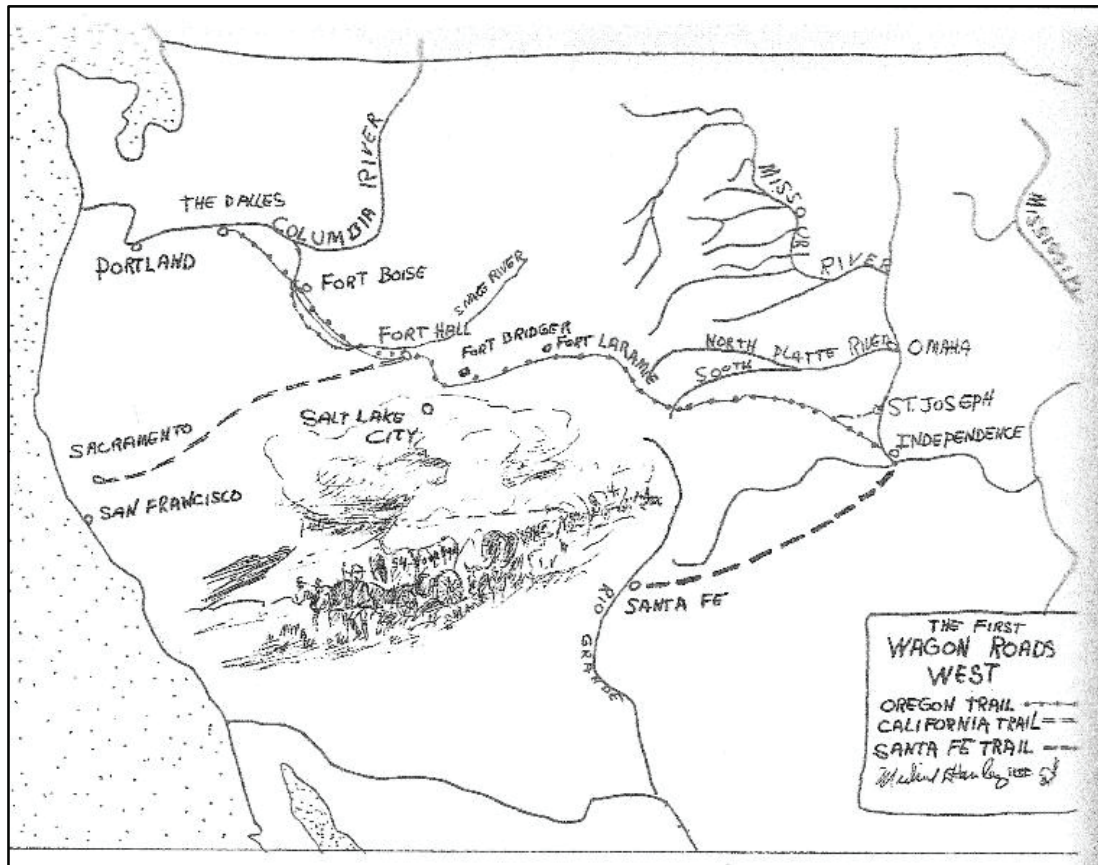




"Sharing the Legacy of a Transportation Empire"

History of Wagons by Michael Hanley: A Partial Chapter from: Sagebrush and Axle Grease

(Permission Given by Mr. Hanley)



The Emigrants using the early roads shared a life of hardship that often ended in tragedy. It has been estimated that an average of 17 people died for every mile of the Oregon Trail. Roughly figuring this would be 30,000 or more lonely graves along the now faded trail that added much to the boundaries of the continental United States. The dreaded cholera killed many more than the uncompromising environment and Indians put together.

Mary and Cole Carter joined the thousands on the Missouri River at St. Joseph for the journey across the Oregon Trail in the Spring of 1854. Mary kept a Journal and on July 16, 1854 wrote, “ The sickness that plagued us on the Platte and the many miles after that seems to have left us in peace. It did though, before it ran its course, take fifty more of our people and that is how many graves we added to the total between the Platte and the Snake Rivers”

Mary Carter was later critically injured in a wagon accident near Fort Boise and Cole completed her Journal. “ My Mary is gone and with her went all our dreams and plans. Now I am alone. I must leave my beloved wife here in this high mountain valley. I can hardly put on paper what has happened, but before she left me, I promised to finish her Journal....”



"Sharing the Legacy of a Transportation Empire"

History of Wagons by Michael Hanley: A Partial Chapter from: *Sagebrush and Axle Grease* (continued)

As the west opened up in the mid 1850's and early 1860's huge freighting and staging companies organized. Some of the companies were Butterfield Overland Dispatch, Russell, Majors and Waddell, Overland Freight Line, Overland Stage Company and Wells Fargo and Company.

The flow of commerce across the plains was almost beyond comprehension. Julesburg, Colorado was one of the Overland Stage Company's main division points and also a freighting center. In a single year 3,574 freighters came into town. There were 4,000 men employed in the business besides 28,000 horses and mules stationed there. Ben Holladay's Overland Stage Company was the largest of the stage and freighting concerns with some 20,000 vehicles. He had more than 100 Abbot and Downing coaches on the road at all times, plus several times that number of the more economical "Mud Wagons" for the rougher routes. It required 6,000 racing thoroughbreds for his coaches alone. When he bought stock for the company, he bought the very best, often paying \$50,000 at a time. Cheaper stock could be obtained but Holladay looked beyond them paying upwards of \$250 for horses and mules of the best quality. Just for his stages he had \$500,000 invested in horses and that was separate from the stock he purchased for his freight outfits. On top of all this the feed bill for the stock was \$1,000,000 annually. Often using his own capital while waiting for government payments that never came through. Holladay went way out on the limb to keep mail and freight moving. His heirs were still trying to collect when all government debts were cancelled during WWI.

Another of the companies engaged in freighting in a big way was the Overland Freight Line owned by E. G. Maclay and Co. It was known as the Diamond R and was immortalized by Charles M Russell in his painting "The Wagon Boss." It has been estimated that the company had approximately 12 hundred head of oxen, 400 head of mules and a large number of horses that were used to freight, with well over 100 large freight wagons. The most important contribution wagon s made for the United States was the role they played in the transfer of large tracts of the public domain into private ownership. In order to open up the lands to the west, it was essential for roads to be built into them, so that they could be settled and developed. Congress could not raise the funds for road building so land grants were offered for construction of wagon roads and in later years for railroads.

Some Fun Wagon Terms

The roads that the wagons used binding our country together have names that are synonymous with the word 'wagon.' A list of a few of the more famous takes in: The Santa Fe Trail, The Pennsylvania Turnpike, The Cumberland Road, Braddock Road, Applegate Road, National Road, Mullens Road, The Barlo Road and The Kelton Road.

Besides roads there are towns and cities which owe their fame and in some cases origins to the wagon. A few of them are: Santa Fe, New Mexico, Wheeling ,West Virginia, Independence, Missouri, Julesburg, Colorado, Concord, New Hampshire, Saint Joseph, Missouri, and Denver, Colorado.,"

The wagon people contributed more than their fair share of songs too. A list would include: "Wait for the wagon", "All the Pretty Little Horses," "Skip to My Lou," "Oh Suzanna," "Buffalo Gals," "Coming 'Round the Mountain," and "The High Salary Driver on the Denver City Line.