

THE STORY.

During the 1800s, travel time in California was measured in days and weeks. Before the first railroads in the state were completed in the latter part of the century, the mainstay of commerce was the stage line. Typically, a local enterprise consisted of teams of horses and wagons. Drivers braved whatever came along to transport passengers, freight, and mail.

Stagecoach travel was always risky, even on the best of roads. Apart from holdups and bad weather, the newspapers of the day told frequently of disastrous accidents. Bad ruts, rock slides, and overflowing creek beds were common sources of trouble, often resulting in major detours or worse. Albert Seeley lost one of his stages in 1876 when it was swept into the sea along the San Onofre Creek.

Stage Lines in California generally had their start during the Gold Rush boom. Using all sorts of wagons, independent lines began to connect San Francisco with San Jose; Sacramento with Stockton, Marysville and Virginia City; and Mother Lode towns with Portland, Oregon. The first stage line between Los Angeles and San Diego began in 1852.

Mail service between eastern cities and California began in 1850, but not until 1857 was a mail route approved between San Antonio and San Diego via Yuma. This stage line, officially called the "San Antonio and San Diego Mail," was also derisively called "The Jackass Mail" because mules were used to pull the stage. Parts of the route were so rough, it had to be traversed by pack mule.

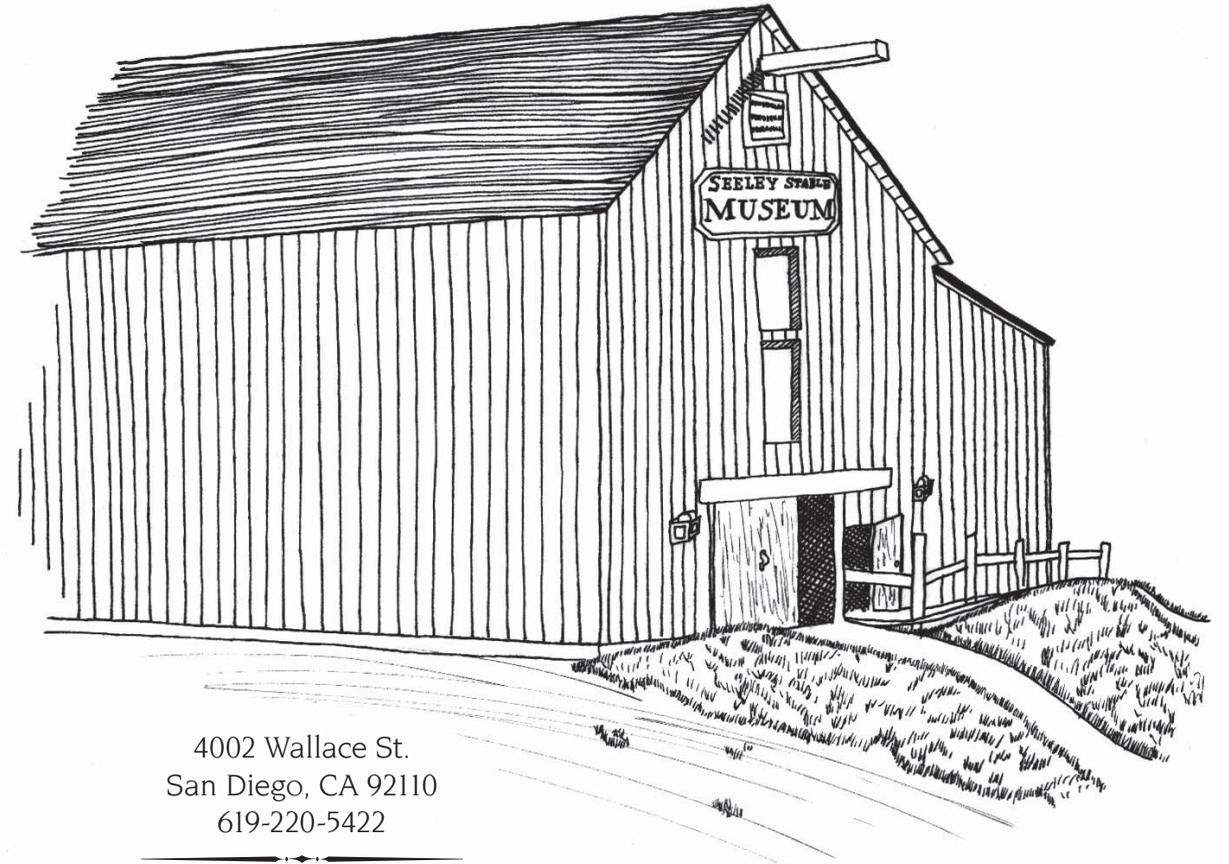


In 1861, the same year the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Stage line ceased operation, Wells Fargo and Company began to acquire control of western stage lines. In little more than a decade, railroads would become the principal mode of transportation. However, communities like San Diego, which were not immediately located on a railroad, still had to depend on a local stage service a little while longer.

Thank you for your interest in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, part of the California State Parks system. Inquire at the Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center or visit our website to find additional ways to experience California's history.

THE SEELEY STABLE.

**PAPPY HAZARD COLLECTION.
THE SEELEY STABLE MUSEUM.**



4002 Wallace St.
San Diego, CA 92110
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www.parks.ca.gov/oldtownsandiego



Date Built: **Circa 1869.**
Interpretive Period: **American.**
Rebuilt in 1974.

Illustrations by Megan Curtis.

THE BUILDING.

The original Seeley Stables was built circa 1869 to support the transportation services offered by Albert L. Seeley. Horse stables typically would have horse stalls, wagon storage and tack rooms on the ground floor, while feed and straw would be hoisted to the top floor for storage. The current museum has three large areas: the main floor, the upstairs loft, and the outside yard. One area on the main floor is set up to resemble a 19th century express office. Items of western memorabilia on the second floor and many of the wagons were donated by Roscoe E. "Pappy" Hazard, a San Diego transportation and highway construction pioneer of the first half of the 20th century.

The exhibits on the ground floor contain several rare examples from California's early wheeled transportation history. One of the earliest is an original ox-drawn *carreta* from the Spanish Period. Across from it are a pair of massive freight wagons. Farther back in the exhibit is a Concord "mud wagon" stagecoach. There were two distinct classes of Concord

coaches, with a number of variations. The mud wagon was particularly suitable for the rough and rocky terrain of Southern California.

Among the western memorabilia upstairs are a number of items that relate to Southern California. The California *vaquero* and saddle displays will give you a sense of San Diego *ranchio* life during the Spanish and Mexican Eras. The branding iron, like many other tools and words in the cattle industry, finds its origins in Spanish ranching.

The original Seeley Stables was demolished in 1920. The Seeley Stable Museum is a 1974 reconstruction by California State Parks.

The yard in back contains covered wagons and sturdy freight wagons that were once used to haul people and goods long distances. A large collection of horse-drawn buggies, surreys, carts, and carriages are housed in the two out-buildings in the courtyard. In addition, the yard has two resident donkeys.

THE PEOPLE.

Albert Lewis Seeley (1822-1898) was born in Illinois. A stagecoach driver since 17, he had worked in Texas and Los Angeles. In 1867,

Seeley came to San Diego with his English-born wife, Emily, and their six children. He soon began the United States Mail Stage Line.

In 1868, the U.S. Government granted mail service over the Tucson to Los Angeles route via San Diego. Seeley was awarded a contract for the San Diego to Los Angeles run. In addition to the two-day, tri-weekly mail and passenger service to Los Angeles, Seeley's stage line also provided service between San Diego and Yuma.

On May 1, 1869, to provide a depot and accommodations for his line, Seeley purchased the former Bandini residence for \$2,000 in gold coin. He added a wooden second story to the adobe structure and renamed it Cosmopolitan Hotel.

The new hotel served as a local social center as well as a stage stop. *The San Diego Union* stated that it was "one of the roomiest and most comfortable hotel buildings in Southern California." Also at this time, Seeley constructed this stable barn adjacent to the Hotel.

Seeley's business prospered during the following decade. In 1871, he expanded to Los Angeles mail and passenger service six days a week. Also, he purchased the Blackhawk Livery Stable. Three years later he contracted with Wells Fargo and Co. to run his coaches tri-weekly to gold mines in the Cuyamacas and weekly from Julian to San Bernadino. Seeley was also awarded a four-year contract to deliver mail to Julian; leaving from the Cosmopolitan Hotel on Mondays and Fridays.

Seeley's business declined steadily over the next decade as railroad lines spread throughout the state. By 1887, Seeley had ceased running stages except for a local line between San Diego and Ocean Beach. That same year, he sold the Cosmopolitan Hotel and the stable for \$15,000 in gold coin. Seeley and his wife moved to San Francisco in 1895.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Seeley's stagecoach route to Los Angeles took 32 hours with an overnight stay at San Juan Capistrano. The one-way fare was \$10.00. That same amount of money could buy room & board in a San Diego hotel for about two weeks.
- Stagecoaches held about 18 people.
- Early California transportation was by ox-drawn *carretas*.
- It was said that Seeley once purchased the largest, most splendid stagecoach that San Diego had ever seen and gave everyone in town a free ride.
- The original stable was blown down by a small cyclone in 1901.

CAN YOU FIND?

- A mudwagon
- A very, very quiet horse
- A plate of slumgullion

