

## **“Three Crossings Home Station”**

I have always been fascinated by American icons, and it would be difficult to think of a more iconic figure than the brave and daring Pony Express Rider. The Pony Express represented so many of America’s fundamental visions and ideals. It typified our country’s fascination with news, speed, daring, and manifest destiny.

This box represents my vision of what the interior of the “Three Crossings Station” located on the Sweetwater River in Wyoming may have looked like in 1860. The station got its name because a rider had to ford the Sweetwater River a total of 3 times on his way to the station. This is also the famous station where the legendary William Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, rode out of and where he earned much of his bigger than life reputation. Also, although Wild Bill Hickok did not ride with the Pony Express, he was a good friend of Cody’s and probably also visited the station during 1860/1861.

Although the Pony Express was only in business for eighteen months, (April, 1860 - October, 1861), its impact on our culture and mythology has been huge and everlasting. What young boy, myself included, has ever not imagined himself as one of the Express’s fearless riders.

The Pony Express was made up of approximately 150 stops/stations stretching from St Joseph, MO. to San Francisco. Each of these facilities was manned by a station manager, and each had a corral where the horses were kept. The smaller way stations were located every 7 to 10 plus miles along the trail. These were little more than shacks with a caretaker, a few horses and a corral. On the other hand, the home stations, like the one envisioned in my box, were much more substantial. They were

located approximately every 100 miles. These structures were where the riders would rest, eat and be housed. Many of these home stations also were used by the area's general population for various reasons.

The approximately 200 express riders were all men and generally small, of slight build, young and hardened by their frontier upbringing. The Pony Express recruited and were known to prefer hiring orphans due to the many dangers the riders faced including wild animals, Indians, other "bad guys", harsh weather and varied trail conditions. The riders did not carry any guns which would have added to the weight. They were basically on their own riding at full speed in the frontier with no protection or provisions many miles from any help.

At each way station, the riders would change mounts. They would ride in, dismount, place the leather "Mochila" (a leather type blanket which fit over the specialty made light weight saddle and contained 4 locked pockets where the mail was placed) on the next mount and ride away. This procedure probably took less than a minute to perform. The accurate and beautifully made miniature leather saddle and mochina in the box were made by Deborah Mackie a well known and accomplished miniaturist artisan.

The Pony Express ceased operations in October of 1861. It made 308 complete runs covering over 66,000 miles and delivered 34,753 pieces of mail. Sending a 1/2 ounce letter from St. Joseph to San Francisco took several days and cost \$5 the equivalent of \$170 in today's dollars. The business venture was a total financial disaster. It only achieved 50% of the three founders' usage projections; and, most importantly, the owners

did not account or plan for the technological advances of both rail transportation and the telegraph.

*Robert Off*