

British Columbia Express Company.

SEVEN HUNDRED MILES OF STAGING IN CARRY-
ING H. M. MAILS TO AND FROM THE
NORTHERN INTERIOR.

The days of stage coaching are generally considered as belonging to ancient history, but such is not the case, as up to the present day many a mountain town and mining camp in the wide west depend upon stage coach lines as their chief means of communication with the world at large. In the heart of our own country exists one of the most important of these lines, that of the British Columbia Express Company, running from Ashcroft to all the mining, grazing and agricultural districts of the north, carrying Her Majesty's mails into Lillooet, Chilcotah, Horse Fly, Cariboo and Peace River countries. Over this route the traveller may journey nearly 700 miles in a stage coach not unlike those of which Dickens wrote so graphically in describing his characters' travels to and from London. Instead of the liveried post boys, however, is the regular western driver, who though he gives himself up to driving rather than dress, is a more picturesque figure than many a devotee of fickle fashion. The driver needs to be a man of nerve, skill and courage, for it is no simple trick to bring a six-horse team around the sharp curves of the mountain roadway, and his charge in on time as well as in safety in all kinds of weather. Then the days of the road agent are not past, and when carrying treasures from the mines the driver knows not at what moment he may be asked at the point of a Winchester to deliver up, for such demand has been made even in civilized British Columbia three times within the past six years. To protect its own interests and those of its patrons the company has since the last robbery put on a guard.

Although the country through which the stage runs is very different from that around London, even when Dickens wrote of it, all along the route may be seen the "mile posts" marking the distance from Lillooet, and "way-side inns" where the traveller is entertained in a manner which is always a pleasant surprise. The "Cariboo road" throughout is kept in excellent condition, considering the nature of the country through which it runs and the amount of travel over it. For a distance of fifty miles from Ashcroft it winds along the valley of the Bonaparte river, through a pleasant and prosperous farming country. Another fifty miles carries the traveller over a bleak and desolate mountain after which it descends into the Lac La Hache valley, a magnificent dairying and grazing district, which extends northward another fifty miles. Along the Fraser river to Quesnelle, an agricultural country is traversed, when the famous Cariboo mining country is reached. Through this the stage runs for a distance of sixty miles or more, the route terminating at Barkerville, on William's Creek—the hub of Cariboo.

The coaches used by the B. C. Express Co., are the "Concord" pattern, fitted with "thoroughbrace" gearing, specially adapted to mountain travel, which enables the vehicle to sail along the hilly road like a vessel over a billowy sea. The coach is hauled by four and six horse

teams according to the load, the animals being changed about every twenty miles, the company having stables stationed at that distance all along the road. From sixty to seventy miles a day is made and 100 horses and thirty men are employed in the service. From Cottonwood river to Barkerville, a distance of about 40 miles where the road rises to an altitude of 4,000 to 6,000 feet above the sea, in the months of March and April, a dog team is employed to carry the mails. Here the snow falls to a depth of 15 feet at times, and horses could not get through. The dogs kept for the purpose readily haul their burden on toboggans, and make good time. The principal stopping places along the route are Hat Creek, Mundorf's, Clinton, 83 Mile House, Bridge Creek, McKintleys (Lac La Hache), 134 Mile House, 150 Mile House, So la Creek, Quesnelle, John Boyd's, Stanley, and Barkerville.

As may be easily imagined this system was not perfected in a day, or a year. In the early sixties Mr. F. J. Barnard, M. P., carried the mails along the Fraser from Yale. This was before the waggon road was built and he packed it on his back. Then Indians were employed who carried the mails in their canoes, and later on horses and mules were pressed into service. Although large quantities of gold were carried in those days, no losses or mistakes ever occurred, and thefts were unknown.

Deitz & Nelson's express carried the mails up the river from the coast to Yale, the present lieutenant-governor being the second member of this firm.

The Cariboo trunk road from Yale to Barkerville was opened in 1863, and the following spring stages were put on by Mr. Barnard. The first horses were bought from Mr. Porter, butcher, of Victoria, who at that time was staging on the Yale-Lillooet route. In those days the passenger fare from Yale to Barkerville was \$130, and express matter was \$1 per pound. As an offset to this Mr. Barnard had to pay as high as 30c. per pound for horse feed, 10c. to 20c. being the ordinary prices. The present manager of the express company, entered the employ of Mr. Barnard in 1864 and the year following, the late James Hamilton also engaged with Mr. Barnard. Later he became a shareholder in the business and continued with Mr. Barnard till the time of his death. In 1866 the Big Bend excitement broke out and stages were put on the route as far as Savona's Ferry, and canoes brought from the Fraser river were employed in carrying freight from this point on Kamloops lake to Shuswap lake, from whence it was packed into the Big Bend mines.

In 1868 the express business had attained such proportions that enough suitable horses could not be obtained in British Columbia, and S. Tingley was despatched to California to secure animals. In Southern California he bought some 300 head which he drove up to this country "overland," the drive occupying six months. These horses were for breeding purposes as well as stageing, and a number of the animals were left at Okanagan Lake where Mr. Barnard took up a ranch, where Vernon is to day, and where he and his associates have continued to breed horses ever since. The stock imported was of

extra good quality and the Barnard and B. C. Express Companies have always been noted for their good horseflesh. At the time of this importation there were only two or three settlers between Okanagan and Kamloops.

About this time Messrs. Tingley and Hamilton became partners, the firm being known as Barnard & Co. Deitz & Nelson withdrew from the Yale-Westminster route and Barnard & Co. took over the carrying of the mails between these points, also running the express to Victoria. Steamers carried the mails in summer, and in water canoes, sleighs, and Indians backs continued the work. Capt. Bristol had charge of the Fraser route for many years and proved a most efficient and trustworthy officer. He was noted for his punctuality and reliability, always being on time, no matter what difficulties he had to overcome. Wade, swim, walk or canoe, it made no difference to him; he got there just the same.

Branches of the Bank of British Columbia and British North America were established in Barkerville. They bought up the gold taken out in those days, and shipped it regularly to Victoria by Barnard & Co.'s Express. From 500 to 800 pounds was brought down at a trip, and on one occasion 1,800 pounds of dust, \$400,000, was brought down by the express stage. Each of the banks sent out two armed messengers and the Express Co. one. This guard was kept on until the banks were withdrawn from Barkerville, the company retaining one guard for years afterwards. Senator Reid, of Quesnelle, at one time was engaged as one of these messengers.

In 1878 the concern was incorporated by Act of Parliament under the name of the British Columbia Express Company, taking over Barnard & Co.'s stock, and has been carried on since under that name, at the present time being one of the best known institutions of the upper country.

Mr. Barnard and his successors from '63 to the present date, have carried Her Majesty's mails to Cariboo, excepting a term of ten months. This time it was carried by other parties who failed to satisfy the demands of the department and Mr. Barnard was prevailed upon to take up their contract. The company during the earlier years were obliged to employ section men who devoted their whole time to keeping the roadway in good repair, and this they did the whole year round, the road from Yale to Barkerville, along the wild canyons of the Fraser and along the tortuous pathway through the mountains to Cariboo being kept in perfect order, every foot of it being traversed twice daily. This care and vigilance prevented any serious accident occurring, even during the building of the C. P. R., when the roadway was crossed in several places.

Before the building of the C. P. R. the Express Company's stages were the only regular means of travel in the country—save on foot. Everyone from the most humble and hopeful prospectors to their excellencies the Lord and Lady Dufferin rode in the same stage. The old drivers tell of the latter getting out at Hellgate; one of the wildest points on the Fraser Canyon, to take dinner, and they apparently enjoyed themselves, notwithstanding their strangely wild