

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *Saint Francis of Assisi* (October 4) by Juseppe (a.k.a. José) de Ribera. It depicts Saint Francis in prayer in the wilderness. On his hands can be seen the Stigmata, the wounds of Christ, which Francis received in 1224. His heavily patched robe is in tatters, indicating the poverty that he voluntarily embraced and required of his followers. In the lower left is another man in prayer, probably Brother Junipero, one of his first and most faithful followers. Francis was born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in Assisi, Italy in about 1181. His father was a wealthy and influential silk merchant, with the preponderance of his wealth coming from his trade with the French. Because of this he renamed his infant son Francesco (“Little Frenchman”). As a young man Francis was being groomed to take over the business. He lived the high life, traveling in elite social circles, dressing lavishly and spending money extravagantly. Even then, however, he was frequently mocked by his friends and scolded by his father for his generous giving to the poor. In 1202 he went on a military expedition to Perugia, where he was captured and spent a year as a prisoner of war. He re-evaluated his life while in prison, but upon his release he returned to his carefree lifestyle. While on his way to Apulia to enlist in the army there, he had a vision and suddenly returned to Assisi. He said that he was destined to marry “a fairer bride than any you have ever seen,” referring to Lady Poverty. Much to the wrath of his father he renounced his inheritance and embraced the life of a beggar. Returning from a pilgrimage to Rome he stopped at the Chapel of St. Damiano, an old run-down church outside Assisi. There he had a vision in which God told him, “Francis, repair my Church, which as you can see is falling into ruins.” He thought he meant the

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church where he was praying, so he sold some of his father's silk and gave the money to the priest. His furious father locked him in a warehouse, but his mother released him and he left Assisi. The story of the rest of his life could fill many books, but he had realized that God's command to repair his Church did not mean St. Damiano's, but the earthly branch of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. He founded the Order of Friars Minor ("Little Brothers"), the Franciscans, which became one of the great monastic orders of the Church.

Juseppe de Ribera (1591-1652, a.k.a. José and Josep) was a Spanish printmaker who painted in the Tenebrist style. Tenebrism (from the Latin *tenebra*, darkness) emphasizes a stark contrast between light and dark colors. Although he was noted even in his own time as a leading Spanish painter, he did most of his work in Italy, where he was known as *Lo Spagnoletto* ("the Little Spaniard"). He was born in Valencia, Spain, where his father was a shoemaker. He was apparently more than a cobbler, however, as he seems to have been quite prosperous. He aimed José toward a career as an educator or intellectual, but early in life his only interest was in art. At the age of 19 he went to Rome, where he was enamored of the work of Caravaggio. Caravaggio had a large following in Rome with whom Ribera associated. His work on a fresco attracted the attention of a cardinal, who became his patron. In 1616 he moved to Naples, which had been ruled for a century by Spain. The Spanish Duke of Osuna sponsored him and arranged many important commissions for him. There he showed strong influence of Guido Reni. The Duke was recalled to Spain in 1620, and for the next several years Ribera did very few paintings, but he produced a number of magnificent prints. His career picked up significantly by the end of the 1620s, and he came to be regarded as the best painter in Naples. In 1644 his health began to fail badly, and he produced very little. In spite of Masaniello's anti-Spanish uprising in Naples in 1648, he never returned to Spain. He died in 1652, deeply in debt.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that creep and crawl and go bump in the night, good Lord deliver us.” This prayer allegedly comes from a 17th century Scottish litany. Unfortunately, no one as yet has found the original, but only references to it, and literary and liturgical critics have little positive to say about its authenticity. Even so, especially with Halloween looming, it is too good to throw away just because it may be “fake news.”

There is a strange quirk in human nature that makes us enjoy being frightened, especially when we know that in reality we are safe. Billions of dollars are spent every year on everything from rubber snakes and horror movies to roller-coasters and bungee-jumping, all in an attempt to frighten ourselves. Some even go so far as to dispense with assured safety, and indulge in such things as sky-diving, cliff-climbing and what are called “extreme” sports. To many, the adrenaline rush seems worth the perceived or even the real danger.

During the Middle Ages people lived in constant real fear of almost everything around them. “Ghoulies and ghosties,” which were very real to them, were among the least of their worries. There was always the threat of disease, starvation, injustice, war, sorcery and witchcraft, and untimely death, and the most terrifying of all was the ever-present threat of being damned to the eternal tortures of Hell. Everyone believed in Hell, and everyone, even the most righteous, believed that the probability of their going there was very high. It can justifiably be said that it was a Hell of a way to live. This was, of course exploited to the hilt by the Church, which had discovered that people who live in fear are much easier to control. Convince the masses that there is something terrible looming and that you are the only one who can save them from it, and you will hold the reins. This, of course, was nothing new. Politicians have been doing it for millennia. FDR, albeit a politician, succinctly warned us that “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

One of the dangers in modern society is that we are going

too far in the other direction. While I certainly do not advocate a return to the mentality of imminent Hell, or of Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," I am concerned that we have very few moral or spiritual fears today. All our fears center on this world, and draw so much of our energy and attention that we fail even to consider the next. We need to return to being God-fearing people. There is no need to fear a loving God in the modern sense of the word fear, but rather in the original sense of holding him in deep and reverent awe. We should fear offending him not because he might "hit back," but we should fear offending him just as we fear hurting someone we deeply love. Do not fear God's punishment, but be very afraid of cutting yourself off from God's love and grace.

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Editor

Public entertainment in ancient Rome was a major industry. This almost exclusively involved chariot racing, which was hands down the most popular sport, with bloody gladiatorial contests, the mass slaughter of condemned criminals and wild animals, and spectacularly staged mock battles running a close second. These were obviously extremely expensive to produce, and were usually underwritten by wealthy aristocrats who were trying to impress the populace in order to gain political advantage. Julius Caesar went millions of sesterces into debt providing free food and entertainment to the masses in order to garner enough votes to be elected Consul in 59 BC (it paid off—he died one of the richest men in Rome). The man who paid for and organized these games was called an *editor*, "one who puts forth," and the result of his efforts was an *editio*, an edition or production. It was not until 1640 that the word came to be used for one who paid for the publication of written matter, and in 1712 that it came to mean the one who prepares the writing.

Richard R. Losch+

The Meaning of “Selah”

The enigmatic word *Selah* (סלה) appears seventy-four times¹ in the Old Testament, and no one knows what it means. It stands by itself, usually at the end of a block of verses. Some have suggested that it is an interjection like *Amen* (truly) or *Hallelujah* (God be praised), but most scholars reject that. The most widely accepted explanation is that it is some kind of musical or liturgical notation. The Psalms were sung in the Temple by a Levitical (priestly) choir. Many Psalms have titles, and in thirty-one of the thirty-nine that contain the word *Selah*, the title contains the word *lamatzach* (למצח), “to the chief musician.” This is strong evidence that it is a musical direction.

Accepting that it is a musical direction, the question arises, what does it direct the singers to do? Most scholars believe that the word derives from the verb *salal* (סלל). This literally means to make light of, but is also used to mean to lift up or raise. Whether it means to raise the pitch or the volume is unknown.

The Septuagint renders *Selah* as *Diapsalma* (Διαψάλμα), Interlude. This could mean an instrumental interlude between the blocks of verses, or it might mean a pause for meditation and reflection. It could be a combination of both. Since Temple worship was in full operation at the time the Septuagint was being translated, we must pay careful attention to this translation. The Alexandrian Scribes who made this translation knew exactly what was done in the Temple in Jerusalem.

In sum, the word is still a mystery. Many translations of the Bible simply leave it there untranslated as *Selah* (King James Version), some footnote it (New International Version), while most just omit it altogether. However it is treated, it should not be allowed to distract you from the beauty of the Psalms.

Richard R. Losch+

“If you find a perfect church, don’t join it. You’ll spoil it.”

– Billy Graham

¹ Seventy-one times in the Psalms, and three times in Habakkuk.

Fast-Food in Pompeii

The fast-food restaurant may be a great idea, but it is not a new one.¹ Most of the poor in ancient Rome did very little cooking in their tiny, overcrowded, unventilated firetrap apartments. They bought most of their meals from street corner fast-food stands called *thermopolia*, most of which sold cheap (and probably not very appetizing) stews, pottages and soups from rows of heated pots like modern steam tables. These rarely contained any meat, but were concoctions of grain (usually barley or rye), beans and sundry other vegetables. You provided your own bowl, and for a couple of *denarii* you could get enough food to take back to your family to sustain them for another day. There were also more expensive upscale vendors who offered more appealing fare, including hearty meat or fish stews, but these were well beyond the means of the poor. The clientele of these places would be the better-off middle classes. Even these, however, were take-out restaurants. Genteel Romans reclined to eat, they did not sit down, so they would take the food back to their homes to eat it there. The rich, of course, had their own slaves to prepare and serve their food at home.² Many of these *thermopolia* were more like snack bars, where passers-by might purchase a piece of bread with a dab of meat, or perhaps a small bowl of a savory stew, along with a cup of wine. They were rather like modern street vendors who offer a hotdog or a soft pretzel with a can of soda. These, of course, were usually far more expensive than the very poor, who represented at least 80% of the population, could afford.

¹ The first fast food restaurant in America was the Automat, which opened in New York City in 1921.

² By the 1st century BC slaves were so plentiful that often even lower-class Romans might own one or two, while the very rich could own hundreds. The Senate proposed a law requiring that all slaves wear a uniform of some sort so they could be easily identified. They withdrew the bill, however, when they realized that if the slaves knew how numerous they were (they may have actually outnumbered the freemen), they might revolt. There were, in fact, three major slave revolts, including that under Spartacus.

Most Roman cities had such vendors, and Pompeii was no exception. Pompeii, on the other hand, was a prosperous sea-port on the beautiful Bay of Naples, where the percentage of the very poor was much smaller than in Rome. To the general population, most of Pompeii's eighty *thermopolia* were more of a convenience than a necessity. On the average, therefore, the quality of their food was higher than in Rome, and for the most part they served more as snack-bars or quick lunch stops than as primary sources of meals. As well as a port and industrial city, Pompeii was a seaside resort where many rich Romans had summer homes.¹ Even the rich may well have stopped at some of these places for a snack as they were perusing the shops in town.



Pompeian Thermopolium

The Pompeian Archaeological Authority recently announced the full excavation of a remarkably well-preserved *thermapolium*. Its primary decoration is a Nereid (sea nymph) astride a seahorse. This seems to be its logo, as the same design is found on two pottery *amphorae* (two-handled wine jars). It seems that meat, at least fowl, was served there. On the base of one section are pictures of ducks and a rooster, and in one of the *dolia* (serving pots) still imbedded in the counter there are duck bones. Other jars contain evidence of goat, fish, pork and snails. One of the wine jars contains crushed beans, probably used to bleach and enhance the flavor of the wine.

Another important find on the site was the skeleton of a dog. Although dogs were common in ancient Rome, this one was remarkable. It was fully adult, yet stood only 8-10" high at the shoulder. This is the earliest evidence of ancient Romans practicing "extreme breeding," the breeding of dogs that could have served no other purpose but as pets.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Rome at its best was a noisy, filthy and stinking city, and in the summer the stench became almost unbearable. Romans who could afford to do so left during the summer months for their country estates or seaside villas.

What's in a Name?

In the 16th century a new wave of humanism burst forth in Germany, and with it came a reawakening of fascination with ancient Graeco-Roman culture. It became all the rage among intellectual humanists, particularly in the universities, to Latinize and in some cases Graecize their names. Basically, it was an arrogant declaration of “Notice how intellectual I am.” One of Martin Luther’s main disciples, Philip Schwartzertd (“Blackearth”) became Philip Melancthon. The famous naturalist Georg Bauer (“Farmer”) became Georgius Agricola. The noted pencil-making family Schmidt (“Maker”) became Faber, and are still remembered today as the founders of the pencil-makers Eberhard-Faber. The map-maker Gerhardt Kremer (“Shopkeeper”) became Gerhardt Mercator, and the map style that he developed is to this day known as a Mercator map.

Probably the most widely recognized of these names today is that of a young intellectual named Joachim Neumann (“New Man”), who became Joachim Neander. He is not noted for anything special, but his grandson of the same name became a famous theologian and hymn-writer in the Reformed (Calvinist) Church in Düsseldorf. His hymns were extremely popular throughout the Protestant and Anglican churches.¹ He loved nature, and frequently held services in the beautiful limestone Düssel River valley just outside the city. He wrote many of his finest hymns while hiking there. Because of that they named the valley after him. They called it Neander’s Dale, which in German is Neanderthal. Two centuries later an excavation in the valley uncovered the bones of a previously unknown species of prehistoric human,² and the rest is history.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The most beloved of all of his more than 60 hymns is “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation.” This is #390 in our Hymnal 1982, which also contains his “All my hope on God is founded” (#665).

² Anthropologists disagree as to whether Neanderthal Man is a species (*H. neanderthalensis*) or a subspecies (*H. sapiens neanderthalensis*).

Jesus' Real Name

It is pointless to ask what someone's "real" name is, because we cannot define what real means in that context. It all depends on who is using the name, where, and when. A man we call John could also be Jean, Juan, João, Johann, Yohanen (יִיְהוֹנָן), Ioanne (Ἰωάννης), Johannes, Sean, or many others, including nicknames like Jack or Hans. So it is with the name Jesus. If you were to go back to Galilee 2000 years and ask the apostle James (who would not recognize that name) where you could find Jesus, he would probably ask, "Who is that?"

In Jesus' time most men were known by their given name and either the name of their father or their place of origin. The man we call Jesus would have called himself Yeshua (ישוע). As this was a common name, he also would have been identified as Yeshua bar Yosef¹ (ישוע בר יוסף, Jesus son of Joseph) or Yeshua Minazreth (ישוע מנצרת, Jesus of Nazareth). We hear the name Yeshua often today because of the large number of Messianic Jews. These are Jews who accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, although not all accept him as divine. They usually call him Yeshua rather than Jesus. In the Old Testament it is usually translated Joshua, and in Maccabees it is Jason.

How, then, did the name Yeshua become Jesus? The New Testament was written in Greek, and that presented a problem. There is no letter Y and no *sh* sound in Greek,² so the best they could come up with was *Iesua*. Greek nouns require a case ending. Since *-a* is feminine, the most appropriate one here was

¹ Jesus' primary language was Aramaic, not Hebrew. In Hebrew it would be *ben-Yosef*. Both were Semitic languages written with the same alphabet, but they were quite different in many ways. Linguists have suggested that they are about as similar as Latin and Italian. Someone who spoke only one of them could probably figure out what was said in the other, but it would have been a struggle. All educated Jews would also have known Hebrew, which was the language of most of their Scriptures.

² The Greek uppercase letter that looks like our Y is actually closer to a U. I had a Greek professor who said that the Greeks considered the *sh* sound to be vulgar, and as barbarian as wearing trousers.

the masculine *-ous*. This gave them *Iesous* (Ἰησους), pronounced *yáy-soos*. When this was translated into Latin the Latin case ending replaced the Greek, producing *Iesus* (also pronounced *yáy-soos*). In Late Antiquity, when manuscripts began to be so beautifully illuminated, the initial I was often given a flourish that made it look like a J, but it was still pronounced like I or Y. There was no J sound, but when this sound first appeared in the Middle Ages the flourished I (J) began occasionally to be pronounced like our modern J.¹ The name Yeshua had finally completed its transformation to Jesus.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

The Vikings were arguably the best sailors in the world since the Phoenicians. They ruled the northern seas from Scandinavia to the shores of North America for over three centuries in the early Middle Ages. Their ships were sturdy and very seaworthy, and always had about the same design. The rudder was on the right side of the ship near the stern. Although they usually landed by beaching their ships, they occasionally came into a port and tied up to a dock or a rock mooring. They always came into port with the mooring to their left to avoid damaging the rudder, which they called the steering board or *star bord*, on the right. To this day sailors use these Viking terms. On a ship, the port side is left, and the starboard side is right.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last eight years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a *.pdf* file.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Most European languages still pronounce J like Y. In Spanish it is pronounced like H (the Spanish H is silent), and in French and Portuguese it is pronounced like the English J, only a bit softer.

Priest, Levite and Samaritan

Almost everyone, even most non-believers, knows the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30ff). It has become so ingrained into our culture that it is considered a compliment to call someone who has gone out of his way to be helpful a Good Samaritan. We have “good Samaritan” laws protecting helpers from lawsuits, and Franklin Graham’s ministry to the sick and suffering is known as Samaritan’s Purse. As familiar as this story is, however, there are some important subtleties that most people miss when they hear it. Ask most people to tell the story, and they will tell you that a man was robbed by bandits, stripped, beaten and left for dead by the side of the road. Two important but selfish men saw him and ignored him, walking by on the other side of the road. Finally a good Samaritan came by and helped him, took him to an inn, and paid for his care. It is pretty clear, they will tell you, that this is the way Jesus expects us to behave. Unfortunately, it is not that simple.

The road itself is important, as it was the road to Jericho. Jericho was a major commercial and religious center, and it was also a popular resort for the rich. The only way to it from the Jerusalem area was a long and lonely road through wilderness,¹ and it was a perfect place for bandits to hide in waiting for lone travelers. Most people, when they traveled it, were accompanied by a retinue of some sort. It was a dangerous place, and it was wise to pass over it as quickly as possible.

We have a positive association with the word Samaritan, but with the Jews in Jesus’ time it was quite the opposite, and their history makes it clear why. One of the reasons that Solomon’s United Monarch of Israel broke apart after his death was that there was a major religious difference between the ten northern tribes and the two southern tribes of Judah and

¹ The wilderness where Jesus was tempted by Satan after his baptism (Matt. 4:1ff) was almost certainly a large desert hill alongside that road, from the top of which one has a clear view of Jericho in the valley below. When Satan took him to the top of the mountain showed him “all the kingdoms of the world” it is likely that what he showed him was Jericho.

Benjamin, who were solidly monotheistic. They believed that while there might be other gods beside Yahweh, he and only he was to be worshiped, and all other gods must be scorned and totally ignored.¹ The northern tribes, on the other hand, believed that while Yahweh was to be worshiped as the chief and highest God, it was also acceptable to worship other gods as long as they were treated as totally subservient to Yahweh. Under David and Solomon this was not allowed, but after the division of the United Monarchy into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the practice re-emerged in Israel. This is why it was so easy for Jezebel to introduce the worship of Baal into Israel.

When the Assyrians conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel in 723 BC they did not exile all the people, but only the leaders, the intelligentsia, and the socio-economic elite. These they dispersed throughout their kingdom, giving them reasonably good lives in the hope that they would absorb into the culture along with their own talents and abilities. That they did, to the point that they eventually disappeared from history altogether. The Assyrians left the common people behind in the belief that without leadership they were no danger. The region that was once Israel came to be known as Samaria, after its capital, and its inhabitants were called Samaritans. The religion they practiced honored only the Torah, the first five books of what we call the Old Testament, and they rejected all the other books that were considered sacred Scripture in the southern kingdom of Judah. These included the Prophets, the histories and the Wisdom Literature. Instead of honoring the Temple at Jerusalem, they built their own temple on their holy mountain, Mount Gerizim in Samaria. In 587 BC the Babylonians conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and exiled the elite to Babylon just as the Assyrians had done to Israel two hundred years earlier. About 50 years later in 539 BC, the

¹ Pure monotheism, the belief that Yahweh is the only God who exists, did not become firm among the Israelites until much later. It was not until then that a religion that could properly be called Judaism (the religion of Judah) can be said to have arisen.

Persians conquered Babylon and allowed the exiles to return to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, and even helped them to do so.¹ The scribe/priest Ezra, with the support of the Persian governor Nehemiah (who was a Judean who had risen to high office in Persia), established a major religious reform that included strict rules of racial purity and religious observance. The Samaritans wanted to be a part of this, but they refused to comply with the rules of the new faith, which included accepting the Temple in Jerusalem as the only center of the religion. They denounced the Judeans and their reforms, and from that time on the Jews² considered the Samaritans as schismatics and heretics, and rejected them as equivalent to Gentiles (non-Jews). This remained so for about 400 years until about 113 BC, when John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean (Maccabean) king of Judea conquered Samaria and tried unsuccessfully to force them to convert to orthodox Judaism. He destroyed their temple on Mount Gerizim, thus increasing their hatred of the Jews. He established colonies of Judeans in the eastern and northern regions around the Sea of Galilee, and thus planted many faithful Jews in the region. These were the Galilean Jews, of whom Jesus and most of the Apostles were descendants. The Judeans considered them “yokels,” but nonetheless respected them as Jews (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”). For Galileans to go to Jerusalem they had to pass through Samaria, which they considered alien territory, and where they were not at all welcome. As we can see, then, when Jesus told the parable and mentioned the Samaritan, we can imagine the double-take of his listeners—a Samaritan as the

¹ This was not out of the goodness of their hearts. They saw the wisdom of having a strong but grateful vassal kingdom on their western frontier. It was a good move. Judah was indeed grateful, and remained loyal to Persia until it fell to Alexander the Great in 334 BC. To this day Cyrus the Great of Persia is honored in Jewish tradition as an agent of God.

² Although the term Jew is generally used more liberally, this is the first time that it is technically correct to use it. The word Jew comes from the word Judah or Judea (as Judah was called after the Exile), and it means a follower of this reformed Israelite religion, that of Judea, called Judaism.

hero? That was a surprise.

What would not have been a surprise to his listeners, but might be to us, is that they would have fully understood the Priest and the Levite passing by the victim. They were just obeying the law! They were actually both Priests. All priests were Levites, and all male Levites who were not physically maimed were Priests. Many functioned as Priests only at certain times of the year, and when they were not on duty they were often called Levites instead of Priests. Of all the ritual defilements that could make a Jew “unclean,” one of the most serious was touching a corpse. The Torah makes it very clear that under no circumstances is a Priest ever to touch or even approach a corpse. The only exception was if it were a member of his immediate family, and even then the process of being purified and becoming ritually clean again was extremely long and complicated. He could not enter the Temple or come into contact with any other person until it was completed. Therefore, when the Priest and Levite saw what they thought was a corpse on the side of the road, the expected thing would be for them to move to the other side as far away as possible and get away from there as quickly as they could. Their sin was not in avoiding him, but in failing to send one of their retinue over at least to get a closer look and try to determine if the man was really dead (as Priests they would almost definitely not have been alone on that dangerous road).

We can see, then, that this parable is not about “bad guys and good guys,” and it is not about the noble savage who in the end rises above his base nature and does what is right and good. It is a simple story about caring about someone else’s need regardless of who it is, and it leaves us to contemplate what we would have done in the same situation.

Richard R. Losch+

The holes or “eyes” in Swiss Cheese are carbon dioxide bubbles formed by a bacterium called propionibacterium freudenrichii shermanii, or p. shermanii for short. We knew you would sleep better knowing that.

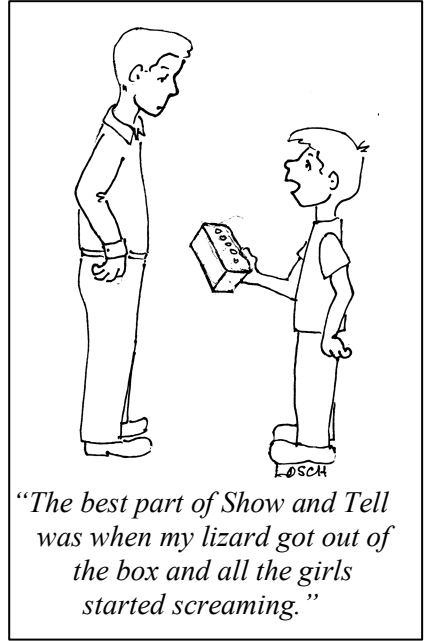
A Touch of Trivia

The Pony Express lasted only 18 months, from April 1860 to October 1861. It may have seemed like a romantic and exciting adventure, but in fact it was a very dangerous job. Not only did it require long hard riding under grueling conditions, but the riders were in constant peril from Indians and bandits. An advertisement for riders read, "Wanted: Young, wiry fellows not over 18, must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred." The pay was great, but the survival rate of the riders was not.

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JAMIE

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