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ROSS, ELIZABETH. STAGE COACH -

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Elizabeth Ross, Interviewer
Indian-Pioneer History
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Stage Coach

During several years, passengers bound from Tahlequah for Fort Gibson, or from that place to Tahlequah, were carried in a stage coach similar to those which have often been mentioned in connection with the far west. At one time horse-drawn wagons were largely used, but after the passage of many years large covered hacks were often used, and eventually John F. Wilson, proprietor of a large livery barn at Tahlequah placed a stage coach in operation. The vehicle was drawn by four horses and the distance between the two towns was covered in exceptionally good time considering the road which was unpaved and often in poor condition due to adverse weather conditions. The distance was approximately twenty-one miles over a route which led through woodlands, prairie, and hills.

The United States mail bags were carried on the stage coach, and there was usually a crowd assembled in front of the post offices at each end of the line when the vehicle arrived.

ROSS, ELIZABETH. STAGE COACH.

7424

2

On several occasions the stage coach was held up and the mail bags secured and carried away by robbers, but usually the trips were without unusual incident. During the latter half of 1894 and through 1895 several lawless characters were known to lurk, from time to time, at several places along the road, and there was possibility that robbery might be made. As a consequence some of the passengers felt uneasy along the more lonely sections of the route, but except on the occasions mentioned no trouble was experienced.

There were several watercourses along the route which were usually fordable, and at times were almost devoid of water, but in times of copious rainfall the streams, even the smallest, became wide and raging torrents and could not be crossed for hours. At such times, the driver waited until the waters subsided sufficiently for the horses to draw the vehicle to the opposite bank. Bridges were unknown at this period, and no one seems to have thought of the convenience bridges would have been to all concerned.

The four horses composing the motive power

ROSS, ELIZABETH. STAGE COACH.

7424

3

of the stage coach were large, long-bodied and strong animals. When entering the limits of Tahlequah the four were driven with somewhat increased speed and clattered up the principal street in a sweeping trot. It was not until some years later that the railroad was completed to Tahlequah and the stage coach was at that period the most modern passenger carrying vehicle.

The men who from time to time served as drivers were skilled in the handling of horses, and were familiar with the route and the branch roads sometimes used when detours became necessary on account of high water, or muddy and miry conditions caused by heavy rainfall. The drivers were also familiar with the fords and immediately realized when the water was too deep to be crossed with safety.

Large numbers of travelers made their way from one town to the other during the several years that the Tahlequah-Fort Gibson stage coach was operated.

Authority: References to stage coach in the Tahlequah Arrow; recalled by George N. McGregor, Daniel Lannigan, and others.