

CAMEL EXPRESS

(Continued from Cover)

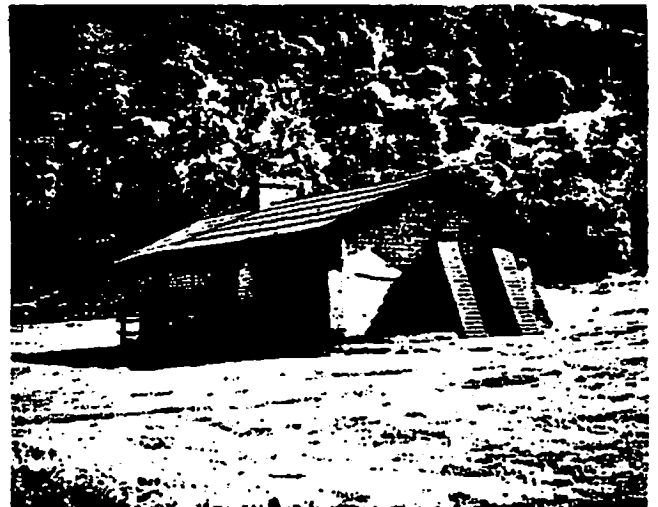


The story behind the founding of the camel express reads like a chapter from the Arabian Nights. During the 1850's travel in the western United States was fraught with danger; not only from roving bands of hostile Indians, but by traveling with exhausted horses and oxen, who often died of thirst, leaving their owners stranded in the desert, hundreds of miles from the nearest settlement.

During those trying years of the winning of the West, some of Washington's brightest minds conceived the idea of using camels to transport mail, supplies and perhaps even passengers, across desert wastelands. Jefferson Davis, then serving as Secretary of War under President Franklin Pierce, was particularly intrigued with the plan. In 1855 he urged Congress to appropriate \$30,000 to import camels from the Near East, along with a few native drivers and necessary equipage. David Porter (later to become the famed Admiral) and Major Henry Wayne headed a delegation to Egypt, where they purchased seventy-eight camels for \$250 each and shipped them to Indianola, Texas in February, 1856.

Twenty-eight of the new arrivals were allotted to Fort Tejon, an Army post located near Bakersfield, California. An ex-naval officer, Edward Fitzgerald Beale, called "a man of unquestionable courage and deep conviction" by one of his contemporaries, was commissioned to lead them overland.

Beale has been compared with General Fremont and Kit Carson as a "pathfinder of the West." Appointed by President Buchanan in 1852 as Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California and Nevada, from 1853 to 1861 he conducted expeditions across the southwest to California, opening up wagon roads in New Mexico, California and Nevada; all arid regions



Two photos taken at Fort Tejon site by Arda Haenszel show (left) ruins of barracks building, and (right) one that's been restored.

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