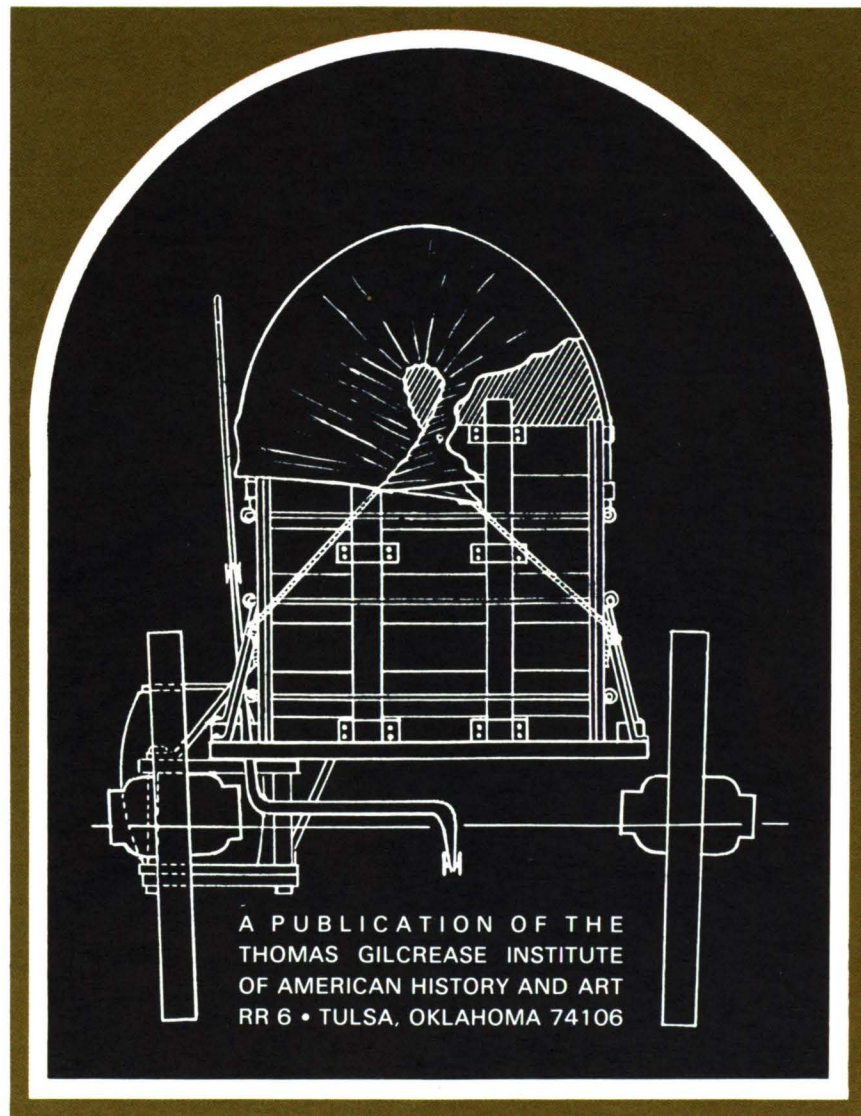
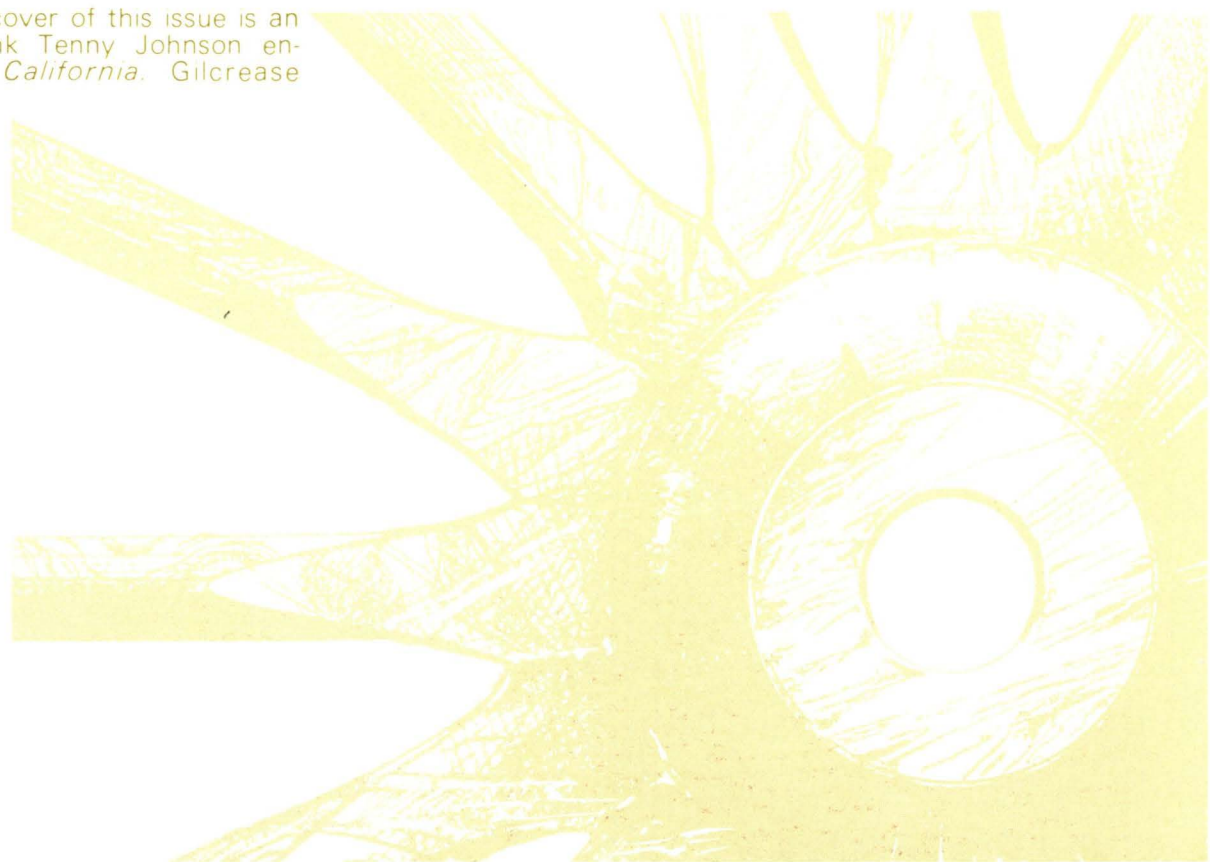


The American Scene



TRAVELING
WESTWARD

Reproduced on the cover of this issue is an oil painting by Frank Tenny Johnson entitled *Oregon or California*. Gilcrease collection.



The American Scene

GILCREASE INSTITUTE

*Founded by the late Thomas Gilcrease
Owned and operated by the City of Tulsa*

JAMES M. HEWGLEY, JR.
Mayor

MRS. P. P. MANION, JR.
Chairman, Parks & Recreation Board

AMERICAN SCENE COMMITTEE

JAMES C. LEAKE Chairman
OTHA H. GRIMES Member
MORTON R. HARRISON Member

Editorial Staff

PAUL A. ROSSI Editor
DANIEL M. McPIKE Associate Editor
DAVID C. HUNT Associate Editor
MARIE KEENE Editorial Assistant
DONNIE GOOD Editorial Assistant
OLIVER WILLCOX Photography

Design, Layout, & Lithography
by Tulsa Litho Co. Inc., Tulsa

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

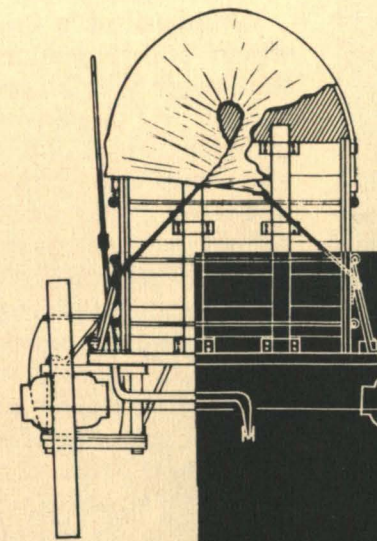
OTHA H. GRIMES Past Chairman
ALFRED E. AARONSON Past Chairman
WILLIAM S. BAILEY, JR. Past Chairman
GEORGE H. BOWEN Chairman
DAVID R. MILSTEN President
MORTON R. HARRISON Vice-President
MRS. ROGER DEVLIN Vice-President
JAMES C. LEAKE Vice-President
JOSEPH F. GLASS Secretary
WILLIAM S. BAILEY, JR. Treasurer
PAUL A. ROSSI Director of the Institute

Volume IX, No. 2 of the American Scene, published and copyrighted by the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, an Oklahoma corporation. A \$10.00 membership in the Institute entitles the holder to four issues of the American Scene along with membership privileges. Regular subscription \$5.00. Single issues, \$1.25. (Address: Rural Route #6, Tulsa, Oklahoma).

©Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, 1968



A PUBLICATION OF THE THOMAS GILCREASE INSTITUTE OF
AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART



TRAVELING
WESTWARD

An article dealing
with the motives
and modes of
transportation
characteristic of
those explorers, commercial
adventurers, and pioneers who
traveled westward to settle the vast
country beyond the Mississippi
in the nineteenth century.

Researched and written for the
American Scene by Donnie D. Good
of the Gilcrease publications staff.

TRAVELING WESTWARD

A great deal of past discussion and conjecturing has centered upon the motives behind the explorations and migrations of the men who were active in the early westward movement across the North American continent. One fact which cannot be questioned, however, is that they were motivated to move, and to continue moving... westward. No individual appeared to analyze their transportation needs or to focus public attention upon them. Rather, the motives and aspirations of waves of determined people caused them to employ the best means of transportation immediately available to them in their half century of periodic advances from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.

When the available means proved inadequate, other means were sought to fill the needs of the business-minded freighter, impatient gold seeker, army escort, or settler carrying the things that would help to make a new place a home. The changes thus brought about were not always by design but were governed more often by the force of the motive of the traveler. Therefore, there appeared as great a variety of vehicles and conveyances as there were reasons for moving the things men wanted and needed to accomplish their different purposes.

Activities in the trans-Mississippi West in the first half of the nineteenth century revolved primarily around those adventurers engaged in fur trapping and trading or the early entrepreneurs of the freighting business. The Missouri River served as the primary route to the Rocky Mountain fur trapping country and was used by water vessels or followed by overland travelers. An 800-mile overland route from Missouri to Santa Fe was the scene of the earliest freighting activity in the West.

Lewis and Clark and other early explorers to the Northwest or Mexico used pack horses to carry their gear and supplies. The mountain men and fur trappers also

used pack animals extensively, and the earliest trails into the Far West, the North, and the South were made by these animals. The pack train, with its advantages and disadvantages, had a long history of being replaced by other means of transportation and of being reinstated for use again as people pushed farther into wilderness areas. Horses, mules, burros, and very rarely oxen, were used as pack animals. Although the horse or burro was preferred in certain regions, the mule became the most popular pack animal in the American West.

"Stubborn as a mule" is an expression which still proclaims the sentiments of the people who knew the mule as a pack animal. A cantankerous, unpredictable, clannish "cuss," the mule was, above all else, stubborn. Through proper training, however, this stubbornness could be turned into an asset. As a trained pack animal, the mule could out-perform the horse or the smaller burro, and could carry a two hundred pound pack at the rate of five or six miles an hour over trails that no wheeled vehicle could manage.

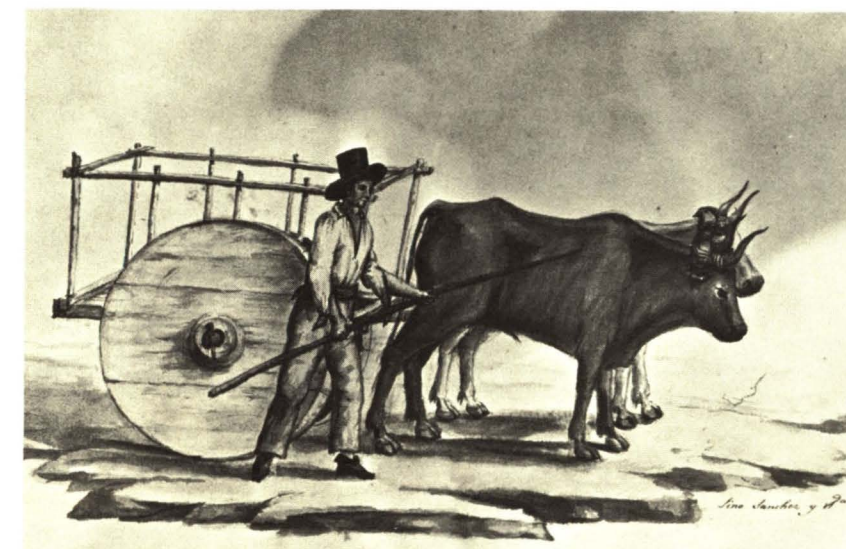
The earliest traders between Old and New Mexico preferred burros with pack saddles. The burro was also used by desert prospectors in the Southwest and to pull the carts or wagons of the freight outfits in New Mexico and Texas. These hearty little animals could go without water for two or three days and could forage on next to nothing.

Two-wheeled wooden carts were used by Mexican border people for several centuries, their size depending upon the load which they carried. The Mexican cart most generally used was a small light-weight carry-all pulled by two oxen. The Chihuahua cart, or *carreta*, was a heavier freight vehicle drawn by three or more pair of oxen. The *carreta*'s outstanding feature was a three-section wooden wheel. These wheels varied in size and detail, but the



Easily compared here are a Red River cart of the north as depicted (above) in a painting by William Cary, and the typical vehicle used along the Mexican border to the south described in a sketch by Sanchez y Tapia (right).

Below is reproduced a Mexican lithograph which suggests the difficulties entailed in the handling of an overburdened pack mule.



basic structure was always the same. Occasionally a larger, covered cart was employed which had wheels six feet in diameter.

Another two-wheeled cart particularly suited to frontier conditions was the Red River cart, which was used along the North Dakota-Canadian border for half a century. Although the origin of this cart is not known, it was observed as early as 1792 and remained unchanged as an important conveyance in the settlement of the Red River Valley. Made entirely of wood, the Red River cart, without the complicated turning mechanism of a wagon, could go nearly anywhere a horse could go. Because these carts could be constructed quickly with only a few tools and at very low cost, they were used for many years. □





Earliest adventurers of the unknown regions of the trans-Mississippi wilderness observed the Indians traveling on land using dog and horse travois to facilitate movement, and on water a bowl-shaped, hide-covered structure called a "bull-boat." Just as the bark canoes of the Indians of the southeastern part of the country had been adopted for use by earliest settlers, the first of the high-spirited men who stayed in the Far West — the fur traders

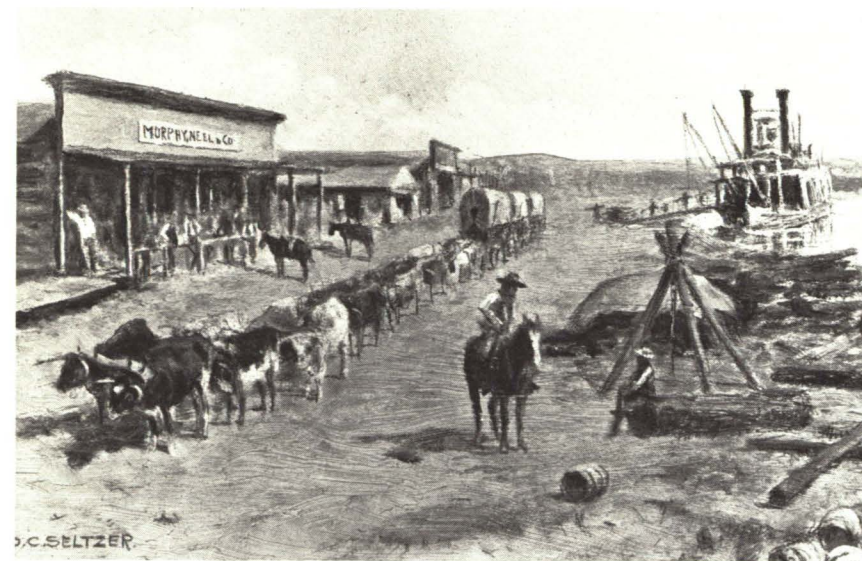
Modes of travel on the western rivers are indicated by the keel boat featured in the print after Carl Bodmer (left) and the sketch of the raftsmen shooting Dead Man's Rapids (below) by William Cary. Both artists ventured up the Missouri River to sketch scenes of frontier life, Bodmer traveling as far as Fort Union in the 1830's, and Cary arriving at Fort Benton in the 1860's.



and trappers — adopted the "bull-boat" to transport their furs downstream on the Missouri River.

The Missouri River constituted the principal means of access to the distant regions of the Far West until the time of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Earliest vessels used on the Missouri were canoes hewn from cottonwood tree trunks to an average size of 20' long by 3' wide. These canoes were paddled upstream averaging from fifteen to forty miles a day. A heavier variation of the canoe was the pirogue which consisted of two log canoes fastened together with rough wooden deck. This raft-like structure used a large sail, when conditions permitted, to relieve the work of paddling.

The large, pretentious keel-boat used on the Missouri River by government explorers, military commanders, and big business venturers was similar to keel-boats in the East. The Missouri River



Freighting from Fort Benton (left) by Olaf Seltzer, suggests how goods were shipped by steamboat from the East up the Missouri, and then transferred to freighter wagons following the trails to Oregon or California. In the 1860's Fort Benton was the uppermost point of steamboat navigation on the Missouri.

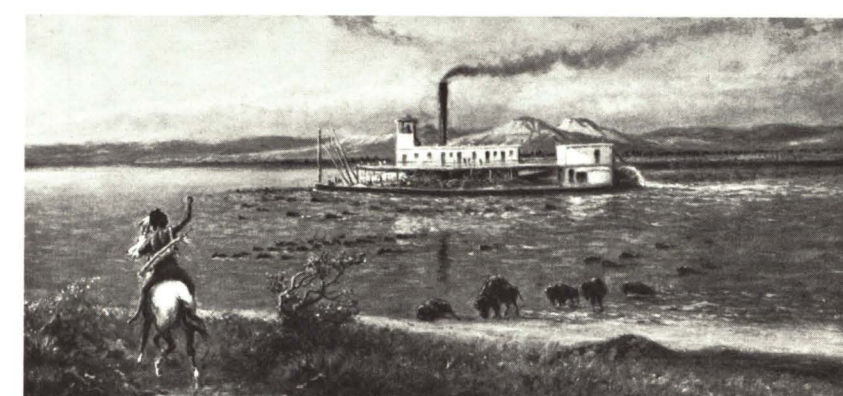
Enroute to the Agency for Supplies (lower left), by William Cary shows the Indian use of the horse & dog travois.

Buffalo Crossing the Missouri (below), oil, by William Cary.



keel-boat could be compared to a man who wears both suspenders and a belt. Standard equipment on these vessels included mast and sails, oars for rowing, sets of poles, and 1,000 feet of heavy rope for pulling. If one method of propulsion didn't work there were three others immediately available to do the job. Another variation of an eastern vessel was the Mackinaw, a large flat-boat used for freighting. Averaging from fifty to sixty feet in length, the Mackinaw was a one-way craft suitable only for traveling downstream. At the end of the trip the boat was sold for lumber.

Although the steamboat was introduced to the Missouri River as early as 1819, man-powered vessels continued to be used for many years. It was 1832 before a steamboat



appeared on the Upper Missouri. A year later two steamboats, the *Yellowstone* and the *Assiniboine*, reached Fort Union. Problems encountered by these two pioneer vessels caused alterations in future steamboats used on the unpredictable Missouri waters, and only one or two steamboats made the trip each year. From 1834 to 1853 the mouth of the Yellowstone was the farthest point reached by the annual steamboat voyage, a distance of nearly 2,000 miles from St. Louis. □



The oil painting by Olaf Seltzer entitled *In Memoriam* (above) depicts a Conestoga-type vehicle abandoned along a western trail.

While the steamboat was being introduced to Missouri River travel and trade, wagon freighting was being established from St. Louis, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Although there had long existed a need for manufactured items in the agricultural province of which Santa Fe was the capital, the Spanish government had strictly enforced its opposition to trade between Santa Fe and the commercial-minded Americans. Trade with Santa Fe became a reality only after Mexico's declaration of independence from Spain in 1821. In that year, William Becknell made the first successful trip to Santa Fe and returned the following year with the first freight wagons to be used on the Santa Fe Trail.

The wagon was the primary vehicle used for freighting on the Santa Fe Trail. Pack trains were tried but were soon replaced because of the time-consuming and tiresome detail of packing and unpacking the animals daily. A wagon pulled by mules or oxen could be loaded at the beginning of the long journey and unloaded in Santa Fe with only the unharnessing and reharnessing of the animals being a daily chore. The covered wagon also afforded better protection for the freight than any covering on a pack animal could provide.

The earliest covered wagons used on the Santa Fe Trail were Conestoga wagons which had served pioneering Americans since 1755. Developed in the Conestoga Valley, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, this wagon was ideally suited for travel on the early wilderness trails. Although years of changing needs caused the original design to be heightened or lowered, lengthened or

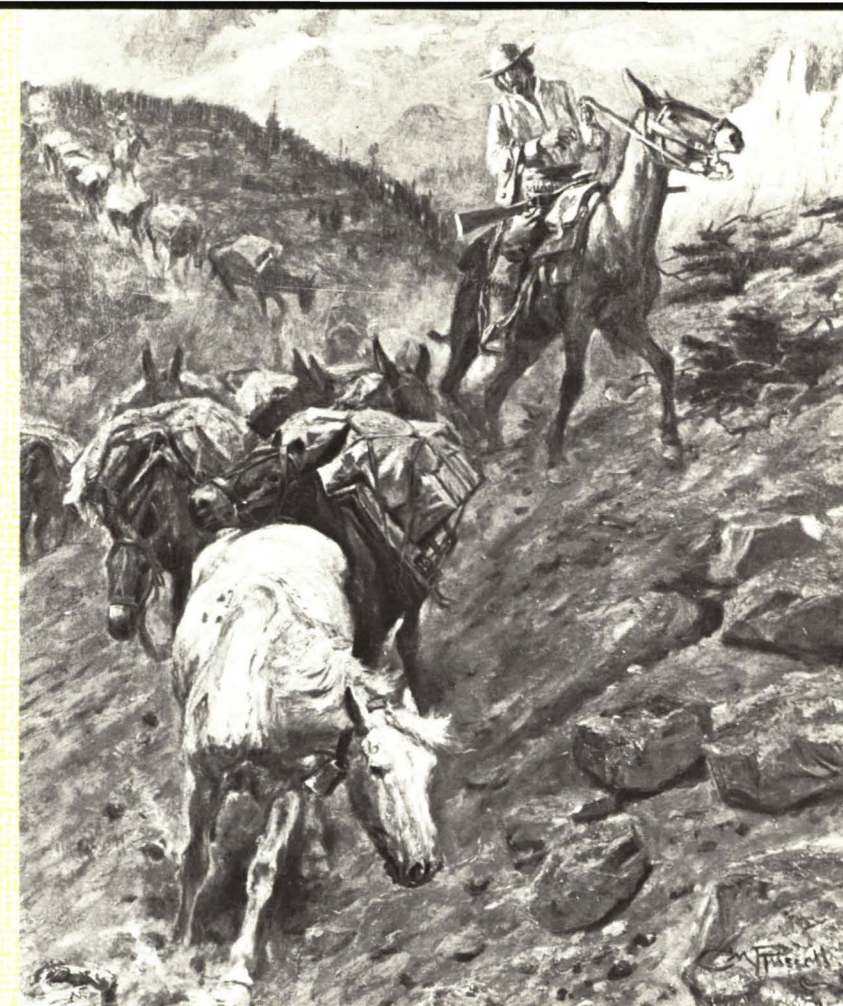
shortened, made heavier or lighter, and subjected to hundreds of other major or minor changes, the Conestoga wagon can indeed be called "the Granddaddy of 'em all!"

Although the basic design of the Conestoga survived for nearly a hundred years, it was not, contrary to popular belief, the major conveyance used by pioneer families but was instead a freighting vehicle. Its characteristic, curved bottom was designed to allow for a minimum amount of load shifting while in motion, and the body itself was often brightly painted. The basic color scheme was usually blue, with the running gear painted red. Many of these wagons sported scenic views painted on their sides by local artists and were in other ways highly decorated.

Virtually forgotten today is the Conestoga horse, a breed developed in the same Pennsylvania valley in the 1700's from Flemish or Danish cart horses brought to America by German settlers of that region. The Conestoga horse was a tall animal approximately seventeen hands high. Not inclined to be fleshy, nevertheless, it was extremely powerful for its weight and was used chiefly to pull Conestoga wagons, canal boats, and heavy carriages. All colors were prevalent except black, with greys predominating. It is doubtful that the Conestoga horse was ever used in the West or in early freighting operations on the Santa Fe Trail, for reliance was placed strictly on western stock, either horses or mules. By 1900 the breed had virtually disappeared.

Oxen were introduced to the Santa Fe Trail by the U.S. Army which was assigned to escort the freight wagons after Comanche raids in 1828. The primary change in the Santa Fe wagon train was brought about by heavy import duties imposed on the traders by the Mexican government in 1837. The Conestoga wagon design was lengthened and heightened, retaining the characteristic overhang—the famous "Murphy wagon" was the result. These large freight wagons pulled by ten to twelve mules or oxen covered up to twenty miles a day. A two-wheeled cart was often hitched behind the wagon, caboose style, to carry water or extra supplies for the trip.

Charles M. Russell's painting, *Bell Mare*, (right) shows a typical mule pack train used by early western traders. William H. Jackson's painting (reproduced below) portrays a wagon train bound for California in the process of crossing the Platte River.



The photographs reproduced here indicate common types of wagons and animals employed on the western trails throughout the nineteenth century. Top photo shows heavy freight wagons used with oxen.

By 1839 expansion and improvements were an accepted part of the Santa Fe freighting scene. The Bent brothers had established a wagon route through Colorado from Santa Fe by way of Raton Pass, and Bent's Fort, built on the north bank of the Arkansas River, served as the main stopover for freighters following the mountain route. Regularly scheduled caravans of 100 wagons or more made the annual trip each spring to Santa Fe.

During the War with Mexico, 1846-1848, the Santa Fe Trail was an important supply route. At the end of the war, the United States acquired vast amounts of western territory including present day California, Utah, Nevada, and portions of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming. In July, 1849, an early stagecoach line ventured, heavily protected, over the route from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The decade between 1840 and 1850 was one of refinement and change in modes of transportation in the East. Steamboats were replacing most other vessels on the rivers. The stagecoach was replaced by railroads in many areas. In 1848 the railroad extended

to Cincinnati, Ohio, and stagecoach service went no farther west than St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri.

The Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to the Pacific Ocean, charted and mapped by John C. Fremont in the early 1840's, had been traveled for almost twenty years by occasional pack trains of early adventurers. After Fremont's reports of his expeditions were published in 1843, the Oregon Trail soon became the primary wagon route used by immigrants moving West. During the following decade, mass migrations of people in covered wagons cut a network of side trails and short cuts, in some cases branching off to make other major routes such as the California Trail.

These were the beginning years of the overwhelming migrations into the West. After gold was discovered in California, January 24, 1848, transportation facilities passing from use in the East were revived in the Far West. These earlier types of vehicles were used to settle the West and to hold the people together until the coming of the railroad. The promise of free land and homes caused many people to brave the hardships between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

Many gold seekers bound for California followed the Oregon Trail via the North Platte Valley and the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, by-passing Fort Hall onto the California Trail which led across the Great Basin and, eventually, the Sierras. Fort Laramie, Fort Bridger, and Fort Hall were inhabited stopovers where travelers on the western trails replenished their supplies, made necessary repairs, and sought information about conditions which faced them on their journey. Forging rivers and streams with wagons and gear was a difficult and time-consuming job. Prairie storms, fires, buffalo stampedes, and Indian uprisings were among the many dangers to be anticipated.

Reports of the tedious overland trip caused more and more changes in wagons. Iron axles were introduced, an important advancement in wagon design. Changes were made in the shape of the wagon bed to accommodate travelers and their belongings rather than freight. The prairie schooner,



William Cary's sketch entitled *Settlers Moving* (above) presents a somewhat less dramatic view of overland travel in the mid-nineteenth century. Here the emigrant train is not beset by Indians or other dangers, but simply described in the midst of its toilsome progress across the central prairies.

er, developed as a one-way wagon generally drawn by two or three yoke of oxen, was a small, light-weight vehicle with an average 2,500 pound capacity. Since men could not build a road for a vehicle which had not been designed, the establishment of new routes followed the introduction of improved conveyances. As wagon designs showed distinct changes, the trails and routes also began to change. Road improvements, however, did not keep pace with the newer designs of the vehicles.

The wagon train became a familiar sight on crowded trans-Mississippi trails. Immigrants in light-weight prairie schooners joined groups of other gold-seekers or land-seekers going West. The eager travelers, partially aware of their inexperience, sought

a wagon master with wisdom, understanding, and, if possible, experience. Experience with a wagon train included knowing the trail and the best way to handle the possible dangers and situations which the train could encounter on the long trip. If an experienced man could not be found, the next best man for the job was one who could be counted upon to make logical and fair decisions.

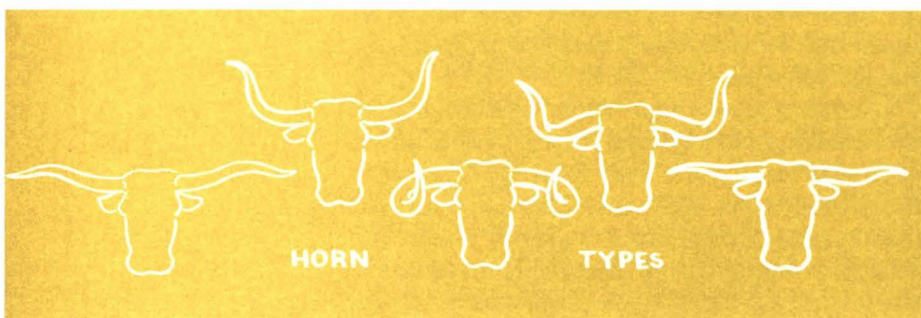
Traveling in a wagon train was no simple undertaking. It required much preparation for each family to have wagon, supplies, and utensils which were needed, as well as the many things they wanted, ready for departure in the spring. Wagons and animals often had to be bought and the animals trained. Departure time for the wagon train was carefully based on the time when grass for the animals would be available for most of the five month trip. Many families preferred the slower moving oxen for the advantage of their being able to live off all but the most barren land. If supplies ran short or the animal was injured, it could be slaughtered and eaten. Six or eight oxen used for each wagon needed no expensive harness. Yokes of ash or hickory could be easily constructed or were inexpensive to buy.

When the wagon train set out it moved slowly over the many miles of unknown, unsettled, prairie — unpredictable country. Each wagon was assigned a position in the caravan which it was expected to maintain for the entire trip. The average distance a wagon train covered in a day was twelve to fifteen miles.

A day on the trail in a wagon train caravan was only partially taken up with traveling. Meals had to be prepared and eaten and a two-hour grazing period for the animals was allotted each noon. The night camping site was selected early in the afternoon and the train pulled into a specified formation when it reached the location for that evening. Extra animals had to be herded while the train was on the move, and all the animals had to be cared for when it halted. Harnessing, unharnessing, repairing equipment and gear, and a hundred other small tasks were all part of the regular, daily routine. □



Russell's *Gunpowder and Arrows* depicts an attack by hostile Indians upon a wagon train carrying emigrants to the Oregon country — an incident often experienced by weary travelers crossing the vast expanse of the American continent.



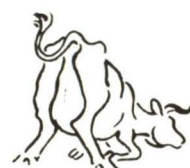
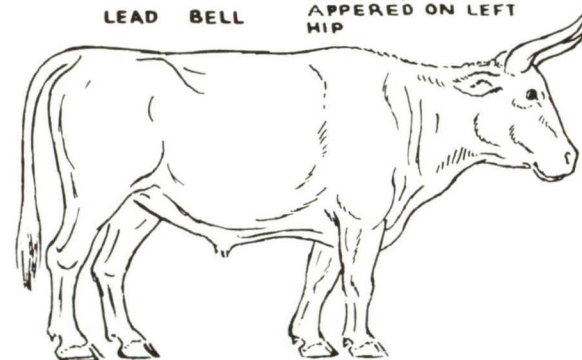
OX SHOES



LEAD BELL

Z
T
B
A

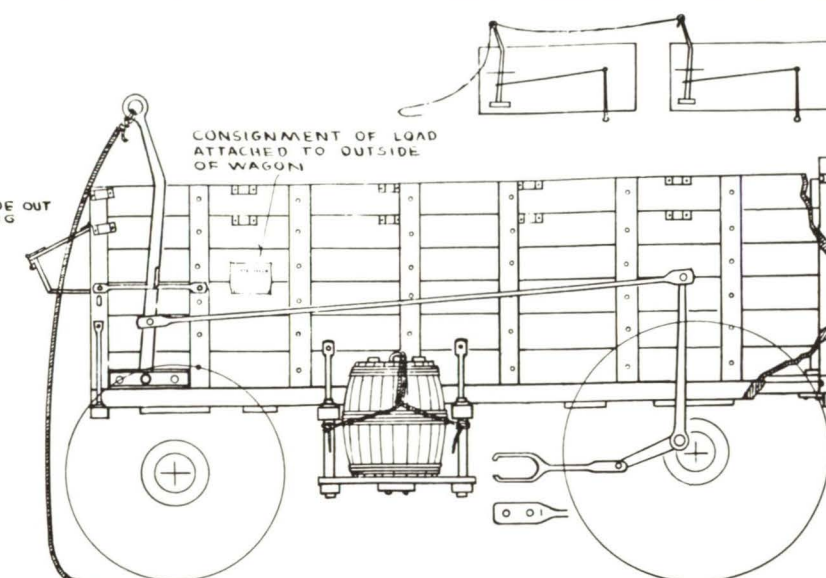
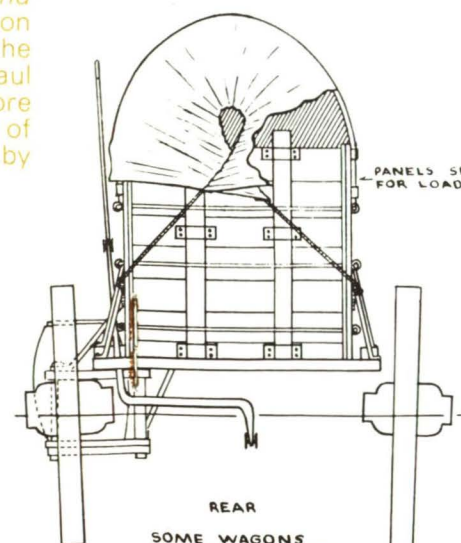
COMPANY BRAND
APPEARED ON LEFT
HIP



OXEN WERE CHEAPER AND
EASIER TO MANAGE BUT
NOT AS FAST AS MULES



Frank Tenny Johnson's painting, *Overland Trail* (above) is a very romanticized rendition of a wagon train bound for new lands in the Far West. The technical drawings by Paul Rossi featured on this page describe in more matter-of-fact terms the various types of wagons, animals, and equipment used by such caravans.





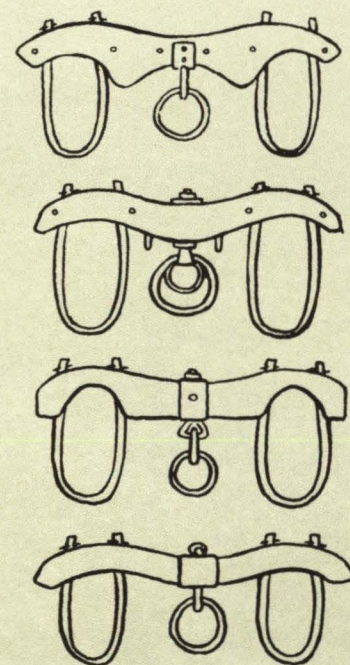
For the inexperienced thousands who went West, the journey itself was a long and hazardous experience. Settling homes or mining for gold brought new trials to be faced; but they began to know their needs, what they would have to have in order to stay; and most of them determined that they WOULD stay.

Many western army posts were established to help protect the growing population from Indians who became increasingly alarmed at the numbers of people beginning to settle in their regions. Supplies for settlers, miners, and the Army caused freighting to be one of the most profitable and active businesses. Communication and exchange soon became a recognized need which individuals, the Pony Express, and, finally, organized express companies filled. Travel and communication were made easier and quicker by the establishment of regular stagecoach routes.

The rapid exchange of goods between the east and west coasts was a challenging task. More of the people who went West became

wealthy by filling the needs of transportation, communication, and supplies than by mining for gold or settling land. Half the immigrants who went to California seeking gold remained to do business in the towns rather than going on to the mines. Men with business foresight profited by the ever-growing needs of the gold-seekers, land-settlers, and the Army. In California three major organizations were formed in one year to service the needs of the expanding population: the California Steam Navigation Company, California Stage Company, and a similar express business.

During the fifties, freighting merchandise to western military posts was a profitable and competitive business. Government contracts were given to those considered most competent to deliver the goods to the isolated posts. Alexander Majors became a prominent freighting figure. The Russell, Majors, and Waddell Freighting Company was primarily involved in fulfilling government contracts to freight goods to remote army posts. Due to a large contract with the government to freight goods to the army in



Reproduced above is an oil painting by Olaf Seltzer entitled *Freighter Outfit*. The etching by Edward Borein (below) indicates that western travel and the transportation of livestock in particular was accomplished by other means than that of wagon or river conveyance. Cattle were commonly herded long distances overland from Texas to shipping points in Kansas after the completion of the transcontinental railroad following the Civil War.



COMMON YOKES IN
USE 1860-1890

Illustrations by Paul Rossi

Utah in 1856-1857, the company added 3,000 wagons, 40,000 oxen and 1,000 mules to their regular equipment of 300 to 350 wagons and teams in operation. In addition to their established headquarters in Leavenworth, Kansas, they built warehouses and set up a second headquarters in Nebraska City. Freighting had become big business in the West. In order to make big profits from the government contracts, Majors organized rules for the freight wagon trains based on his experience in freighting. These rules were used by large and small freight outfits all over the West.

Long caravans of freighters were divided into 25-wagon units separated by from two to ten miles. The wagon boss, riding a horse in the lead, had complete control over all the units of the train. His assistant, responsible for keeping everything rolling, maintained a constant check by moving back and forth along the train as it moved. A "skinner" was responsible for each mule team in the unit, a "bullwhacker" walked beside each team of oxen. Extra stock, following behind each 25-wagon unit, were driven by a single herder. A few outriders were assigned to each unit to handle emer-

gencies and to help whenever they were needed. Other outriders served as advance guards and flank guards to warn and to protect the freight train of unexpected dangers.

The wagons used in Western freighting business until after the Civil War were huge Conestoga-type vehicles with tires four inches wide and half an inch thick. Five or six yoke of oxen were generally chosen to pull the load of five or six thousand pounds. Some of the breeds of slow-plodding, powerful oxen used to pull the heavy freighters were Durham, Ayrshire, Devon, and Short-horn. The front hooves of the oxen were protected by a two-piece iron shoe.

The men employed in the freighting business were usually paid a dollar a day and expenses. Among the toughest of the men in the West, they could out-work, out-fight, out-drink, and surely "out-cuss," any man, anywhere. To balance these traits they were also known to be big-hearted and generous to a fault. With the entire outfit under the direction of the wagon master, each freighter took his turn at cooking, herding, and guarding, as well as attending to his regular duties. □

Featured at right are two watercolor portraits of frontier characters by Olaf Seltzer: *The Freighter* is shown standing to the right of *The Bull Whacker*.



The photograph at the left shows a freighter team bringing in the vestibule for safety vaults to be installed in the new bank building of the International Trust Company, Denver, Colorado, at the turn of the century.



Through Hostile Country, by Oscar Berninghaus.

In the 1860's wagon factories were opened in Missouri to repair old wagons and produce new designs. Jackson, Weber, Murphy, Schuttler and Studebaker were important names in wagonmaking. The "new look" in freighters was a big, box-like wagon bed with broad-shoulders to match their 4,000 pound carrying capacity. This new design

permitted the use of short couplings, enabling the wagons to be joined together, sometimes with three or more linked wagons pulled by a team.

Communication and transportation needs of the new inhabitants of the West were filled for the most part by Concord coaches, which got their name from their place of origin. The best were built by the Abbot-Downing Company in Concord, New Hampshire. The Concord coach was the best known of the vehicles commonly referred to in the West as the "stage." The first of these coaches to reach California in June, 1850, sent by clipper ship around South America to San Francisco, was a light-weight vehicle designed for use in the East. The Abbot-Downing Company soon developed heavier Concord coaches for western use. Concord equipment became standard in all the major stageline operations in the West.

Although there were many variations of

the Concord coach, they fell into two major divisions, the mailcoaches and the stage-wagons. The outstanding feature of both types was a "thoroughbrace suspension," an early type of shock absorber. The coaches were suspended on spring-hung leather bands, primarily as protection for the horses that pulled them, not for the comfort of the passengers; for teams were harder to find and keep in good condition than customers. The thoroughbrace suspension design was superior to any other available for use on the rough roads and trails of the West. Most of the Concord coaches could accommodate as many as nine passengers inside, and another dozen could ride on top. The rocking motion of these conveyances had advantages over the rigid jerking motions of the spring-wagons for passengers as well as the teams. Most stages were drawn by four or six horses.

The attractive mailcoaches resembled the 18th century English coaches, exhibiting graceful "egg-shaped" bodies with tri-dimensional curves. The body of the coach rested on, and was fastened to, heavy steer-hide thoroughbraces which were shackled to vertical standards attached to crosspieces which held the three reaches, or coupling posts, in position. This complicated suspension design was used for both light-wagon hotel coaches and heavy mail coaches. The stage wagon, or "mud-wagon," with its straight-bodied superstructure, had a much simpler thoroughbrace suspension fastened at the front and rear axles. The Abbot-Downing mountain wagon was attached to iron springs rather than leather thoroughbraces and was equipped with a heavy brake.

Concord coaches shipped from the East were the type of coaches used by the California Stage Company formed in January, 1854, by the merging of most of the stage lines operating in California at that time. By 1860 it had become the second largest stage business in the United States. With its main headquarters in Sacramento, the California Stage Company established routes all over California and one from Sacramento to Portland, Oregon.

Between 1851 and 1858 various unsuccessful attempts were made to establish



Above is a poster advertising the Columbia Coach Company, Chicago manufacturer of stage line equipment in the 1890's.



Featured above is Olaf Seltzer's oil entitled *Guard for the Stage*. Frank Tenny Johnson's *Pony Express* is reproduced below.



regular overland mail service along a central route between Missouri and Salt Lake City and between Salt Lake City and California. When Congress authorized the Post Office Department to establish an overland mail service, the six year contract was awarded to John Butterfield. The route chosen was a southern route: St. Louis to Memphis, Memphis to El Paso, and El Paso to San Francisco. Four-horse coaches, or spring-wagons, were specified in the contract to provide weekly or semi-weekly mail service to the coast. The first stage from Missouri to California left on schedule, September 16, 1858.

A new gold strike in the Pike's Peak region during the winter of 1858-1859 created a need for stage service to that area. William Russell of the freighting company of Russell, Majors, and Waddell joined John P. Jones to start service of the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express on May 17, 1859, using Concord coaches and mule teams. Russell

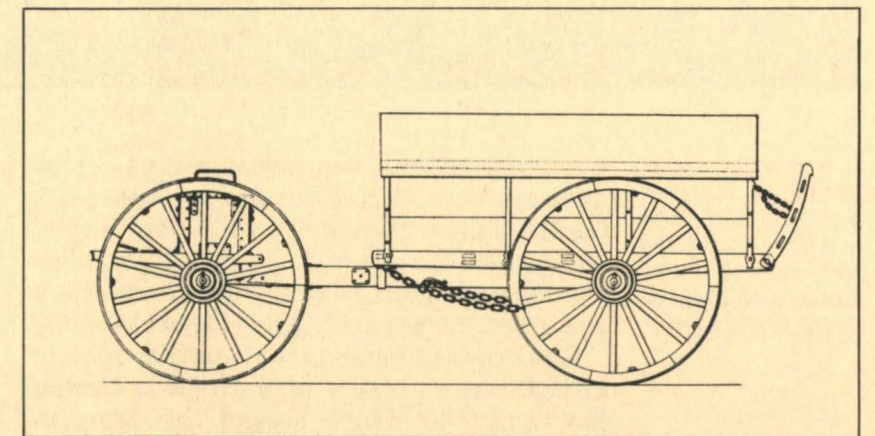
and Jones also bought a contract for a mail route from Missouri to Salt Lake City. Due to expenses of the two operations overbalancing the receipts, Russell, Majors, and Waddell Freighting Company was forced to take over the holdings of the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express Company.

By July 1, 1861, the Civil War caused the contract between the Government and the Butterfield Overland Stage Company to be altered, and the central overland route came to be used instead of the southern route. Along with many other changes in the schedules and regulations of the service to be supplied, the Butterfield Company was also to operate the Pony Express, which was started April 3, 1860, by William Russell, until telegraph installation was completed from Nebraska to the West Coast.

In 1862 Ben Holladay took control of the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company whose major stockholders — Russell, Majors, and Waddell — were

facing financial ruin. During the next four years Ben Holladay operated and expanded stage coach lines from Kansas to California. He secured new mail contracts with the government and was able to make improvements in the equipment. Wherever development created a need for transportation, the Holladay Overland Mail and Express Company provided the service. Another service offered by the Holladay organization was the handling of express business. Special Concord express-wagons were ordered from the Abbot-Downing Company for the purpose of carrying gold-dust, bullion, currency, coin, or any other small, valuable items.

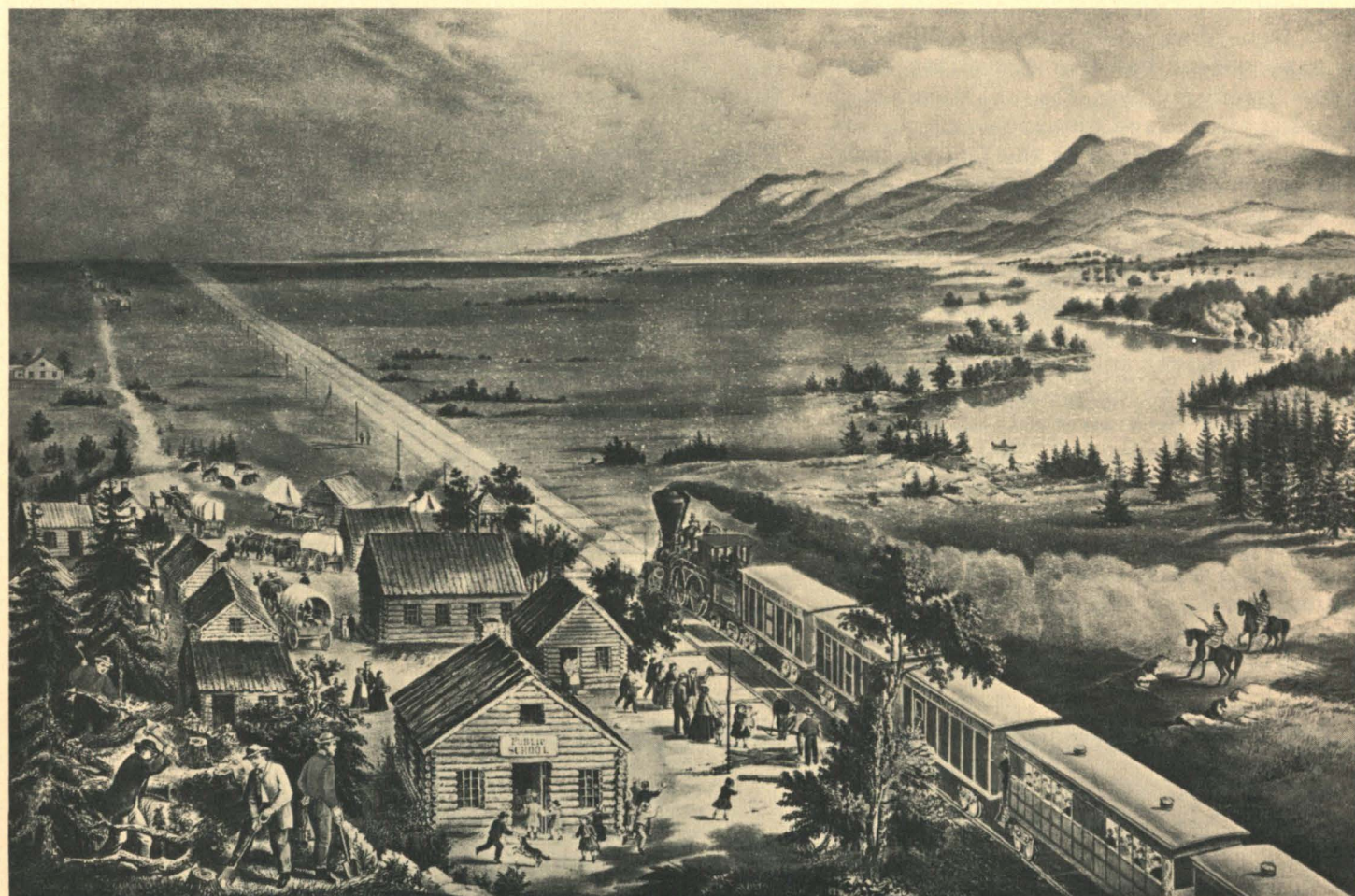
On November 1, 1866, Ben Holladay sold all his holdings to Wells Fargo for \$1,500,000 cash, and \$300,000 in Wells Fargo stock. Holladay predicted a quick decline in the stage business. In 1869 when the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads were completed in Utah, the stagecoach days were over. □



Army transport vehicle, 1860's.

Colorado and Montana gold rush activities, the beginning of great cattle drives, and mass killing of the great herds of buffalo increased the growing alarm and anger of the Indians. After the Civil War, increased numbers of troops were rushed to the forts which had been established in the West. Although supplies were delivered to the forts by private freighters under government

contracts, the Army built wagons to carry its supplies along with the troops on their campaigns. The six-mule wagon used by the Army during the Civil War was the same which served as a supply wagon during the Indian campaigns in the West. This vehicle had a distinctive, sturdy appearance, with an apparent Conestoga influence. Made to army specifications, each wagon had



Reproduced above is a Currier and Ives lithograph entitled *Westward the Course of Empire makes its Way*.

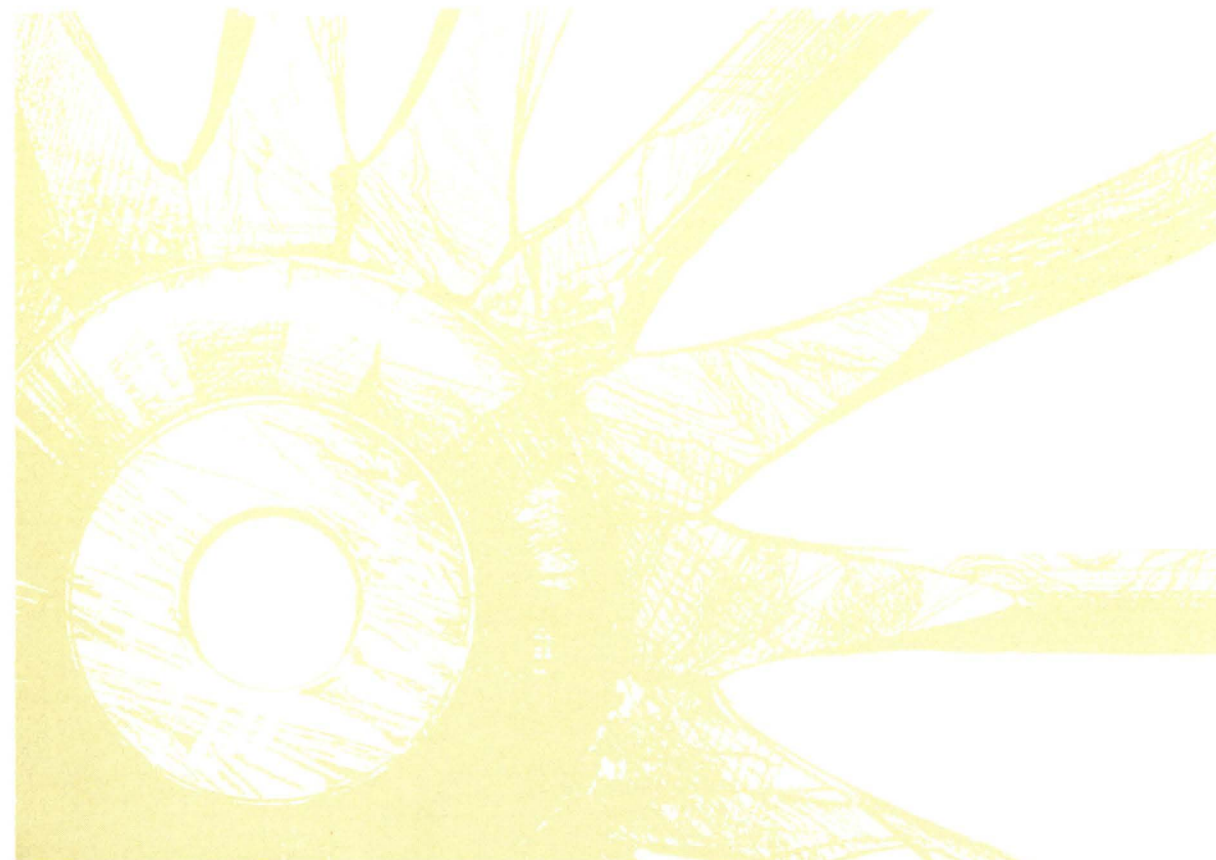
straight paneled sides, white wagon cover, upswept ends, a tool box on the front, and feed trough on the rear. This six-mule wagon was gradually replaced by a slightly smaller version pulled by four mules or horses which was given the name of "Army Escort Wagon."

The army ambulance was another vehicle brought to a degree of perfection during the Civil War which served the Army in the West. The four-mule ambulance was a light-weight, four-spring, canvas-covered vehicle with a step mounted at the rear for loading stretchers which could be placed on the two lengthwise seats behind the driver's seat. The ambulance wagon which went west became an all-purpose personnel transport as well as a conveyance to serve the injured.

As the clanging, hissing sounds of the railroad reached the West coast, the tinkle of bells attached to the lead mare of a pack

train or in sets to animals in a freight rig became, during the following 25 years, a distant and more distant sound—a fading jingle into remote regions. Gone was the creak of the wooden wagons used by thousands of immigrants to reach the West—replaced by the sounds of conveyances used to settle Western land.

When the transcontinental railroad brought to an end the long distance stagecoach and wagon travel, the wagonmakers turned to the development of smaller scale wagons designed for short distance travel. The steel spring was invented and perfected for use on the buggy, surrey, and the western buckboard. Catalogs distributed by wagon manufacturers showed an amazing variety of short-distance wagon styles available to the purchaser. The buckboard and Concord side-spring buggy became most popular in the West. □



Bibliography

- American Cyclopaedia*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866.
- American Heritage Pictorial Atlas of United States History*. New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1966.
- Dunbar, Seymour. *A History of Travel in America*. 4 vols. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1915.
- Eggenhofer, Nick. *Wagons, Mules and Men*. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1961.
- Ewers, John C. *Artists of the Old West*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965.
- Frederick, J. V., PhD. *Ben Holladay—The Stagecoach King*. Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1940.
- Gregg, Josiah. *Commerce of the Prairies*. 2 vols. New York: Henry G. Langley, 1844.
- Hunt, David Curtis. *Romance of the Western Wilderness*. Tulsa: Privately printed Master's Thesis, 1967.
- Winther, Oscar O. *Express and Stagecoach Days in California*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1936. □

All material in this issue was prepared from primary and secondary sources in the library and art collections of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute.