

EXCERPTS FROM AN ARTICLE IN THE PORTLAND OREGONIAN
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In the Stagecoach, Pack Horse Mail Days
of 1897 - Yamhill Route -

"Yamhill, Oregon was a busy trading center and there were many travelers going through. Dust rose off the street in summer and mud took over in the winter, but even Portland was like that in the 1800s.

In 1897, Grace Trullinger, sister of Fred, went to work for her brother, who was the Postmaster. The Post Office was in the front corner of the hardware store. Her family, the Trullingers, are well-known in Oregon business.

The period after the civil war, found the country settling up fast, but the few roads were very bad. Tillamook and Yamhill were concerned with getting a mail route over the Coast Range. Tillamook was growing and more Dutch and Swiss farmers were being attracted to settle there, by the knee-deep green grass and mild climate.

The big bay, with its clams and fishing, was their pride and joy, but the entrance to it was a death trap for shipping. Ships were reluctant to call often, unless they had large canoes; so the people largely got along without supplies or packed them in by horseback over the old Indian trails. Many a story is told of the mishaps and adventures of bringing in supplies that way. The mail was a very happenstance affair, but something needed to be done.

The shortest and most direct route from Portland and valley points to Tillamook, was by Yamhill. The hills were low and not as rough as in some areas, so it was scouted for a possible road. In 1871, with the dubious blessing of the State Legislature to the tune of a \$10,000 appropriation, which somehow shrunk to \$5,000 when the bonds were sold, a toll road was in the planning stage. It was a dream coming true, but there was a long way to go before it would be anything but a horse-back trail. The money was totally inadequate and

the road-building tools they had then would make us think now of someone trying to build a road with a garden hoe.

The timber stood tall and thick, the hills were not very rocky, but in the coast range, they have their steep pitches and hog backs. The road was worked 13 years before it was finally possible by wagon. In 1884, after all those years of road building, the first stage went over.

In 1897, when Sister Grace went to work at the Post Office, the stages had been going over the Trask Toll Road for a little more than 12 years. They ran all summer and into the fall, as long as they could get through the mud. There were only a few stretches of the road that had been corduroyed

The mail sacks were filled and piled high in the back of the rig and ready to go soon after 4:A.M. The horses were hatched to the rig and stood in the street switching flies and stomping. After the passengers were aboard, the whip cracked and the horses moved out as the driver yelled 'Ya-a-Wang.' It took a certain amount of showmanship to be a good stage driver.

The driver, Fred Perkins, was started on his twelve-hour trip as the stage rattled and creaked across the flat vally, out of Yamhill, across the river, before the long uphill pull started. He had time to visit with the passengers on the flat, but when they had crossed the river, the long, uphill pull started. The turns were sharp and sudden and the driver was much too busy to talk.

Up into the timber, the trees were so thick, the sun barley filtered through and the smell of moss, the ferns and the fur boughs, hung in the air. The rig groaned and creaked a little, causing great annoyance to the varied wild life and birds.

When the trail wound out into the sunshine, it was like coming out of a dark room, it was so dazzling. There were frequent water holes where the passengers could get nice, cool spring water. At Maddox house on top of the cascades, everyone was very glad to get out and eat lunch while the horses were changed for fresh ones. They would be on the down

grade from now on, but that was hard on the animals, too. The Trask River lay far below them and there were many sharp turns and down pitches.

One day as the stagecoach was pulling up to Ferndale, (10 miles out of Yamhill), two masked men, with revolvers in their hands, held up the coach. The mail bags were searched for money, as well as the passengers. The coach returned to Yamhill where Fred Trullinger reported the incident to the authorities in McMinnville and Portland. Fred was told to guard the mail at any cost, so with his gun in hand, he drove in his rig to the spot of the hold-up. The inspectors did not get there until the following morning, so Fred Trullinger had a long night, sitting with his back to a tree and his gun across his knees.

In the winter, the mailman was bundled up to his eyebrows and had his horse and the pack animals out in front of the Post Office at daybreak. Anyone who wanted company could ride over with him.

Often the coast area passed through a wet cycle and the snow got to be ten feet deep. This was trouble for whomever had the mail contract. He always had 'down trees' and 'wash rain' ran down the wheel rut. He not only had to haul the mail, he had to hire a man to take horses through the trail to tramp the snow, so the mail pack horses could get through. The driver, Mr. Williams, always had extra horses for hire, especially in the winter when there wasn't so much call for the rigs. What he needed was horses with built snow shoes. If it was snowing, 8 or 10 horses were led over the trail to tramp it. The trail was one horse wide, hard-packed between 8 or 9-foot banks of snow. It was an eerie, lonesome trail up and down, across snow slides, then between the banks again.

Sometimes conditions were impossible and they had to call it quits for a week or two, but the mail piled up so fast that as soon as it quit snowing, so they could tramp out the trail again, they were hauling.

In 1910, they had the Granddaddy of a snowstorm. The

snow was actually 22-feet deep at the top of the mountain. It settled in and snowed for days. At first, they made it across, but it kept on snowing. One night, the mailman and the road owner spent the night walking the mail down the hill. The carrier had unloaded the horses and carried down what he could and they went back and got the rest of the mail out of the snow before daylight.

A month went by and no one could get across the mountain either a-foot, or horseback, and the mail piled up in the Yamhill Post Office. After many notes back and forth, between the Portland office and Yamhill, a Postal Inspector was sent out to survey the situation. He asked Fred Trullinger if he could ride out and take a look, so they got horses and started.

They rode across the valley and crossed the river. The first ridge was negotiated, but at the top of the second one, the trail skirted around a hill and ended in a big snow slide. They came on it so suddenly, the inspector's horse planted both front feet and snorted. The Inspector sailed gracefully over his head and into the snow bank. As he was pulled out, he had to admit somewhat ruefully, that the mail could not get through.

Six weeks went by and finally the Yamhill Post Office had word to send the mail back to Portland where it would be shipped to Tillamook by boat. The ship got across the bar alright and Fred and his sister, Grace, felt greatly relieved."