

Hacks, Drays & Model Ts

Since the origin of trading until the rise of the motor truck, horse-drawn wagons, and the men who drove them were the backbone of wealth and prosperity. The heavy wheeled wagons used were called drays and the firms that used these wagons were dray lines. Hacks carted people around in carriages or surreys (touring carriages with springs at the front and back of the cab for a better ride). The multi-purpose Model T eventually replaced both.

In the early days of Three Forks, a number of dray lines were based here. Martin Larson had the first dray business. His advertisements in the Three Forks Herald told patrons to leave a message at the Milwaukee Hotel (which was near the railroad tracks before it was moved to where the Lewis and Clark Hotel is now). Three hack lines (taxi services) were also in town. Thomas Francis Lane advertised his livery and hack service in the Herald in 1909, operating "two doors south of the Herald" (or where the First Security Bank is now).

Charles Ellison, an early resident, got a view of the dray business from several angles. When he arrived Ellison operated the first cafe in Three Forks, serving meals from a tent, and getting supplies from freighters. Ellison was elected an alderman to the second ward in January 1910, but resigned in May 1910 so he could be appointed Pound Master and Marshall by the City Council in June. It became his duty to enforce the newly enacted ordinance to regulate the speed of autos, horses and other vehicles in the City. (There were only about 14 ordinances on the books when Ellison was hired.) Ellison and Wallace Burrell later ran a dray business for a time.

Lee Henslee built the Henslee Garage and Auditorium in 1912, was a Ford dealer, and at times ran the ambulance, horse-drawn hearse, taxi and drayage. Mert Williams and Leslie West drove Model T taxi for Mr. Henslee, often picking up passengers from the Northern Pacific depot in Old Town and driving them to the Sacajawea Hotel on the north end of town for 25 cents. West later drove a three-seat surrey for J.J. Broderick.

Sherlock Nave started work as a mechanic and taxi driver at the Henslee Garage in about 1916, building on things he learned from his father. Sherlock's father, Errendel F. Nave, was a soldier from Missouri serving in the Confederate Army. Errendel made 22 trips between Missouri and Montana with oxen and wagon. He also operated a freight service between Fort Benton and Bozeman in 1864.

Across the street from Henslee (where M&W Repair is now) was the City Garage and Auto Livery. E.R. Avery purchased it in 1915. Henslee and Avery competed in the business of storing and parking automobiles. Avery also repaired vehicles, sold parts and sold trucks for prices ranging from \$575 to \$2000 in 1915. In 1917, Avery built the Avery Garage, now the Thriftway Conoco. In its early years it was an auto livery and had an elevator that took cars to the second floor for storage! The building was heavily damaged in the 1925 earthquake.

Today's die-hard Chevy or GMC fanatics will find it appropriate that in 1916 Three Forks was a home to the Ford



Hospital, an auto repair and auto livery service.

Others in the dray business:

George Dunkley and Earl LaFever started a new auto service dray and baggage business called the Star Bus and Transfer Line in 1920.

John Watson managed the city dray service and drove school bus for 23 years. The Watsons later purchased the Gambles Hardware store and ran it until 1975.

Today, trucks have taken over the duties of drays. According to the American Trucking Association, trucks haul nearly 70% of the tonnage carried by all modes of freight transportation in the US, nearly 10.7 billion tons of freight in 2005. Imagine the amount of clean-up if horses were still used to haul that much freight!

Photo above courtesy of the Headwaters Heritage Museum
Image below from the H. H. Museum Newspaper Microfilm Archives

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