

Early Stage Driving Problems Recalled



THE ASHLAND STAGE waits at the old Linkville Hotel before departing on its day-long run to Ashland, where its passengers will board the railroad for their eventual destinations. This picture, taken at about the turn of the century, shows the old four-horse "thoroughbred" stage, the finest road transportation of its day. John Yaden, the son of J. L. Yaden, who took over the direction of the Ashland line in 1904, was unable to identify any of the people shown, but said the man on the ground leaning against the wheel might have been Bob Garrett, superintendent before Yaden arrived here.

By DICK HUBBELL

"Problems? We had nothing but problems in those days. If it wasn't one thing, it was another," was the comment recently of John Yaden, the son and co-worker of J. L. Yaden, the operator of the last stage coaches to run out of Klamath Falls.

Yaden's coaches folded rapidly after the railroad poked its way into Klamath Falls from Weed in 1900. And, because hauling mail was Yaden's chief source of revenue, he never went heavily into the motor stage business.

The younger Yaden, now proprietor of a Klamath Falls welding shop, was reminiscing recently about the old days—but not the "good old days."

"I don't see how they call them the 'good old days,'" he said. "It was nothing but labor, hard labor. If you have ever sat on a wagon driving horses all day, you'll know what I mean."

His father was a partner in the company of Chilton and Yaden of London, Kentucky, when he first came to Klamath Falls in 1904. The partnership grew into one of the top three mail contractors, operating routes in areas from New York to the Pacific Coast.

One of the routes was the ailing Klamath Falls-Ashland stagecoach line, which connected the Basin with the railroad at Ashland. Yaden came west to supervise the operation, which was losing \$10,000 per year, and attempt to bring it into the black.

His efforts were successful, and he converted the old Linkville Hotel into the center of a stagecoach operation reaching Lakeview, Ashland, Merrill, Fort Klamath, and other cities.

But, his son emphatically said, the operation was no bed of roses.

"I just don't know how they got through on some of the runs. They did, but I don't know how."

He said that the only reason the mail could be held up was high water. Which meant, he went on, that coaches would give way to sleighs in the winter. And the sleighs would, in turn, give way to individual horsemen carrying the mail pouches.

If the going got impossibly rough, the riders would take the lower class mail pouches, tie a long rope to them and suspend them from trees out of reach of animals.

"Sometimes it would be two or three weeks before we could de-

liver some of that mail," Yaden said, "but, eventually, it all got through."

And the job was not without risk. Yaden remembers one occasion when he almost lost his own life between Klamath Falls and Bly. It was one of those days when a man on horseback was about the only way the mail could be carried. The trail itself was fairly well packed, but slippery. And the snow beside the trail was very deep and soft.

The horse slipped off the roadway and threw its rider.

Yaden was unable to get back on the horse, so wrapped his hands with its tail. Then he half walked and was half dragged to the next relay station, at Royston (White's Ranch).

At the ranchhouse, he thawed himself out, and slept "almost around the clock" before resuming his way.

Yaden said that after this experience, he was bothered by cold for several years before he fully recovered.

The life was dangerous, to be sure. But the danger did not extend to holdups. About the only holdup Yaden can remember was one in which his father, who was driving an extra wagon from Keno to Klamath Falls, was the victim.

A young man was standing alongside the road, and, as was customary, Yaden stopped to pick him up. After they had been riding a ways, the passenger pulled a gun on Yaden and demanded all of his money.

Yaden turned over his purse, and the man got off and disappeared. Later, he was arrested, and was

committed to the state hospital in Salem, where a year and one half of treatment failed to do any good.

It was a hard life, devoid of glamour. But it produced its own brand of humor. One story coined during the times involves the stage driver who, during the spring thaw, side the trail in the mud.

It was deep mud—axle deep.

But the driver stopped his coach to pick up the hat, which looked like a new one. He lifted up the hat, but was stunned when a voice demanded "Gimme back my hat!"

The driver looked again and saw a man's head sticking up above the mud. He offered the man a ride, saying that "you can't walk through this stuff."

The man replied:

"Who's walking? I'm riding a good horse!"

Stories like this were the products of a hard working, colorful group of men, the stage drivers. Yaden said that the stage drivers, unlike the railroad men of that period, were not boomers, drifting from job to job. Instead, they stayed on, perhaps because theirs was a slowly dying trade and they wanted to hang onto a job as long as possible.

In some ways, stage drivers had to act like "characters" to make up for their low pay, about \$40 per month, room and board.

One of the top drivers, who was about 65 when he went to work for Yaden, was Horace Manning Sr. of Merrill, who, when he began driving stage, was an ex-sheriff of the county which, at that time, included what are now Klamath and Lake counties.

For many isolated ranchers, the stages, which also functioned as rural mail delivery carriers, were the only contact isolated ranchers had with the outside. Often, Yaden said, sheepherders and others living in the wilds would travel as far as four or five miles just to see the stage go through.

"And some of them were real characters, right out of a movie," he added.

Yaden came west because the post office required that there be a resident manager to operate the mail routes. He brought with him a family of five sons and one daughter.

Two of the sons are still active today. There is Yaden, the welder, and his brother, A. C. Yaden, an attorney with offices on Main Street in Klamath Falls.

The various members of the Yaden family spell their names differently. Some, including the father, spell it Yaden, and others, Yaden.

All of the sons helped in the operation of the stage line, but John and A. C. were probably the most active.

One of the sons, Lynn, was an active civic promoter who donated part of the land occupied by the old Klamath County High School, first exclusively high school building in the county. Lynn also aided in the development of the First Addition area.

As the railroad came north from the end of the Weed Lumber Company line at Grass Lake, the fortunes and operations of the stage lines began to change, adopting themselves to the new pattern.

When the rains got as far as Dorris, a combination stage and boat system met them. Passengers

rode the stage to Keno, where they transferred to boats operated by "Cap" Woodbury, a former Willamette River pilot, who carried his passengers the rest of the way to Klamath Falls.

Somewhat later, the steamer Klamath, originally built in Portland, was disassembled, hauled piece by piece to the Klamath River and rebuilt for service in the area.

Later, when the trains ran as far as Klamath Falls, the stages were rapidly replaced by motor carriers using the large, old touring cars to carry both passengers and mail.

The last stage to operate in the county, Yaden said, was the one which ran from the Polegama Lumber Company mill on what is now the road from Copco to the Greensprings Highway, into Klamath Falls.

But the Yaden group did not find it feasible to operate more than just one motor line, a line to Merrill, which lasted only a short time. This was due to another new policy by the post office, which would only allow one mail route to be awarded to a single contractor.

When the Merrill motor route was discontinued the older Yaden retired. He died in 1918.

In their heyday, the Yaden stage lines, which incidentally, were for a time the only lines operated out of Klamath Falls, used "thoroughbred" stages, the finest of their kind, spring wagons, and during the winter, sleighs. Occasionally, when their equipment would break down, a farmer's buckboard would be borrowed to complete a mail run.

The trip to Ashland took a full day, and the run to Lakeview was much longer. During the winter, the Lakeview run was divided into two segments at Bly.

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