chick, Nassau Street New York City"

IT IS AGREED, and in consideration of this contract, that the OVERLAND STAGE LINE are not to be held responsible for any loss or damage to gold or silver as forwarded only; nor for any loss or damage by the dangers of railroad, ocean or river navigation, leakage, breakage, fire, or from any cause whatsoever, unless same be proved to have occurred from the fraud or gross neglect of ourselves, our agent, or servants, or unless insured by us, (in no case do we insure against safe or breakage), and in no event is this Company to be liable beyond their route as hereto recipied. Yucca Cross Ferry Douglas, unless otherwise hereto stated.

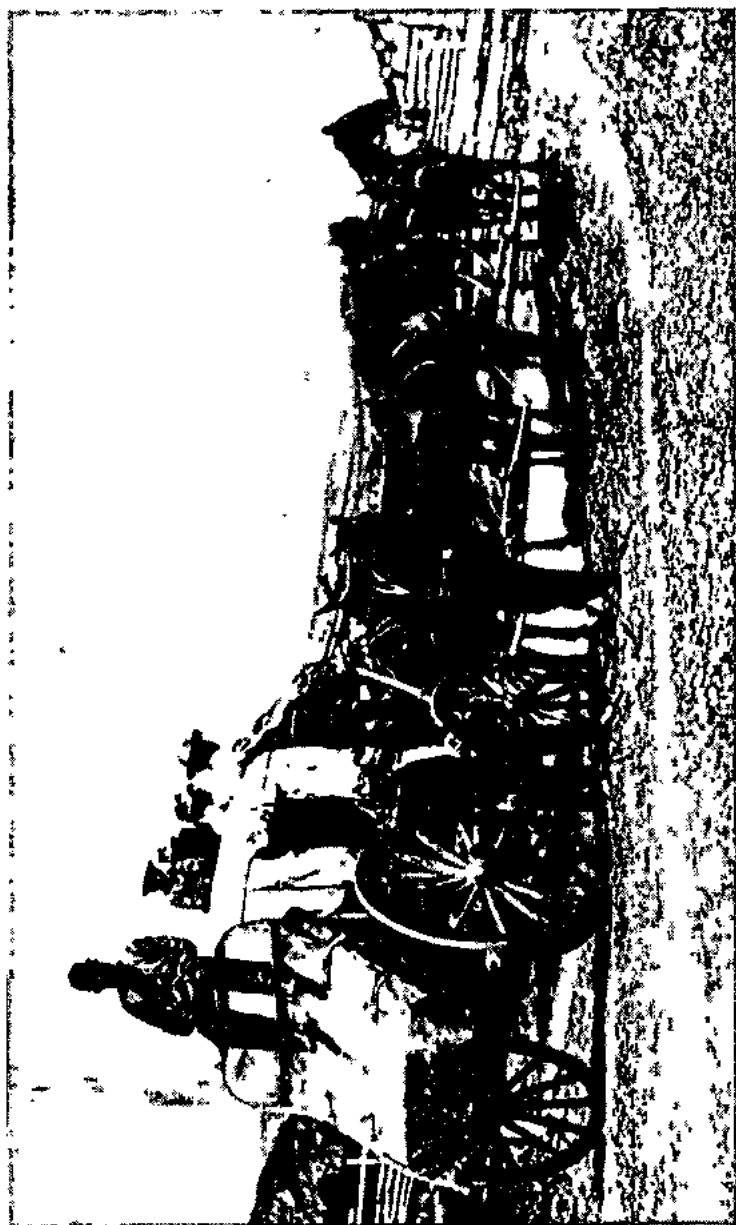
ALL KINDS OF FRAGILE WARE AT SHIPPERS'S RISK.

*Charles Geo. Co*  
For the Overland Stage Line. *Ed. Washburn*

AGENT.

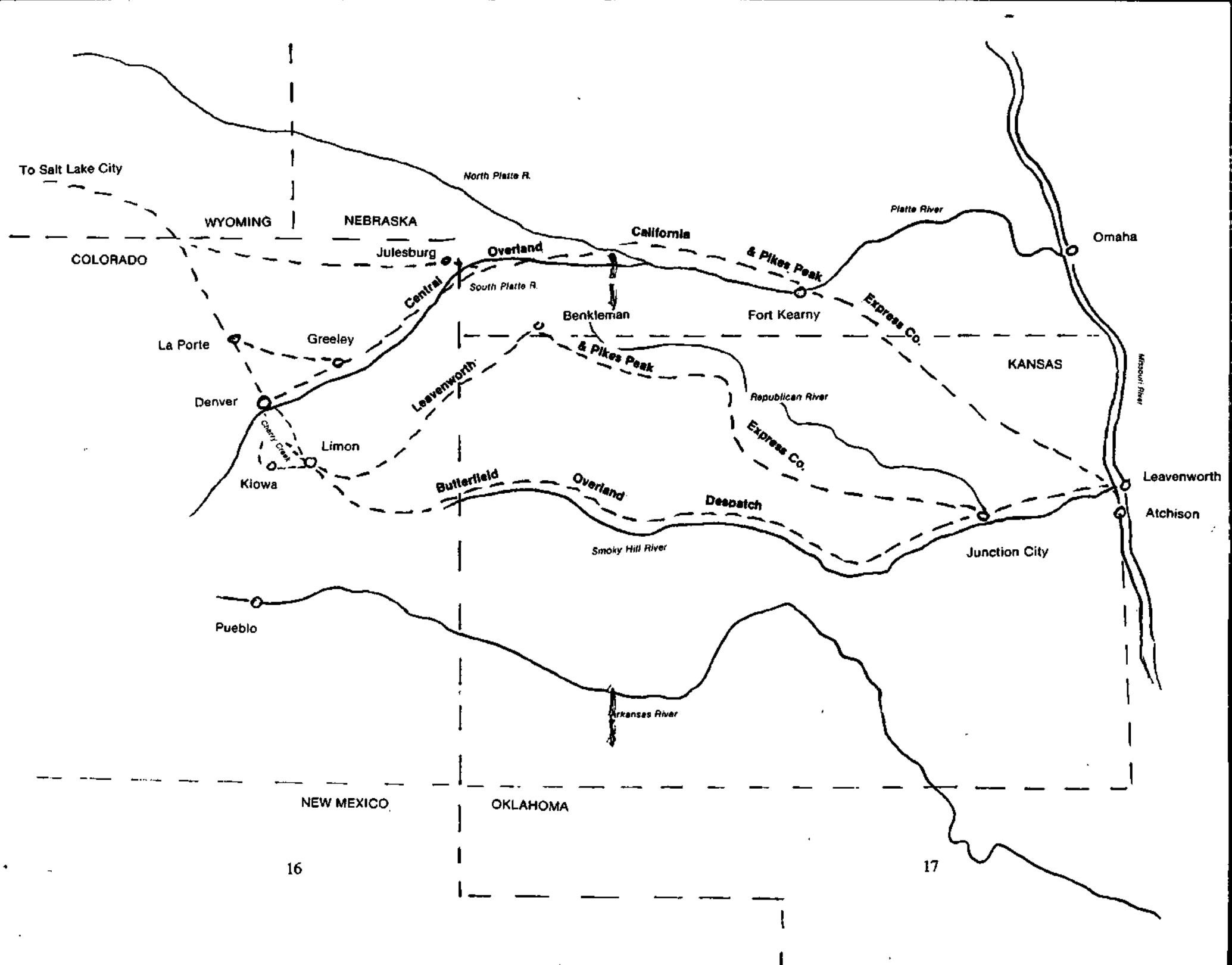
Store 2 Jews, Rustlers, 22 Fulton Street, N. Y.

Denver Public Library, Western History Dept.



*Ben Holladay Overland Coach at Kimballs, 1867 - Denver Public Library, Western History Dept.*





To Salt Lake City

WYOMING

NEBRASKA

COLORADO

North Platte R.

Platte River

Omaha

California

Julesburg

Overland

& Pikes Peak

Central

South Platte R.

Benkleman

Fort Kearny

Express Co.

La Porte

Greeley

KANSAS

Denver

Leavenworth

& Pikes Peak

Republican River

Limon

Express Co.

Kiowa

Butterfield

Overland

Despatch

Missouri River

Leavenworth

Atchison

Junction City

Smoky Hill River

Pueblo

Arkansas River

NEW MEXICO

OKLAHOMA

16

17



*Holladay Overland Mail & Express Depot at Denver. Denver Public Library,  
Western History Dept.*

## BEN HOLLADAY FIGHTS COMPETITION

The route change of the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express Company was accompanied by a new corporate name, a title that was as long as it was optimistic about the final destination of its coaches. Encompassing the key words, "Overland" and "California," the new company mirrored more its dreams than the reality of where it terminated. The Central Overland, California and Pikes Peak Express Company, as it was called, fell short of reaching the Pacific ocean by at least a thousand miles since it went no further than Salt Lake City; but its sign painters enjoyed the challenge of fitting the lengthy name on the fascia boards of its coaches.

With the new Federal mail contract to haul the mails to Salt Lake City it was hoped that the flood-tide of operating deficits could be damned for a while or that, even, a profit might show on the company's books.

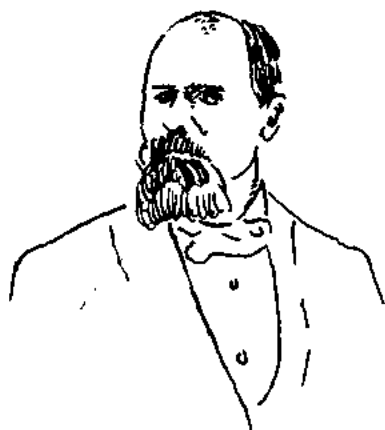
This was not the case, however. Deficits continued to pile up, and in desperation, C.O.C. & P.P.'s president, Russell, sought the aid of Ben Holladay, one of the west's most famous stagecoach entrepreneurs. Holladay seemed all too eager to grant the Central Overland credit and hastily emeshed the struggling company in a fine web of obligations that was to have far-reaching consequences.

Holladay was a Kentucky farm boy who had left the family homestead at an early age to seek his fortune in the west. His first successful venture had been selling whisky to the troops at Fort Leavenworth who seemed possessed of an unslakable thirst for frontier firewater. Other trading endeavors had been equally lucrative including those in Salt Lake City. Usually suspicious of "gentiles," Holladay was one of the few viewed with favor by Brigham Young, the all-powerful Mormon leader. Other business transactions with the Federal government had been tainted with scandal. There was no question that Holladay came out usually on the best side of any deal or that he embodied the perfect example of a survival-of-the-fittest business mentality — a code that viewed competition as a curse on financial enrichment.

It was no surprise, therefore, that Holladay moved swiftly to acquire the ailing C.O.C. & P.P., declaring its bond in default and instituting foreclosure proceedings. At a public sale on March 21st, 1862, in Atchison he took possession of the line's assets. Behind his feverish dealings was a long cherished dream to establish a transcontinental stage line between the Missouri River and the Pacific. It was the wish of every stagecoach operator to do the same and one reason why the key word, "Overland," was incorporated so often in the title of lines that served the west.

Holladay's takeover came at a propitious moment. The Civil War had closed the great Butterfield Overland Stage line that carried the coast-to-coast mails. Its route from St. Louis to San Francisco had looped through the south-west, and its stations in Texas and Arizona had been closed by Confederate raiders. Congress had acted quickly to establish a safer route for the mails. The Butterfield line, now owned by Wells, Fargo and Company, was switched at its western end to run from San Francisco to Salt Lake City where a connection was made with the C.O.C. & P.P. for points to the east. Once again there were name changes. Butterfield's line now became just the Overland Mail Company, and Holladay, in an effort to emulate Wells, Fargo called the C.O.C. & P.P. the Holladay Overland Mail and Express Company.

All of this might of been of little concern to the citizens of Denver except for the fact that Holladay's company served the Queen City by a branch line from Julesberg, located at the very tip of northeastern Colorado. It seemed shabby treatment for a forward-looking community that viewed itself as the hub of a great empire. Holladay had done nothing to sooth Denverites discontent when he eliminated his competition by buying Western Stage Company's Federal contract to haul the mails from Fort Kearny to the Mile-High City. He further refused to pick up Western's passengers bound from Nebraska to Denver. Thoroughly defeated, Western subsequently withdrew its trans-Missouri routes.



*Ben Holladay*

Holladay, however, was mindful that this situation could not last forever. In a statement to the press, dated September 3rd, 1862, he promised that the great through mails would soon be passing via Denver, but, in point of fact, it would still be another two years before this actually happened. In the meantime, he tossed Denverites a carrot by moving the terminus of the branch from Julesberg to Latham (near Greeley).

Fulminating against Holladay's monopoly upon the occasion of his successful bid for a new overland mail contract in 1864, the Rocky Mountain News stated: "For four more years, Colorado, Utah and Nevada belong to Ben Holladay for a footstool and may the Lord have mercy on them."

Denverites might have chafed against this situation in vain, but relief came at last with the announcement early in 1865 that Colonel David Butterfield (1), formerly a successful and well-liked Denver business man who now resided in Atchison, would soon operate a stage line between the two cities. Experienced in the transportation business, he seemed likely to succeed. In Atchison he had acted as a shipping agent for a line of Missouri-river packets and, in that capacity, had handled many consignments for the gold camps. Butterfield had already established a freighting operation between the two cities, the first wagon train carrying 150,000 pounds of freight having left Atchison on June 24th of that year.

For his stage line, Butterfield hired Major Isaac Eaton to survey the most direct route to Denver. Eaton was a retired army officer who had spent many years on the frontier and seemed well qualified for the task. Accompanied by a military escort, since the Indians were increasingly hostile, Eaton chose to survey the old Smoky Hill trail. His choice was a bold one. The Smoky Hill had earned a well-deserved reputation as a hazardous route; but Eaton completed his survey and brought back good news: water had been found along the entire length of the route except for a twenty mile stretch in eastern Colorado.

Butterfield proceeded with plans to establish his new stage line, "The Butterfield Overland Despatch." Twenty coaches were ordered from Chicago, and over two hundred horses, the best that could be found, were shipped to Atchison along with many mules that would do the pulling in more remote areas. Stage stops were established every twelve miles along the route. The old Smoky Hill trail was used except at its western end. At lake station (near Limon) Major Eaton had chosen a more southerly trail to the Cherry Creek valley that passed through Kiowa.

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(1) David Butterfield was not related to John Butterfield, founder of the Overland Stage Line.

Colonel Butterfield was one of the passengers on the first coach to leave Atchison and experienced a safe and uneventful journey across the plains. He arrived at Four Mile House, on the outskirts of Denver, on September 23rd, 1865, where he was met by a large civic delegation.

Dusty but elated by the success of his trip, he was gently removed from his coach and given a seat in the mayor's carriage. Led by a brass band, the procession wound its way down Cherry Creek to the city limits and thence to the Planters House, one of the city's best hostelrys where a banquet was given in the Colonel's honor. The after-dinner speakers, indulging in the florid rhetoric that typified the era, praised him as the new transportation king of the west.

Holladay was determined, however, to gain that title for himself and had no intention of letting his competitor destroy his monopoly of service to the Queen City.

Butterfield's line enjoyed the advantage of a shorter route to the Missouri River. Running time for coaches between Atchison and Denver was usually five days, something that Holladay's coaches could not match traversing the longer trail along the Platte. Holladay set out to disprove this by having himself driven between the two cities in three days, eleven hours and fifteen minutes using one of his own coaches. While it proved that it could be done, so many horses were ruined by being pressed beyond their limits that it was ruled out as standard operating procedure.

Next he cut the fare for the trip by one hundred dollars. Butterfield, maintaining his composure, did the same and further retaliated by putting competing stages on the Denver-Central City run.

Ferocious competition was not the only problem that Butterfield faced. The plains Indians grew increasingly hostile, attacking Butterfield coaches with no quarter given passengers or personnel who operated the stops along the way.

Riding a Butterfield stage was a hazardous undertaking at best as Theodore Davis, a travel correspondent for Harpers, found out upon leaving Leavenworth on November 17th, 1865. Davis had been forewarned. He carried a personal armory consisting of a Ballard rifle, a pair of Navy revolvers, and a stout sheath knife — all this in addition to what the other passengers, the driver and guard toted.

Davis' fears were soon justified. Late one night as the coach bumped along the uneven trail, they encountered the few survivors of an Indian attack

on the coach that had just preceded them. This prompted the driver of Davis' stage to return to the last station where a military escort was procured. Despite this additional protection, the Indians attacked again, killing one soldier and "lifting" the hair of another. They also destroyed an army ambulance by setting fire to it.

The Indians next besieged the station where the party had sought refuge, setting fire to the grass around it and making sorties during a very long night. Davis and his fellow travelers had almost given up hope when, at last, military reinforcements arrived and the Indians retreated (much to the overwhelming relief of all concerned.)

Strangely enough, Holladay's coaches traversing the Overland trail to the north suffered few calamities of this nature, and it was rumored that the crusty transportation king was instigating these attacks to discourage ridership on the B.O.D. It was reported that one redskin sortie had been led by a white man who had been careless enough to reveal his identity by leaving his greasepaint and feathers at home. Despite these suspicions of foul play, definite proof was lacking, but there was no doubt that passenger business on the Butterfield had



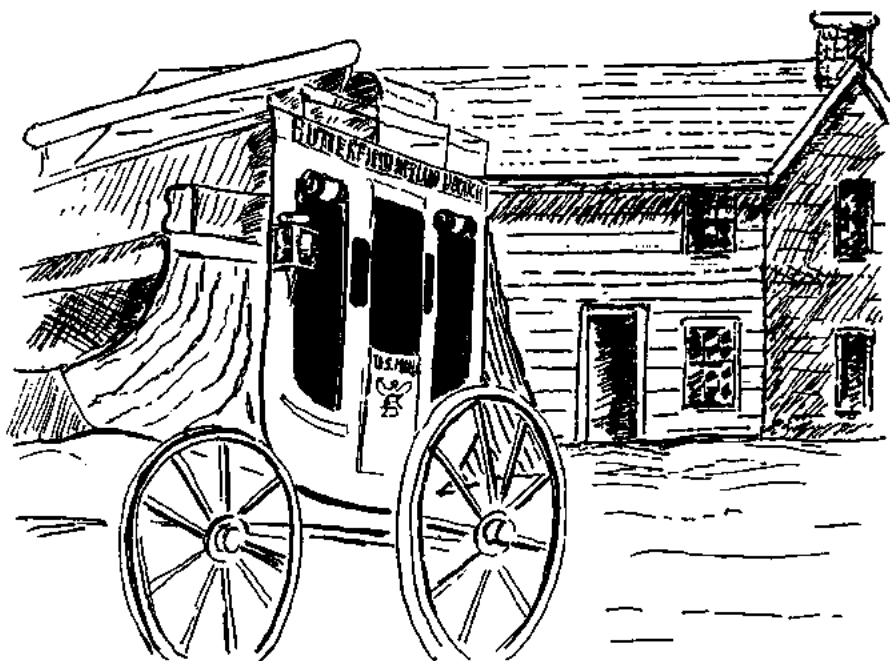
*INDIANS ATTACK A BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND DISPATCH COACH*

declined sharply. Express was still hauled, but the company lacked a Federal mail subsidy.

A slump in the western mining industry adversely affected Butterfield's freight business. By 1866, the company's financial situation was disintegrating rapidly.

Holladay made an offer for the assets of the company that Colonel Butterfield felt it best not to refuse. Therefore, in March of 1866, the Butterfield Overland Despatch was sold to Ben Holladay for an undisclosed price. Once again, the wily transportation king had bested his competition.

Soon after taking control, Holladay made a number of route changes at the western end. A new cutoff was made from Cheyenne Wells to Hugo, and, from Lake Station the road headed in a more northerly direction following what is today U.S. Highway 40. It skipped the Cherry Creek valley entirely. Stations and stock were taken up and transferred to the new cutoffs.





Riding on the last coach to traverse Cherry Creek during the summer of 1866 was Bayard Taylor, renowned traveler, lecturer, author and former correspondent for Greeley's *Tribune*. During his lifetime, Taylor also served as minister to Russia and ambassador to Germany.

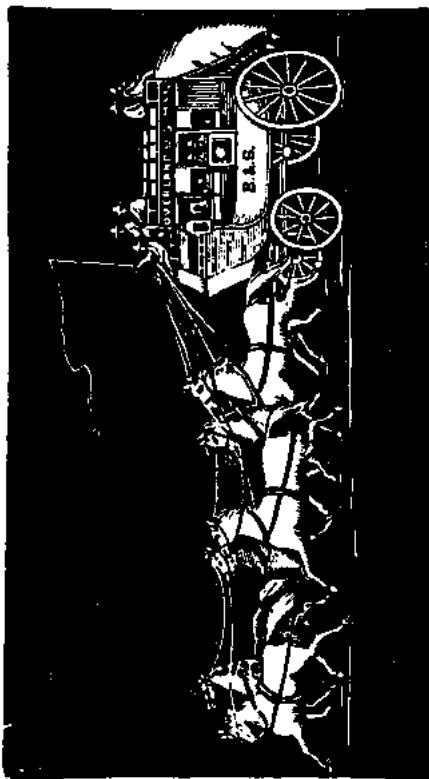
Taylor described his approach to Denver and a brief stop at Four Mile House:

"Midday was intensely sultry . . . We took a hasty dinner at Running Creek, and then made our slow way, with poor horses, across the ridges to Cherry Creek, which we struck about fifteen miles above Denver. Up to this point we had found no settlement, except for two or three grazing ranches. The ride down Cherry Creek, through sand and dust, on the banks of the muddy stream, was the most tiresome part of the overland journey. Mile after mile went slowly by, and still there was no sign of cultivation. At last, four miles from the town, we reached a neat little tavern, beside which grew some cottonwoods. Here were two or three ranches in the process of establishment. The water from the wells was very sweet and cold."

# Barlow & Sanderson's SOUTHERN OVERLAND MAIL AND EXPRESS CO.

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 Canon City to Del Norte, 111 ..  
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 Santa Fe to Taos, 100 ..



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## THE FINAL YEARS OF STAGING

The end of the Butterfield Overland Despatch (which had lasted less than a year) meant that no more of its stagecoaches would be stopping at Four Mile House while passengers refreshed themselves or spent teams of horses were exchanged for the final run into Denver.

Four Mile House, however, still remained a stage stop for coaches heading south to the Arkansas River.

The original log building with its attached acreage had been sold by the Brantners to Mary Cawker in 1860. Mary Cawker had installed a tavern, ladies lounge and a dance hall upstairs.

Although the Civil War had made the Arkansas route unsafe for stagecoaches during the early '60's, many freighters stopped at the log building by Cherry Creek. According to Margaret Long, they used to camp among the cottonwoods; drive into Denver in the morning; trade all day and return for a second night's bivouac before starting on the home trip.

Confederate forces marching towards Colorado were decisively defeated at the battle of La Glorieta in March of 1862. This ended the Civil War in the West. Guerilla activity along the Santa Fe Trail became less of a threat. On September 28th of that year, Cottril, Vickroy and Company's first stage from Bent's Fort on the Arkansas passed Four Mile House. Subsequently, coaches of this line left the Planters' House in Denver every Tuesday for the Arkansas. Connections were made there for Fort Union or Santa Fe.

The line went through a number of name changes and reorganizations. By 1865, it was known as the Santa Fe Stage Company, and coaches departed from Denver for Kansas City every Wednesday. The usual running time was twelve days.

In 1866, the company lost its government contract to carry the mails between Denver and Pueblo to William "One Arm" Jones who announced that he would carry the semi-weekly mails to Denver in two-horse hacks. (Four-horse hacks would be substituted as soon as it was justified by the volume of business.) The Santa Fe Stage Company discontinued service between Denver and Pueblo because it could not compete successfully against Jones, who now possessed the Federal mail subsidy.

Jones named his new line, the Denver-Santa Fe Stage Company. This expressed more optimism than reality. Its hacks never traveled farther south

than Trinidad. Connections were made there with the Barlow and Sanderson coaches for Santa Fe. The journey to the New Mexico capitol usually took three and one-half days.

By 1868, the aging hacks had been replaced with newer Troy or Concord coaches. The Denver and Santa Fe was finally sold to Barlow and Sanderson's Company, now named the Southern Overland Mail and Express Company. By 1870, it was the last major stagecoach system left in the West.

Mary Cawker sold Four Mile House to Levi and Millie Booth in 1864. For many decades, the Booths used the place as a farm and cattle ranch, but, for a time at least, they continued to operate the tavern and serve meals for the weary traveler.

By 1870, the great stagecoach era had ended. There would be no further sounds of pounding hooves, creaking throughbraces, or driver shouts on the road by Four Mile House.

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Illustrations are by the author.