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SHORT-LINE STAGING IN NEW MEXICO

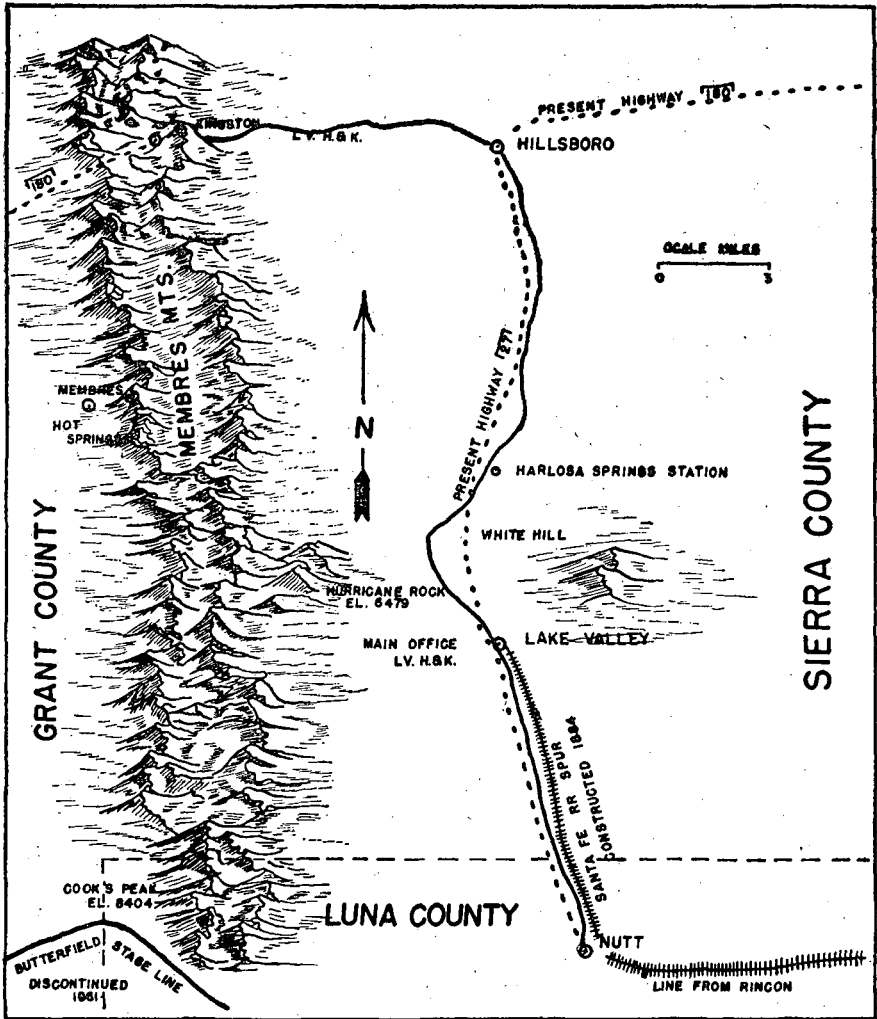
By WILLIAM SWILLING WALLACE *

FEW agents of civilization in the history of the West are mentioned more, taken for granted, then later ignored than the stage lines. The literature of western staging is almost entirely limited to the large companies that operated over great distances. Little has been recorded of the small "feeder" lines that continued to operate even into the second decade of the twentieth century and, in their own way, performed a service no less important than the large lines.¹ This paper deals with only one such small line: the Lake Valley, Hillsboro, and Kingston, New Mexico, Stage Line. Fortunately, it has been possible to supplement the limited available published sources with the reminiscences of Mr. William J. Reay, who was the chief driver for that company from 1892 till 1904.²

* Mr. Wallace is a High School teacher, Douglas Arizona.

1. The bibliographies appended to Le Roy Hafens, *The Overland Mail, 1849-1869* (Cleveland, 1926); and the exhaustive study of Roscoe Platt and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* (Glendale, 1947), 3 vols., are rich sources on the literature of the stage line. Of little use is Agnes W. Springer's, *The Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Routes* (Glendale, 1949). Disappointingly scant in reference to western staging but thorough on transportation in the East is Seymour Dunbar, *A History of Travel in America* (Indianapolis, 1915), 4 vols. The bulk of western literature gives only a fleeting mention of the stage line, leaving the reader to his imagination concerning the actual mechanics of operation, organization, etc. John P. Clum, for instance, in "Santa Fe in the 70's," *New Mexico Historical Review*, II (October, 1927), 381, casually mentions taking a six-horse Concord stagecoach out of Trinidad, Colorado, to Santa Fe in the late fall; Theron M. Trumbo, "The Little Bonanza," *New Mexico Magazine*, 28 (April, 1950), 28, briefly mentions a "hack" line operating between Las Cruces and the Organ mountains during the mining era; *ad infm.*

2. William John Reay was born March 31, 1876, in Hansingham, Cumberland, England, and immigrated to the United States in 1883 with his mother and two sisters



MAP OF THE
 Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston
 Stage Line
 1878 1904
 TO ACCOMPANY: "SHORT LINE STAGING IN NEW MEXICO"
 WS WALLACE, AUTHOR DRAWN BY RL DAWSON 1950

The Santa Fe railway station at Lake Valley was the railhead servicing an area that extended to the north and northwest for more than fifty miles. It was the terminal of a thirteen and one-third miles spur track from the Rincon branch of the Santa Fe joining the branch line at Nutt, New Mexico, and was constructed in 1884.³ On March 10, 1881, the two divisions of the Southern Pacific railroad were joined at Deming, New Mexico, which formed the first trans-continental railroad through New Mexico and Arizona.⁴ Within this area the mountain ranges of Cook, Pinos Altos, Mimbres, Mogollon, Burro, and Black held forth their promise of riches in gold and silver. For a while the major transportation service of this vast area had been the Butterfield Overland Mail Company, but it brought its services to an end in 1861 when the Civil War created a tenuous situation with which it did not care to contend.⁵ Following the Civil

to join the rest of the family, four brothers and his father, at Georgetown, Colorado. After staying in Georgetown for two years the family then moved to Kingston, New Mexico Territory, a major boomtown of the period. Between 1885 and 1904 he made his home first in Kingston and then in Hillsboro where during this twenty-one year period he spent twelve years as driver for the Line. In 1904 he moved to Douglas, Arizona, where he first went into the livery business and then branched out into other activities. The information on the Line was obtained from interviews with Mr. Reay by the writer during the winter of 1949-50. The writer is indebted to him for his cooperation and the plates accompanying this paper. Unless credited to other sources, factual information in the following pages is taken from typescript copies of interviews with Mr. Reay.

3. On September 25, 1882, the Lake Valley Railroad Company was granted papers of incorporation at Santa Fe which called for an initial capitalization of \$600,000; but plans for the company never materialized, probably because the superior capital and facilities of the Santa Fe railroad which were by that time firmly entrenched in the region. See George B. Anderson, ed., *History of New Mexico: Its Resources and People, Illustrated* (New York, 1907), I, 899-900.

4. *Ibid.* The first concrete step taken toward establishment of railway service in this area was in 1872. On May 13 of that year Gen. George M. Dodge, engineer of the Texas and Pacific railroad, wrote George Wolcott, division engineer for the same company: ". . . Organize parties for the purpose of developing the country from the Rio Grande to the Gila river near the Pimas' village just below the mouth of the San Pedro and north of the southern boundary of the United States, and south of the Gila river. . . . Leave the Rio Grande north of El Paso near Messilla, going directly to the valley of the Rio Mimbres—then passing the Peloncillo [sic]. . . ." The document was dated at Council Bluffs, Iowa. (Quoted from photostatic copy in the possession of Mrs. Margaret Calkins, Tucson, Arizona.)

5. The last Overland scheduled trip through southern New Mexico left Tucson on March 6, 1861, and arrived at El Paso on March 9th. See Conkling, *op. cit.*, II, 325. The first stage line into New Mexico probably started operations in 1849 on a monthly schedule between Santa Fe and Missouri; eventually being expanded to a daily service. Fares were about \$250 one-way with a baggage limit of forty pounds and \$1 per pound for excess. Thirteen days and six hours was the scheduled time between Santa

War a multitude of short-lived stage lines served many areas of the West until the appearance of the railroad.⁶ The railroad, however, did not eliminate the need for the horse and mule drawn conveyance because the population of this area was centered in the rugged mountain recesses where it had gone in search of the elusive gold and silver—here the railroads could not follow.⁷ Between the railheads and the population they sought to serve, the stage and freight wagons were needed to move men and supplies to and from the theaters of activity. Such was the function of the Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston Stage Line.⁸ From its beginning it was a public carrier limited to the transport of U. S. Mail and passengers.

Ownership of the Line can be pieced together only from the recollections of early residents of Hillsboro because the original mail contracts that would have contained this information have been destroyed.⁹

When the Reay family moved to Kingston in 1885, L. W. Orchard was operating the Line, and the "Mountain Pride," as the stagecoach was called, was in service. This was about seven years after the town of Hillsboro could have needed stage service and one year after the extension of the railroad to nearby Lake Valley. So it may be assumed that the Line probably was founded between 1878 and 1882. Orchard sold the Line to Fred W. Mister in 1902 after being underbid for

Fe and Kansas City. See Ralph E. Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History* (Cedar Rapids, 1917), II, 139-142. Additional data on the earliest stage lines in New Mexico is found in Hafen, *op. cit.*, 70-75, 97, 236.

6. A stage line operated over part of the route of the L. V., H. and K., in the late 1850's and early 60's between Cook's Springs and Fort Thorn on the Rio Grande. See map accompanying Randolph B. Marcy, *The Prairie Traveler* (London, 1863), Richard Burton, ed.

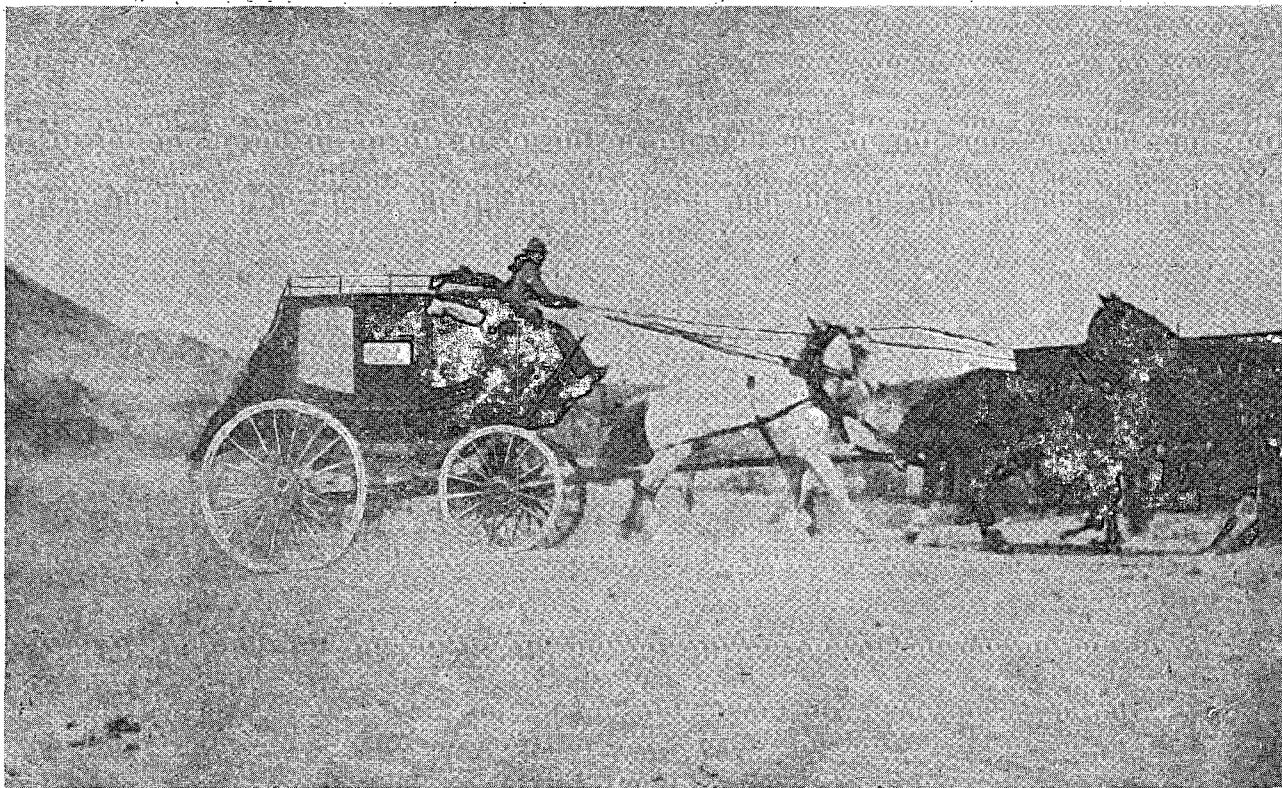
7. Mining in the region centered in the principal mineral belt running along the eastern slope of the continental divide, starting at Cook's Peak, through Lake Valley, Hillsboro, Kingston, Hermosa, Chloride, and Grafton to the south side of the San Augustine Plain. The core of the area, geologically, was four to eight miles wide and twenty miles long and divided into six mining districts: Black Range, Apache, Palomas, Limestone, Cuchillo Negro, and Iron Reef. *Cf.*, Twitchell, *op. cit.*, IV, 267.

8. Hereinafter referred to as the *Line*.

9. Post office Department files concerning star route and other types of contracts covering private carriers of mail from 1870 through 1914 have been destroyed by authority of Congress. C. C. Garner (Chief Inspector, Post Office Department) to W. S. Wallace, May 4, 1950, and Forrest R. Holdcamper (Industrial Records Branch, National Archives) to *idem*, May 9, 1950.



William J. Reay, chief driver, holding reins of "Mountain Pride" near Harlosa Springs station (circa, 1900)



William J. Reay driving the "Mountain Pride" out of the corral at Lake Valley at a full gallop (*circa*, 1896)

the mail contract. After the sale of his business Orchard moved to Belen, New Mexico, where he had charge of transportation during the construction of the "Belen Cut-Off." Sometime later he moved to Colorado. Neither Reay nor any of the older residents of Hillsboro know anymore about Orchard.

More is known of Fred W. Mister, who was born in Broadalbin, New York, November 25, 1859, and died in 1939. In 1883 he became a partner of W. C. Leonard in a mercantile business at Kingston where he also had some mining interests. He moved to Hillsboro and opened a meat market in 1900, and in 1902 bought the Line from Orchard. Mister operated the passenger service of the Line until the decline of mining operations and the onset of World War I after which he suspended passenger service and limited his business to hauling mail over the route.¹⁰ By this time, however, the Line as a stagecoach operation had ceased to operate.

Having no competition the Line never advertised and the contemporary newspapers of the area are devoid of reference to it. Accepted as a permanent fixture to the area people were little concerned about its operation. Ralph E. Twitchell passed over the Line with only a brief comment: "Hillsboro is reached by a stage line from Lake Valley, the terminus of a branch line of the A. T. & S. F. Railway."¹¹

With headquarters and a principal terminus located at Lake Valley the route extended northward over the rolling sand swept desert valley. At a point six miles north of Lake Valley a rise known formerly as "White Hill" was crossed and then the route descended into the Harlosa Springs Station where the Line maintained a corral for team changes on the north-bound trips. From this point the route continued northward for twelve miles to Hillsboro, the county seat of Sierra county. Traversing a winding, climbing, road in a westerly direction out of Hillsboro to Kingston into the Mimbres Mountains the stage reached the outgoing terminus

10. Twitchell, *op. cit.*, IV, 276, gives a brief biographical sketch of Mister. Information concerning his later years was obtained from George Meyers, Executor of the Mister Estate.

11. *Ibid.*, 263, note 600.

of the route. At Lake Valley the passenger transfer point was the railway depot; in Hillsboro, the Hotel Union; and the Hotel Mountain Pride in Kingston. The name of the Kingston hostelry was adopted by the Line for its nine passenger Concord stagecoach. Lettered across the top panel on either side of the coach in gold filligree was "Mountain Pride."¹²

The coach was a "Southern" style thoroughbrace suspended vehicle built in the Concord fashion but probably manufactured by the Eaton, Gilbert and Company of Troy, New York.¹³ It was of oak construction and painted dark red on the body, yellow on the carriage and black-striped at the joints, corners, etc. Its interior was upholstered in russet leather and at the top of each window heavy canvas duck side curtains were attached. The stitched leather thoroughbraces were three and a half inches wide and extended from standards on either end of the front axle to standards on either end of the rear axle. The body of the coach, attached to the thoroughbraces, had a backward and forward movement described by Mark Twain as "swinging and swaying" and to the coach as a whole as a "cradle on wheels."¹⁴ Fastened to the forward pillars on each side of the coach were box-like lanterns, occasionally used as running lights in the dark and poor weather. Two, three passenger seats were inside and another was located on top just behind the driver's box. At the rear of the body was a triangular "boot" for luggage and another at the front under the driver's box. The Line also used a six passenger jerkey for charter service, a mud-wagon, and it had a miscellaneous assortment of

12. The coach may be the one formerly used on an earlier line that operated between Cook's Springs and Fort Thorn (*Supra*, note 6). Wayne L. Mauzey, "Western Stage Coach Days," *El Palacio*, XXXIX (August 14, 21, 28, 1935), 34, speaks of a coach given to the Historical Society of New Mexico by Mrs. Arthur Seligman in 1935, as having "operated last between Lake Valley and Hillsboro, New Mexico." This is possibly the same coach referred to above. The coach's name is discernible on all of the accompanying plates.

13. The "Mountain Pride" had a seat located on top behind the driver's box, a construction detail incorporated only in the Troy coaches. *Cf.*, Conkling, *op. cit.*, I, 131-133.

14. Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), *Roughing It* (New York, 1871), I, 7.

Sheba Hurst, the "wit of Kingston," a humorous character in *Roughing It*, is buried in an unmarked grave at Kingston.

wagons for hauling feed and equipment from its principal supply depot at Lake Valley to the stations along the route.

The Line was no exception among stage companies in the pride and care with which it cared for its horses.¹⁵ Eighteen to twenty spirited animals were kept in the Line's corral at Lake Valley and whenever reports were received of a particularly outstanding "outlaw" or wild horse within fifty miles of the area immediately it was captured, if possible, and added to the Line's herd. No one team (of four) was worked more often than every third day. Light, nervous horses were prized as *leaders* (the forward pair in a team arrangement of four or more) and heavy, powerful horses were placed at the *wheeler* position (the pair hitched nearest to the body of a horse drawn conveyance). This matching of mood and power seems to have reached perfection in the eyes of the company with the team used at one time on the coach in the Zavia Whitham painting.¹⁶ In this painting the left leader is "Prince," the right leader "Andy," left wheeler "Dude," and the right wheeler "Reilly." These four horses were considered the best combination the Line ever had, both from the standpoint of efficiency and as specimens of fine horseflesh. From the day Mr. Reay first entered the employ of the Line until his last run all teams were judged on the basis of comparison to Prince, Dude, Andy and Reilly.

The "Mountain Pride" maintained a schedule that was timed to the arrival of the noonday Santa Fe train at Lake Valley. The schedule was as follows:

<i>Read Down</i>	<i>Station</i>	<i>Miles</i>	<i>Read Up</i>
12:00 Noon	Lv. Lake Valley	0	Ar. 10:00 AM
3:00 PM	Ar. Hillsboro	18	Lv. 7:00 AM
3:10 PM	Lv. "		Ar. 8:30 PM
4:40 PM	Ar. Kingston	9	Lv. 6:30 PM

15. See J. C. Birge, *Awakening of the Desert* (Boston, 1912), 410.

16. This oil (26" x 37"), now hanging in Mr. Reay's office at Douglas, was painted sometime in the mid-90's by Zavia Whitham, former school teacher and painter in various parts of Colorado and New Mexico. It shows the "Mountain Pride" rounding a corner with L. O. Orchard in the box. On Orchard's left is a "Dr. Ried" of Detroit (a frequent visitor in Hillsboro at that time). On the top seat behind Orchard sits a "Mr. Van Heusen." The man next to Van Heusen is unknown. The picture was painted at a spot where the route cut across a pasture of the Sierra Land and Cattle Company, about six miles south of Hillsboro. Orchard gave the painting to Mr. Reay in 1902 when he sold the Line.

As is evident, the Line scheduled its movements at ten miles per hour, a fast schedule when compared to the Overland Mail Company's schedule of four and four-tenths miles per hour over comparable terrain in the Fourth Division of its route between Tucson and Franklin (El Paso).¹⁷ On the return trip the stage remained in Hillsboro overnight. There were always a few passengers on each run but when the occasion demanded the coach could be loaded with many more than the normal capacity of nine. The record number for it, and probably all other Concords that ever rolled, was twenty-three. This was on the evening of the last day of the "Lee and Gilliland" trial at Hillsboro, when Mr. Reay drove twenty-three participants in the trial back to Lake Valley;¹⁸ one of them the famed Lincoln county sheriff, Pat Garrett.

No financial records are to be found of the Line's business but expenses must have been great. During the peak of operations seven to eight men were regularly employed in addition to part-time labor gangs used to augment the county road crews in filling the ruts and removing rocks from the right-of-way. A few of these employees' names are remembered: Frank Richardson, a stock tender at Lake Valley; Jim Rafter, bookkeeper at the Lake Valley office; and a stock tender at Hillsboro named Neal Sullivan. Stock tenders were also kept at Kingston and Harlosa Springs but their names have been forgotten. In addition to labor costs there was a large monthly bill for feed which was shipped into Lake Valley by rail in boxcar loads.¹⁹ Harness was another item that

17. Postmaster-general's *Report*, 1858, *Senate Executive Documents*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., 739-741. The Barlow and Sanderson Stage Line operating in western Colorado in the 1880's maintained a ten and one-half miles per hour schedule on its Marshall Pass Division, a distance of seventy-five miles. (David Lavender, *The Big Divide*, New York, 1949, p. 145.)

18. The trial of Oliver Lee and James F. Gilliland for the murder of a prominent Las Cruces attorney, Col. Albert J. Fountain, and his son, in March, 1896, was a sensation in its day. The bodies of Fountain and his son were never found and Lee and Gilliland were acquitted. Pat Garrett was the arresting officer in the case. A good summary of the affair is in Anderson, *op. cit.*, I, 350-351.

19. It is hard to comprehend the amount of feed required for draft animals in the past century. F. A. Root and Connelley, *Overland Stage to California* (Topeka, 1901), 487, refers to a general manager of the Overland Mail Company at St. Louis who, in one day, chartered seven river steamboats to load corn for the herds of the Overland. The L. V., H. and K., used native "gramma" hay and oats for its basic feed rations.

required heavy initial outlays of capital. One interesting cost was for men's old shoes. These were purchased by the sack and the soles used to reline the brake-blocks of the stage-coach. This relining operation was performed daily in Lake Valley. It was extremely necessary because of the constant braking of the wheels on the return trip from Kingston. To meet current expenses of the Line during the late 80's and 90's and make a modest profit for the owner there had to be at least a gross income of about fifteen thousand dollars per year.

Passengers were permitted fifty pounds of baggage free but all exceeding that was charged at the rate, generally, of ten cents per pound. The schedule of fares was:

	<i>One-way</i>	<i>Round-trip</i>
Lake Valley to Hillsboro	\$2.00	\$3.50
Hillsboro to Kingston	1.50	2.50
Lake Valley to Kingston	3.25	5.50

Passenger tariffs were kept at about nine cents per mile between Lake Valley and Hillsboro while it was increased to sixteen and two-thirds for the more difficult run from Hillsboro to Kingston.

There is little doubt that the communities served by the Line were economically able to afford a service of such cost.²⁰ In the time of Victorio and the Apache sub-chiefs Loco and Nana, the area had been subject to the control of the Apache. However, by the early 80's rich strikes had been made by prospectors and the hordes poured in. Ore valued as high as a thousand dollars per ton was exposed in famous mines, one, the "Bridal Chamber" near Lake Valley. The ranchers had also moved into the valley and combined with the miners gave Lake Valley a population of about a thousand. Kingston dated its beginning back to August, 1882, when Jack Shedden, a miner from Colorado, discovered the "Solitaire" mine there. In less than a year Kingston's population reached eighteen hundred and by the late 80's had approached ap-

20. A short summary of these communities' histories and of Sierra county are covered in Twitchell, *op. cit.*, IV, 268, 269, note 603, note 604, *passim*; Anderson, *op. cit.*, II, 757-767.

proximately twenty-five hundred. Hillsboro, the first county seat of Sierra county, was the center of extensive gold operations instead of silver, as was the case of Lake Valley and Kingston. Founded in 1877, Hillsboro was an offshoot of Georgetown, in Grant county. Georgetown prospectors made the first gold strikes in the Hillsboro area in May, 1877. From that time on the town continued to grow and prosper. A brick courthouse (now in ruins) was constructed, schools were maintained and numerous hotels, restaurants, and stores opened. The population climbed to an estimated three thousand at its peak period. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Hillsboro had begun to decline, to such an extent that the county seat was moved to the rapidly expanding cattle and tourist center, Hot Springs, in the northeastern part of the county. The Apache had ceased to make trouble in the vicinity of the Line's operations previous to 1890. The drivers of the line had stopped carrying arms by the time Mr. Reay became a driver in 1892.

The harness arrangement used in western staging was not the same as in ordinary draft work. In place of numerous attachments ordinarily used the stage harness was relatively simple. The belly band, back band, hames, and reins comprised the harness.²¹ Such commonplace hardware as hooks and snaps were unknown on the stage harness. The only hook on a Concord stagecoach was the "goose-neck" on the end of the tongue. All connections were made with rings through which "T" links were inserted, much in the manner of ordinary cuff-links. In preparation for a departure the bridles and harness were placed on the horses and they were led to their positions at the front of the stagecoach. All tugs and connections were completed by the stock tender with the exception of the tug²² joining the harness of the left wheeler to the carriage. The driver climbed to the box with the reins in hand, and only after making certain all

21. Harness detail is plainly visible in all of the plates. The small rings on the neck and head of the leaders in Plate II are decorations used on special occasions. These rings were made of gaily colored celluloid and attached to most of the harness.

22. The *tug* is the trace of a harness which may be made of rope, leather, or chain and used in pulling anything along; in the case of staging—the coach itself.

was in readiness, would he signal to the stock tender to hook the left wheeler tug. This was a necessary precaution because, as Mr. Reay put it, "Once the left tug is secured, get out of the way! Without a word from the driver the team was off in a full gallop." As the bell was to the fire horse so the last hitching operation seems to have been to the stagecoach team.

Getting the stagecoach underway required a driver with "good hands" and a good team. If the leaders were slow in starting the wheelers would force the tongue forward and thus risk cutting the leaders on their harness while a team of wheelers slow in starting after fast leaders would have the forepart of the carriage and body rammed into their bodies causing serious injury. Therefore, the driver had to have the ability to start the leaders just a fraction of a second ahead of the wheelers. This was no easy accomplishment and it called for much practice and mastery of the art of driving.²³ The reins were held in the left hand with the rein to the left leader between the thumb and index finger, the left wheeler rein between the index and middle finger, the right leader between the middle and fore finger, the right wheeler rein between the fore and little finger. In this manner the driver had instant control of any one or combination of horses while the right hand was free to control the slack of the reins or use the long whip carried in a socket at the driver's right.²⁴ Knowing how to turn the team was as important as getting it underway. If a leader turned faster than the wheeler behind it, the wheeler would trip and become seriously injured as the coach tongue cut across its front legs; this was a common accident when inexperienced drivers were in the box.

Besides "good hands" and a well-matched team the method of loading the stagecoach was also of great importance. The seat favored by passengers was the inside rear seat and it was for this seat the passengers always vied. How-

23. For a discussion of the art of driving see: Maj. Gen. Geoffrey White "Driving," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1936), VII, 665-667.

24. See pictures for a stagecoach just getting underway and reins detail.

ever, in less than full loads concentrated weight at the rear of the stagecoach caused the front of the body to spring up, thus endangering the stability of the coach and making it more difficult for the horses to pull. Likewise, concentrated weight at the front had a similar effect on the rear of the coach. The driver would usually balance the luggage between the fore and aft "boots," however, before making the rear seat passengers change to the front, if it were at all possible. Upsetting was always a potential danger and was recognized even by the coach manufacturers. The coach makers (of the Concord type) assembled the front wheels and axle in such a manner that only a loose fitting kingpin held the body to the front wheels and axle, in this way an overturned coach was instantly disengaged from the team because as soon as the upset occurred the kingpin fell out of its connection and freed the front wheels and the team thus preventing a frightened team from pulling the upset body along the road.

Today, New Mexico State Routes 27 and 180 follow the route of the L. V., H. and K., between Lake Valley and Kingston. In Sierra county the decline of the mines and new emphasis on ranching have brought about the decay and abandonment of most of the three communities formerly served by the Line. Though only a small enterprise compared to the Holliday and Overland companies it made its contribution to the development of western America.