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Man, 87, Settles Dispute on First Pony Express Rider

William B. (Billy) Richardson, Living at Transit House, Says He Carried Mail Pouch on His Pony From Barn to Ferry and Gave It to Johnny Frye—Elderly Man's Part Was "Just a Joke."

Identification of Johnny Frye, youthful frontiersman, as the first Pony Express relay rider out of St. Joseph for Sacramento, Cal., was established with apparent finality last night by William B. (Billy) Richardson, eighty-seven-year-old resident of the Transit House, who had been named himself as the first rider in a historical controversy that has raged for a quarter of a century.

Breaking a silence he had kept on his participation in the start of the express April 3, 1860, Richardson declared that the first mail pouch had been thrown over his Indian pony at the express barn, and that he had galloped with it to the Missouri River ferry, where he gave it to Frye, who crossed the river and set out on the first relay.

"I was just nosing around at the Pony Express barn, like a boy will do, when the express was getting ready to start," said Richardson. "I had a nice little Indian pony. You could buy one for about a dollar in those days.

"When the cannon was fired to signal the start of the express, Paul Coburn, an agent for the express company, threw the mail on my pony just for a joke," Richardson smiled. "Coburn was a half-brother of mine.

"I rode with it down to the river and gave it to Frye," asserted Richardson. "He was the first rider. All this about me being the first rider is bunk, junk and rubbish."

Thinks Frye Rode With Him.

Richardson said he believed Frye rode with him from the barn down to the river along with others who joined in the dash to the ferryboat, which was moored somewhere between Felix and Mainie streets.

"I can't be certain about how

many rode the river," Richardson asserted. "There was such a slough of people at the start. After all, I was only a boy, about ten years old. I think me and Frye started off together."

Asked if he knew Frye personally before he gave him the saddlebag containing the mail, Richardson replied: "I knew Frye around the barn. They always called him Johnny Frye. That's all I knew about him. He is the one I gave the mail to."

All Boys Could Ride Then.

"Was Frye an excellent horseman?" Richardson was asked.

"I don't know that he was," he smiled in reply. "All boys could ride then. It's not like it is now. Boys nowadays can't ride in a box car with all the doors closed."

Gray-haired and with a neatly clipped mustache, Richardson was dressed last night in a stylish gray suit and carried a cane. He said he had lived at the Transit House since last August.

Shunning notoriety over his connection with the Pony Express start, Richardson said he had told some friends about his participation, but never had made it generally known.

"I would give \$2.50 right now not to have anything said in the papers about this," he asserted.

Ran Away From School.

Richardson, an inspector at the

cattle scales for the St. Joseph Live Stock Exchange from 1922 to 1930, has lived most of his life in St. Joseph, where he was born Oct. 31, 1859.

He said that his mother died when he was a baby, and that his father, John Richardson, was a contractor and bricklayer. He said he was raised by Mrs. Clara Patchen at Sixth and Sylvania streets.

"When I was about twelve years old I was sent to St. Benedict's College," he said. "I ran away from there and came back to St. Joseph. Then they sent me to Christian Brothers College in St. Louis. That was too far away from here to run away, so I stayed there."

Lived at Maryville.

Richardson said he came back here from school about 1886 and went to Colorado for a short time. Returning here he went to Maryville with a "couple of trotters" and helped establish the Highland Park stock farm east of Maryville.

On coming back to St. Joseph he said he worked in the stock yards, later becoming a cattle trader. He also was employed by a live stock commission organization before being employed by the St. Joseph Live Stock Exchange.

Richardson said he has a daughter, Mrs. O. W. Stinson of Springfield, Mo., with whom he had visited for several months prior to making his residence at the Transit House.