Guide to the California Stage Company Register 1864/1868

Overview of the Collection

Collection Title: California Stage Company Register
Dates: 1864-1868
Identification: MS-0443
Creator: California Stage Company
Physical Description: 0.20 linear ft
Repository: Special Collections & University Archives

Historical Note:
The California Stage Company was founded by James E. Birch and was one of the principal stagecoach lines carrying passengers during the California Gold Rush during the 1850s. The company became a Wells Fargo line later in that decade, carrying mail, money, and passengers, and by the early 1860s was operating a huge network of stage lines out of three main hubs: Sacramento, Folsom, and Marysville. Though the company had much competition from the rival Pioneer Stage Line, the route represented in this item was extremely profitable due to the continuous stream of emigrants crossing the Sierra to settle in prosperous California after the Gold Rush, and due to the discovery of the Comstock Lode (the first silver mine in the U.S.) in Virginia City, Nevada, one of the stops on this route. The region served by this stagecoach line was largely wealthy and thriving because of widespread silver mining activity at the time.

According to Bancroft, the California Stage Line sold their route out of North San Juan to Cunningham and Moody in 1866.

Access Terms
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Corporate Name:
California Stage Company

Topical Term:
Coaching (Transportation) -- West (U.S.) -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Stagecoaches--California--1860-1880

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Identification of item, folder title, box number, California Stage Company Register, Special Collections and University Archives, Library and Information Access, San Diego State University.

Scope and Contents
This item is an original manuscript register of the California Stage Company. The ledger begins on January 1, 1864 and ends on August 3, 1868, and is a log of the daily stagecoach run between North San Juan (the line stop where the book was based), Sacramento, Nevada (CA), and Virginia City (NV).

Passenger names, residence, destination, fare paid, and cashier name are all detailed for each day; other details such as extra or special baggage, driver name, and special directions are also given. Driver names include William Poice, Rush Deskins, John Majors, and O. C. Lovitt, and one called "Smokey."

A piece of California Stage Company stationery from Marysville, is pasted on the inside front cover and identifies fares for service points, including: Allegany Town, Forest City, Downiesville, Empire Ranch, Parks and Long Bar, Marysville, and Sacramento. The route represented in this ledger includes the city of Nevada, California and Virginia City, Nevada. The "residence" field for most passengers is San Juan; the most frequent places in the "destination" column are Nevada, Virginia City, and Sacramento. Each page is headed (in handwriting) "Nevada Line" or "Nevada & Virginia," until October of 1865, when the heading changes to "Nevada, Colfax & Sacramento."

Many details in the register illuminate the social, economic, and ethnic history of the Sierra Nevada after the Gold Rush. For example, nearly every day there is at least one passenger entry for "China" or "Chinaman." This detail speaks to the presence of Chinese immigrant workers in the area, their movements within the region, and their contribution to the economy as railroad laborers, mine workers, cooks, carpenters, and farm hands. The general term "Indian" also appears occasionally in the passenger lists; however most of the passenger names are German, Irish, Scottish, or English in origin. A frequently seen general term is "Lady" or "Wife" in conjunction with a gentleman's name, but full names of female passengers are also written out. According to the passenger list, both married and single women often traveled alone, with another woman, or with a child or several children.

Two famous stagecoach robberies (detailed in Great Stagecoach Robberies of the Old West, by R. Michael Wilson, TwoDot Publications, 2006: p.46-52) occurred on the road between North San Juan and Nevada City on May 8th and May 16th of 1866. The passenger lists given here correspond to published accounts of those robberies.

A page titled "Account of Hay and Barley delivered by G. W. Smith for the Telegraph Stage Company 1866" appears as the last page in the register, and gives figures for deliveries in June, July, and August of that year. Though the Telegraph Stage Company ran a similar line as the California Stage Company at the time, the relationship of the two businesses to each other during this time is unknown.