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Beehive Archive

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

To Utah By Stagecoach

The stagecoach is a legendary symbol of the American West, part of a transportation network that spanned the continent. How did Utah fit into this network?

Traveling to Utah was difficult – to say the least – in the mid-19th Century. Major land routes between the east and west coasts skirted Utah to the north and south. The need for easier communication between Salt Lake City and the outside world drove the development of new transportation routes for both mail and passengers.

The first such stagecoach service was started in 1858 by George Chorpenning using the Central Overland Route, a new trail that ran through central Utah and Nevada to California. The route was originally scouted in 1855 by Howard Egan, who used it to drive cattle, and was improved by US Army Captain James Simpson, who used it to supply Camp Floyd during the Utah War. The new route was about 280 miles shorter than the more northerly California Trail, shaving off two weeks of travel.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 blocked stagecoach transportation in the south, forcing the US Government to shift its communication lines north to the Central Overland Route. Wells Fargo purchased the route and their iconic stagecoaches ran regularly through Salt Lake City. Stages changed teams about every 13 miles, so stops developed along the way. The Stagecoach Inn – which still exists in Fairfield, Utah, across from Camp Floyd – was one of these stops.

Passengers could now travel from Missouri to California in about 25 days. In 1863, the fare was \$200 and meals were 60 cents. Many famous people traveled the route through Utah, including writer Mark Twain, newspaper editor Horace Greeley, and English explorer Richard Burton. Burton described the torture along some parts of the route, saying that passengers became “crazy by whisky, mixed with want of sleep.”

With the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, the Central Overland Route through Utah was practically abandoned. Although stagecoaches continued to reach areas not served by the railroad, the heyday of the stagecoach was over.

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