Collections

TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

1901-1902;

TOGETHER WITH

ADDRESSES AT ANNUAL MEETINGS, MEMORIALS, AND MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS.

EDITED BY GEO. W. MARTIN, SECRETARY.

VOL. VII.

TOPEKA:
W. Y. MORGAN, STATE PRINTER.
1902.

TRAVEL BY STAGE IN THE EARLY DAYS.

Reminiscences of HENRY TISDALE,* written for the Kansas State Historical Society.

I STARTED for Kansas in February, 1857, from Davenport, Iowa, in company with three brothers, one being married, and one sister of theirs, all from Nova Scotia. We left Davenport on a Mississippi steamboat for St. Louis. I remember my sensation on crossing over to Rock Island, on beholding a pile of bacon on the levee, men walking over it and dogs turning up to it, I being born in northern New York, and raised in Vermont and Canada. From St. Louis we took another steamer up the Missouri river and landed at Parkville. My friends had two horses, and a wagon with a canvas cover. I bought a pair of blankets for camping purposes, as the ladies occupied the wagon and we slept upon the ground. We stayed at Parkville until the next day, buying the necessary articles to use on the road. Left Parkville in the afternoon, going toward Weston, that being the only place where we could cross the river at that time. After going about four miles, we camped for the night near a small creek. The water froze that night about an inch thick. I nearly froze. Had to get up in the night and build a fire and walk around it to get warm. The next morning the sun came up warm and pleasant.

We went on to Weston, crossing the river there, and took the road to Fort Leavenworth. About noon the sun was very warm and my feet got sore walking, as the menfolks walked, except the driver, the team being heavily loaded. I sat down on a log and bathed my feet in a small brook that day. We went near Leavenworth city and camped, it being a small place then—only a few houses on and near the levee. From there we went to Lawrence, staying one day, and pushed on to Osawatomie, and selected claims about four miles west of Osawatomie. After building a preemption cabin—I say preemption cabin, so I will describe it: It was about ten feet square, made by placing logs one on top of another—a cat could jump through the cracks; some shakes for a roof, a hole for a chimney and a hole for a window—minus chimney and window; made a door by nailing some shakes onto two sticks about four inches in diameter, hinges being pieces of old boot-legs. In preempting, they asked the size of house. Answer: "Ten feet square, one story, one window, one fireplace, earthen floor."

When the cabin was done I went to Osawatomie to look for work. About the first person I met was Charles Martin, son of one of our neighbors, about my age, I not knowing he was in Kansas, and he not knowing I was in Kansas. You can imagine our surprise. I went to Lawrence with him, as he was driving the stage which ran once a week and carried the mail, Samuel Reynolds being the proprietor. I worked for Mr. Reynolds, building picket fence, and plowing on his farm three miles south of Lawrence, about three weeks. Martin left for home, and I entered into a partnership with Mr. Reynolds to drive and manage the stage line. We soon got the mail three times a week, which made me a permanent business.

*HENRY TISDALE was born in Norfolk, St. Lawrence county, New York, May 17, 1833. His family moved to Brasier Falls when he was about five years old, and thence to Missisquoi, province of Quebec, and here and at Bedford he lived until he was twenty-three. He obtained his education at Missisquoi Bay and Bedford, Canada, and Georgia, Vt. In the fall of 1856, he moved to Iowa, where he lived until February, 1857, when he settled in Lawrence, Kan. He has been engaged as president, general manager and superintendent of transportation lines and companies for the past forty years. He is now superintendent of the Southwestern Stage Company, and resides in Lawrence.

That fall typhoid fever and ague were so bad in Osawatomie there were not enough well ones to take care of the sick. The hotel there was a one-and-one-half-story frame building, with outside stairs going up to the sleeping-rooms. Down-stairs was used for an office, dining-room, and kitchen. Beds up-stairs, on each side of room, alley in the middle about three feet wide, and about eighteen inches between beds. It got so bad—the foul air—that I slept in my wagon. All water used was hauled from the creek in barrels each morning. The creek got low in summer; there was a scum over it; and you can imagine what made so much sickness.

The road from Lawrence to Osawatomie ran through Prairie City, Ottawa Jones's, and Stanton. There was n't any Baldwin City or Ottawa then. I drove that route, going one day and returning the next, until February, 1858; then went to work for Colonel Eldridge. He had started a stage line from Lawrence to Leavenworth, in opposition to one which was run by a Mr. Southerland, soon after the line to Osawatomie was started. A line was put on from Kansas City to Lawrence by Mr. Richardson. Colonel Eldridge then put on a line from Lawrence, through Wyandotte to Kansas City, in opposition to Mr. Richardson. They fought away from six to nine months, until they all got so poor they could n't pay their bills, when some parties from Ohio, two Messrs. Hawks and a Captain Terry, bought them all out and formed the Kansas Stage Company.

While I was in the employ of Colonel Eldridge, in the summer of 1858, the Kimball brothers built a foundry and machine-shop, and imported a molder from Massachusetts. This was the first foundry in Kansas. About September of 1858 they tried to make some rollers for sorghum-mills, with other castings, and failed on account of their iron not being hot enough. They came to me, knowing I had been in that business, and, with the consent of Colonel Eldridge, I worked a half-day each day for two weeks and helped them out—made the casts and taught them how to melt iron; so they succeeded after that.

I went to work for the Kansas Stage Company under L. G. Terry, general superintendent. His headquarters was at Leavenworth. I acted as assistant superintendent. They ran lines from Topeka to Kansas City, *via* Lawrence, to Leavenworth; from Leavenworth to Topeka; and afterwards, in the summer of 1859, added lines from Topeka to Junction City, Leavenworth to Kansas City, and Leavenworth to Atchison.*

They had trouble at Lecompton as to the receipting agent. Mr. Terry sent me there to receipt the fares, and clerk in the hotel for Doctor Woods. At that time Governor Shannon was the principal lawyer there, and Colonel Moore, father of Ely Moore, was receiver of the land-office. Governor Walsh was acting gov-

*A Kansas City directory for the year 1860 announced the following stage lines for Kansas:

"Fort Scott Stage Company—A. B. Squires, general superintendent; James H. Roberts, agent. Office, corner Delaware and Levee. Distance from Kansas City to Fort Scott, 122 miles. Fare, $11. Running through Westport, Little Santa Fe, Squiresville, Spring Hill, Paola, Osawatomie, Twin Springs, Brooklyn, Paris, Moneka, Mound City, Dayton, Mapleton, Osage, Fort Scott, and Warrenton.

"Kansas Stage Company—L. G. Terry, general superintendent; James H. Roberts, agent. Office, corner Delaware and Levee. Distance to Junction City, 150 miles. Fare, $10. Running through Westport, Shawnee, Chillicothe, Monticello, Lexington, Eudora, Franklin, Lawrence, Lecompton, Big Springs, Tecumseh, Topeka, Indianola, St. Mary's Mission, Manhattan, Ogden, Fort Riley, to Junction City.

"Missouri Stage Company—James H. Roberts, agent. Office, corner Delaware and Levee. Running from Kansas City to Independence, Liberty, Plattsburg, and Osborne, connecting with the Hannibal & St. Joseph railroad. Distance, 55 miles. Fare, $4. Also from Independence *via* Wilmington, Lexington, Dover, Jonesboro, to Booneville; distance, 136 miles. Fare, $6.

"Moore & Walker's stage line from Kansas City to Leavenworth.

"Sac and Fox Agency—From Kansas City to Westport, Olathe, Gardner, Bull Creek, Black Jack, Palmyra, Prairie City, Boling City, Centropolis, Minneola, Sac and Fox Agency. Distance, 75 miles. Fare, $5.

"Santa Fe mail—Hall & Porter line, running once a week from Independence *via* Kansas City to New Mexico and Santa Fe, N. M. Time, fifteen days. Distance, about 740 miles. Leaves Kansas City every Saturday morning at seven o'clock A. M. Government compensation, $50,000. Value of stock employed in service, $50,000."

ernor. Lecompton was one of the noted places of the territory. Every one had to go there to preempt land. A man by the name of Walker paid out $60,000, nearly all in gold, buying Kansas land—which in after-years nearly broke him. In January, 1859, I think it was, they got word at Lecompton that John Brown was camped across the river, about four miles from their town. Doctor Wood, a man by the name of Phillips, and others—about ten in all—made up a party to go out and capture him. There was among the crowd a saloon-keeper. He had a fine horse. They all had Sharp's rifles, two revolvers apiece, and some had knives. They talked loud and smart about taking Brown and party prisoners. They started about nine A. M., and reconnoitered Brown's camp very carefully. The saloon-keeper, an Irishman, was braver than the rest and ventured nearer the camp. Brown and one man rode out, took him prisoner, kept him until next day, and turned him loose—minus horse and arms. The others returned the same evening quite crestfallen, and Brown went on out of the country.*

While I was at Lecompton I had an occasion to go to Topeka. There were six or eight passengers in the four-horse coach when we got to Big Springs to change horses. The driver and stock-tender led out one of the fastest teams on the road, but thin and stiff—so stiff it was quite an effort for some of them to step over the door-sill. We having made good time from Lecompton to Big Springs, the passengers made derogatory remarks regarding the new team. The driver remarked: "They are like cold potatoes, better when warmed up." He then started them on a walk, gradually increased the speed until, about Tecumseh, we were going at about the rate of eight or ten miles an hour, and at every rough place on the road the passengers were tolerably well mixed up inside, making the run in about one and one-half hours. If you want to vex a stage-driver, speak with derision of his team.

From Lecompton, the stage company put me on the Platte County railroad, which ran between Atchison and St. Joseph. I billed the stage passengers on the cars, for the stages for Leavenworth, Topeka, and other points in Kansas. Soon the railroad was extended to Iatan. A steamboat ran from Kansas City to Iatan, connecting with the railroad, in summer. In winter the stages ran from Leavenworth to Iatan, connecting with the railroad. It took from four to six stages per day to do the business; and, after the railroad got to Weston, about the summer of 1863, the boat connected there in summer and stages in winter. Travel grew so heavy it took eight and ten four-horse stages each day to haul the passengers, express, and mail, it being the principal route into the state of Kansas. We used to start twelve four horse stages out of Leaveworth per day in the winter.

We had many difficulties to contend with. Some of them were the ferry, about a mile and a half below Weston, an uncertain landing, as the water in the river rose and fell, a profane captain that could swear a blue streak, awkward drivers, and, when the ice was freezing, many times having to break ice four inches thick, and, near shore, six inches. One trip I will never forget. It was in the winter of 1864 or 1865. The ice was frozen too hard for the boat near shore,

*About midnight, and somewhere opposite Lecompton, on our way to Topeka, I noticed men behind a fence. Of course, I could not tell how many. Going to the wagon in which the old man rode, I acquainted him with the fact. He was dozing when I spoke, but my news woke him up. He told me to keep a good lookout. No one troubled us, however, but I found out afterwards, from some prisoners we took at Holton, that they had actually ambushed us, but could not conceive of ours being the outfit that they were looking for until it was too late; no oxen, no guards, or if there were guards they were behind and of an unknown quantity, and it might be unsafe to stop us, or it might be a strategic movement of some kind to take them in. They waited to see and missed us. (Hinton's "John Brown and his Men," 1894, p. 223.)

but was quite thin in the middle of the river. We laid down boards in the thinnest places for the passengers to walk on, for safety. We had a large hand sled we hauled the mail, express and baggage on. One day we had some mail and express matter on the sled; two men were pulling on a rope about twenty feet long, and I was pushing behind with a long stick. The ice gave way with the sled, breaking as far back as where I was. I and the sled went into the river. I struck bottom in about four or four and one-half feet of water. There was considerable current; consequently mail and express goods commenced floating down stream. I threw out money box, goods, and mail, as fast as possible, on the ice, the men grabbing them as they came out. After all was out, I jumped into a stage and drove for Leavenworth as fast as possible, about five and one-half miles. On arriving there, my clothes were frozen so stiff I had to be helped out of the stage and into the Planters House and stage office. D. T. Parker, the receipting agent at the time, built up a good fire. I thawed out and dried my clothes on me—thereby I caught no cold, and the next morning was as good as ever. When J. W. Parker, the superintendent of the United States Express Company, heard of the exploit, he gave me $25 as gratuity for saving the goods and money box, which contained quite a large amount of money.

I think it was in the summer of 1864* that the Kansas Stage Company started a stage route from Junction City to Fort Larned, making a through route from Leavenworth to Fort Larned of about 300 miles, *via* Topeka, Manhattan, Fort Riley, Junction City, and Abilene—then one house, a small store, about 12 x 12, and a blacksmith shop, used occasionally; then on to Salina, which had three dwelling-houses, one a hotel with one sleeping-room next to the rafters, one store, and a blacksmith shop. At the time there was n't anything west of Salina in the way of settlements. At Smoky Hill crossing, near where Ellsworth is now, there was a hunting ranch. Two young men lived there by killing buffalo for their pelts and tallow, and by killing wolves for their pelts. From there to Fort Larned there was not a white man. On my first trip over the road to establish stations, I found a lone Indian on the top of Pawnee Rock, near where the town of Pawnee Rock now stands. It was afternoon, and I was terribly hungry, after traveling about thirty-five miles that forenoon. Had not seen any one but the person I had with me, Ham Rogers, from Junction City. We ventured up to the Indian and made him understand we wanted something to eat. He cooked us some buffalo meat. We ate that and rested awhile, and went on to Fort Larned that night, some thirty-five miles more. This trip was done from Fort Riley with one pair of mules and a buckboard.

That summer we built a stage station north of Pawnee Rock about eight or ten miles, and put a man there to take care of stock. He never saw any one

*Evidently a mistake in his year. The following extract is taken from Andreas' History of Kansas, page 698:

"During the existence of the war Saline county had very little to excite either the avarice of bushwhackers or the vengeance of the Indians, but yet what little there was seemed to be sufficient to attract the attention of both. The first visit was from the Indians, who, in the early part of 1862, concluded to chase out or kill every white person in the Smoky Hill valley. West of Salina were a number of ranchmen, whom the Indians attacked first, several of whom they killed. The alarm soon spread from ranch to ranch, and being too weak to offer any organized resistance, those who had escaped hastened to Salina, where a stockade was erected and every preparation made to give the savages a warm reception, which caused the Indians to change their course without attempting an attack. The next hostile visit the people received was in the fall of the same year, from a gang of about twenty bushwhackers. So suddenly was the dash made into Salina, and so unexpectedly, that the people were altogether unprepared to meet it, and from the very moment the gang entered the town was at its mercy. Meeting with no resistance, they attempted no personal injury, but houses were entered, stores ransacked, and wherever any powder, ammunition, arms or tobacco were found, the marauders appropriated it. The firearms they could not carry off with them they destroyed. Everything thought to be of service to the people in case of pursuit was destroyed. On leaving, they took with them twenty-five horses and six mules, the property of the Kansas Stage Company. After they had gone, it was discovered that they had overlooked one horse, and this was mounted by R. H. Bishop, who rode to Fort Riley, and covered the distance, fifty miles, in five hours."

only when the stage passed, sometimes for a week or ten days at a time. The next summer the Indian war broke out. The Indians stole our horses, burnt the ranch, and killed the stock-tender. After that the government sent some soldiers, one company, to a point near where the Walnut creek empties into the Arkansas river, and called it Fort Zarah.* We then ran the stage in the night about forty miles from Smoky Hill, crossing to Zarah.

I remember one trip I made. When we got to Salina we heard that the Indians had come down on the road between Salina and Smoky Hill crossing and killed some soldiers who were coming east to Fort Riley. We had six passengers, myself and driver, with some arms. I had a Henry rifle and two revolvers. After going about ten miles west of Salina, we found three soldiers lying dead near the road, terribly mutilated. We went on to Smoky Hill crossing that day, and waited until about dark and started for Zarah, getting there just before sunup. Zarah was on the bottom of the Walnut and Arkansas rivers. There was one road up the Arkansas bottom which passed close to the military camp. Another road passed near the bluff and crossed the Walnut about a mile up the stream from the military camp, or Fort Zarah. We drove into camp and were turning out the mules with the government herd, when, looking up the creek, we saw about 300 Indians coming. We hurried the herd back to camp. The Indians came to this upper crossing and stopped, apparently to hold a consultation. At the same time there was a freight-train from Fort Leavenworth coming up the roads, about half on each road, the heavy wagons on the upper road, and the balance on the lower road, or "wet route," as it was called. The teamsters, about twenty-two in all, had no idea there was any danger or Indian war. Those on the upper road, driving towards the Indians, were about one-fourth mile from the creek, when half the Indians started down the road, and upon meeting the teamsters, they hallooed "How!" the teamsters returning the saluation. When they got near the last wagon they commenced firing at the teamsters, killing ten and wounding five. Four of the wounded came running into our camp in horrible shape, being wounded with arrows.

In the meantime the soldiers, eighty-five in number, were ordered to mount. They counted off as fast as on parade and filled their cartridge-boxes. The captain ordered one-half of them out in the direction of the Indians. After going about half-way he wheeled them to the right, returning them to camp. The captain dismounted near where I stood, and asked a soldier to take his horse, he sitting down on a hardtack box perfectly exhausted by fright and nervousness, making a very pitiful and disgusting appearance. The captain was afterwards cashiered for cowardice and unsoldierly conduct. He was a printer from Topeka, it being a Kansas company. The men were brave enough. One sergeant requested the captain to let him take a part of the company and attack the Indians. The captain would not allow it. The Indians sacked the train, carrying off all the flour, sugar, blankets, etc., they could pack on their ponies, crossed the Arkansas, and disappeared. The next day we went with an escort to Fort Larned, taking the wounded. One boy among them, from Salt creek valley, near Leavenworth, was wounded sixteen times, and scalped so there was n't any hair on his head, except a little below the ear and a little in the back of the neck. The surgeon at Larned dressed his wounds and head. The boy afterwards went to Washington by President Lincoln's orders and request.

I remember a trip I made in the spring of 1868 or 1869. I started from Lawrence to go to Paola. Got there the same day *via* Baldwin and started from Pa-

*A history and diagram of Fort Zarah are given by B. B. Smyth in his "Heart of the New Kansas," 1880, page 82.

ola to return the next day. There were some eight or ten inches of snow on the ground, and as the sun came up it commenced thawing and the roads were bad, but we got to Baldwin about 4:30, and stopped there for supper before starting for Lawrence. About 5:30 the stage arrived from Lawrence for Ottawa with eleven passengers on board, having started from Lawrence about 1 P. M. Among the passengers were Colonel Bassett and other parties attending court. After supper the driver heard that a culvert or small bridge had washed out one and one-half miles from Baldwin. Creeks all being full, I thought it dangerous for him to start without help. I therefore took a lantern and walked ahead of the team to show them the way to the culvert and to examine it. When we got there we concluded the bridge or culvert was there, but with water about two feet deep running over it. We crossed it all right, I standing on the side of the stage. I concluded there were many more dangerous places between there and Ottawa, and I would go through with the stage, it being very dark that night. I walked the whole distance to Ottawa before the team, carrying the lantern, getting there a little after daylight. It turned cold in the night, so the team was all covered with frozen mud, and a person could n't have told the color of any of the four horses.

Another trip the same spring, about a month later, was from Ottawa to Burlington. Driver and I started with a dry-goods box tied to the front axle of the stage, and with a colored man, a barber of Burlington, as a passenger. We left Ottawa about seven A. M., roads very bad, and got to the second station, about twelve miles from Burlington, about six P. M.; got supper and started for Burlington; worked hard until about two o'clock that night, when we reached the river. It was high, but we thought we could cross it. We piled the mail on top of some boards on the box and started in, knowing we had a good swimming team. The horses waded a part of the time and swam the other part, landing a little below the proper place to get up the bank. The vehicle swung around within a few feet of the bank. The colored man jumped out into the water, catching some limbs of trees, and escaped. Driver and I crawled out on the wagon-pole and between the horses, and jumped ashore without getting much wet. After the horses got breath, and having now no load, they hauled the front gear, with the dry-goods box and mail, to the road, and to town. That time driver and I were so covered with mud a person could n't have told the original color of our coats.

These are some of the many unpleasant times we had staging in Kansas. While we had many delightful trips, with jolly passengers, good roads, good appetites, and good dinners, when the time went merrily, I could write of such trips in this state as I have described to fill an ordinary book, and of more in Colorado, since staging ended in this state by being superseded by railroads. But probably this will give you some idea of the early difficulties of the settlement of a new country.

There probabaly is no more pleasing sight than to see, as I have many a time, a fine stage team hitched to a Concord coach, well loaded with passengers, come down the side of the mountain — I in the valley below, at the station, where the smoke goes straight up from the chimney, and station nestled beside a trout stream — and hear the driver's horn go out, and see the stage swing along like a thing of life. The horses tramp in unison; the axles talk as the wheels work back and forth from nut to shoulder-washer; driver, with ferruled whip, and ivory rings on harness, drive up and say, "Whoa!" unhitch the horses, and see them take their places in the stable like they were human; see the next team started from the stable by speaking to them, and take their places at the coach so the breast-straps and tugs can be hitched without moving an inch, every horse in his place. It is one of the finest scenes on earth, and the delight of an old stage-man who has staged continuously for forty years.