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VALLECITO STAGE STATION - SAN DIEGO COUNTY

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VALLECITO STAGE STATION

The restoration of Vallecito stage station has preserved another structure significant in the history of California. This stage station in eastern San Diego County midway between the mountains and desert, was on the old Butterfield stage route from St. Louis to San Francisco.

One hundred and fifty miles from Los Angeles, Vallecito is reached from that city by driving via U. S. Highway 101 to Oceanside, thence east on Highway 78 to seven miles beyond Julian, then about twenty miles south on a desert road. Water and campsites are available. An alternate route is from San Diego via Highway 80 to two miles east of Plaster City thence north on the desert road thirty-eight miles to the historic structure, a one hundred forty mile trip from San Diego.

Vallecito was known to the Indians years before the coming of the white man. It was probably first seen by the Spaniards about 1781, when Pedro Fages and his party passed through this region after the Yuma Indians destroyed the missions on the Colorado. The trail blazed by Captain Juan Bautista de Anza in 1774-75 from Sonora to the California coast by way of San Carlos pass was shifted southward after this, and Vallecito became a stopping place, for

here was water and grass for the horses.

In 1832 a little group of trappers pushed across the Colorado desert and over the mountains to the sea by the same route. With them was Jonathan Trumball Warner, who later owned the famous Warner ranch. Stephen Kearney and Kit Carson, soon to meet the Californians at the battle of San Pasqual, passed by this spot in 1846, as did, a little later, the famed Mormon Battalion.[1]

In the days of the gold rush thousands of forty-niners paused beneath the shelter of the whispering mesquite trees at Vallecito. They were followed in later decades by the great trading wagon trains, drawn by slowly moving oxen, with their ponderous wooden yokes. Here they rested before the arduous journey over the mountain into El Valle de San Jose, where Warner's ranch lies. Three times in twenty miles it was necessary to take the wagons apart before reaching that goal, because the four-wheeled vehicles would not pass where the two-wheeled ones of the Spanish had gone en route across the desert.

About 1851 James R. Lassator constructed at Vallecito the building which later became the historic stage station. The house was small and made of salt grass sods.

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1. "Historic Vallecito to Live Again on Old Pioneer Trail," Butterfield Chronicle, I:1 (December 1934), 6-7.

Six years later it became a station on James E. Birch's San Antonio and San Diego Mail, the "Jackass Mail" which was superseded by the Butterfield stages after Birch lost his life in a shipwreck.[2]

On September 16, 1857, the Butterfield Overland Mail Company was awarded the contract for carrying the government mail across the continent to California. A southern route through Yuma, Arizona, was selected because it was open all the year round.. The portion of the route between the Colorado River and Los Angeles followed in part the old trail which passed through Vallecito, and the old sod house built by Lassator in 1851 became one of the stations on the new stage line. From Vallecito the route went northwest to Warner's Ranch and southeast through Mason Valley and Carrizo Canyon, striking the present highway from San Diego to Yuma near Dixieland.[3]

Stages rumbled in and out of Vallecito until 1861, when the exigencies of the Civil War caused the route to be shifted farther north. In the days before the railroads in

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2. Newell Jones, "Vallecito Area Enrapted by Legend's Mystic Veil," Butterfield Chronicle, II:11 (November 1936), 8-10.
3. State of California, Department of Natural Resources and the State Park Commission in Cooperation with the California State Chamber of Commerce, Report No. 23, 2; Hero Eugene Rensch and Ethel Grace Rensch, Historic Spots in California: The Southern Counties, 199-200.

Arizona, heavy freighters continued to use this path in transporting goods from Los Angeles to Tombstone. Then, as newer and more modern developments took place in the West, the old route was gradually forgotten.

The station was deserted, and, a prey to vandals and earthquakes, its sod walls crumbled rapidly. The building eventually came into the possession of Christopher F. Holland, who saw that if an effort were not made to preserve it, there would soon be little or nothing to show where it once stood. In order that the ruins might be restored and the station preserved for future generations, Mr. Holland gave the building to San Diego County. The restoration, an SERA project carried on with the cooperation of the San Diego Historical Society, was completed in 1935.[4]

Five rooms of the old station were reconstructed. The main room is about sixteen by twenty feet, with a large fireplace. The walls of the structure are about three feet thick, made of sod from the cienega. The floor is dirt and the roof of poles, over which is laced brush. Following the exact details of the original roof, the brush over four rooms is tied on with cowhide, while that over the fifth is secured with buckskin. It is supposed that this arrangement

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4. L. Schwacefer, "Californology," Butterfield Chronicle, IV:5 (May 1938), 10.

resulted from the original builders using what skins they had available. A total of fifteen cowhides, or one and three-quarter miles of cowhide thongs were used to tie the roof down.

There were no nails available when the old building was built, and the restoration has faithfully employed wooden pins of the same type as were used in the original structure. In the same manner, all doors and windows were hewn from logs, and the hinges and locks were made at a forge. The walls have been plastered.

In order to make the historic station more accessible, the desert road to Vallecito was improved. Public interest was evidenced in the restoration almost at once, and on Easter Sunday, 1935, over one hundred cars visited the stage station. The building was made a State Historic Monument on August 10, 1939.[5]

The main interest in the old structure lies in its connection with the famous Butterfield stage system. The story of this enterprise goes back to the early fifties, when a direct, continuous overland mail route was being

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5. "Vallecito Lives Again," Butterfield Chronicle, I:6 (May 1935), 3; State of California, Department of Natural Resources and the State Park Commission in Cooperation with the California State Chamber of Commerce, Report No. 23, 2.

sought by California. Mail came monthly by steamer by way of the Isthmus of Panama and by stage coach mail on a line from Independence, Missouri, to Salt Lake City, where it was transferred to another line which continued on to Sacramento. The time consumed by this latter trip was so great that ocean mail was used exclusively for through correspondence.

This sentiment for an overland mail route to California crystallized in Congress early in 1856 with the introduction of four separate bills on the subject. The adoption of an amendment proposed by Senator Weller to the Annual Post Office Appropriation Bill of 1856 by the Senate, was the first step towards accomplishment of this objective. This amendment provided for a semi-weekly mail service between the Missouri River and San Francisco. The mail was to be carried in four-horse coaches within a nineteen-day schedule, with a compensation not to exceed half a million dollars a year. Opposition to the amendment was based on the contention that it was impractical that the mails could be carried at the price stipulated and that by the amendment the legislative branch of the government was intruding upon the prerogatives of the executive department. But the House refused to agree to this amendment, and it was stricken from the

Senate version of the bill in a conference committee.[6]

When Congress convened in December 1856 for the short session, the issue was raised again with the introduction of several bills which were referred to the Committee on Post Office and Post Roads. Senator Rusk of Texas, chairman of the committee, and other members of the committee gave full consideration to the proposals and made every attempt to frame a bill that would be practicable and acceptable.

The advice of experienced western mail contractors was carefully considered in the formulating of the bill. A fairly liberal contract was permitted as an inducement to responsible bidders, as it was recalled that mail contractors often bid too little and then had to come to Congress for an extra allowance. In order to avoid sectional conflicts the eastern terminus and the route was left undetermined.

The bill was reported to the Senate in the form of amendments to the Annual Post Office Appropriation Bill. Senator Crittendon of Kentucky in the debate that followed expressed the view that the Post Office Department should be as nearly self-supporting as possible. "Wait until your line can go a little further towards supporting itself," he said:[7]

> It is out of season, out of time, inappropriate, extravagant, exaggerated

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6. Congressional Globe, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 225.
7. Ibid., 34th Congress, 3rd Session, Appendix, 294.

> in the highest degree.... Here is one route established by sea (to California) at a cost of nearly one million of dollars, and then there is a land communication to Salt Lake City from the western part of Missouri and from Salt Lake City to Sacramento.... You have then perhaps, $1,300,000 now of annual expense in carrying the mail to California.... The question is whether you will add to it $600,000 or $300,000 more.

The proponents of the legislation stressed the fact of a surplus in the treasury and the prospects of ultimate repayment.[8] Senator Johnson of Arkansas observed:

> It is almost impossible to tell when we shall ever succeed in obtaining an overland communication through our own territory. I imagine, however, that there never was a time in our history when this government was so well able to make an effort towards the accomplishment of that object as now. The discussion on the tariff bill yesterday demonstrated the fact there are millions in the treasury not only for the purpose of making what is certainly a fair and reasonable experiment, but millions that we do not know what to do with.

Senator Gwin of California expressed the attitude of his constituents remarking, "How can we ever supersede the steamships unless we have a mail across the continent?" The ocean mail service and the Panama railroad were denounced as gigantic monopolies that could be broken only by

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8. Congressional Globe, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, Appendix, 310.

the establishment of this competitive route. Senator Rusk stated:[9]

> We have a simple proposition before us - it is whether you will continue a contract for a mail, twice a month, across the Isthmus of Panama at $900,000 a year, or whether you can get the mail service performed twice a week through your own territory for $600,000 a year.

The importance of the measure as an aid in opening the frontier was emphasized by Senator Weller:[10]

> I confess that I not only desire to have this mail route but what I regard as equally important, I desire to have a good emigrant route. I believe, by the establishment of a mail route with little posts every ten miles you will have in fact military posts all along that road. In this way you will give protection to your emigrants. That is what I am after.... This I regard as vastly important to the future interest of your possession on the Pacific. One cannot advise a family to go overland at the present time, because of hostile tribes of Indians in the way, and the unprotected condition of the road. But give us the mail route, let us establish little posts at every ten miles and then the emigration will be safe.

This plea in debate was answered by a 24 to 10 vote in favor of the amendments. The House failed to agree and the matter was considered by a Conference Committee of both

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9. Congressional Globe, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, Appendix, 311.
10. Ibid., 1st Session, Appendix, 317.

houses. The report of this committee was approved by Congress and the Postmaster General was authorized to contract for the conveyance of letter mail from a point on the Mississippi River to San Francisco for six years at a cost not exceeding $300,000 per annum for semi-monthly, $450,000 for weekly, or $600,000 for semi-weekly. The contractors were given the right of preemption to three hundred and twenty acres of any land not then disposed of or reserved, at each point necessary for a station, not to be nearer than ten miles from each other. A time limit of twenty-five days for each trip was prescribed by the act.[11]

The Post Office Department advertised for bids and requested bidders to name the starting point on the Mississippi River and the intermediate points proposed to be embraced in the route. There were nine bids received, and after much consideration the Postmaster General ordered that the proposal of John Butterfield, William G. Fargo, James V. P. Gardner, Marcus L. Kinyon, Alexander Holland, and Hamilton Spencer for a semi-weekly mail at $600,000 per year be accepted. The Post Office Department selected a route which, starting from St. Louis and Memphis, converged at Little Rock,

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11. United States Statutes, 1855-1857, Chapter 96, Law approved March 3, 1857.

then went across Texas to El Paso, and thence to California by way of Yuma. As no bid had been received for this particular route all the bidders agreed that their respective bids might be held and considered as applying to it.

The selection of the southern route was much criticized. The Postmaster General justified his selection in his annual report of December 1857. He indicated that the overland route by way of Salt Lake City was utterly impractical because of the deep snow in winter. A route by Albuquerque was equally inadvisable because of excessive cold. The minimum and maximum temperatures recorded by the War Department at Albuquerque since 1849, with the observations of explorers and travelers, in his opinion proved that climatic conditions were not favorable there.

The scarcity of water was urged as a reason against the southern or El Paso route. The response to this was that there was no route between the Mississippi River and California against which the same objection could not be made. Attention was directed to a statement by Lieutenant Mowry which held that in the country from El Paso to Tucson there was no part of it for a distance of over thirty miles without water. From Tucson to the Gila River, a distance of ninety miles, he stated, there was no water in the dry season. Down the Gila to Fort Yuma, there was plenty of water

and grass. From Fort Yuma to San Diego County the route is heavy with sand, and water is found in but three places at all seasons of the year. In the wet season water is found every few miles.[12] The desirability of the southern course was substantiated by the opinions of Commissioners Emory and Bartlett, Lieutenant Parks, and A. H. Campbell, the head of the Pacific Wagon Road Office of the Interior Department.

The significance of this mail route in the development of the frontier was fully appreciated by Postmaster General Aaron V. Brown who reported:[13]

> As the pioneer route for the first great railroad that may be constructed to the Pacific, the Postmaster General has bestowed upon it all the labor and examination possible. He contends that since the railroads have not concentrated at one point on the Mississippi, this pioneer mail line should point the way by choosing some point west of that river at which the future railroads might concentrate and from which point the line to the Pacific could be projected.... Thus it is that we have found west of the Mississippi what we could not obtain on it - a common concentration of railroads to a single point from which the future railroad may commence, swollen and enlarged in its common stem by the contributions of the railways coming in from every State of the Union.

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12. United States. 35th Congress, 1st Session. Senate. Executive Document, No. 11, 1001.
13. Ibid., 1004.

The military possibilities of the route were indicated in the report. In time of war it would furnish a highway for troops and munitions of war.

The cry of sectionalism was made against the selection of the southern route. A southern course selected by a Postmaster General from Tennessee savored of favoritism to those of this viewpoint. Improved facilities were offered to northern mail lines in the following year to alleviate this discontent.

One of the most arid sections of the route was from Yuma to Carrizo Creek, about one hundred miles through the sand dunes now traversed by highway and railroad. The course at this point turned north, crossing the mountains at Warner's Pass and thence northwest to Los Angeles and then through the San Joaquin Valley to San Francisco. Butterfield and his associates were faced with a tremendous task in preparing the route for use. Wells had to be sunk and reservoirs constructed. Stations were built and equipped. The stations were usually ten to fifteen miles and occasionally twenty to twenty-five miles apart. Relays of teams had to be provided over the longest dry stretches.[14]

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14. H. D. Barrows, "A Two Thousand Mile Stage Drive," Historical Society of Southern California Annual Publications, III (1897), 40-44.

September 15, 1858 was an important day for California and the West. The first mail coaches of the Butterfield line left St. Louis and San Francisco simultaneously on that day. The roar of cannon hailed the arrival of the first stage in San Francisco. An immense meeting was held and enthusiastic speeches were made. A San Francisco newspaper[15] describes the scene of the reception of the mail:

> At a quarter after four o'clock the coach turned from Market into Montgomery Street. The driver blew his horn and cracked his whip, at which the horses, four in number, almost seemed to partake of his enthusiasm, and dashed ahead at a clattering pace, and the dust flew from the glowing wheels. At the same time a shout was raised, that ran with the rapidity of an electric flash along Montgomery Street, which throughout its length was crowded by an excited populace. As the coach dashed along through the crowds, the hats of the spectators were whirled in the air and the hurrah was repeated from a thousand throats, responsive to which the driver, the lion of the occasion, doffed his weather-beaten old slouch, and in uncovered dignity, like the victor of an Olympic race, guided his foaming steeds towards the Post Office.

The first mail in St. Louis was escorted through the street to the post office by a long procession led by brass bands. Butterfield telegraphed the President of the

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15. San Francisco Bulletin, October 16, 1858.

United States: "The overland mail arrived today at St. Louis from San Francisco in twenty-three days and four hours. The stage brought through six passengers."[16] President Buchanan made the following reply:

> I cordially congratulate you upon the result. It is a glorious triumph for civilization and the Union. Settlements will soon follow the course of the road, and the East and West will be bound together by a chain of living Americans which can never be broken.

G. Bailey, a special agent of the Post Office Department, was on the first trip east to St. Louis. His report stated that the trip had been performed within contract time, or twenty-four days eighteen hours and twenty-six minutes. He indicated that the road was stocked with substantially built Concord spring wagons, capable of carrying conveniently four passengers with their baggage, and from five to six hundred pounds of mail.

The magnitude of the difficulties met by the mail were stressed in the Bailey report. He stated:[17]

> The various difficulties of the route, the scant supply of water, the long sandy deserts, the inconvenience of keeping up stations hundreds of

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16. L. R. Hafen, "Butterfield's Overland Mail," California Historical Society Quarterly, III (October 1923), 219.
17. U. S., 35th Congress, 2nd Session. Senate. Executive Document, No. 1, 741.

> miles from the points from which their supplies are furnished; all these, and the many minor obstacles, naturally presented to the successful management of so long a line of stage communication, have been met and overcome by the energy, the enterprise, and the determination of the contractors. Thus far the experiment has proved successful. Whether this success is to be permanent; whether this great artery between the Atlantic and Pacific states is to pulsate regularly and uninterruptedly, does not, however, depend entirely upon the Overland Mail Company. They have conquered the natural difficulties of the route, but they have yet to encounter an enemy with whom they cannot successfully cope unaided. I refer, of course, to the tribes of hostile Indians through whose territory they necessarily pass. Their stations in Arizona are at the mercy of the Apache, and the Comanche may, at his pleasure, bar this passage through Texas.

A memorandum of distances between the stations on the trip from San Francisco to St. Louis was made by Bailey. The route was divided into nine divisions, and Vallecito was in the second division. The stations and distances between each in that division were: Los Angeles to Monte, 13 miles; San Jose, 12; Chino Ranch, 12; Temescal, 20; Laguna Grande, 10; Temecula, 21; Tejungo, 14; Oak Grove, 12; Warner's Ranch, 10; San Felipe, 16; Vallecito, 18; Palm Springs, 9; Carrizo Creek, 9; Indian Wells, 32; Alama Mocho, 24; Cook's Wells, 22; Pilot Knob, 18; Fort Yuma, 10. Seventy-two hours and twenty

minutes was the time required to cover the 282 miles of this division.[18]

An extract from a report made in March 1858, to the Postmaster General by the superintendent of the route from San Antonio to San Diego related that:[19]

> At present we have no good road directly over the coast range of mountains from Lassator's ranch to Vallecito on the desert, but the enterprise of the people of San Diego will secure us one at an early day. When I came over the mountains on my way east, there was a large working party of Indians, under Mr. Lassator, diligently using the means which had been subscribed in the county for a road over the mountains.

The passenger traffic through Vallecito was not heavy, though there were usually passengers on every coach. The continuous riding day and night for twenty-five days was extremely tiring, and passengers often remained at some intermediate station. The through fare from San Francisco eastward was one hundred dollars, later two hundred, and finally, one hundred and fifty dollars. The fare westward from St. Louis or Memphis to San Francisco was two hundred dollars. This rate did not include meals.

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18. U. S., 35th Congress, 2nd Session. Senate. Executive Document No. 1, 742.
19. Ibid., 746.

A San Diego newspaper in response to numerous inquiries recommended the following equipment for travel on overland stages:[20]

> One Sharp's rifle and a hundred cartridges; a Colt's navy revolver and two pound of balls; a knife and a sheath; a pair of thick boots and woolen pants; a half dozen pairs of thick woolen socks; six undershirts; three woolen overshirts; a wide-awake hat; a cheap sack coat; a soldier's overcoat; one pair of blankets in summer and two in winter; a piece of Indian rubber cloth for blankets; a pair of gauntlets, a small bag of needles, pins, a sponge, hair brush, comb, soap, etc., in an oiled silk bag; two pairs of thick drawers, and three or four towels.

The Butterfield Overland Mail soon became the most popular way of sending letter mail to California, and more letters were sent by it than by ocean steamers. In England sealed letter bags were made up regularly for California and British Pacific Coast ports to go overland in the times intervening between the dates of departure of the Panama line of steamers. A schedule of from twenty-one to twenty-three days was maintained in spite of occasional attacks by Comanches and Apaches.

George F. Pierce, Bishop of Georgia, Methodist Episcopal Church South, came to California with his wife

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20. Hayes Collection, [Bancroft Library]. Transcontinental Mails, CIV, 61.

and daughter on the Butterfield stage in 1859. He records his observation of the region in the vicinity of Vallecito thus:[21]

> The Desert is a treeless, herbless, grassless, lifeless waste. The heat would be intolerable, but for the winds which sweep restlessly over its bosom. Sometimes these winds swell to a gale, and there is what is called a storm of sand. The air is dark, the road obliterated. Neither man nor beast can face the tempest. To stop and turn your back is the best one can do. To persevere is to lose your eyes, or be suffocated, or be lost. Providence spared us this trial.
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> We are now in California, but still the soil is poor, timber small and scarce, and the only material change in the scene is, at long intervals a human habitation. To Los Angeles from Fort Yuma is about two hundred miles. On the route are some valuable ranches - immense herds of cattle, horses, sheep, and goats are to be seen now and then. If a man were emigrating from any other State and were not well posted at the outset, on entering this great Pacific State from the East, his courage would fail him, and, like the hunted hare, he would take the back track and carry to his old home an evil report of the modern Ophir. But we are in for it, let us go on. 'It is bad luck to turn back,' so saith the old saw. Well, here is San Felipe, an Indian town, a bold spring, several huts, cabins, and human beings of various colors. And lo! yonder is

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21. G. Smith, "Parson's Progress to California," Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly, XXI (June-September 1939), 73.

> some green grass, let your eyes
> regale themselves while the horses
> are changed. The desert is past,
> the wilderness and the solitary
> place are behind, before us are
> food, water, safety from Indians,
> fields, gardens, vineyards.

In 1861, the Civil War brought an end to stage travel over the southern route. In later years commerce shifted to other paths, and the old road through Vallecito was virtually abandoned. The stage station was deserted and fell into ruin, but around it have grown a series of legends and a folklore which have kept alive the memories of its early days of prosperity.

One of the most picturesque of these tales concerns the tiny graveyard which lies on a little hill to the east of the station. There saint and sinner of years gone by sleep alike in graves marked only by a cross or two. Among the other markers is a beautiful white tombstone inscribed "John Hart, at the age of 30 years in the year 1867." Vandals have splintered the stone with rifle bullets, but its story still lives intact in the world of folklore.

John Hart had become involved in a brawl at Vallecito during pioneer days and was killed. Methods of communication were slow, but word of his death finally reached his mother in the Middle West, who, however, never knew how he died. She purchased out of her meager savings the beautiful

white stone, and it was started on its way West. Gradually it worked its way over the southern route, being carried from outpost to outpost by kindly hands, until it reached Vallecito, where it was set up in the little cemetery.[22]

One of the most tragic stories of the region is that of James Ruler Lassator, the original builder of the stage station. Lassator, whose name is variously spelled "Lassiter" and "Lassitor," was a San Diego County supervisor in 1861. Three years later, while returning to Vallecito from a gold mining venture in Arizona and presumably carrying a large quantity of gold, he was mysteriously murdered.

A first-hand account of the ill luck which seemed to dog both Lassator and his wife and their families for years, has been recently obtained by the restoration group from J. H. Williams. Williams is a son of Mrs. Lassator's daughter, one of Lassator's five stepchildren.

According to Mr. William's account:

> My mother says in her history that on the way back, two men at a hotel or inn told Mr. Lassator they would go with him to California if he would wait until morning. So when they camped they drove clear away from the road to find water, and the two men killed Mr. Lassator, also the man that was with him, also the dog....

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22. "Historic Vallecito to Live Again on Old Pioneer Trail," Butterfield Chronicle, I:1 (December 1934), 8.

Then, he states, when Lassator failed to return home, one of his stepsons, Jon Wesley Mulkins, only 17 at the time, went out into the desert country alone, picked up his stepfather's trail, and followed it to a grim ending.

"He tracked them to the camping place," Williams recounts, "and found their cart and their bones."

A posse is believed to have trailed the two suspected killers into Mexico, where they disappeared. Another version is that young Mulkins sought them for months in the desert country of the southwest and was never able to catch up with them.

There was much sorrow in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Lassator. Her first husband, father of the five Mulkins children, and her mother had both died from drinking water poisoned by Indians, as he and his family were driving to California by covered wagon. Mrs. Mulkins, who later was married to Lassator, took up the reins of their ox team and brought her five children across the desert to California, coming to San Diego.

The ill fortune of the family continued when the first husband of Williams's mother, Cyrus B. Kimball, a storekeeper at Warner's Hot Springs in the early days, was killed by robbers on the Santa Ana river. It struck another time at the descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Lassator when one

of the two children born to them at Vallecito, James Lassator, Jr., was killed in 1896 near Tombstone, Arizona, in a "war" between sheep and cattle ranchers.[23]

Residents of the region relate an interesting legend of Vallecito. They say that oft times during the night, a lady on a snow-white horse comes riding into the lonely valley and searches for some loved one who sleeps there in the silence of the grave.

There is another tale which causes the superstitious to shun the vicinity of the Vallecito stage station upon dark nights: An eastern girl stopped there on her way to join her sweetheart in the gold fields for a wedding that had been delayed for long and lonely months while he came west to "make his stake." She was stricken with some malady there and died. They buried her at Vallecito in a grave now lost and unmarked. And from that day, it is said, the phantom of the tragic girl often wanders mournfully through the valley and in the old adobe, clad in her wedding white.[24]

There are other tales not so well known as that of the ghost bride. Many of these were gathered by the San

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23. Jones, "Vallecito Area Enrapted by Legend's Mystic Veil," Butterfield Chronicle, II:11 (November 1936), 8-12.
24. Ibid., 8.

Diego group which brought about restoration of the stage station. Blood was shed in that vicinity, according to one of these legends, in a Chinese tong war of early days. Avenging hatchet men from the north came down into the desert country to take the life of a fellow countryman who had offended the ancient tong laws. There is a legend of another man for whom searching parties hunted in vain there many years ago. This tale is said to have been revealed by fearful Indians only a few years ago. It concerns a prospector who started out from Vallecito station for Julian one morning to market a heavy find of gold.

The prospector did not reach his destination a search was made for him, but he had disappeared without a trace. Years later the Indians revealed that earlier red men of the neighborhood had murdered the prospector for his gold and had hidden his body. Then fearing discovery, they had buried the gold in an isolated spot in the mountains and never had dared to return to it.[25]

Vallecito stage station welcomes the tourist in the superlative setting of the desert. The beauty of the spot and the significance of the reconstructed building

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25. Jones, "Vallecito Area Enrapted by Legend's Mystic Veil," Butterfield Chronicle, II:11 (November 1936).

have been ably described in the following poem by Christopher

F. Holland, the man who donated the monument to San Diego
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County:

Thou jewel of the desert rare
What secrets are within thy care?
These rugged peaks that o'er thee brood
Guard ever well thy solitude.
Their lofty heights above thee tower
And guide the traveler to thy bower.
Thy beauty is beyond compare,
The depths of thy blue sky so fair.
The stars that crown its dome at night
The pale moon's glow of liquid light,
Thy meadows green, thy cooling shades,
Thy crystal springs and everglades,
Defy the wastes of desert sand
That compass thee on every hand.
No rose e'er bloomed in garden bower
More lovely than thy cactus flower.

A thousand years the Red Man stayed
And built his hut within thy glade,
He flaked his flint by humble toil
And lived in peace upon thy soil.
Then time rolled on, and year by year
There came the hardy pioneer;
Thy bounty ever offered free,
Men came and made their bed with thee.
The man of war then pitched their tent
And made of thee a battlement.
Unfurled their flag in freedom's name,
And let the hills and vales proclaim
The birth of empire proud and great,
Our California's glorious State.
A land of fame, a land of gold,
A land of wealth as yet untold.

But see yon clouds of dust that rise
And trailing sweep toward the skies

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26. C. F. Holland, "Vallecito," Butterfield Chronicle, II:11 (November 1936), 3-4.

We strain our ears, and listening greet
The thundering sound of iron feet,
The crack of whip, the neigh of steed,
The rattling wheels as on they speed.
The creak of brakes as they engage;
They come, it's here! the stage! the stage!
Then years toll by, and day by day
The stage coach stopped upon its way.

Thou desert gem that lies serene
In calm repose 'mid fields of green,
What tales could yonder graves unfold
Of battles fought in days of old,
What scenes of triumph and defeat
Where armed men of bold hearts meet.
Life's tragic drama they had played
Then side by side in peace were laid.
Shall California e'er forget
To thee its long neglected debt.
Proud of thy part in making great
And guarding well the Golden State
In gratitude we now enroll
Thy name on her historic scroll.
This spot in homage most profound
We dedicate as holy ground.

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