

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

GRANGEVILLE - FLORENCE STAGE LINES

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The discovery of the fabulously rich placers at Florence in 1861 saw scores of miners rushing to the new camp. The district experienced rises and declines in population proportionate to the availability of paying claims, but miners remained in the area well after the turn of the century. Some quartz mines were developed, but the lack of an adequate wagon road hindered early efforts. Until 1896 only a pack trail existed between Mount Idaho and the camp, and the mines and merchants received their mail and supplies by pack and saddle trains. By the summer of 1886 George Shearer, a Nez Perce War veteran, had charge of the Grangeville-to-Warrens mail route. To accommodate the citizens of Florence, he ran his line through that camp. He operated a passenger service in conjunction with his mail business and offered the best of saddle horses for customers. (Idaho County Free Press, July 16, 1886, p. 1, c. 5 and September 24, 1886, p. 1, c. 6) By 1896 the trail had been widened to permit the passage of wagons, and Fred Riggins and James Lytle began a stage line over the route. Their four-horse stage left Grangeville on June 23 carrying U.S. mail and passengers. Their schedule called for one-day service twice a week, but during the early spring when the roads were wet they found it necessary to stop overnight at the Halfway House both coming and going. Before obtaining the U.S. mail contract, Riggins had offered a private mail service four times a month. He took two days going in and a day and a half coming out. (Ibid., March 20, 1896, p. 1, c. 6; July 3, 1896, p. 1, c. 4) The following month Frank and Hugh Coston received the mail contract and commenced a semi-weekly mail service on September 3. Their four-horse stage left Grangeville on Monday and Tuesdays, but they soon attempted to establish a tri-weekly service. (Ibid., September 4, 1896, p. 1, c. 5) In August 1897 John Clark was operating a stage and express line along the route, and in July 1898, J. C. Holsclaw subcontracted the mail for a year. (Ibid., August 13, 1897, p. 1, c. 2; July 29, 1898, p. 1, c. 5) In September the Florence stage was compelled to turn back on account of forest fires while on its way out. (Ibid., September 2, 1898, p. 1, c. 5) In February 1899, Jay Coston, the twenty-one-year-old younger brother of Frank and Hugh was found dead within four miles of Florence. He had died of exposure. (Ibid., February 17, 1899, p. 4, c. 1) The following month the Grangeville paper reported: "Stage line to Florence Daily. Leaves Grangeville 5 a.m. Arrives Florence 5 a.m. Leaves Florence 5 a.m. Arrives Grangeville 7 p.m. Fare to Florence \$5; round trip \$9; express freight, \$3 per 100 lbs. Coston Bros., proprietors." (Ibid., March 24, 1899, p. 3, c. 7) In March 1900 A. G. Smith, of the Grangeville-Florence stage line, removed his family to Dead Horse Station and established the Grangeville office in

the Palace Hotel. (Ibid., March 2, 1900, p. 3, c. 3) By June the California, Idaho and Nevada Stage Company had secured the mail contract. W. E. Travis, superintendent of the company, reported that he would put on a four-horse stage six times per week along the route.

In addition, the company would inaugurate a tri-weekly mail service between Adams Camp and Buffalo Hump. Saddle horses would be used along this route until a wagon road could be completed. (Ibid., July 6, 1900, p. 4, c. 1) In September 1904 Jack Moore was in Grangeville buying horses to put on the stage lines between his place at Adams Camp and Florence. He had leased the route and intended to improve the service. He also reported several forest fires still raging in his vicinity, but as there were few settlers no serious damage had resulted. (Ibid., September 1, 1904, p. 4, c. 3) In March of 1908 the stage from Florence got stuck near the Toll Gate on its way out in the deep snow. The team broke through the snow and several men worked forty-eight hours in an attempt to save the animals. One horse was saved but the other could not be extracted and died. (Ibid., March 19, 1908, p. 1, c. 5) The declining population of Florence made a stage line an unprofitable venture, and service was discontinued shortly after 1910. The few miners who remained in the old camp were once again left to their own devices for the transportation of their supplies.

Way Stations

In March 1898, a Mrs. McGaffee took charge of the Slate Creek Station. She was well liked and considered a good businesswoman. (Idaho County Free Press, March 25, 1898, p. 1, c. 2) Six way stations were operating between Grangeville and Florence when L. R. Bickford started a seventh one at Big Boulder, six miles from Florence, in April 1898. (Ibid., April 15, 1898, p. 1, c. 4) In May 1898 Dave Pugh, of Florence, purchased the station at Adams Camp. He hoped to make it the best stopping place on the route. He also planned to continue his meat market business in Florence. (Ibid., May 20, 1898, p. 1, c. 4) The Free Press on November 12, 1903, noted: "Adams Camp, a road station on the way to Buffalo Hump conducted for many years past by David Pugh has been sold to John Moore, a brother-in-law of Frank Brown who has already taken possession. It has always been a popular stopping place and is nicely situated to accommodate all travel either to the Hump or Florence. The price is said to have been \$2,500 cash." (p. 4, c. 2) In March 1899 C. O. Washburn and Geo. Brewer were owners of the hotel at Dead Horse on the Florence road. (Ibid., March 17, 1899, p. 1, c. 5) In July 1903 A. A. Smith took charge of the station. He replaced John Weatherford, who had been running the station for the previous four months but had recently departed for Heppner, Oregon, to settle a large estate left to him by relatives who were drowned in a flood. (Ibid., July 16, 1903, p. 4, c. 3)