

Richard Carroll
234 E St.
Salida Colo.

Pam 346-1 26

Fred A. Seelinger

Fred A. Seelinger was born of German parents in Dearborn county Indiana Oct. 22, 1858. Shortly after, the family moved to Ripley county. There he lived until he was 20 years old. When the rich mining strikes were being made in Colorado, and the rush to mining fields was in full progress; Fred felt the urge, too. So he joined an emigrant outfit--who had contracted for a car via the the Santa Fe Railway--and came to Pueblo. This was in 1879.

(The next day after his arrival in Pueblo, he was hired as a teamster by Dan Kelsey, freighter; and, as a member of a supply train, he started for the booming town of Leadville. They followed the stage route through Canon City, Grape creek, Cleora, Buena Vista, Granite, and then on to Leadville. It was a rough up-hill trip, and it required 8 days to traverse the 160 miles.)

Lured by the higher wages paid in Leadville, Fred quit his job as teamster when he arrived there, and became an employee of the Granite Smelting Co. He received \$3.50 for 10 hours labor which was considered to be very good wages in those days.

Two weeks of this work, however, convinced Fred that the smoke and gases of the smelter weren't beneficial to his health, so once more he quit. He left Leadville and started down the Arkansas, arriving in Cleora in the spring. At this time there was nothing at the present site of Salida except a small slaughter house and the recently completed railroad grade.

Cleora, being the end of the rail from Nov. 1879 until

the spring of 1880, was the "metropolis" of that vicinity. During the short duration of Cleora's boom quite a number of buildings were erected, which included a general store, hotel, various business shacks and residences.

John T. Blake, proprietor of the general store, asked Fred if he wished a job as clerk and handy man; and He accepted. The work proved to be too confining, however, so he wasn't satisfied. What did appeal to him, were the stages; and he always managed to be at hand when they were due at the station. Even after he had seen it many times, he always thrilled to that final wild dash, the dusty, slithering halt, the hustle and bustle of unloading express and passengers, and the quick changing of the teams.

So it naturally followed that Fred should become a stage-driver; and he took that position with Barlow and Sanderson in May, 1879. His regular trips, or "runs", were from Bale's Station (Cleora) to Canon City, 61 miles, 5 hours scheduled time; and from Bale's Station to Leadville, 61 miles, scheduled time 4½ hours. On account of carrying mail and express, the matter of keeping the stages on their schedule was of great importance to the stage company; to say nothing of the personal pride of each driver. So it wasn't often that the stages were late.

On the western trip, the stage was due to leave Bale's Station at 8 a.m. Stops were made at approximately every 10 miles to change horses. The first one being Brown's Creek, (near Centerville) Nathrop, (the station was 1½ miles above the present site) the station opposite Wild Horse, Granite, Crystal Lake, and Leadville, the terminal.

Post Office stops were Brown's Creek, Buena Vista, and Granite. Each stop required about 10 minutes. Almost before the stage came to a halt the mail pouch was flung to the Postmaster who dumped its contents sorted out his mail, added the outgoing mail, and returned the pouch

to the driver.

If it was a stage station, also, the horses were changed. This was done in two or three minutes by merely removing a pin at the end of the tongue, where it was connected to the stage coach, driving in the four fresh horses, affixing the tongue in the cleavis, dropping the pin, and they were ready to go.

On the eastward trip from Bale's Station, Valley was the first stop, then Texas Creek, the 12 Mile Station, and Canon City. In some places it was necessary to add an extra span of horses, making a total of six, due to the steep grades.

The capacity of the coaches, excluding the driver, was eight inside, two by the driver; and about 600 lbs. of baggage, express, and mail. Only a small amount of gold dust and nuggets was shipped from Leadville and vicinity; most of that being routed through South Park. There was considerable gold, though, in the silver bullion which was transported in 100 lb ingots, or bars, by the freighters.

On Tuesday morning an armed messenger usually accompanied Mr. Seelinger as that was the regular day for the weekly money shipments from Denver to Leadville. These shipments totaled from \$50,000 to \$100,000, mostly currency, and the express rate was \$15 per thousand, Denver to Leadville. Passenger fares were, \$21.65 Bale's Station to Leadville, and \$22.50 Bale's Station to Canon City. On every trip the stage coaches were loaded to capacity.

Because of his excellent record, Fred was always selected to make emergency runs, or to drive special parties, which called for the best equipment and drivers obtainable.

On one of these occasions, Jeb Sanderson, stage supt., informed Fred that he was to take a new coach the next morning to Leadville. There was to meet a party of mining men who had contracted for a coach to Canon City.

Early the next morning, Fred piloted his four eager horses and bright new coach down Harrison avenue to the Tabor Opera House, to load his passengers for the rough, long trip to Canon City. One of the six men who boarded the coach was H.A.W. Tabor. Though Fred was not acquainted with any of the party, they proved to be friendly; and they were well supplied with "liquid refreshments" which they offered to Fred quite frequently. They finally desisted, however, with Mr. Tabor's remark: "Well, son, you are the first stage driver I have ever seen who wouldn't take a drink!"

It took 12 hours to make the trip. There was eventful occurrence, except the frequent stops for visits and "refreshments". At Canon City with steam up, ready for a quick run to Denver, there was a special train awaiting the party.

When trains became an actual reality in Cleora, Fred resigned his position as stage driver. He went to Leadville once more in Nov. 1879; and began work at the Little Pittsburg mine. He was employed there until the miners' strike during the summer of 1880. He quit then and went to Poncha, which was experiencing a boom caused by the rich mining discoveries at Maysfield, Garfield, and Monarch.

After working there for a short while in the Post Office, he departed for Canon City. There, in 1881, he entered the employ of the D&RG R.R. as a fireman. His first work was on a construction train, which was assisting in the building of the Silver Cliff branch. ~~During the time~~ After that he began running on the main line between Canon City and Leadville. During this time the railroad was being built from Salida to Gunnison; the end of the rails was at Parlin in November 1881.

The next year found the railroad completed to Grand Junction, where it met the Rio Grande Western. At this time the railroad companies purchased 130 new locomotives; and Mr. Seelinger helped to

deliver some of them to the railroad in Utah, He then located in Gunnison; working between there and Montrose.

In 1887 he was promoted to engineer; and in November of the same year, he was happily married to Miss Amelia Gaiser, daughter of Mr. John Gaiser of Gunnison, formerly of Hornell, N.Y.

Mr. Seelinger foresaw the brighter possibilities on the standard gauge, (via Tennessee Pass) so he transferred to that division in 1893; and in 1894, he moved his family to Salida.

After 47 years of faithful service, and with an unblemished record--of which the latter years were spent as engineer on the crack passenger trains--he was retired in October, 1928.

At 75, he is still young and vigorous. He resides in Salida, where he and his wife can enjoy the companionship and love of their sons, daughters, grandchildren, and great grand children.

Ford A. Seelinger

322 E W

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