

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

GRANGEVILLE-SALMON RIVER-NEW MEADOWS STAGE LINES

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Shortly after the discovery of gold at Florence in 1861, settlers and miners became interested in the Salmon River area between Riggins and White Bird. Ranches along the river provided needed supplies for the miners, and some served as way stations along the trail to the mines. Although it attracted a few early placer miners, the area did not receive too much attention until the 1890's. The Nez Perce War in 1877 had an unsettling effect on the river population, but soon after the cessation of hostilities the area experienced an increased growth. Pack trains and saddle horses remained the standard mode of transportation for supplies and travelers until the beginning of a road system in 1894.

On November 30, 1894, the Idaho County Free Press (p. 4, c. 1) wrote: "Roy Gordon started the first stage to ranches and communities along the Salmon River. He goes to the end of the state wagon road which is in the course of construction. He makes the trip with four spirited horses and covered coach twice a week." The following spring Gordon sold his Salmon River stage line between Grangeville and Freedom to John Riggins. Riggins established various stops along the route and made two round trips every week between Grangeville and John Day Creek. (Ibid., April 19, 1895, p. 1, c. 4; May 3, 1895, p. 4, c. 2) In the fall he built a stage station near Horseshoe Bend and contracted to purchase baled hay on Camas Prairie. (Ibid., October 18, 1895, p. 1, c. 5) In November he continued to expand his facilities, constructing a large stage barn on the east bank of Three Mile Creek within the city limits of Grangeville. (Ibid., November 1, 1895, p. 1, c. 4; November 15, 1895, p. 1, c. 4) He published his winter schedule, December 1-April 30, in the Free Press on November 29, 1895 (p. 4, c. 3):

From Grangeville by way of White Bird, Freedom and Pollock
to Meadows.

Leave Grangeville Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6 a.m.

Arrive Pollock by 10 a.m.

Leave Pollock Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 6 a.m.

Arrive Meadows by 6 p.m.

Leave Pollock Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 6 a.m.

Arrive at Grangeville by 10 p.m.

Riggins continued to run the line until he sold his holdings to Ezra Baird and Frank Rice in April of 1897. After the sale, he opened a blacksmith shop on his ranch, which he ran in conjunction with his

Salmon River ferry. (Ibid., April 23, 1897, p. 1, c. 4) The next summer Cyrus Overman subcontracted the daily mail service between Grangeville and Freedom and drove the stage himself. (Ibid., July 15, 1898, p. 1, c. 4) In September Fred McGaffee replaced Roy Gordon as driver on the White Bird-Goff portion of the line. Gordon moved to Lewiston to care for his brother Sida, who was incapacitated with typhoid fever. (Ibid., September 28, 1898, p. 4, c. 3) In the spring of 1899 a tri-weekly stage was operating between White Bird and Goff, where connections were made for Meadows. The stage left White Bird on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 11:30 a.m. The return stage left Goff on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 4 a.m. and arrived in White Bird at 11 a.m. A. A. Robinson, the general state agent, maintained an office in Grangeville. (Ibid., March 24, 1899, p. 3, c. 7) In September 1901 the State Wagon Road between Grangeville and Meadows was nearly completed and wagons passed over the route daily. By November the road had been accepted as completed by the State Wagon Road commissioners and officially opened for traffic. (Ibid., September 5, 1901, p. 4; November 7, 1901, p. 4, c. 2) On July 1, 1902, a daily mail service went into effect between Grangeville and Meadows, which made Boise accessible in two days from Camas Prairie. "The stage leaves here every evening at 5:40 and keeps going until Meadows is reached, where there will be direct connections with the P. I. & N. Railroad at Council. From Grangeville to White Bird Leroy Gordon will operate the line, and from White Bird to Goff and from Goff to Meadows the line will be in the hands of Allen Riggles and Freeman and White." (Ibid., June 2, 1902, p. 1, c. 5) In August the Grangeville-Meadows Stage Line advertised an \$8.50 fare to Meadows and \$17.50 to Boise. (Ibid., August 7, 1902, p. 4, c. 4) The same month Esten Freeman, one of the proprietors of the line, married Miss Lizzie Clay on the 20th at Meadows. (Ibid., August 28, 1902, p. 4, c. 4) In February 1903 Homer Levander and Charles Goodno purchased the Goff-White Bird portion of the line from Allen Riggles, Levander and his wife soon moved from Meadows to the stage station about twelve miles out from White Bird. (Ibid., February 26, 1903, p. 4, c. 2) In May 1905 the Meadows Eagle noted, "The summer schedule on the Meadows-Grangeville stage line works only inconvenience and annoyance to all concerned. The traveling public is inconvenienced by early starts and night rides and the patrons of the mail route are annoyed by having their Saturday and Sunday's papers delayed until Wednesday, instead of receiving them on Monday, as during the time of the winter schedule." (Ibid., May 18, 1905, p. 3, c. 1) In June 1907 R. L. Freeman, a member of the firm of Freeman and Brown, proprietors of the White Bird-Meadows stage line, reported that the railroad had reached Evergreen and stages would run to the railhead. "One can now get on the White Bird stage at 6 a.m. and get to Meadows the next evening, leave Meadows the following morning and connect with the train at Evergreen for points south." (Ibid., June 13, 1907, p. 1, c. 3) During the summer the stage left Grangeville daily, except Monday at 6 a.m. and arrived every day except Tuesday, in Meadows at midnight. The fare between Grangeville and Meadows was \$9.00; between Grangeville and White Bird, \$2.00. (Ibid., May 2, 1907, p. 3, c. 6) In December 1912 the Whitebird Sun reported: "The post office has ordered changes in the mail service which will require the Salmon River Stage Company to run into New Meadows rather than the old town

as formerly. This will necessitate turning off from the old road some three miles this side of their destination. The distance is the same.

This change takes away all through travel from the old town and is quite a boost for the new." (Ibid., December 26, 1912, p. 2, c. 3) The change was made so that the stage could connect with the railroad, which had reached New Meadows in January 1911. In the spring of 1914 Freeman and Brown were kept busy hauling large loads of parcel post to their Salmon River patrons. (Ibid., April 9, 1914, p. 8, c. 2) In July Leroy Gordon and E. J. Smith were awarded the mail contract and relieved Freeman and Brown of their duties on the first. The firm began their contract with new outfits but retained the services of Arthur Dunham as driver between Grangeville and White Bird. (Ibid., July 2, 1914, p. 1, c. 5) Within a year Freeman and Brown were back in control of the line, as reported by the Free Press: "Monday of this week [May 31] terminated the Grangeville-New Meadows contract of Smith & Gordon. The mail route was taken over by these parties in July last year, and should have continued until July 1918. It seems however that the figures were so in excess of the revenue derived by the government that new bids were called for and the contract relet. Freeman & Brown have now taken over the line and purchased the equipment of Smith and Gordon." (June 3, 1915, p. 5, c. 1) The following month the stage was involved in an accident about one mile north of John Day Creek. "The outfit met an automobile and the horses plunged over the side of the road and fell some 300 feet. Three of the horses were killed and the outfit was lost. Total lost of \$500. The driver jumped and was not injured. No passengers were on board." (Ibid., July 22, 1915, p. 1, c. 5-6) four-horse stages continued to run on the road until the spring of 1919. The Free Press wrote: "Automobile stages were placed in operation on May 1 over the entire route of the stage line from Grangeville to New Meadows. Freeman & Brown, proprietors of the stage line, are operating three motor cars over the route, and plan to make the trip from Grangeville to New Meadows, a distance of ninety miles, over rough mountain roads, in one day. One motor car will go from Grangeville to Freedom. Her passengers and freight will be transferred to a second car which will continue to Pollock, transferring to a third stage bound for New Meadows. The company will continue to use stages and horses when the roads will not permit auto traffic. The new stages are motor trucks equipped with pneumatic tires and will haul eight passengers as well as mails, baggage and express." (May 1, 1919, p. 1, c. 4-5) That fall heavy snows forced the line to abandon the motor trucks and return to horses, but the days of horse-drawn coaches were numbered. (Ibid., October 30, 1919, p. 1, c. 1)

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