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William F. Cody and the Pony Express

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Lead: In the settlement of the West, two institutions are firmly linked in the common memory: the Pony Express and William F. Cody.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: Few characters in the development of the Western United States were as well-known as William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill." His story is shrouded in legend as much as fact. The hero of dime novels and magazines, the subject of rumor, myth

and down right lies, as much as any figure Cody came to symbolize the romance and allure of the West. He served as an Army scout, cowboy, contract hunter for the railroads, gold miner, and then was one of America's foremost showmen.

The Pony Express was actually a very elaborate advertising scheme. William H. Russell, a friend and sometime employer of Cody, was interested in winning the contract for the delivery of mail to California. In the late 1850s overland mail was carried south from Little Rock through Texas to San Diego and then north to San Francisco. It took 25 days. Russell wanted to take it straight across from Missouri to

Denver and then on to California. To prove this central route was both practical and quicker he and his partners developed the Pony Express. It was a highly organized relay of riders on horseback who would move at top speed from one station to the next and cut the time for a letter to ten days. The service was in a race with time anyway as the transcontinental telegraph was nearing completion. This link would render the Pony Express as obsolete.

The first rider left St. Joseph, MO. on April 3, 1860. The telegraph was completed in late October, 1861 and the last run of the Pony Express was just over a month later. The irony was that despite the tremendous interest

generated nationwide, Russell and his collaborators failed to get the overland mail contract, had to close the Pony Express, and went bankrupt. Despite its failure the system was an organizational marvel. It took 190 stations, 500 horses, and 80 riders. One of them was Buffalo Bill. Next time Cody rides the Pony Express.

"A Moment in Time" is produced at the University of Richmond. This is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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Russell, Don. *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.

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New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1981.**

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