PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-61

The Plainwell stagecoach photograph: Grand Rapids Public Library negative 1896, its earliest printing yet found, 1969, and the unsourced "last stage" of 22 October 1869

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SUMMARY

A photograph of a crowded four-horse coach before a clapboard building at Plainwell, Michigan, circulates as "the last stage coach trip from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids," 22 October 1869. Its negative is in the Grand Rapids Public Library (Coll. 33-10-24, Neg. 1896), catalogued with a supplied title as a Concord coach with "those on top of the coach in Civil War uniforms." The earliest printing yet found is in the village's centennial book, *Plainwell, 1869 to 1969: The First Hundred Years* (1969), which shows the same scene, down to the cut-off sign "STOV" at the right, captioned as Patterson, Glynn & Lyon's stagecoach "in front of THE PLAINWELL HOUSE ... in 1859." The library has also dated the picture 1865. No source of the period or since gives 22 October 1869 or names a last coach on any day.

THE RECORD

1. **“Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo Stagecoach” (title by cataloger), Grand Rapids Public Library, History & Special Collections, Archives, Coll. #33-10-24, Neg.# 1896, location Plainwell, Mich.**

   > *“Four horses pull the stagecoach loaded with passengers, those on top of the coach in Civil War uniforms. Note ‘Kalamazoo’ printed above the door of the coach, and the larger wheels at the rear. The coach is the type known as the Concord coach.”*

   Grand Rapids Public Library · See the record (https://www.historygrandrapids.org/photo/1523/grand-rapids-to-kalamazoo-stag)

2. **Centennial Book Committee, *Plainwell, 1869 to 1969: The First Hundred Years* (Plainwell, 1969), photograph caption, p. 11 (Internet Archive index)**

   > *“Patterson, Glynn & Lyon’s Stagecoach in front of THE PLAINWELL HOUSE, unloading passengers at the ‘Junction’ for the Allegan turn-off on the Plank Road in 1859. THE PLAINWELL HOUSE was located on the northwest corner of Main and Allegan Streets.”*

   Allen County Public Library, via the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/plainwell1869to1002/page/n10/mode/1up)

3. **Crisfield Johnson, *History of Allegan and Barry Counties, Michigan* (Philadelphia, 1880), p. 293**

   > *“After the plank-road and the success attending Patterson, Glenn & Lyon’s line of stage-coaches, the next impetus given the village was the organization of the Plainwell Water-Power Company.”*

   Cornell University Library, via the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/cu31924032193587)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The circulating picture is tied to its negative and to a printing of 1969, and its four dates (1859, 1865, the Civil War years, 22 October 1869) are set side by side. The 1869 "last stage" date is shown to have no source in the county histories, the centennial book, the National Register study of Plainwell or the libraries' records.

LIMITS

The match of the 1969 halftone to the library's negative rests on the published images and descriptions; the library's print was not examined. The book and the library give no basis for their years, and the cataloguer's "Civil War uniforms" is a reading of the clothes.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The library's photo and Michigan Memories records; the centennial book (page image); the histories of Allegan and Barry (1880), Kalamazoo (1880, 1906) and Grand Rapids (Baxter 1891, Etten 1926); *Historic Michigan*, vol. III; the National Register study of Plainwell (1990); the Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids libraries' local-history pages; Michigan railroad timelines, 1868–1870; web searches for the caption's wording.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Lynne B. Weir and Mary Grace York, *Historic Resources of Plainwell, Michigan*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (1990). https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/6af1658f-5a3b-4ce3-a968-3a8107a1965d

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The stagecoach at the Junction (projectscroll.com/news/the-last-stage-to-grand-rapids/). In the discoveries register:

- `plainwell-stagecoach-1969` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#plainwell-stagecoach-1969)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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