

Jack Slade – A Synopsis of His Life as Related to the Virginia Dale Stage Station

The following chronology and maps are excerpted, paraphrased and quoted from:

“An Ear in His Pocket – The Life of Jack Slade”

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1831 – Joseph Alfred “Jack” Slade was born in Carlyle, Illinois, a town laid out by his father Charles after the state was admitted to the Union in 1818. Charles was elected to Congress in 1832.

Circa 1842 - Allegedly, thirteen-year old Jack kills old Man Gottlieb after teasing and enraging him with “childhood” pranks. Jack leaves for the southwest as a fugitive from justice.

May 4, 1847 – Fourteen-year old Jack joins the army, giving his age as eighteen, to serve in the Mexican War, serving as a teamster along the supply lines on the Santa Fe Trail (experience of importance to his later life), with no remarkable exploits, as the war ends on September 17, 1847. However, his brother Charles dies in service due to widespread illness in his battalion.

1848 – As the story goes, honorably discharged veteran Jack returns to Carlyle to sign his “Oath of Identity” entitling him to claim his bounty land for his military service. It is believed he moved to California amidst the Gold Rush of 1849, only to learn the state did not honor federal land warrants. It is presumed he then mined for gold. He may have observed the beginning of the Well Fargo Company, as evidenced by his owning 134 shares of its stock at the time of his death.

1857 - Mormon leader Brigham Young proclaims martial law in the Utah Territory, forbids the United States troops from entering and calls up his 5000 militia to enforce it. Slade is hired by the famous freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, to deliver provisions to General Johnston’s Utah Expedition, amidst his (successful) initiative to quell the “Mormon Uprising”. In route he kills one of his drivers over an “argument”.

1858 - Jack freights over the Utah Trail, killing several Indians. He later marries Maria Virginia (surname unknown).

1859 - Russell, Majors and Waddell et al. joint to form the Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company, its first run being from Leavenworth, Kansas to Denver, Colorado. The firm then acquires John M. Hockaday & Co., which ran stages to Salt Lake City and Denver, via the South Platte Trail but also had a lucrative mail delivery (from St. Joseph, Missouri to Salt Lake City) contract. But, losing money rapidly, the firm goes into bankruptcy. But, in

1860 - The line is reorganized (absorbed) into the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company- aka “the Overland” (Express). Essentially, the line connects St. Louis to San Francisco, via Fort Kearney and Salt Lake City. The line serves as a vital link in the Union Army’s shipments of gold from California eastward to pay its troops. The company also owns a vital line from Julesburg to Denver along the South Platte Trail.

1860 – The Overland appoints Jack Slade as its Sweetwater Division agent, running the 346 mile line from Julesburg, CO to Sweetwater Bridge, WY along the North Platte Trail (historically, a segment of the Oregon Trail).

1860 - Jack Slade also assumes responsibility of the newly formed, Pony Express (founded by Russell, Majors and Waddell). Slade hires (the not yet famous) William Frederick Cody (later famed as “Buffalo Bill” Cody) as a Pony Express rider.

1860 – Indians attack a relay station and steal its entire provisions. Slade hires James Butler Hickok to lead riders to recover the stolen stock. (“Wild Bill” Hickok was considered the West’s greatest gunfighter and expert shot, killing many a “slow gun” until his own death by shooting (by Jack McCall in Deadwood, SD) in 1876).

1861 - Jack Slade meets Samuel Clemens (later, in 1862, aka “Mark Twain”) during his trip through the west by stage. Despite less than one hour of interaction (over breakfast), Twain writes two entire chapters about him in his later book, *Roughing It*.

March 21, 1862 – Western business tycoon, Ben Holladay (then the owner of the largest commercial enterprise in the Nation) calls the mortgage on the Overland Express and acquires it “for a song”.

March 1-April 10, 1862 - With military garrisons drained by the Civil War needs, Indians cause havoc along the Sweetwater line, attacking numerous stations. Holladay instructs Jack Slade to repair and restock the stations, and he has the line running again by July.

July 8, 1862 – Holladay closes the North Platte Route permanently, in favor of the Cherokee Trail to the south. The new route from Julesburg followed the South Platte River to the mouth of The Cache la Poudre River at Cherokee City, CO (now named Latham, east of Greeley, CO) and then along the river to LaPorte, CO and then northwest along the foothills and eastward to where it connected to the west end of the North Platte Trail near Fort Bridger, WY. Basically, they built a “by-pass” – in today’s roadway terms! Later, the route was changed – from Latham to Denver, CO and then northward to LaPorte.

1862 – Jack Slade is appointed division agent for the Latham – Denver - Fort Bridger line.

1862 – Jack Slade builds his division headquarters in a small valley near Dale Creek, naming the location VIRGINIA DALE in honor of his wife. Constructed in June, 1862 the **VIRGINIA DALE STAGE STATION** station is located in the Black Hills about thirty-five miles northwest of Fort Collins (not far from the present day U.S. 287).

1867 – The Union Pacific Railway completes its line to Cheyenne, and the Virginia Dale Stage Station is closed. As the original road from Ft. Collins to Laramie runs by it, the Virginia Dale Stage Station was used as a store and post office for the region - for many years.

1862-1864 – Jack Slade frequently stops in LaPorte, gets roaringly drunk and shoots up the town, among much other revelry. Other drunken binge transgressions elsewhere, assaults and so forth led to his discharge – allegedly he was summarily fired on November 14, 1863. “Robert J. Spotswood” who “had the unenviable task of facing Jack Slade and telling him he was fired as division agent” testified that Slade was not relieved until October, 1864.

1860-1864 - There was no formal law in the Overland between Kansas and Utah; Jack Slade practiced frontier justice during his Overland period of keeping his division effectively running and safe, thus leaving a trail of killings by weapon or hangman’s rope. Few dared to test his ill will, or venture near him when he was drunk. So by reputation and actions, he was both respected and feared.

Post 1863-64 - Jack Slade followed the gold seeking thousands to Alder Gulch, Montana and was succeeding in the freight business. On the other hand, numerous saloon binges in Virginia City led to many destructive rampages. Vigilante justice caught up with him and the vigilance executive committee elected to arrest and hang him. On July 20, 1864 they did just that.