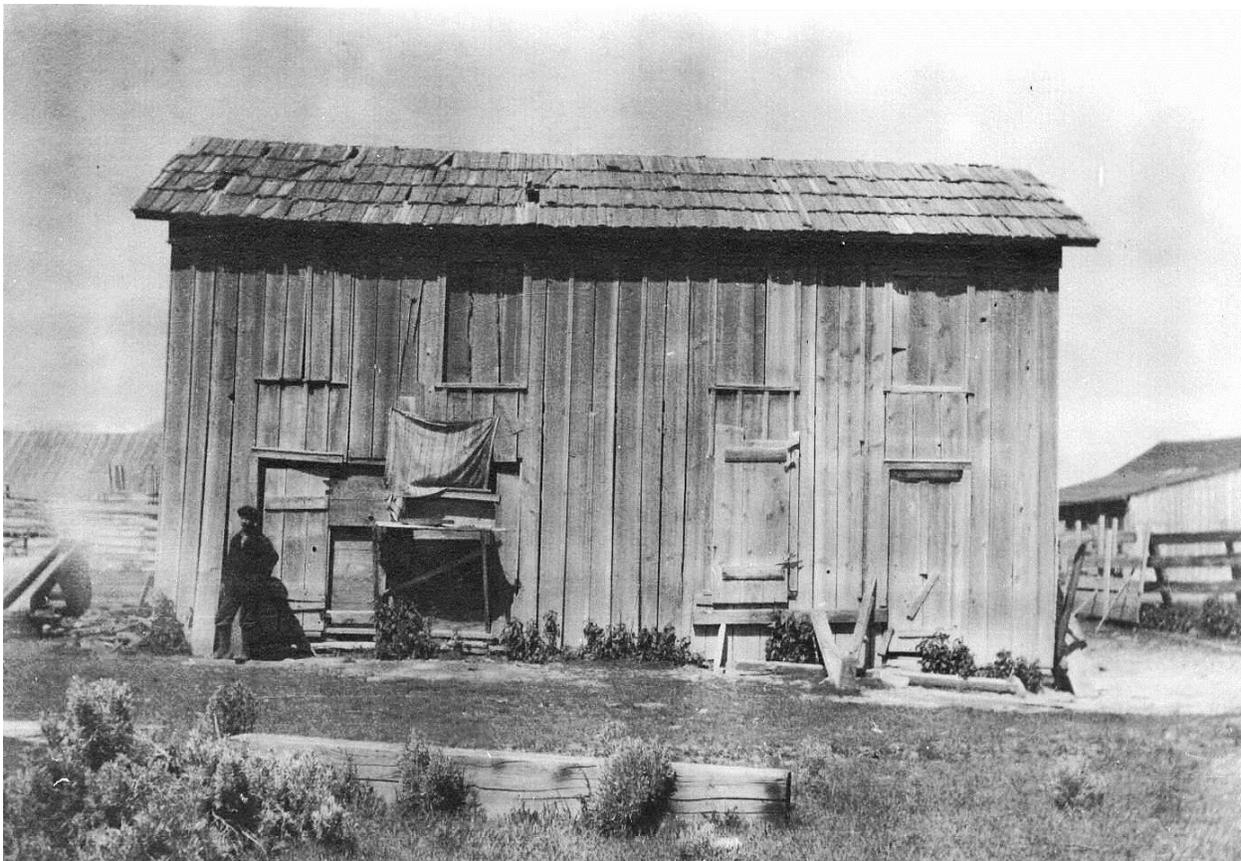


Slough House Stage Stop

by
Gary Dielman

The Slough House stage stop, also known as Jenkins Station, was a fixture on the route between Baker City and La Grande during the years before the automobile became the dominant mode of travel. In those pre-motorized days, the stage stop or stage station was the equivalent of today's service station. Since horses could pull conveyances like stage coaches, wagons, and buckboards only a limited distance without rest, stage stops were located at intervals of every ten to twenty miles. At the stage stops, the horses could be exchanged for a fresh team, or animals and passengers could be watered, fed, and rested before continuing down the road.

Between Baker City and La Grande, there were three stage stops. The closest was Slough House about eight miles north of Baker City. Another was called Fifteen-mile Station located at Clover Creek north of North Powder. And a third stop was found on Ladd Creek at the southern edge of Grande Ronde Valley near the site of today's I-84 rest area.



Slough House Stage Stop north of Baker City

Retired rancher Fred Warner, on whose property Slough House used to stand, says his great-great-grandfather William H. Jenkins built Slough House in about 1865 on Clark's

Slough, a southern branch of Baldock Slough. His family acquired the property in 1959 from Walter "Bud" Colton. Other owners were the Evans family for a while and before that Sylvester Grier, who for many years owned the stable on Main Street in Baker City where Hotel Baker stands today.

In 1982 I interviewed the late Brent Perkins, Sr., who was 78 years old at the time and had lived his whole life in the area. Perkins' father, Gustavus Perkins, bought the land just south of Slough House in 1906. Perkins said Slough House was torn down by Bud Colton in the 1930's.

Remnants of the stone foundation of Slough House can still be seen today. Drive north on Cedar St. and continue on Frontage Road for about a mile and a half after crossing Chandler Lane. An old barn is on the west side of the road and nearby on the east side of the road north of a trailer house is an east-west fence line. Slough House was located in the southwest corner of the field bordered on the south by the fence and on the west by Frontage Road.

Old maps show that Slough House was located on the west side of what was called the Road to Auburn, which later became the Missouri Flat Road, and is now I-84. An 1898 surveyor's map shows a spur road to Slough House angling north off the Road to Auburn. The old maps also show that a southern branch of the Baldock Slough flowed just north of Slough House. Warner says that the slough, which he calls Clark's Slough, still runs water during heavy rains, spring runoff, and irrigation season. If you have ever flown over the area north and west of the airport, you know that it is covered with snake-like old slough channels, some still containing water today, but many are long dry due to agricultural development.

Slough House was a rectangular, two-story building about 24 feet wide and 30 feet long. The photograph accompanying this article shows the building's south side. An unknown person wrote in pencil on the back of the photograph, "The Old Slough House, or Jenkins Station, was built by Hiram Jenkins in 1864 or 1865." The handwritten note also says that the building was located on the Hinkler Slough, named for a German geologist Chris Hinkler who came through the area in about 1858. A final bit of information says that the photograph was taken in 1936 just three months before Slough House was torn down.

Brent Perkins, Sr., said that as best he can remember the building had an outside stairway and was never painted. Slough House had ceased operation as a stage stop by the time he was old enough to remember it. He was told that the ground floor was used for meals and the upper floor for sleeping quarters for travelers. As a child, Perkins used to play in the building, which was used as a horse barn by the Evans family.

One story Perkins heard about Slough House was that a family of three, a married couple and daughter, camped overnight near Slough House. During the night Indians came and killed all of them. Their bodies were buried southeast of Slough House.

But Jenkins Slough House was apparently not the first or only Slough House stage stop north of Baker City. In the 1904 issue of the Baker City High School Nugget, students gave a short history of another Slough House "built on the Old Emigrant road in 1864 by a man named Ward," who, they said, was one of two survivors of the Malheur Massacre near Vale. Its tenure as a stage stop was cut short, however, when William Jenkins built a competing stop which "drove the Slough House out of existence."

The students described the Ward Slough House as being "a large, rickety building" with "a large slough running beside it." They said that a "swing team" ran between Baker City and Slough House, coming out in the morning and returning in the afternoon. According to the students, the first horse race in Baker Valley took place at Slough House. "Now," the students wrote, "it is almost ready to crumble to the ground."

A government surveyor's map produced in 1864, plus an interview I had with the late Charlie Colton in 1982, may support the existence of Ward's Slough House. The 1864 map shows a building at the point where the Old Emigrant Road, now called the Oregon Trail, crossed Baldock Slough about a mile north of Jenkins Slough House. Sylvester Grier settled at this spot early in the history of Baker County. Today the land belongs to the Colton Family. Charlie Colton, who preserved a short stretch of Oregon Trail ruts just north of his house, told me that there was a stopping place at the Baldock Slough which his father had torn down.

Historical research is a never-ending process. Back in 1982, I started out to explore the story of a stage stop on the Old Oregon Trail north of Baker City. In 1999, I end up with a story of two stage stops located within a mile of each other, another piece of the jigsaw puzzle of Baker County history.

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