

“Wanted: YOUNG SKINNY WIRY FELLOWS not over eighteen. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans Preferred.” Inevitably, whenever the Pony Express is spoken of, it is often in glorious praise of those “young wiry fellows.” There is no doubt that these daring riders deserve our admiration, but there are five people who are often left in the shadows—the superintendents responsible for building, stocking, and maintaining stations.

A.E Lewis, Joseph A. Slade, James Bromley, Major Howard Egan, and Bolivar Roberts were the superintendents of the Pony Express route which was split into five separate divisions. Among the superintendents, Major Howard Egan stood out among the rest.

Egan seemed destined to be a part of the Pony Express as 300 miles of his established trail, The Egan Trail, was adopted as part of the Pony Express route. Also, both of Major Howard Egan’s sons, Howard R. Egan and R. Erastus Egan, became riders for the Pony Express. Egan’s family connections along with his experience with pioneering the west and cutting trails made him a perfect fit for a Pony Express Superintendent.

Besides his impeccable background, another attribute setting Major Howard Egan apart from his fellow superintendents was the manner in which he ruled. Egan oversaw the route from Salt Lake City, Utah to Roberts Creek, Nevada, and he cared for his stations and his riders with thoroughness and devout dedication. He successfully maintained every one of his relay and home stations, keeping them stocked with supplies

and food for both the riders and horses. Egan never failed to restore his stations after the destruction of either Indian attacks or Mother Nature.

Egan was in charge of hiring his riders and oversaw them with just authority. He did not use brutality or violence as did Superintendent Joseph Slade, but maintained control by unifying himself with his riders. Egan was so dedicated to the success of his horsemen that he himself rode the first pony express into Salt Lake City.

“The pony on this run was a very swift, fiery and fractious animal. The night was so dark that it was impossible to see the road, and there was a strong wind blowing from the north, carrying a sleet that cut the face while trying to look ahead. But as long as he could hear the pony’s feet pounding the road, he sent him ahead full speed.”

This passage from Egan’s *Pioneering the West* (p. 199) reflects his determination to see through the success of his riders and the success of his division of the Pony Express route.

After the Pony Express ended in November of 1861, Egan stayed as the Superintendent for the Overland Mail Company until 1869. He died nine years later on March 15, 1878.

Although the Pony Express was short-lived, it was wildly successful in efficiently connecting the communication of the East and West, and a major part of that success is due to the unwavering dedication of rider and superintendent, Major Howard Egan.

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