

## Wells Fargo History Museum, San Diego School Tour Guide

Standards touched on:

- 4.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.**
- .5 Use maps, Charts and pictures to describe how communities in California vary in land use, vegetation, wildlife, climate, population, density, architecture, services, and transportation.
- 4.3 Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.**
- .2 Compare how and why people traveled to California and the routes they traveled.
  - .3 Analyze the effects of the Gold Rush on settlements, daily life, politics, and the physical environment.
  - .4 Study the lives of women who helped build early California.
- 4.4 Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power, tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural development since the 1850's.**
- .1 Understand the story and lasting influence of the Pony Express, Overland mail Service, Western Union, and the building of the transcontinental railroad, including the contributions of Chinese workers to its construction.
  - .2 Explain how the Gold Rush transformed the economy of California including the types of products produced and consumed, changes in towns, and economic conflicts between diverse groups of people.

## San Diego

The tour will begin with a brief discussion of San Diego and the changes that have occurred over time. A large mural of San Diego circa 1855, a map of sea routes, and a map of Wells Fargo stage lines will be used to enhance the discussion. Some key points:

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**Environment** – San Diego is a coastal desert. Native plants are few. However, thanks to people such as Kate Sessions San Diego today is lush with plant life.

**Geography** – Old Town San Diego was once the center of city life and the seat of local government. However, during a midnight fire in 1872 much of Old Town was destroyed. After the fire, most San Diegians moved to Alonzo Horton's "new town" taking the local seat of government with them.

**Transportation**- Most people arrived to San Diego via steamer or sailing ship during the gold rush era. The journey from the east coast to California was a 6-8 month trip via Cape Horn. Going through Panama would cut the time from 4-6 months. Coming overland either by covered wagon, horse back or walking could take anywhere from 6 months to a year.

**Communication** – Prior to telephones, email and even the telegraph, communication between long distances was a slow endeavor. Mail had to be carried overland or oversea creating a delay of 6-8 months from the time a letter was written to the time it was received. The federal government funded pony express reduced this time by setting up a relay of riders carrying mail bags overland. However, due in large part to budget and the newly completed overland telegraph, the government abandoned the venture. In San Diego, mail arrived by steamers that traveled up and down the coast.

## **Wells Fargo & Company Express**

Next we discuss Henry Wells and William Fargo's roles in opening the West via their successful express company and the stagecoach that became a legend. Visuals include portraits of Mr. Wells and Mr. Fargo, a Wells Fargo & Co. Express sign, a map of Wells Fargo stage lines, a photograph of a stagecoach with riders and an original Concord stagecoach. Some key points:

**Henry Wells and William Fargo** – In 1852, Mr. Wells and Mr. Fargo established Wells Fargo & Company Express to meet the growing need for banking and expressing services in California. These services included buying and selling gold, accepting deposits, safekeeping valuables, transferring funds and delivering mail. The first office opened in San Francisco. In 1854, they established an office in San Diego.

**Express Service** – Prior to the establishment of commercial overland stage companies traveling from the east coast to the west meant a journey of 6 – 12 months. By establishing and maintaining stage stations to change horses, drivers and to provide food and water, Wells Fargo was able to cut travel time to 32 days. Wells Fargo transported three types of cargo mail and packages, money and gold, and people.

**The Concord Stagecoach** – Made in Concord, New Hampshire the stagecoach held 18 people including the driver and shotgun messenger. The coach was pulled by 6 horses and traveled 24 hours a day seven days a week with the horses changed every 12 to 20 miles at various stage stations strung along the route.

## The People

Finally, we tell the stories of Black Bart, Thomas Davies, and Charlie Parkhurst. Visuals include a treasure box, the Davies pocket watch, a shotgun and pistol, and the book Riding Freedom, by Pam Munoz Ryan. Some key points:

**Black Bart** – Charles E. Bowles a.k.a. Black Bart robbed Wells Fargo Stages 28 times over an 8 year period. He never harmed passengers but he became a pro at getting into treasure boxes and tearing through mail bags with speed. On his final robbery, a shootout ensued and Black Bart dropped his handkerchief in the chaos. On it was the laundry mark FX07. After searching 91 laundry services the detectives finally tracked down the mark and by consequence Black Bart himself. Black Bart left his mark in other ways, as well. He liked to leave poetry behind after taking a strong box in a robbery using the pen name, PO8.

**Thomas Davies** – Thomas Davies was by all accounts an honest man. He lived in Mission Valley and ran an olive orchard. On a run from Julian to San Diego, a Wells Fargo box containing \$10,000 worth of gold was accidentally dropped off a stage very near Mr. Davies's orchard. Upon arriving at the Wells Fargo office the stage driver realized what had happened and decided to retrace his route in an effort to recover the box. Lucky for Wells Fargo, Thomas Davies had found the box. After refusing to hand over the box to the driver who was to him a complete stranger, Mr. Davies personally drove the box to San Diego and turned it in. Wells Fargo was so impressed with his honesty, they had made and inscribed a beautiful gold pocket watch which is on display in the museum.

**Charlie Parkhurst** – Looks can be deceiving. Charlie was a very accomplished stagecoach driver who drove stagecoaches over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The pitch of his voice was a bit high and sharp, he was shy and kept to himself and he was very short and slim. He was only robbed twice, the first time he was caught without a gun. The second time he was ready. When the cry, "throw down the box" was heard, Charlie grabbed his gun, whirled around toward the robber and shot him in the chest escaping. After quitting the stage business for health reasons, Charlie operated a stage station and died a few years after of natural causes. However, when the doctor examined the body it was discovered that Charlie was actually a girl! She had grown up in an orphanage for boys and learned the ropes from a very young age.