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**AN ISOLATED FRONTIER OUTPOST: HISTORICAL AND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE CARRIZO  
CREEK STAGE STATION**

*By*

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**Everybody goes armed here. If a man has no shirt to his back he will have his knife in his belt (Phocion R. Way – San Antonio – San Diego Mail Line Passenger, 1858).**

# 1857 -- 1861 SAN ANTONIO & SAN DIEGO AND BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL LINES:

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### I. Introduction

Of the many overland trails used during the vast Gold Rush immigration of 1848–50, the Southern Emigrant Trail is the least recognized for its importance. Thousands followed it westward from the Rio Grande in New Mexico across the deserts of Arizona and California, and it became the major overland entrance to Southern California prior to construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Accounts of travel over the portion between the Colorado River and Carrizo Creek have been considered some of the most distressing records of overland Gold Rush immigration (Wray 2000). After reaching the spring at Carrizo, the overland travelers' situation gradually improved. From this point, at approximately 500 feet above mean sea level, the trail followed the Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Pass through a series of elevated valleys, including Vallecito, El Puerto (present day Mason Valley), present day Box Canyon, and San Felipe. This route provided reliable water and gradually lifted the emigrants out of the desert until the top of the mountains and good pasture land in San José Valley were reached at Warner's Ranch, 50 miles to the northwest at around 2,800 feet above sea level (Figure 5 A & B). Here the arduous desert crossing ended.

The Southern Emigrant Trail's origins preceded the Gold Rush by many decades. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spanish and Mexican military explorations first established the route by following Native American trails. It became well used by traders and trappers who journeyed between California and Sonora in the 1830s.

The 1840s and 50s saw invading American armies follow the route to California during the Mexican War, followed by thousands of Gold Rush Argonauts (Figure 6). Then, in 1857, overland mail service was established along the road.

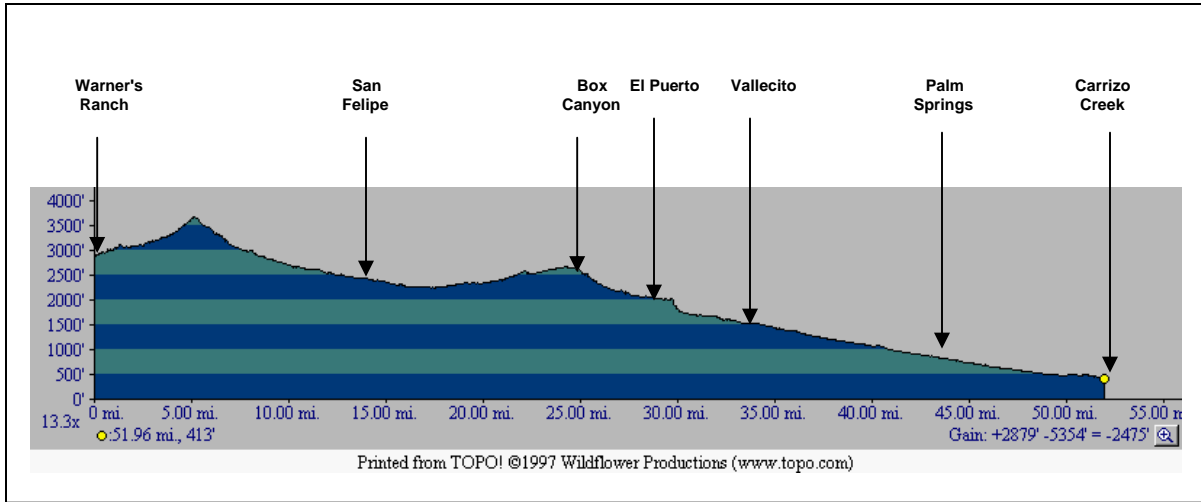


Fig. 5A Elevation Profile Map of Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Spring Pass

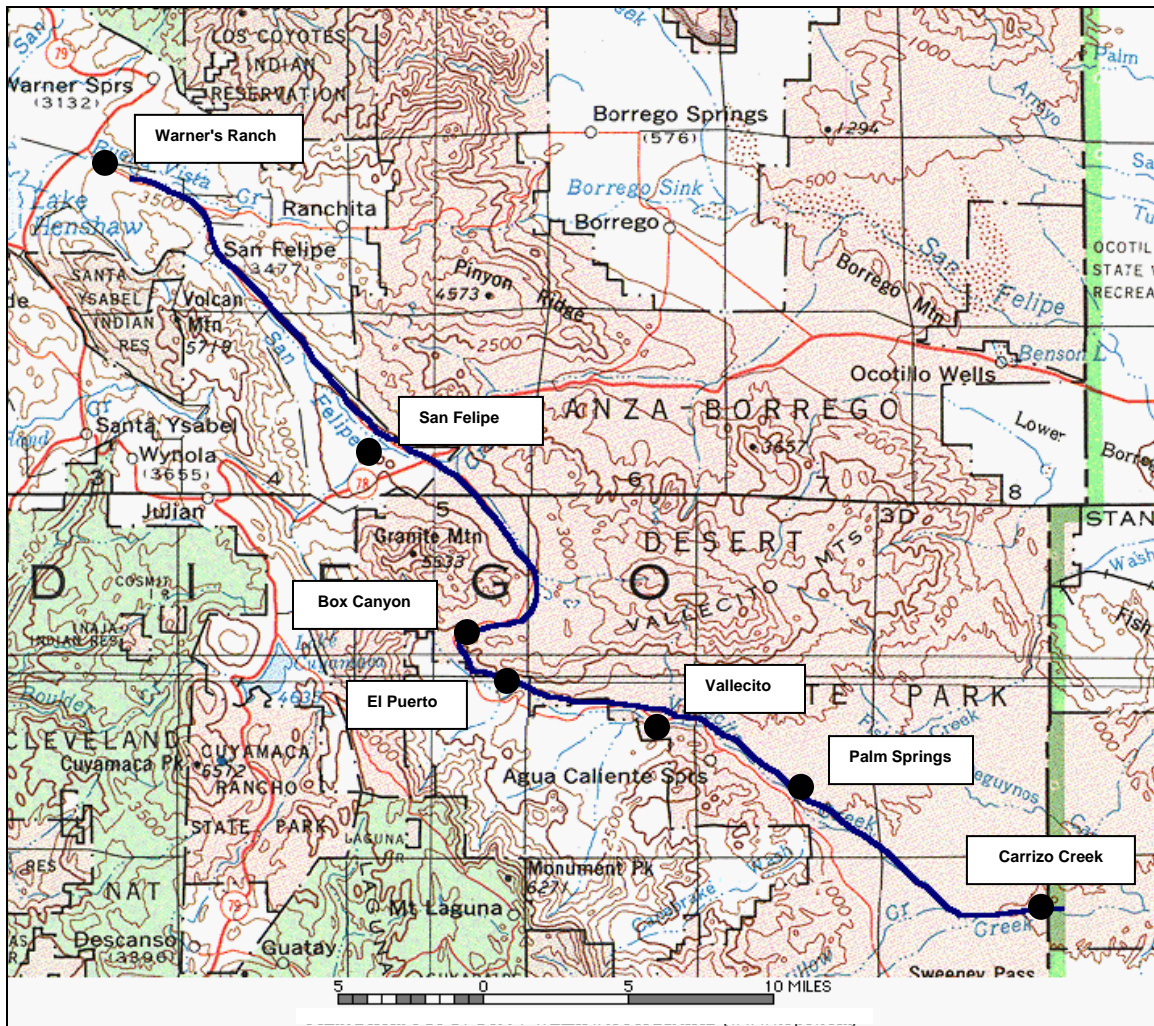


Fig. 5B: Map of the Southern Emigrant Trail Through the Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Pass

## II. The Overland Mail

Mail had been carried overland to California since 1847 by military couriers. Prior to 1854 this occurred periodically according to the army's needs and its consequent dispatches. There was no regular service. Joseph Swycaffer and Sam Warnock ran the first mail service between San Diego and Fort Yuma from 1854 to 1857. They used mules and followed the trail from Green Valley in the Cuyamaca Mountains down the old Indian and Fages trail in Oriflamme Canyon, intersecting the emigrant road between El Puerto and present-day Box Canyon (Lake 1957; Rensch 1957a; 1957b; Swycaffer 1938).

From 1857 to 1861 the Gila trail was used by the overland mail service. First carried by the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line, from July 1857 through August 1858, and then the Butterfield Overland Mail Company, from September 1858 through June 1861, establishment of the Overland Mail constituted the first regular communication and transportation service across the continental United States, 12 years before completion of the transcontinental railroad. In the mid-1850s, creation of a transcontinental overland mail service became a priority of Congress. With such a large population now residing in California as a result of the Gold Rush, the long delays of several months to send mail by sea routes was unacceptable. During 1856, four overland mail bills were submitted and on August 18, Congress passed an amendment to the Post Office bill, authorizing establishment of an overland mail route between the Mississippi River and San Francisco. It also authorized the Postmaster General to immediately initiate an interim service to provide adequate mail connections between East and West until the route between the Mississippi and San Francisco could be established. James Birch, a successful California stage line entrepreneur, received a contract for the interim service and established the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line. He was to run stages twice monthly on a 30-day schedule between these two small frontier outposts for \$150,000 a year. From San Francisco, the traveler could proceed by steamer to San Diego, by stage to San Antonio, then by various means to New Orleans and the Atlantic Coast. There were also connections from El Paso or Fort Filmore, farther up the Rio Grande, with stagecoach lines to Independence, Missouri, by way of Santa Fe (Banning & Banning 1929, 1930; Johnson 1938). The first eastbound mail left San Diego on August 9, 1857, and followed the wagon road via Santa Ysabel, Warner's Ranch and San Felipe. The first west-bound mail, which left San Antonio on July 9, followed the same route across the mountains and arrived in San Diego on August 31 after a trip of 52 days (Johnson 1938; Pourade 1963:220-225).<sup>1</sup>

### A. The San Antonio and San Diego Mail

Establishment of the Birch line was nothing less than remarkable. Only 27 days elapsed from the date he received the contract, on June 12, 1857, and the 9<sup>th</sup> of July when the first mule train carrying mail left San

Antonio. Superintendent Isaiah C. Woods, in charge of laying out the line, set it up as the mule trains and coaches journeyed west across 1,450 miles of arid wilderness. Woods took charge on June 15, dispatching agents to San Antonio and San Diego to procure mules, employees, and supplies, and dispatch the first mails. The second westward-bound mail left San Antonio at 6 a.m. on July 24. Woods had prepared the self-contained "outfit" for a journey across unsettled country with almost no existing infrastructure. It included one coach and harness, six men — each well armed with rifles and a Colt's pistol, four saddles and accoutrements, ropes, hobbles, shoeing tools, shoes and nails, cooking utensils, numerous minor articles, 19 mules, provisions for 30 days, and six hundred dollars in cash to purchase supplies. An additional 27 mules and a coach had already been sent out to provide relays along the road. This party was subsequently attacked by Indians who killed one of the passengers, damaged the coach, and stole the livestock (Woods 1858:6). The third westward-bound mail left San Antonio on July 31. This train included three coaches and harnesses, 17 men armed with rifles and Colt's pistols, 38 mules, four thousand pounds of rations, ten saddles, and "the smaller articles usually sent." Woods left the next day to overtake and travel with this train to San Diego, setting up the line as he went (Woods 1858:3-4).

The party proceeded westward, camping out, fording flooded rivers, repairing coaches and wagons, procuring additional mules and vehicles, and avoiding hostile Indians. On the morning of August 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah recorded:

We cooked our breakfast this morning under the trees just outside of the tower of Uvalde. We have tin plates, tin cups, knives and forks, iron spoons, a gunny bag as a table cloth, and one seat in the shape of a water keg among eight of us (Woods 1858:9).

On August 4<sup>th</sup> he continued:

In carrying the mail we do not drive all the time from our morning start to the night camp. We stop four times during the day; twice for our two meals of breakfast and dinner; breakfast after the morning drive, dinner about 4 o'clock. We also stop once for a nooning, and once about sunset to graze the mules, at which hour they seem to feed best. We stopped half an hour to-day at Camp Hudson, situated at the second crossing of the San Pedro, or the Devil's river; here I found the remnant of our coach, with the pole and ten spokes broken, the bars gone, the top all stripped, a bullet hole through the body from a gun, carbine, or some piece carrying a heavy ball, and fired by the Indians (Woods 1858:9).

Five days later on August 9<sup>th</sup>, R.E. Doyle, the company's agent in San Diego, dispatched the first eastward-bound mail. Mule relays had already been sent ahead to Fort Yuma (Pourade 1963:220-225; Johnson 1938:56; *San Diego Herald* 8-15-1857).

By September 4<sup>th</sup> Woods had reached the Colorado. They crossed the river shortly after sunrise of the fifth on "an excellent ferry, and continued across the desert, arriving at Indian Wells at sunset the following day." The wells had no water, "an encampment of Yuma Indians had used it nearly up." After eating, they continued to Carrizo Creek, arriving at dawn the next morning, September 7. In contrast to the agony most 49ers had experienced on this section, Woods commented "This portion of the road is by no means a bad one" (Woods 1858:21).

At this point the mules were exhausted. Most of the herd had made the journey from Tucson in less than eight days. They had not slept during the 48 hour crossing from Yuma, and had gone 24 hours without water. Upon reaching Carrizo they "filled themselves at once with the medicated waters of the creek and thus destroyed their appetites, so that they would never eat a proper quantity of hay or grain." In order to get the mail over the mountains and into San Diego as quickly as possible Woods selected nine of the best animals and pushed ahead, with one other companion, taking the Oriflamme Canyon cutoff to Lassitor's ranch at Green Valley in the Cuyamacas.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the group followed at a slower pace along the emigrant Wagon Road to Warner's and then took the cutoff to San Diego via Santa Ysabel. Woods' mule train reached San Diego at 10 p.m. on the night of September 8, "after a toilsome day's journey down the mountains." He had been on the trail for 38 days (Woods 1858:22; Rensch 1957a, 1957b).

Woods spent the next five weeks preparing the western end of the line, dispatching men, vehicles, and supplies to newly-established stations. On October 6<sup>th</sup> a steamer arrived from San Francisco with supplies. On the 24<sup>th</sup> a coach and wagon loaded with rations left for Maricopa Wells. A corral for livestock was established at Lassitor's ranch, where Woods also contracted to have hay and straw delivered to stations at Vallecito and Carrizo Creek. On October 17<sup>th</sup> two coaches with "complete outfits" of animals and other necessities were sent over the mountains: "one is to run between Carissa Creek and Fort Yuma; the other ... between Fort Yuma and Maricopa Wells." Two more coaches, and a pack train of fourteen animals "heavily laden with every description of supplies for the line" were sent to Carrizo Creek on October 22. Woods left two days later on mule back, with Mr. Doyle and a through passenger, taking the "shorter mountain trail" to Lassitor's where they spent a day branding a "mulada" of 75 animals." They reached Carrizo Creek with most of the herd the afternoon of October 27, where they found the party with the coaches that had come via the wagon road through Santa Ysabel and Warner's Ranch. The west-bound train now included 12 men, 3 coaches, 72 animals, "and everything necessary for staging purposes." They left Carrizo Creek Station on October 28<sup>th</sup> and proceeded eastward to supply the line (Woods 1858:23-24; Rensch 1947a).

The station at Carrizo Creek became an important link in the San Antonio — San Diego Mail line. It functioned as one of seven major stations west of the Rio Grande. Here passengers disembarked to change coaches. At Carrizo Creek they left the east-bound stage from San Diego and boarded another that ran between Carrizo and Fort Yuma (Woods 1858:23-24, 26-27). It is assumed that this stage remained at the station until the other returned with west-bound passengers that had boarded in Yuma. Watering stations were established at an average of 30 mile intervals (*Sacramento Union* 8-12-1857).

Woods reported that by November 27<sup>th</sup>,

The mail line had now nearly or quite two hundred head of mules west of the Rio Grande, stationed at San Diego, Carissa creek, Fort Yuma, Petermans, Maricopa Wells, Tucson, and La Mesilla. At each of these places agencies or stations had been established with abundant supplies of grain everywhere. We feed corn to all our working mules. I had made contracts for hay wherever the grass was likely to be short the coming winter. We had thirty-five mail carriers and agents along this part of the line; well armed border men, carefully chosen for familiarity with this kind of service. We had seven coaches on the road, and three more building in San Diego, so that we could already take passengers through from ocean to ocean in stage coaches (Woods 1857).

He also noted that "Our watering places in the desert west of Fort Yuma are by no means far apart, but the supply is limited at all times. It will be a matter of absolute necessity to enlarge them before the overland emigration of this spring reaches the desert. The improvement of those now used as well and the digging of others, will be easily accomplished" (Woods 1857:33).

Residents at the frontier pueblo of San Diego became extremely excited over the development of overland mail service from San Antonio. They felt it would assure the community's growth into a major urban transportation center. The local newspaper, the *San Diego Herald*, followed events closely and reported on Birch's reception of the contract on July 25, commenting that the event was more important to the region than passage of the transcontinental railroad bill. It insured the future coast-to-coast rail link would follow the southern route with San Diego as its western terminus (*San Diego Herald* 7-25-1857).

When the first mails arrived at noon on August 31<sup>st</sup>, celebration engulfed the town that included firing of fire crackers, a 100 anvil salute, "and the general congratulations of the citizens." The *San Diego Herald* proclaimed it "the most important event which has ever occurred in the annals of San Diego, and undoubtedly constitutes an epoch in the Pacific Coast of the Union, which will be recorded and remembered with just pride, long after the mails will have been transported on the great continental railroad, the first rail of which may be thus said to have been laid" (*San Diego Herald* 9-5-1857).

The mail dispatched from San Antonio on the 24<sup>th</sup> had overtaken the first mule train, which had left on the 9<sup>th</sup>, so that both arrived in San Diego on August 31<sup>st</sup>. It took 52 days for the first and 38 days for the second mail to complete the journey. Although not at the overwhelming numbers of 1848 through 51, there were still many emigrants on the trail. The mail riders had passed "upwards of one hundred wagons, ... with considerable quantities of stock" (*San Diego Herald* 9-5-1857).

As Isaiah Woods continued to establish stations along the route, the carriers began to set new records for completing the journey. The third and fourth mails reached San Diego in just 30 days, arriving on September 8<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> respectively. The fourth mail made the crossing from Fort Yuma to San Diego in two days and 14 hours, "the quickest time on record" (*San Diego Herald* 9-12-1857, 9-26-1857). The next trip proceeded even faster and arrived on October 5<sup>th</sup>, completing the 1,450 mile journey in 26 days and 12 hours. The pueblo once again celebrated with an anvil salute. These riders made the trip from Fort Yuma to San Diego in exactly two days, crossing the desert between the Colorado and Warner's in 29 hours. The *Herald* declared "The bugbear of the desert is knocked sky high" (*San Diego Herald* 10- 5-1857).

Throughout the rest of 1857 and the winter and spring of 1858, trips of less than 30 days became common. Then in May, 1858, the mail carriers set a new record of 23 days, followed by a completed journey of 22 and a half days in early June. San Diego once again celebrated and 100 guns were fired in the plaza (*San Diego Herald* 5-22-1858; 6-5-1858). When compared to the hardships experienced by overland travelers on this same terrain just five years before, the record of the San Antonio to San Diego line was extraordinary.

By November, 1857, overland mail departures had become routine (Figure 10A). On the arrival of each steamer from San Francisco a coach was dispatched with six through passengers (*San Diego Herald* 11-21-1857). The mail company used two routes to get to the desert. "Light covered coaches" followed the traditional wagon road through San Pasqual, Santa Ysabel, and Warner's Ranch (*Sacramento Union* 1-11-1858; Johnson 1938:64) (Figure 10 A). Some passengers traveled in vehicles to Lassitor's ranch, then traveled 18 miles down Oriflamme Canyon to Vallecito on mule-back. The price of passage was \$35 to Fort Yuma, \$75 to Tucson, \$120 to El Paso, and \$150 to San Antonio (*San Diego Herald* 11-21-1857). On January 9, 1858, the *San Diego Herald* praised the line: "The overland mail from San Antonio arrived on the 8<sup>th</sup> inst., in 29 days. Considering the length of the route, the longest uninterrupted line in the U. States, if not in the world, it is worthy of remark that the contractors have never failed to make their schedule time since the second mail run. They have lost animals, wagons, and men, fought Indians, and conquered the desert, but they always bring their mails along inside of time. This shows the right kind of energy" (*San Diego Herald* 1-9-1858).



James Birch never saw the success of his pioneer overland mail. He was lost at sea on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1857. The business continued to operate under the partnership of George H. Giddings of San Antonio, Texas, and R.E. Doyle of San Diego. Giddings was Superintendent of the eastern division and Doyle of the western division at the time of Birch's death (Johnson 1938: 20-24).

In spite of the regularity of arrivals and departures, a journey on the San Antonio to San Diego Line was an adventurous passage through an unsettled and dangerous frontier. The company recommended that each passenger:

... should provide himself with a Sharp's rifle, (not carbine,) with accoutrements and one hundred cartridges, a navy sized Colts revolver and two pounds of balls, a belt and holster, knife and sheath; a pair of thick boots and woolen pants; half a dozen pairs thick cotton socks; three under (sic) shirts, three (sic) brown linen do (sic); three woolen over shirts, a wide awake hat, a cheap sack coat, a soldiers over (sic) coat, one pair of blankets in summer and two in winter; a piece of India rubber cloth for blankets; a pair of gauntlets; a small bag with needles, thread & c., in an oil silk bag; two pair of thick drawers, and three or four towels. Such money as he takes should be in silver or small gold. A person thus fitted out has no extra baggage (which indeed, cannot be taken), and can travel comfortably at any season of the year (*San Diego Herald* 11-21-1857).

Although advertisement and reports mentioned coaches, actual accounts of travel on the San Antonio and San Diego line describe travel in celerity or mud wagons, also called ambulances (Figure 10 B), the common military use for the same type of vehicle, rather than the better known Concord stagecoach of twentieth century western movies. More adept for travel over rough undeveloped terrain than the Concord, these stages were lower to the ground, lighter, and often open on the sides, or enclosed only with canvas curtains (Figure 11 A & B). Like the Concord, the body of the celerity was suspended over the undercarriage by large leather straps called a through-brace.

Travel continued to be conducted in trains of coaches and mules even after the line became well established. Water holes may have been set up at 30 mile intervals. Many, however, remained unmanned, and actual stations could be separated by 100 miles. Traveling eastward from San Antonio in May, 1858, Phocion R. Way described his outfit:

Our train presents a singular appearance: two ambulances loaded down with baggage and the mail. Every part of the stage where an article of luggage can be stored is filled. We can hardly find room to sit down. Our caravan is led by a drove of about 30 mules. These are guarded and driven by 4 men mounted on mules – two Mexicans – two Americans. They carry rifles strapped across the pommel [sic.] of their saddles, and large six shooters in their belts. We have large fierce looking fellows for drivers, who have been accustomed to frontier life and Indian fighting. They are armed the same as the guards. We have four passengers to each carriage, all of them well armed. We have forty-four shots in our carriage without reloading (Way 1858:44).

I neglected to state why we drove so many mules with us. They are called relays – that is, we drove one set of mules until dinner time and while we dine, turn them loose with the others to grass (they never fed them). After dinner we catch a new set and drive the rest before us, and so on until they have all seen service. It is a singular thing how these animals will either follow or lead the train – they are perfectly free but do not attempt to leave us. They are trained to it, and will follow us like dogs from San Antonio to San Diego (Way 1858:45).

On parts of the road the ambulances were changed for “a rickety carriage” and later “a heavy wagon, strong and would do but we should have another” (Way 1858:53). In places passengers had to walk in order to relieve the fatigued mules (Way 1858:147). The mail usually moved ahead of the coaches by mule train, traveling night and day (*Sacramento Union* 1-11-1858; Way 1858:151; Johnson 1938:64). When Phocion's party reached Tucson, those going to the Pacific Coast continued on muleback with the mail (Way 1858:151). The passenger stages traveled slower than the mule trains. In October, 1857, it took the coaches from San Diego 23 days to arrive at Tucson, while the mule train with the mail made the same journey in seven. Phocion R. Way recorded the pace of his journey:

We stopped a few hours last night for rest. We started about two hours before day this morning and traveled until the sun was about an hour high, when we stopped to prepare our first meal. We have our provisions with us and we do our own cooking. We have good wholesome fare; and although we cook it in a primitive way it is very good, especially to appetites sharpened by travel and exercise. We all sit in the ground in a circle and eat our provender out of pewter plates.

We only cook two meals a day. We are very fashionable in our hours; we breakfast at 8 or 9 and have supper at 5 or 6 o'clock. We generally stop in the heat of the day to rest our mules, and then indulge in a cold snack or lunch of bread and dried beef (Way 1858:45).

They slept on the ground every night and meals were almost always prepared in the open. The food varied slightly. At times described as “miserable — bad beans and bad bacon poorly cooked,” on other occasions the fare included beefsteak or mutton with breakfast of fresh eggs. All meals appeared to have included beans (Mexican frijoles) and coffee as consistent staples (Way 1858:53, 155). After several weeks of the outdoor life stage travelers, developed a wild and unkempt appearance. “We all wear nothing in this warm weather but a check shirt and pants and a belt around the waists where we can carry our revolvers and knives. We have not changed our clothes since we started, nor shaved our faces. And the hot sun has made us almost as dark as Indians” (Way 1858:48).

The few actual manned stations on the route consisted of Mexican native adobe, stone, or wattle and daub buildings — usually windowless — with thatched roofs and packed earthen floors. The latter were

constructed of small woven branches, generally willow or ocotillo. At times they were left uncovered and on other occasions plastered with mud (Fay 1955; 1956; 1958; 1959; Lopez-Morales 1987). Described as "a hard looking tavern," "a primitive looking place," a "regular backwoods establishment" or "odd looking" these stations often had one or two dwellings and a corral for horses and mules. The cramped quarters seldom provided sleeping space for stage passengers, who spread their blankets outside on the ground (Way 1858:43, 51, 53, 160) (Figure 12 A & B).

Passing through "a wild uninhabited" country, the journey was dangerous. Indian raids were not unknown and bandits attacked stations. These conditions affected the manner, attitude, and appearance of the local inhabitants:<sup>3</sup>

There are a good many border men living here and they are decidedly a hard looking set. They are generally fine specimens of the physical man but the life they lead is of constant danger and makes them bold and reckless. They seem to place no value on human life, and apparently think no more of shooting a man that offends them than they would of shooting a horse or dog. . . Every man, no matter what his business goes well armed at all times (Way 1858:44).

Everybody goes armed here. If a man has no shirt to his back he will have his knife in his belt (Way 1858:159).

Two recent innovations in small arms — the Colt revolver and Sharps rifle — provided overland mail parties with exceptional firepower when compared to muzzle loading arms still commonly in use at the time.<sup>4</sup> When Phocion Way left San Antonio his group could muster 44 four shots without reloading (Way 1858:44). By the time they neared Tucson their fire power had increased to 95 shots. "All our guards have Sharps rifles — the best most efficient gun ever invented. You can load them 5 or 6 times a minute" (Way 1858:47). As the stage traveled, passengers were compelled to be continually on their guard, to have their revolvers in their belts, and rifles where they could lay hands on them in a moment. "We walk about with our arms, we sit down with them by our sides, and we sleep with them" (Way 1858:51). At night they placed a guard over the mules, spread blankets on the ground "and lay down with our rifles and revolvers by our sides for instant use" (Way 1858:47).

Eastbound travelers found the same primitive frontier conditions after leaving San Diego. Through the mountains the coaches stopped at local ranches. The only actual company station in the desert appears to have been the one at Carrizo Creek. Watering holes located at Indian Wells, Alamo Mocho, and Cooke's Wells were unmanned.

Charles F. Running, correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, rode the stage to Lassitor's Ranch at Green Valley and then traveled by mule down Oriflamme Canyon to Vallecito on the desert.<sup>5</sup> The first day "We made twenty-one miles that p.m. and stopped at Ames Ranch. For supper we had jerked beef, tea, and algunas tortillas mal hechas (some badly made tortillas). Our landlady was an Indian woman." The next day they journeyed another 27 seven miles to Lassitor's, where they arrived late at night and "slept in low hut with fire in the middle, Indian fashion. Had a good supper and breakfast — fresh butter, bread, mutton, coffee" (Running 1858).

Here they left the stages and "rode on horseback" for 18 miles, "three of which were over snow, and we had a very steep hill to go down. The country is very hilly and almost destitute of vegetation... ." Upon reaching Vallecito in the evening they slept in a sod house built there by James Lassitor in 1854, "on a hard dirt floor and had a tolerably good supper in the shape of 'ragout,' good coffee and butter. Here we met passengers coming from the other end of the route, five in number; they complained very much and had had a very hard time of it. I thought it a pity for one was a newly-married lady, and I thought it must have been a rather dangerous honeymoon. However, she was fat and hearty and had got along better than any of the men" (Running 1858).

Those who took coaches through Santa Ysabel and Warner's Ranch found similar frontier conditions. After stopping at the Alvarado adobe in Peñasquitos Canyon, the stage continued to Santa Ysabel and then to the Carrillo ranch house at Warner's.<sup>6</sup> On the desert at San Felipe passengers found "an adobe house, brackish water, and poor grass, like that usually growing in salty land." The proprietor, a German called Dutch Bill, "occupied the aforesaid adobe house and supports himself by selling necessities to travelers" (*San Francisco Herald* 12-27-1857; *San Diego Herald* 5-29-1858).

At Carrizo Creek the mail company used the adobe constructed by the military in June, 1855, as a station building. J.J. Thomas saw the place in the fall of 1857 as an "old adobe house," occupied by William Mailland. The thatch roof had been burned off (*Sacramento Union* 12-24-1857). The unmanned water holes in the desert continued to be unreliable. Thomas found Indian Wells to be "small holes 20 feet under ground where some water is obtained." He described the smell to be "about as delicate . . . as e'er rose from a barnyard. Here we feed animals with barley carried with us and refresh ourselves as circumstances permit" (*Sacramento Union* 12-24-1857). A few months later overland mail passengers camped overnight at Indian Wells, and had sufficient water for themselves and the animals, and enough wood for a fire. From this point they made the crossing to Fort Yuma without water, finding the wells at Alamo Mocho caved in, and Cooke's Wells dry (*Sacramento Union* 3-12-1858).

The undercurrent of violence that permeated life along the eastern parts of the line also existed here. In May of 1858 William Mailland, the station keeper at Carrizo, killed his Indian wife. The *San Diego Herald* reported on May 29, 1858:

#### MURDER at CARRISO

We have been furnished with the following facts in reference to the murder of the Indian Squaw at Carriso by William Mailland. Mailland occupied the adobe house at the creek, the squaw living with him. A deserter apprehended on the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> inst., at San Felipe, stated that he had been in the house with Mailland the day before and that a party of 10 Indians armed with rifles had surrounded the house and were trying to get in and put Mailland to death. The deserter stated that he had escaped, but supposed that the Indians had, by that time, succeeded in achieving their purpose.

Maj. Riggold, U.S.A., en route to Fort Yuma, reached Carriso next afternoon and found two Indians at the door, which was barricaded, one of them being armed with a rifle. They both left soon after Major R's arrival. Mailland was found to be in a state of delirium tremors - did not seem to have any clear idea of what had occurred - but admitted that possibly he may have killed the squaw, but if he did he was drunk at the time and did not know anything about it. Major R. thought proper to get him away from present danger, there seeming great doubt as to the man's being in a sane state of mind, and he, therefore, had him placed in the ambulance and carried to Indian Wells, 30 miles into the desert, with the view of sending him back by some one of the wagons of the command then en route from Fort Yuma across the desert. He was accordingly carried back to Carriso, where he appeared perfectly recovered and sane, but indifferent and apparently insensible to the crime he had committed. The room where he had shut himself in had blood all over the floor, the bed was saturated with blood, and subsequently the body of the squaw was found buried behind the house. That night Mailland took himself off - was met by the mail riders and turned back with them, riding a spare horse some distance, but fearing the civil authorities, he concluded again to go into the direction of Fort Yuma. He accordingly got into Ingall's wagon and went with him as far as Indian Wells, where, taking the Paymaster's party again, he took to the bushes. It was supposed that he had perished on the desert. Then a traveler who stopped at Dutch Bill's at San Felipe, told Bill that he had seen Mailland across the Colorado, making tracks for Sonora.

Following Mailland's departure, Hamilton Breeze became station keeper at Carrizo Creek. The company paid him \$75 a month (District Court 1860). In addition to tending to the livestock and equipment of the stage line he ran a "public house" that provided meals, drinks, livestock feed, and other limited services for travelers on the road. Stage driver George E. Freeman remembered Breeze as ". . . chief cook and bottle washer. (He) cooked, tended the bar, and took care of some animals belonging to the S.A. & S.D. Mail Co." Merchandise and goods on hand included tea, coffee, sugar, hard bread, and whisky. Hay and barley were kept for the animals. The scale of this business was small. With the exception of the livestock feed, all the other merchandise could have been packed out on two horses. R.E. Doyle sent supplies from San Diego and Hamilton often obtained additional provisions from Vallecito and San Felipe (Freeman 1860).

Hamilton Breeze left Carrizo Creek in October of 1859, (District Court 1860). By this time the desert outpost had also become a station on the overland mail line headed by John Butterfield.

### **B. The Butterfield Overland Mail Company**

On July 7, 1857, the Postmaster General awarded the contract to provide overland mail service between San Francisco and the Mississippi to a combine headed by John Butterfield of New York. This group collectively controlled the most powerful express companies on the East Coast. They were to provide a semi-weekly service from two eastern termini at Saint Louis, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee to San Francisco (Richardson 1925). The Missouri and Tennessee lines converged at Little Rock, Arkansas. The San Antonio to San Diego line continued to operate along its entire length through August, 1858, while the newly-formed Overland Mail Company, popularly known as the Butterfield Line, established a 3,000-mile stage route. Most of the road followed the Gila overland trail through the desert wilderness of the southwest. Tasks for the new company included building and stocking 139 stations, along with associated corrals, wells, and cisterns, and assembling 1,200 horses, 600 mules, and 100 coaches. The company hired 750 employees to run the stations. Stages were expected to complete a one-way trip between the two terminuses in 25 days. The first stage left Tipton, Missouri, on September 16, 1858. The route now passed through Warner's Ranch and Temecula to Los Angeles rather than taking the Warner's-Santa Ysabel cutoff to San Diego (Richardson 1925; Pourade 1963:224-225).

The Overland Mail line developed a much larger and more complex infrastructure than the San Antonio and San Diego Mail. The company had manned stations every 10 to 15 miles, and occasionally 20 to 25 miles apart (Barrows 1896). These were grouped into nine divisions, each one under the direction of a superintendent. An agent served under the superintendent and had charge of a number of stations. The road between the Colorado River and Warner's Ranch was part of Division # 2, which included all stops between Fort Yuma and Los Angeles. Twelve stations, under the direction of Agent Warren G. Hall, spanned the route from Yuma through Warner's Pass and included Fort Yuma, Pilot Knob, Cooke's Wells, Gardener's Wells, Alamo Mocho, Indian Wells, Sackett's Wells, Carrizo Creek, Palm Springs, Vallecito, San Felipe, and Warner's Ranch. The stations within the United States, their personnel, available livestock, and feed on hand, taken from the 1860 Federal census, are listed on Tables 1 and 2 (Census 1860a; 1860b). The Federal Census did not include Pilot Knob, Alamo Mocho, Gardener's Wells, and Cooke's Wells since these stations were located in Mexico.

Carrizo Creek appears to have been occupied by employees of both the San Antonio and San Diego and the Overland Mail Companies, during the first year of the Butterfield Line's operation. George Freeman, a

driver for that firm, was headquartered at Carrizo Creek, at the same time Hamilton Breeze ran the station for Giddings and Doyle (Freeman 1860). Following Breeze's departure in October of 1859, the station seems to have been occupied exclusively by Overland Mail Company personnel (Census 1860a; 1860b).

Yuma and San Felipe became the Overland Mail Company's two most important stations between the Colorado River and Warner's Ranch. The company had a major maintenance facility at Fort Yuma, with an investment of \$10,000. Twenty-one employees resided there including two agents, a clerk, carpenter, blacksmith, harness maker, four drivers, six conductors, three teamsters, a cook, and a hostler. Twelve tons of hay and barley were on hand although only five horses were kept there (Census 1860a; 1860b).

**Table 1: 1860 Federal Census Listings for Butterfield Stage Stations**

STATION	INDIVIDUAL	AGE	SEX	RACE	PROFESSION	REAL ESTATE	PERSONAL ESTATE	PLACE OF BIRTH
Warner's Ranch Station	Alexander Vance	28	M		Hostler			Ohio
San Felipe Station	Warren Hall	40	M		Mail Agent	2000	4000	New York
	Margaret Hall	34	F					New York
	Anita Hall	2	F					California
	Margaret Cook	69	F					New York
	Oliver P. Cook	31	M		Hotel Keeper		500	New York
	Joseph Lober	18	M		Cook			Germany
	Hiram P. Huntington	37	M		Harness Maker			New York
	Solmen T. Wormsley	31	M		Stage Driver			New York
	George Freeman	43	M				300	Virginia
Vallecito Station	Andrew Mulkins	26	M		Merchant	500	2000	New York
	John Meir	37	M		Cook		300	Germany
2 <sup>nd</sup> Household	Wm. Johnson	39	M		Hostler			Pennsylvania
	John McClintock	36	M		Hostler			
	Numerous Indian Households Also Listed							
Palm Springs Station	John White	30	M		Hostler		200	New York
Carriso Station	William H. Yates	21	M		Hostler		200	New York
Sackett's Station	George Taylor	30	M		Hostler		100	Pennsylvania

**Table 1 1860 Federal Census Listings for Butterfield Stage Stations  
(Continued)**

STATION	INDIVIDUAL	AGE	SEX	RACE	PROFESSION	REAL ESTATE	PERSONAL ESTATE	PLACE OF BIRTH
	Maria Taylor	25	F	Ind.				California
2 <sup>nd</sup> House	Henry McClaghen	35	M		Station Keeper	400	200	Scotland
	Edward Oathemer	30	M		Blacksmith	500	500	Pennsylvania
Indian Wells	William Holmes	30	M		Hotel Keeper		500	Missouri
	John Pete	30	M		Hostler			Tennessee
	Thomas McWilliams	24	M		Hostler		100	Ireland
	Maria Romero	22	F		Cook			California
	Ysabel Romero	1	F					California
Colorado, Station (Ft. Yuma)	Edward G. Stevens	32	M		O' Mail Agent	1200	6000	New York
	George W. Jacobs	38	M		O' Mail Agent			New York
	Henry W. Tibbetts	40	M		Clerk			New York
	Garrett-Garretsy	46	M		Carpenter			New York
(Ft. Yuma)								
	Arvin Harper	34	M		Blacksmith			Pennsylvania
	Chauncey Jewett	36	M		Harness Maker			New York
	Oliver M. Parks	40	M		Stage Driver			New York
	Henry Stafford	33	M		Stage Driver			Pennsylvania
	Andrew Baker	32	M		Stage Driver			New York
	Newell Hosner	30	M		Stage Driver			New York
	Hugh Doran	28	M		Mail Conductor			New York
	Smite Tyler	32	M		Mail Conductor			New York
	George Andrews	26	M		Mail Conductor			New York
	John McTusk	35	M		Mail Conductor			New York
	John Loyd	37	M		Mail Conductor			New York
	Louis Brewer	35	M		Mail Conductor			Maryland
	Mathea Webber	42	M		Teamster			Virginia
	Joe E. West	40	M		Teamster			Missouri
	Dennis Tiemays	35	M		Teamster			Ireland
	Henry Gilbert	34	M		Cook			Louisiana
	Patrick Table	32	M		Hostler			Ireland

**Table 2: 1860 Federal Census Economic Data for Butterfield Stage Stations**

STATION	REPRESENTATIVE	CAPITOL INVESTED	BARLEY	HAY	STOCK
Warner's Ranch	Alex Vance, Keeper	\$1000	12 ton	12 ton	4 horses
San Felipe	W. (Warren) F. Hall, Agent	\$5000	48 ton	36 ton	19 horses 2 coaches
Vallecito	Wm. Johnson, Keeper	\$1500	12 ton	12 ton	6 horses
Palm Springs	J. White Keeper	\$1200	12 ton	12 ton	5 horses
Carrizo	Wm. Yates Keeper	\$1200	12 ton	12 ton	5 horses
Sackett's Well	George Taylor Keeper	\$1200	12 ton	12 ton	5 horses
Indian Wells	John Pettes Keeper	\$1200	12 ton	12 ton	1 Coach 5 horses
Colorado (Fort Yuma)	Edwin G. Stevens, Agent	\$10,000	12 ton	12 ton	5 horses



San Felipe now served as the major change station west of Fort Yuma. The division agent, Warren G. Hall, resided there as well as five other employees: the station keeper (also called an agent), a hotel keeper, a cook, a harness maker, a stage driver, and their families. The company had invested \$5,000 in the station. The post had 48 tons of barley, 36 tons of hay, 19 horses, and 2 coaches. The remaining stops, including Carrizo Creek, functioned as changing or "swing" stations to replace worn out teams with fresh horses. Most had a single keeper, identified as a hostler, who took care of the livestock and helped change the teams. Exceptions were at Vallecito, where two hostlers, a cook, and a merchant resided; Sackett's Station (Wells) with a hostler, station keeper, and blacksmith; and Indian Wells, with a hotelkeeper, two hostlers, and a cook. The swing stations kept 4 to 5 horses and 12 tons each of barley and hay. Company investment in each station ranged between \$1,000 and \$1,500 (Census 1860a; 1860b). Based on traveler's descriptions, some also served as meal stops. The presence of employed cooks listed on the 1860 census, as well as descriptions, indicate Yuma, Cooke's Wells, Indian Wells, Vallecito, and San Felipe provided food (Orsmby 1858; Tallack 1860; Farwell 1858).

A through trip between San Francisco and Saint Louis on the Butterfield line generally took between 23 and 25 days (Richardson 1925). Stages traveled day and night, stopping only briefly for meals and to change horses. H.D. Barrow, who traveled from Los Angeles to Missouri, remembered, "We traveled day and night by stage for about eighteen days and five hours ... . Of course the journey was somewhat tedious, but this was more than compensated for by the incidents and variety of scenery ... and really, the weariness of stage travel was less disagreeable than sea sickness, etc., by water ... . At first it was not easy to get much sleep, but after a couple of days out we could sleep without difficulty, either day or night" (Barrows 1896).

On the eastern portions of the route, where roads were improved, Butterfield's company used Concord Coaches. On the west coast the Overland Mail Company, like the San Antonio — San Diego line, used celerity or mud wagons (Figure 11 A & B). H.D. Barrows recalled that on his journey from Los Angeles they rode in "through-brace mud wagons" until reaching the neighborhood of Springfield, Missouri (Barrows 1896). A driver and conductor accompanied each stage; both went armed. Unlike the small arsenal of weaponry and large list of supplies and equipment required on the San Antonio — San Diego crossing, all the Overland Mail passenger needed "to tender himself comfortable is a pair of blankets, a revolver or knife (just as he fancies), and an overcoat, some wine to mix with water (which is not the sweetest quality) and three or four dollars worth of provisions, purchased in Los Angeles, to last him over the desert" (Lang 1858). In addition, an ounce of tartic acid to relieve the diuretic effects of the desert water was recommended "as it has an admirable effect in relieving disagreeable sensations" (Lang 1858).

Since the stage stopped only briefly at each station, passengers recorded few details. J. M. Farwell, correspondent for the *Alta California*, arrived at Palm Springs on a bright moonlight night. "While we remained here the beauty and singularity of the scene will not soon fade from my memory. I was not long permitted to enjoy this, for the coach was ready and we were off again" (Farwell 1858). At Carrizo Creek they found "water still more sulphurous in its taste. We were, however obliged to fill some bottles with it for our own use, though the driver carries a supply, and so long as it lasts passengers are allowed free use of it. As the trip we now had to make was 32 miles in extent, we thought our course a proper one" (Farwell 1858).

William Tallack, traveling in 1860 reached Carrizo Creek Station at day break and found it "a solitary station in a scene of desolation not to be surpassed in the Arabian deserts." Upon their arrival the driver lay down "to snatch ten minutes sleep after the night's exertion ... and was instantly unconscious in profound slumber, from which he has speedily to be roused again." After passing a party of "forty United States soldiers, covered with dust and tattered clothes," they continued "driving for hours through a wind as hot as from a furnace," and reached Indian Wells "-a miserable adobe with walls black inside with clustering flies, but where we were refreshed with coffee" (Tallack 1860).

Meals could be had along the route for 75 cents. They included "Beef, dried apples, beans, potatoes, and frequently pies and venison. Hot rolls occasionally, like meeting a long absent friend, make their appearance and as suddenly disappear." At Alamo Mocho, Lang breakfasted on "tough steaks at four a.m. in another dirty dusty adobe" (Lang 1858).

The harsh desert elements did take their toll. Riding hour after hour the stage became "enveloped in clouds of fine clayey dust. . . . What with the hot wind, the dust, and the perspiration, our faces and hands became covered with a thin mud, only removed to be speedily renewed as we proceeded" (Lang 1858).

The stage frequently passed Native Americans. Not only in their villages at San Felipe, Vallecito, and Fort Yuma, but also along the road "crossing the desert on foot, carrying their water gourds ... these did us no more harm than to make faces at us and grin as our horses shied from them. I found the journey quite unpleasant in the wagon; but they seemed to enjoy the walk, as if used to it." Emigrant trains were also a common sight with "many cattle and oxen dying on the desert from want of water," as they had in 1849 and 50 (Ormsby 1858:90).

With inauguration of Overland Mail Company service, the San Antonio and San Diego became two short branch lines at either end of the nation's southwest border. On October 22, 1858, the Postmaster General

discontinued service between El Paso and Fort Yuma where it overlapped the Missouri to San Francisco route. The stages of the San Antonio and San Diego now provided connections from these two cities to the transcontinental Overland Mail. In compensation, the Post Office Department upgraded operations on the two branches to a weekly service (Tamplin 1979:88; Johnson 1938:27). In 1859 the San Antonio — San Diego had "50 fine new coaches, 400 mules, and 64 men." Drivers maintained an average speed of six miles an hour (Banning Notes 1928).<sup>7</sup> Newspapers in San Francisco and Sacramento, both connected to the Overland Mail, resented continuation of the San Antonio — San Diego in even this limited form, dubbing it the "San Antonio & San Diego Jackass Overland Mail Route" and demanding that Congress "lop off this useless mail" (*Sacramento Union* 11-15-1859; Banning Notes 1928). It was this attack that gave the line its nickname, "Jackass Mail." On April 1, 1860 the Post Office Department reduced the line even farther and discontinued service between Fort Yuma and San Diego (Tamplin 1979:89).

Within a year overland mail service over the Southern Route ceased. With the outbreak of the Civil War in the Spring of 1861, almost half the route lay in Confederate states. On March 2, 1861, the Post Master General stopped mail delivery on the Southern Route and implemented a six-times-a-week service on the Central Route along the Platt River and through the Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountains between Saint Joseph, Missouri and Placerville, California. Butterfield ceased operations in April and Wells Fargo and Company began service along the new route in July (Tamplin 1979:91).

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>. On October 18, 1856 the *San Diego Herald* ran the following article describing some of the preliminary meetings held to establish the overland mail route (W. Davidson's 1931 notes).

### NEW PROPOSED STAGE ROUTE

The Austin Texas State Gazette publishes the report of a public meeting of the citizens of El Paso County, held for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of a tri monthly mail coach line from San Antonio, by way of El Paso to San Diego, in California. A committee was appointed to draft resolutions and make a report. The following is a portion of the report, in which the advantages of the route are spoken of.

"That they are deeply sensible to the great importance of calling public attention to the necessity and propriety of establishing a tri-monthly line of mail coaches, from some point on the Gulf of Mexico, by way of San Antonio and El Paso to San Diego, in California. This route is eminently the best and most practical; free from the snows of winter and the withering heat of summer, passing through a climate salubrious and delightful, tracking fertile and beautiful valleys, and not endless treeless parries and scorching deserts of sand; encountering abundance of wood, water and grass, and not thirsty desert plains, and bleak, barren mountainous, burning as a furnace in summer, and frozen and ice cold in winter, open and passable at all seasons, with everything to cheer the emigrant and traveler, in rich soil and varied landscape, with no mountain barriers, - no natural wall across the pathway, the route contemplated is superior for a great mail route and emigrant road across the continent, to any other north of it and this can be born out passing through our own territory.

The establishment of a tri monthly mail line, on coaches, by this route, would tend greatly not only to develop the resources of Northwestern Texas, but would be the first active, progressive step in the establishment of the great Southern Pacific Railroad. It would direct public opinion to defiantly settle down on the route which is marked by nature as the nearest, cheapest, and best. It would form an active stream of travel across the continent, and unfold to light not only our great resources, but the practicability of the railway. It would be the cheapest and best means of transporting the mails, and we believe that a contract could be reached for carrying them tri monthly at less than one-half what is paid by the Government to the Panama mail steamer."

The resolution after expressing faith in the practicability of the proposed enterprise, reads as follows:

Resolved, that regarding the road by this route as a national military and mail road conducive to the interest of the whole country, we believe that the Government possess the constitutional power to improve it.

Resolved, That our Senators and Representatives in the Congress of the United States be requested to use their utmost endeavors to establish the said tri-monthly mail coach line, and to procure an appropriation to improve said road."

<sup>2</sup>. James Lassitor owned a ranch at Green Valley in the Cuyamaca Mountains and operated a store and hay station for military trains and immigrants at Vallecito. He grew hay and cut wild oats in Green Valley which he hauled to Vallecito down the Oriflame canyon trail (Porade 1963 Wray \*).

<sup>3</sup> Salis St. John and Indian attack.

<sup>5</sup>. At first Isaiah Woods hoped that the Oriflamme Canyon trail could be improved so that coaches could travel this way and bypass Warner's Ranch. An article in the *San Diego Herald* of September 19, 1857 noted:

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### The New Road to the Desert

The stage conductor of the overland mail train, on this end of the route, left here on Sunday afternoon, accompanied by Judge Morse and several other citizens to examine the new route to the Desert, with a view to take their coach train over that road on the 9th of next month. As this road cuts off one day travel between this place and Carriso Creek, we suppose it will be for the interest of the Stage Company to join with the citizens and complete the improvements already projected, when it will be one of the finest roads in the county. When this is done, we may confidently expect a through mail, (in coaches) regularly in 28 days.

P. S. The expedition sent out by the Stage Company to examine the various trails in the immediate neighborhood of Cariso Creek, returned last night, they report passing over and returning by an excellent trail following which a road can be made at a very moderate expense in a distance of seventy-five miles from San Diego to the Desert at Cariso.

In the present state of this trail, the Stage Company estimate that they can take the mail from here to Fort Yuma in 2 1/2 days, by crossing the mountains at the point examined, which is nearly due east of San Diego. A glance at the map will show the cut off which this makes when compared with the old road via "Warner's Ranch."

<sup>6</sup> The Carrillo family lived in the presently existing adobe ranch house at Warner Ranch from 1857 to around 1868.

<sup>7</sup> Strahlmann collection quoted from Texas Almanac of 1860.