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GRANGEVILLE-ELK CITY STAGE LINES

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Miners rushed to Elk City in 1861 when news of a rich strike became known. Express lines and pack trains soon serviced the district and continued in operation until the completion of a wagon road in 1895. Trails and roads into the district often became impassable for wheeled vehicles and horses during the winter and early spring, and mail delivery was made by the determined efforts of hardy men who traveled over the snow-covered trails on snowshoes. Residents found it necessary to purchase enough staples in the fall to last until supplies could reach the community in the spring. The growth of the area experienced peaks and valleys, but the population remained constant enough to warrant regular stage and mail service for many years. In December 1888 Elk City received a regular mail service when A. T. Reynolds was granted a government contract. He began service around the 21st and made the trip between Clearwater and Elk City once a week. (Idaho County Free Press, December 14, 1888, p. 1, c. 4) In the spring of 1893 the Free Press noted: "Ezra Baird has joined with Felix Warren to establish a stage line and saddle train between Grangeville and Elk city. From Grangeville, passengers will take the stage to Silverwood's across Clearwater, and from thence by saddle train into Elk City. They have eight horses at Silverwood's and will make their first trip as soon as the trail is passable for horses. They will extend the stage line into Elk City when the wagon road is completed. Frank Coston is in charge of the line and headquarters have been established in Grangeville." (May 12, 1893, p. 4, c. 1) On May 20 Frank Coston reached Elk City with the mail, and his arrival was heralded as the earliest that anyone had brought horses over the trail. (Ibid., May 26, 1893, p. 4, c. 2) Theibert Wall refuted Coston's feat in a letter to the editor of the Free Press on June 9, 1863 (p. 1, c. 6). He claimed that he had crossed the mountains to Newsome Creek on April 26, 1893, with a pack train loaded with 200 to 250 pounds of freight and a five-gallon keg of whiskey. Woodtick Williams went one better than Wall when he wrote that he came over the trail on the 17th of March with a train of 307 animals. He stated he had 120 white mules loaded with flour, 102 black mules loaded with whiskey, and 85 Cleveland bay mules loaded with general merchandise. He further claimed that all the old-timers would remember him and vouch for his veracity. (Ibid., July 7, 1893, p. 4, c. 3) Pack trains continued to supply the district until July 1, 1895, when an Elk City correspondent to the Free Press wrote: "Great rejoicing in town. Saturday about noon a party of three men road in with a cart, coming through by the trail. First buggy in Elk City. Having horse races this afternoon. The cart left Grangeville Tuesday and arrived in Elk City Saturday at noon sharp. The parties owning the rig intend locating here. They are Barney McCabe, Dr. Maynard and L. H. Barrie, from Tekoa, Washington." (July 5, 1895, p. 4, c. 3) In

August stages began to travel over the route and passengers could at last reach Elk City in the comfort of a coach. The stage left Grangeville every Tuesday and Friday at 5 a.m. and arrived in Elk City at 4 p.m. the next day. Travelers spent the night at the stage company's new station on the summit of Baldy. Fare for the round trip was six dollars and a one-way ticket cost four dollars. Freight charges ran 1½ cents per pound. (Ibid., August 9, 1895, p. 1, c. 3) Travelers over the new road praised it as one of the very best they have traveled. The maximum grade did not exceed ten per cent and the ascent of Baldy was reported as being so gentle that travelers could trot their teams to the summit without realizing they were climbing a big mountain. (Ibid., August 29, 1895, p. 1, c. 4) In November the Free Press published the winter schedule of the stage company, which ran from December 1 to April 30. "From Grangeville, by Harpster, Clearwater and Elk City, to Raymond, 68 miles and back, twice a week.

Leave Grangeville Monday and Thursday at 6 a.m. Arrive at Raymond Wednesday and Saturday by 6 p.m. Leave Elk City Monday and Thursday at 6 a.m. Arrive Grangeville Wednesday and Saturday by 6 p.m." (November 29, 1895, p. 4, c. 3) In the spring of 1896 the stage company initiated a tri-weekly service and the stage left Grangeville on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. (Ibid., March 20, 1896, p. 1, c. 6) In May 1897 Jacob Tippery, the mail contractor, established a way station about five miles west of Baldy Mountain summit. He and his family moved into the new quarters the following month. (Ibid., May 18, 1897, p. 1, c. 5; July 11, 1897, p. 1, c. 4) Within a year, Tippery decided the station was too remote for his family and sold out. He thought it best for his children to be near a school and moved to Grangeville. (Ibid., May 13, 1898, p. 1, c. 4) By February 1899 James and Thomas Surridge ran the Elk City line and reported their operation was doing a land-office business. The increased business prompted the men to purchase a new coach and improve the facilities along the route. (Ibid., February 3, 1899, p. 2, c. 5) The brothers, prior to becoming proprietors of the stage line, laid out the town of Bridgeport on October 1, 1898. In March the Free Press reported: "Surridge Bros. have temporarily raised the rate of fare over their Elk City Stage Line to \$7 for the single and \$12 for the round trip. The increase will remain in force during the period of bad roads. The snow is getting soft and they have had snow shoes made for their horses in order to keep passenger rigs going as long as possible. They have just completed a new 40 x 60 barn at the new town of Bridgeport." (March 17, 1899, p. 4, c. 1) By July the California, Idaho and Nevada Stage Company had obtained the mail contract and was preparing to operate a line of stages over the route.

The Free Press praised the service provided by the Surridge brothers and remarked that they never missed a trip during the winter months. (Ibid., July 28, 1899, p. 3, c. 6) In June the outfit of the California, Idaho and Nevada Stage Company, running into Elk City, was attached for debt. The problems of the line were attributed to the poor condition of the state road and the inability of the company to use coaches along the route. The roads were in such bad shape that the mail had to be carried into Elk City on horseback. (Ibid., June 29, 1900, p. 2, c. 1) Road conditions improved and the stage company once again regained respectability with its creditors. On August 11, 1902, a daily mail service was inaugurated between Stites and Elk City and the future of the district never looked better. (Ibid., August 14, 1902, p. 3, c. 3) In the fall of 1905 J. C. Yandell, proprietor of

the Mountain House, reported business booming due to an increase in traffic along the road. (Ibid., November 23, 1905, p. 6, c. 2) The California, Idaho and Nevada Stage Company continued to run the Elk City route until about 1906. At that time the line became the property of Nathaniel B. Pettibone, one of the founders of Stites. In June 1909 Pettibone sold the line to Alec Clitsome of Spokane for \$15,000. (Ibid., June 3, 1909, p. 1. C. 4) In August the Elk City mail route from Grangeville was changed to connect with the stage at Clearwater. "This change will abolish the Grangeville and Stites line.

J. W. Wilkes, who had been conducting this line, has the contract for carrying the mail over the new route. The stage now leaves Grangeville daily and connects at Clearwater with the Elk City and Stites stage. The Grangeville stages leave at 5 a.m. each morning except Mondays when the start will be at 10 a.m. Returning leaves Clearwater daily at 4 p.m. except on Tuesday when the departure occurs at 11 a.m. (Ibid., August 5, 1909, p. 1, c. 1) In the fall Clitsome abandoned the line, leaving Elk City without a stage line. He claimed there was too much factionalism among the businessmen of Stites, which made it impossible for him to earn a living. Apparently some would boycott him while others lent their support. (Ibid., October 28, 1909, p. 1, c. 5) Pettibone soon came to the rescue of Elk City residents and once again took charge of the line. He continued to run the line until selling out to Frank Hye in 1914. In the spring of 1910, L. Williams, owner of the Grangeville-Clearwater stage line, was awarded a four-year contract to carry mail between Grangeville and Clearwater, where connections could be made with the Elk City stage. (Ibid., May 26, 1910, p. 8, c. 4) During the summer of 1911, John Jack and R. Cote undertook an automobile trip into the upper south fork country. "The trip is a hard one and no doubt the party will have some thrilling experiences before the return to Grangeville. This is the first car to go into the Elk country, the roads to the camp being in such a condition that people have not cared to hazard such a journey. (Ibid., August 24, 1911, p. 1, c. 5) In the spring of 1913 Mrs. I. R. Wisner, wife of the proprietor of the Halfway House, found a gold watch in a sack of flour. The makers of the flour had placed watches in a number of sacks as a promotion to attract buyers. (Ibid., May 22, 1913, p. 5, c. 3) In the fall of 1914 the people of Elk City were stunned upon learning that Frank Hye had shot and killed his wife and Hugh Kennedy, one of his drivers. Hye had suspected that the two had become lovers and returned home early from a trip in an attempt to confirm his suspicions. Upon entering the house, he discovered his wife in bed and Kennedy disrobing. He quickly drew his revolver and shot them both. He then picked up his little girl and took her to a friend's house. He next searched for the sheriff and turned himself in for the recently committed crime. His trial was held in February and March 1914. The jury found him guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced him to ten years to life. After serving just over two years, he was granted a full pardon in September 1917. He returned briefly to the Elk City area and, after attending to some business matters, left for the state of Washington. (Ibid., October 8, 1914, p. 1, c. 1-2; trial, February 22, 1915, p. 1, c. 1-4, and March 4, 1915, p. 1, c. 1-4; convicted and sentenced, March 11, 1915, p. 1, c. 1-3; pardoned, September 27, 1917, p. 8, c. 3) Soon after the arrest of Hye, N. B. Pettibone was placed in charge of the prisoner's interests and the residents of Elk City continued to receive their

mail without any interruption. (Ibid., October 15, 1914, p. 8, c. 4) In May of 1915 the Stites-to-Elk City mail contract was relet to O. A. "Ole" Johnson and John Phillips for a flat rate of \$14,000. (Ibid., May 13, 1915, p. 1, c. 4) During the same month, Henry Foulks, proprietor of the Switchback Station, returned to his business after a visit to San Francisco. (Ibid., May 27, 1915, p. 2, c. 4) In the fall of 1917 the snow was reported to be six inches deep on the switchback on the road to Elk City. The Free Press noted: "Mr. Johnson last Thursday drove an automobile through the snow from Elk City to Stites." (Ibid., November 1, 1917, p. 1, c. 5) The introduction by Johnson of a motorized vehicle along the route would soon bring an end to the days of the four-horse stages rolling on the road to Elk City. In the summer of 1918 Phillips and Johnson began operating a motor truck over a portion of the stage route. "They make two trips a day by motor from Stites to Switchback. The truck is used at times to haul passengers and mail to Newsome and Elk City. They recently made a trip to Red River, taking in a number of men to fight forest fires. They have stated that the truck greatly reduced the cost of operating the stage line by eliminating the need for horse feed and care of the animals." (Ibid., July 25, 1918, p. 6, c. 4) In June 1918 James C. Safely, editor of the Free Press, took a leisurely trip along the route and found the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Yarbrough at Newsome first class. He reported the structures "Built entirely of logs, the tavern at Newsome and the adjacent buildings are entirely in harmony with the natural scenic beauty which exists here, for we are virtually surrounded by mountains heavily covered with timber. . . ." (Ibid., June 6, 1918, p. 6, c. 1) In the summer of 1919, the stage was upset about five and a half miles west of Elk City when the tongue of the four-horse stage broke. The driver, John Waymire, and a passenger, Mrs. Miller, suffered some injuries but were able to proceed when a replacement arrived. (Ibid., July 3, 1919, p. 1, c. 4) The following summer Ole Johnson announced that motor trucks would be placed on the entire route and the trip would be made in a day instead of a day and a half. He reported "Trucks are now on the line between Stites and Switchback and Newsome and Elk City, but it is necessary because of snow and mud to use horses and wagons between Switchback and Newsome." (Ibid., July 1, 1920, p. 1, c. 5-6) One-day service became a reality on July 5 when the auto stage arrived in Elk City after leaving Stites earlier in the day. (Ibid., July 8, 1920, p. 5, c. 3) On the 10th O. A. Johnson and William Sutter sold the Stites-to-Elk City line to R. H. Chase and C. L. Fletcher, who intended to continue the operations in the same efficient manner as the previous owners. (Ibid., July 20, 1920, p. 1, c. 3) Horses continued to be used when the roads were in bad shape, but for all practical purposes the day of the four-horse stage became only a memory. The introduction of motorized vehicles not only eliminated horse-drawn stages but also created the need for better roads. Miners and residents of the Elk City country had long clamored for the construction of a road up the South Fork of the Clearwater River. They proclaimed a river grade road would be much easier to keep open during the winter months and would also considerably shorten the distance. In September 1909 a trail was completed up the South Fork and many soon called for its expansion into a wagon road. (Ibid., September 16, 1909, p. 1, c. 1) In the summer of 1919 voters of the Grangeville Highway District approved a \$50,000 bond for their share in constructing a South Fork road. (Ibid., July 10, 1919, p. 1, c. 1; August 14, 1919, p. 1, c. 3)

Shortly thereafter, W. J. Hall, Commissioner of Public Works reported that the South Fork road would be designated a state highway known as the Elk City Highway. He went on to note that a survey would soon be started and actual construction of the road would follow. (Ibid., July 24, 1919, p. 1, c. 1; August 14, 1919, p. 1, c. 3) In October W. E. Adamson, highway engineer, began work on the final location of the road. There was \$185,000 available for the construction: \$135,000 from the Forest Service and the \$50,000 bond. (Ibid., October 30, 1919, p. 1, c. 6) Shortly after arriving on the job, Adamson accidentally shot and killed himself and a replacement had to be found. (Ibid., November 13, 1919, p. 1, c. 5-6) On July 20, 1920, a contract for the construction of the first link of the road, an eleven-mile stretch between Rocky Point, and Castle Creek Ranger Station, was let to Otto Hanson of Spokane for \$187,000. This was \$2,000 above the allotted amount, but the government agreed to cover the excess. (Ibid., July 15, 1920, p. 1, c. 1; August 5, 1920, p. 1, c. 3) In February 1921 an additional \$20,000 was let by the government and the actual cost for construction of the entire forty-eight miles was estimated at \$800,000. (Ibid., February 10, 1921, p. 1, c. 6) By 1929 the road had reached Golden and late in 1932 the highway was finally opened all the way to Elk City. (Sister M. Alfreda Elsensohn, Pioneer Days in Idaho County, Vol. II (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1951), p. 430.

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