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BICENTENNIAL EDITION

IDAHO COUNTY FREE PRESS

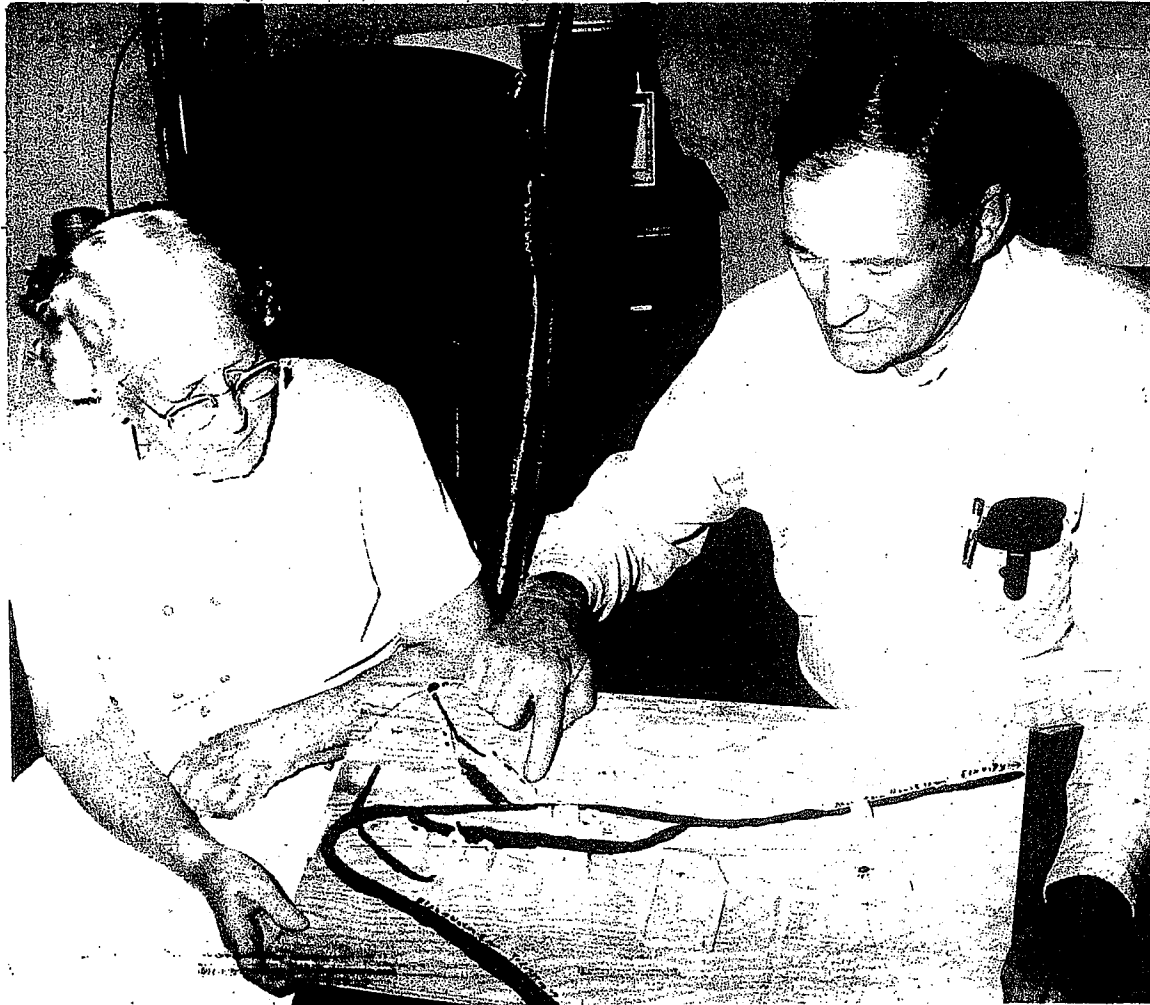
OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF IDAHO COUNTY

Volume 90 - No. 3

Grangeville, Idaho 83530, Wednesday, June 30, 1976

15¢ PER COPY

Kennedy Clan Recalls Early Days At Switchback Station, With Horse-Drawn Stages



ANGUS AND EMMA Kennedy look at the model of Switchback station which Angus made recently. Angus is pointing to the living quarters. The family lived at Switchback station in the early '20's.

Few people in the Grangeville area carry around as much remembrance of the past as Emma Kennedy and her children, for their family at one time in the early '20's operated Switchback way station along the stage route to Elk City.

For the uninitiated, the way stations were necessary along the roadsides for stages and freighters to stop overnight, and to also change horses.

Switchback station was one of several on the old road to Elk City, which, according to sources, crossed elevations nearly 7,000 feet high.

The stage route to Elk City also carried mail, and was a two-day trip by horse and wagon over the rough trails of those times.

Emma Kennedy, 84, was born near Kendrick; when she was three years old their family moved to Camas Prairie, near Tolo Lake.

Mrs. Kennedy recalls Tolo Lake at that time, consisting of a store, post office and blacksmith shop all in one building.

She attended school at Tolo Lake and recalls the name of an individual named Trowe who ran the Tolo Lake store.

When she was four years old, the family moved to the

reservation area near Winona, a town which also does not exist any more. She describes it as, "A little village which didn't last long," which also boasted of a post office.

The family lived on the homestead by Winona in 1904.

In 1910, the Kennedy family moved to Harpster. In 1914, Mrs. Kennedy married Allen Kennedy, and they farmed in the Harpster area for about six years before beginning work with the stage line.

Before marrying, Mrs. Kennedy says her husband was a farmhand, buckaroo, and blacksmith. Later in life he shod horses in Grangeville.

The Elk City-Stites Stage Line took passengers and mail from the end of the railroad line at Stites into the gold mining area of Elk City.

The stages would go from Stites to Clearwater, to the Switchback station. That same stage and driver would pick up passengers going to Stites from Elk City and return to Stites, while passengers going on to Elk City would eat lunch at Switchback Station, which Mrs. Kennedy prepared, and continue on, when the stage going from Elk City to Switchback arrived.

From Switchback, the

stages would go past Corral Hill Station, to Mountain House Way Station for a stop, then to Newsome, where they would spend the night. They would then continue on to Mud Springs, then to Elk City, arriving there the next day.

Stage drivers would leave at 4 a.m. in the morning from Stites. The road to Switchback Station would take until about 10 a.m. to reach, the family recalls. The stage and passengers would then wait for the stage coming the other way. The stage from Elk City would drop off its passengers, and depart with the Elk City bound passengers, stopping at Newsome Way Station for the night.

The following day, the stage would leave Newsome, climb up the hill to Elk Summit Station, also called Mud Springs, and then continue on to Elk City, arriving there that night.

Already during the summertime in the '20's, automobiles were venturing into Elk City, while during the winter and poor weather the stages continued working. Sleds were also used in wintertime.

During the first couple of years while working for the stage line, Allen Kennedy, Emma Kennedy's husband,

(Continued on following page)

Continued from previous page) worked as blacksmith, but then decided to take on the job of managing a way station. Allen Kennedy also drove stages in addition to the blacksmithing work and Kennedy also freighted when required.

About 60 horses were required to keep the line in operation. During 1923, Mrs. Kennedy recalls that they took possession of Switchback station, and lived there for five years.

In addition to the stage line, which carried the U.S. mail into the Elk City area, Mrs. Kennedy said Switchback station was a stopping place for freighting teams carrying mine supplies into the back country area.

The freight teams were heavy wagons, with larger loads, going slowly. They usually stopped at all the way stations, including the ones mentioned previously, and at others at which regular stages did not stop; specifically Corral Hill.

Angus Kennedy has recreated Switchback Station with a model, and explained the many buildings and their uses.

The main building, a two-story affair, where the family lived, and passengers waited for the other stage, contained a large room downstairs called the "office." On this floor also were two bedrooms. Upstairs, directly above the "office" was another large room full of beds called the "bullpen," where weary travelers could spend the night. Directly above the downstairs bedrooms were two more bedrooms. One of the two bedrooms on the second story was later made into a schoolroom for the Kennedy children.

The two barns on the station were large affairs, which could hold as many as 100 horses.

The station was built on a hillside, and because of this, the horses were placed in the lower story, while hay was stored above them. Because of the angle of the slope of the hillside, the hay could be put in the loft through a door, which was level with the ground, and could be easily used for storage, both upper and lower story were at the

same height as the sloping ground.

Under the main building was placed the woodshed. A dining room building was in back. The main building, followed by a third building containing the kitchen. A saloon, closed because of prohibition, was used for storage.

Switchback station was originally built in 1900 by two men who apparently couldn't get along, so the story goes, thus requiring that one man worked the station one year, while the other took a vacation.

"It was interesting work when we were there," recalls Mrs. Kennedy, saying that as many as 15 travelers would be staying there; with sometimes as many as 50 at the station.

The two bedrooms were for special guests; the way-station could put up 10-12 people per night.

At 9 or 10 a.m. the stage from Stites would arrive; Mrs. Kennedy said, adding that they would eat dinner there. They would have left Stites at 4 a.m. that morning.

The Switchback station (Continued on following page)

(Continued from previous page) also contained a two-acre corral for stock, including a "counting gate" for sheepmen to use. The excess horses would be held there, ready to relieve tired stage mounts.

It was about 18 miles to Stites, Mrs. Kennedy recalls,

adding that during winter, men would sometimes reach the station with their clothes frozen onto them.

They didn't have clothes like we have now, she reflected.

The wagons themselves were not the typical Concorde stage wagons, because

the Kennedys explained that these wagons had been tried and couldn't take the punishment of the rough roads.

The wagons were light freight wagons; with a boot up front where mail sacks would be placed. One passenger rode up front with (Continued on following page)

Kennedy Clan

(Continued from previous page) the driver while seats in back would be placed, as many as necessary to accommodate the other passengers.

A canvas would be placed over the passengers with bows of wood supporting the canvas overhead.

The wagons were described as "Just wagons, made to take abuse." Another type of wagon, called a Thorobrace was tried but was apparently also not able to live up to the rigors of the mountain trails.

In the winter, the horses would use snowshoes to carry out their chores, pulling sleds.

Gasoline engines would be used in the summer, with a one-half ton Oldsmobile "commercial" used by the stage line.

In 1928 the family moved to Stites where Allen Kennedy ran a blacksmith shop for eight months, and then to

Grangeville, where Allen Kennedy worked on road construction, specifically, the southfork highway.

Sometimes on Switchback station, hired help was employed, Mrs. Kennedy explained.

One novelty or interesting item about the station was the fact that a teacher was hired for the four children, who were taught up at the station for two years. Angus Kennedy went through the third and fourth grades there, in 1925 and 1926.

Emma Kennedy described the work as, "Just wonderful, I liked to cook anyway."

The meals there were fifty cents apiece, which was an "all you could eat," type of meal.

The Elk Summit station or Mud Station was also remembered by the Kennedys who also explained about corduroy, or planked roads.

Idaho County Free Press - Wednesday, June 30, 1976 - 5B

Kennedy Clan

(Continued from previous page) wheel along a creek.

Newsome was called a gathering point for area people in the "old days."

Stage horses were termed small, from 1,000 to 1,200 pounds in weight, resembling the Morgar breed. Four were used per wagon rather than the six usually used on stages.

However, in the 1930's the road went by the river, and "Switchback died," the Kennedys explained.

Emma Kennedy was a photo buff in those days, and for this reason, photos of their stage line exist; Angus Kennedy collected other pictures from various individuals, to make a scrap book for the Forest Service.

The difficulties with the old road were noticed by Stewart Campbell, state Inspector of Mines in 1932 when he hailed the opening of the river level road.

Campbell's comments, in the annual report for the governor in 1932, include the following observations, "The old road leading from Stites to Elk City, a distance of 53 miles crossed two high divides, with such a great change in climatic conditions that it was never open to wheeled vehicles for more than four months of the year. Starting at Stites, with an elevation of 1,200 feet, the road ascended in the first 25 miles to an elevation of 6,500 feet at the top of Mt. Baldy;

then descended a distance of 8 miles to 3,800 feet at Newsome; from there it ascended to an elevation of 5,700 feet at the top of Elk Summit, a distance of 9 miles and then descended nine miles to an elevation of 3,950 feet at Elk City. Throughout almost the entire distance the road traversed a heavily forested area, and the character of the soil is such that the road was practically a dugway on which the sun seldom shone. Many of the level stretches were through swamps over which corduroys were necessary. The proper maintenance of this road would have been so expensive that the county always refused to expend any appreciable amount on it; hence, nearly all the maintenance provided was that covered by the small sums expended by the Forest Service and the mail contractors. Consequently the road never permitted other than light, slow-moving traffic, a condition which made the cost of transporting mine products and supplies prohibitive and made it impossible to enlist capital for development and operation of the quartz mines, and which resulted in the abandonment of most of them."

Campbell says the river route was begun in 1923, and opened in November of 1932.



CORRAL STATION, four miles up the road towards Newsome from Switchback, photo taken before 1908.—Kennedy collection.