

ROSS, ELIZABETH OLD MAIL ROUTES.

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#### OLD MAIL ROUTES

In Indian Territory days a postoffice was established from time to time in out-of-the-way sections of the hill country east of the Illinois river. The mail was carried by men on ~~horse~~back, who traveled over the hills and through woodlands and valleys, often experiencing much discomfort in the winter season and when there was abundant and sometimes protracted rainfall. One of the routes led by the Wauhatchie postoffice, which was established in 1879 and maintained during a number of years, or until the delivery of mail by a carrier on a route from Welling.

Another carrier rode the distance from Siloam Springs, Arkansas, arriving at Tahlequah in the late afternoon, leaving early the next morning for his Arkansas destination.

A carrier, or as usually called, "mail rider," left Tahlequah in the morning and rode to the July Spring, half-way between Tahlequah and Evansville, Arkansas, on the east, and met the carrier from that place. The riders exchanged mail bags at the spring and returned to their respective towns, each reaching their postoffices during the late afternoon, sometimes at dusk, if not later, in the winter season when the weather was bad.

Out east of Tahlequah, west of the Illinois river, a

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rather deep and once lonely valley between two high ridges, became called "mail hollow" because the mail riders traveled along a trail in the valley. The name is yet occasionally heard when the older people speak of bygone times.

A few of the mail riders of the decade of the nineties of the last century are yet living (1937). When the Illinois river, the Barren Fork, Caney and other watercourses were swollen from heavy rainfall difficulty was experienced in getting the mail through. The Illinois could be crossed on a ferry boat in case its waters had not overflowed its banks and spread far out over the lowlands. But there was no ferry on the Barren Fork, or the smaller streams, and bridges were unknown. So there were times when the riders were compelled to wait until the waters had subsided sufficiently for them to do some "deep fording." Although there were lawless characters in portions of the hills at times, none of them gave the mail carriers any trouble, so far as known.

Establishment of rural routes caused discontinuance of a number of the postoffices in various sections, but some of the older people well remember the mail carriers of a vanished period as they rode along the narrow roads with their leather bags across their saddles.