

'The Real Deal'

An Original Wells Fargo Stagecoach with known provenance in a private collection presented by Paul Kluth on behalf of the owners

Rarely if ever seen in original condition is this workhorse of 19th century 'mode of transportation'. Tucked away by dedicated preservationists of historical artifacts of a by-gone era, this genuine Wells Fargo & Co. Stagecoach was once displayed in the San Francisco Wells Fargo branch bank headquarters. Previously owned by two other serious collectors for a combined 40 years after being located in the bank, I can only share that it now resides in Adams County, PA (and not in Gettysburg as one might expect).

On its way to its latest destination on the East Coast ("Coast"- whoops, a little slip there) from the West Coast, this 'Overland Stage' once had a 20 year stop in Tennessee.

What a surprise and honor as a collector it was to be able to share photographs taken with the readers of E-Gobrecht. And just in time for the 250th Anniversary Celebration of America's history and the signing of the 'Declaration of Independence'.



When Wells Fargo was founded in 1852 as a bank and express company, they used stagecoaches to safely transport mail, valuables, and even people across the western states. The stagecoach became an icon for the Wells Fargo brand, and remains an enduring symbol of longevity, forward momentum and a commitment to help customers succeed. *More images appear on the following pages...*

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(Above image) An Original Sign
(Right) Original Horn used by the drivers
to signal they were close to arriving at
their next stop, and a jug of something?
(Bottom) Right side decorated entry door panel



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As you can see, the drivers sat very high up on the top of the coach with no protection from the elements or gunfire if that be the case. They were mostly sitting ducks except for the speed of the horses pulling the stage at a fast pace.

The 'San Francisco Depot Sign' is a replica, but is true to the original design.

Very heavy and sturdy is the front right wagon wheel made of oak and cast iron.

Double barrel shotgun and pistol were always ready whenever needed.



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An Iconic Symbol: The red and gold coach became a powerful emblem of the American West, symbolizing reliability and progress, despite the dangers of the journey.



The all important brake (top left) and an example of an original Wells Fargo Agent's desk (top right).

[Also see WF Agent's photo on page 36]

View of the coach from the left side. Those all important canvass drop-down canopies blocked out the sun, dust and weather for the passengers inside which could include up to 9 adults.

Information on page 26 courtesy

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Wells Fargo Stagecoach Mural Sketch by John Farnsworth

STAGE, Farnsworth's 22 by 27 foot oil on linen mural which is now a part of the Sky Harbor Airport art collection (Phoenix, AZ) was commissioned by Wells Fargo & Company in 1981.

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In 1852, Henry Wells and William Fargo established the Wells Fargo Stagecoach Company in San Francisco. The two men purchased Concord coaches built by the Abbott-Downing Company in New Hampshire. The coaches varied in size and could seat six, nine or twelve passengers. The larger coaches could carry up to a dozen men on the roof. The coaches were pulled by four or six-horse teams. Next to the driver at the front would sit an armed guard.

The coaches had leather storage compartments (boots) at the front and back of the coach. The compartment under the driver's seat usually carried the strong box where the passengers kept their money and valuables. The larger boot at the back carried the mail and the bags of the passengers.

These stagecoaches were sometimes stopped and robbed by outlaws. The most successful of these outlaws was Charles Bolton (Black Bart) who during a six year period held up 30 coaches. Others involved in stagecoach robberies included the likes of Jessie James and Cole Younger.

By 1880, the Wells Fargo Stagecoach Company had 573 offices and agents. It was now the most powerful stagecoach company in the American West. However, it began to invest in railroad companies and in 1888, Wells Fargo established the first transcontinental express via rail.



From a trusted source: The stagecoach had to be eventually removed as the company was worried about vandalism, protests, etc. There were a lot of other items on display (gold bags, etc.) which made the lobby area like a museum.

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Benjamin Carr photographed the 30 stagecoaches riding piggyback on railcars out of Concord, New Hampshire, on April 15, 1868. Stagecoach maker Abbot-Downing & Company printed the panoramic photo to promote its 85th anniversary in 1898. Photo Credit: Wells Fargo Corporate Archives. (Above) John Burgum painted the colorful landscape scenes adorning each stagecoach door as well as this panoramic canvas depicting the train of 30 stagecoaches. Photo Credit: New Hampshire Historical Society



One of Wells Fargo's stagecoaches prepares to depart Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1868. Photographers in the 1860s seldom captured objects in motion due to long exposure times. This is the only known photo of a Concord Coach where the Wells, Fargo & Company name is readable on the top rail. Photo Credit: Wells Fargo Corporate Archives

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EARLY HISTORY and A GREAT STORY OF THE BEGINNING

In April 1867, just a few months after taking over the operation of most long-distance stage-coach lines in the western U.S., Wells Fargo decided that upgraded equipment would better serve customers now that it covered over 4,000 miles of territory. The company placed an order for 10 new stagecoaches.

Abbot-Downing & Company, a coach and carriage builder in Concord, New Hampshire, was called on to fill the order. The company's "Concord Coaches" - named for their place of manufacture - were marvels of ingenuity and craftsmanship. The curved hardwood side panels on each coach added extra strength, and each coach body rested on a unique suspension system of leather straps called "thorough braces" that cushioned the ride in a rocking - rather than bouncing - motion. Author Mark Twain compared the ride in a Concord Coach to riding in "a cradle on wheels." Concord Coaches earned a reputation as a top-quality product and became one of the first American-made manufactured items widely known by a brand name.

Abbot-Downing built each vehicle to customer specifications and numbered each of them for identification purposes. Wells Fargo ordered the factory's largest stagecoach model - capable of seating nine passengers inside - reinforced with extra iron hardware for use on rough western roads and painted bright red with yellow wheels and running gear. The Wells, Fargo & Company name in gold leaf proudly identified the owner of the 10 new coaches.

On October 8, 1867, Wells Fargo placed an order for an additional 10 stagecoaches, but soon increased the order to 30 coaches, one of the largest orders ever filled by Abbot-Downing. A handwritten page in the coach-maker's order book listed custom features requested by Wells Fargo: three more inches of room between the back and middle seats for the comfort of long-distance passengers; leather flaps enclosing the back boot to secure mail and luggage; extra-large candle lamps to light the way in darkness; and fine damask cloth to line the roof inside. The shop superintendent directed that Wells Fargo's order be "done at once." Workers finished five of the 30 coaches in January 1868, another five in February, and 10 each in March and April. As a final step in construction, Abbot-Downing artist John Burgum painted colorful landscape scenes on each door, and ornament painter Thomas Knowlton added delicate gold leaf scrolls and striping. Finally, all 30 shiny new Wells Fargo stagecoaches were ready on April 13, 1868.

Just after noon on April 15, 1868, the Boston and Concord Railroad's steam engine Pembroke pulled out of the rail yard in Concord. Behind the engine was a train of 15 railroad flatcars holding 30 red and gold stagecoaches and four boxcars full of spare parts and new sets of harness. It was a sight never seen before in Concord, and factory workers, town residents, and news reporters rushed to witness the train of Wells Fargo coaches start its long journey west. Local photographer Benjamin Carr captured the whole trainload of stagecoaches with his camera.

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Newspapers from Maine to Colorado reported on the progress of the train and its unique red and gold stagecoach cargo, but a reporter for the Concord Daily Monitor focused on the artistry of the richly ornamented coaches, writing, "Each door has a handsome picture, mostly landscapes, and no two of the sixty are alike. They are gems of beauty and would afford study for hours."

The train of 30 stagecoaches went first to Nashua, New Hampshire, then west via Albany and Buffalo, New York, to Chicago, where it arrived on April 21. It continued across Iowa to Council Bluffs, just across the Missouri River from Omaha, Nebraska. No bridge yet spanned the river, so the railroad flatcars holding the stagecoaches were ferried across by steamboat. The 30 coaches arrived in Omaha in the early morning hours of April 23, just seven days and 14 hours after leaving Concord, which the Omaha Herald newspaper claimed was the fastest trip ever for a freight train over such a distance.

End of the Line: In Omaha, the train picked up additional livestock cars carrying 150 horses, and a Union Pacific Railroad engine hauled Wells Fargo's 30 stagecoaches further west to Cheyenne, Wyoming - at that time the "end of the line" on the unfinished transcontinental railroad. "Wells Fargo & Co. this morning received thirty new magnificent Concord coaches from the East," reported the Cheyenne Leader on Monday, April 27, 1868.

Once in Cheyenne, the new stagecoaches hitched up to horse teams in shiny new harness and drove off for duty bringing mail, passengers, and express service to Wells Fargo customers - bridging a gap of hundreds of miles separating construction crews laying tracks of the Central Pacific Railroad eastward, and the Union Pacific crews building west.

Twenty of the new Wells Fargo coaches arrived in a grand procession in Salt Lake City, Utah, on June 20. "As they drove through the streets - behind handsome and spirited four-horse teams, they presented a fine appearance," said the editor of the local Deseret Evening News. The coaches soon dispersed to Wells Fargo's routes into Montana and Idaho, or west toward California.

Wells Fargo's domination of the stagecoach business lasted only a few short years, from 1866 to 1869, until the last spike completing the tracks of the transcontinental railroad was driven at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, on May 10, 1869. Now the iron horse ruled long-distance travel, and Wells Fargo carried its cross-country express shipments faster by train.

Wells Fargo soon began to sell its equipment and stock to local stage operators, and by September 1869, Wells Fargo's management of the largest stagecoach in the world ended. While the Wells Fargo stagecoaches rolled through the American landscape briefly, the sight of the red and gold Concord coach delivering money and valuables inspired a generation of people to imagine new possibilities. The story continues at the link below:

[Article full credit: <https://history.wf.com/in-1868-this-was-a-sight-never-before-seen/>]

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To be continued in Part V ...



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Press Release

GOVMINT Partners with Nevada State Museum

This press release announces the Nevada State Museum's partnership with GOVMINT to mint and sell commemorative medals, some of which will be struck on the museum's historic Carson City Coin Press No. 1:

GOVMINT has announced an exclusive partnership with the Nevada State Museum to release limited-edition Carson City Mint 155th Anniversary Commemoratives in gold and silver. These dual-dated 1870-2025 pieces replicate the original designs of the first coins struck at the Carson City Mint in 1870 and feature a special anniversary privy mark. Some were even struck on the historic Coin Press No. 1-the same press that powered the Mint's earliest coinage.

The collection includes designs from the original 1870 Seated Liberty Silver Dollar, \$10 Gold Liberty Eagle, and \$20 Gold Liberty Double Eagle-coins that marked the Mint's opening. Each piece bears the Carson City mintmark and a 155th Anniversary privy mark depicting the Mint building with "CC" and "155." [More details to be presented later].

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Actual photo
of Wells Fargo
agent at work in
Antioch, CA