

Nuggets from the Past

By Norman McLeod

Stages served the 'Forest Hill' Divide

The small stage was known as the Colfax, Yankee Jim & Forest Hill. It carried the U.S. mail and passengers. It was manufactured in 1877 for Mr. Powell of Michigan Bluff and William Rea of Forest Hill by carriage builders White and Hinkle of Auburn.

Powell and Rea at that time also owned the Auburn to Michigan Bluff stage.

In the early '80s, John MacAninch of Forest Hill acquired Powell's half interest in both lines. Then, in 1890, H.T. Power of Bullion purchased William Rea's half interest in both lines. Later, the two were consolidated into the Auburn, Colfax & Forest Hill Stage Line. This was about the time John MacAninch moved from Forest Hill to Butcher Ranch.

On the afternoon of July 2, 1901, the stage was held up by a lone bandit at a place known as the Goat Ranch on Yankee Jim's Road. The seven passengers were ordered to the ground, lined up and turned their pockets inside out. One passenger, George Gray - a traveling salesman for Schilling's Best - was instructed to take up a collection with his hat. Excused from the collection by the outlaw were the driver and all obvious laborers. The reduced take amounted to about \$70. Frank Powell of Forest Hill was the driver.

This robber was apprehended a few months later in Yolo County where he was employed on a dairy farm as a milker. This might explain his apparent sympathy for the laborers on the stage.

Again on the following day, July 3, the Auburn to Michigan Bluff stage was also held up by a lone bandit at a spot between the U.S. Ranch and the Spring Garden School. This well-publicized story is marked by an off-the-road memorial at the spot. This was the incident where the lead horse, Old Joe, was shot and killed by the outlaw, and later buried by the side of the road.

One more time, the passengers were required to disembark, netting the outlaw about \$7. Additionally, he ran off with the Wells-Fargo express box, containing no more than \$70.

This robber was later identified as a former Forest Hill resident, Henry Wise, who had previously served time for stage robbery in Arizona.

Prior to the two robberies, Wise and the milker were released from prison at about the same time. They had planned to rob both of these stages together, but somehow got their signals crossed.

As a point of historic interest, the express box in the Henry Wise robbery can be seen today in the Placer County Museum in Auburn. Eight or ten years after the holdup, an Indian lad from Todd Valley found the box deep in the Middle Fork canyon.

The Wells-Fargo express office in Forest Hill closed in 1904. All express business for The Divide was then handled through the company's office in Colfax.

In 1910, W.H. Russell of Colfax acquired the Colfax to Michigan Bluff Stage Line from MacAninch and Power. In 1911, the mail contract from Auburn to Michigan Bluff expired, and the route was discontinued.

This angered residents of The Divide, who sent off a petition to Congress. A short time later, the mail service was renewed. Fred Rupley was low bidder and awarded the contract.

The second stage was the larger of the two. It was built by Henderson and Son of Stockton. This rolling stock ran from Colfax to Iowa Hill - round trips daily - Sundays excepted. In 1898, this was known as the Armstrong & Russell, Colfax & Iowa Hill Stage Line.

About this time, Iowa Hill was in the midst of a mining boom, with the Big

See STAGES, Page 16

Used in April 05-
news

Contractors, Homeowners...WE RENT 'MOST EVERYTHING!

Air Compressors
Backhoes
Cement Tools
Crawlers
Dump Trucks
Electric Snakes

Forklifts
Garden Tools
Generators



Lawn Mowers
Mixers
Pumps

Tractors
Trailers
Trans Jacks
Welders
Wheelbarrows
Yard Tools

STAGES, Continued from Page 15

Dipper Mine uncovering rich paydirt. The Morning Star Mine was also paying large dividends. The Gleeson, Jupiter and many smaller mines were operating on a paying basis.

China Tom had over 100 Orientals employed in Indian Canyon. New buildings were going up on Main Street in Iowa Hill, replacing those destroyed by an 1897 fire. It was an era of prosperity all over again.

On the upper Iowa Hill Divide, as it was then known, were such rich mines as The Pioneer, Damascus, Jarvis, Red Point, Hidden Treasure at Sunny South and the Centerville Mine at Bullion. These mines employed 450 to 500 miners. They were much closer to Colfax via Iowa Hill than any other route, so Russell and Armstrong established a livery stable there to acquire more business for their stage line.

Iowa Hill travelers could leave their homes at 5 a.m. and be in Colfax close to four-and-a-half hours later - connecting with the westbound passenger train. The majority of incoming traveling salesmen stayed overnight in Iowa Hill, next morning hired a livery team and visited the mines all the way to Michigan Bluff. The second night they stayed in Forest Hill. This was called the Circuit Route; Iowa Hill via Forks House to Forest Hill.

The Colfax and Iowa Hill Toll Road was known as the "steepest, narrowest and roughest road in the state." The braking system on Stage No. 2 had to be maintained in perfect working order to avoid serious accidents, particularly with women and children on board. A dirt road then - paved today - its roadbed is as before, narrow and winding and steep.

Stage No. 2 carried in its lifetime more than \$3 million in gold bullion from Iowa Hill to Colfax. It was never robbed. But, it was threatened many times. In the early 1890s, the county took over this road.

Beginning in 1904, the Iowa Hill mines began to fade. Wells-Fargo closed its office. Armstrong and Russell then took over the express business on a weekly basis - bullion to Colfax and coin to Iowa Hill. These shipments were guarded by the Iowa Hill constable who received \$6 per trip from the shipper.

After one year, the manager of the largest mine decided this was too much. He arranged to ship his bullion by freight. On his first return trip with the coin, the teamster was held up and tied to a tree. Some \$2,200 - and the outlaw - are still missing.

In 1911, the Colfax to Forest Hill mail schedule was changed, making it necessary for an extra stage. Stage No. 2 was placed on that run, and there it remained until the automobile took over.

These two stages were always well-maintained, washed and oiled daily - receiving a coat of paint every three years. The running gear was painted yellow - the body a bright red. The horses were vigorous and well-groomed.

Russell sold his stage line to R.D. Brown of Forest Hill in 1915. Brown replaced the stages with motor busses in 1916. In 1917, Brown sold the line to Fred Rupley of Forest Hill, who, in turn, sold out to May Langstaff Sr. in 1918.