

**Podcast:** The Pig War and Pelican Girls Companion Podcast  
**Episode:** 04  
**Title:** Stagecoach Mary Fields  
**Written / Produced by** Author Joe Cuhaj  
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**Breaks:** No breaks

*[Calamity Jane clip]*

While the 1953 movie, “Calamity Jane,” starring Doris Day is a great movie, it is a far cry from the actual real life story of the men who transported and protected mail and passengers through the rugged and dangerous wild west of the 1800s. But there was actually one woman, an African American woman, no less, who once held the job. She was described as being a fearless, hard-drinking, quick-shooting woman with a wicked temper, the perfect combination to protect the U.S. Mail.

*[Stagecoach Mary name clip]*

Welcome to “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls: Forgotten Stories from American History.” I’m Joe Cuhaj.

This series is a companion podcast to my latest Prometheus book, “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls,” which recalls long forgotten tales of American history.

*[Theme fade]*

Mary Fields was born into slavery somewhere around 1832. Nobody is sure exactly where she was born, but historians believe it was in Hickman County, Tennessee.

After Mary gained her freedom following the Civil War, like many former slaves, she migrated north, travelling up the Mississippi River on riverboats where she took odd jobs along the way.

When she arrived in Ohio, her life took an unexpected turn – she discovered the Ursuline Convent of the Sacred Heart in Toledo. Here, among the quiet and disciplined nuns, she became the convent’s groundskeeper. Her volatile temper, hard-drinking, and penchant for cursing was a bit unnerving for many of the nuns at the convent with one of the sisters saying, “God help anyone who walked onto a lawn that Mary had just finished cutting.”

Her time at the convent was short, and ended when she had a “disagreement” over her wages. She did have one friend there, the convent’s Mother Superior, Mother Amadeus Dunne.

*[1940s Montana Travelog Clip]*

In 1884, Dunne was called by her Bishop to open a new convent in Cascade, Montana, and Mary joined her friend on the trip out west and began working at the new convent. Once again, Mary’s drinking and smoking habits, shooting guns, and wearing men’s clothing were her downfall. The final straw came when Mary had a run-in with the convent’s janitor and guns were drawn.

At this point, Mary began taking up odd jobs in cascade including establishing a couple of eateries and taking in laundry, but her reputation proceeded her and she became well-known across the region for her drinking and gunfights, a trait that was in demand with the U.S. Postal Service.

In her early 60s, Mary applied to become a Star Route Carrier for the post office as researcher Becky Stone explains.

*[Star Carrier clip]*

Mary was awarded the contract with the help of the convent’s nuns who gave her a glowing recommendation, making her the first African American woman and only the second woman to become a Star Route Carrier.

The highly coveted job was a dangerous one. Mary was tasked with protecting the U.S. Mail from bandits and thieves. But her nickname is a misnomer. She never drove actually drove a stagecoach as actress Rosieleetta “Lee” Reed explains during her portrayal of Mary at the Allen Texas Public Library.

*[Buckboard clip]*

Armed with rifles and revolvers, Mary would pick up the mail, load up the buckboard, then race across the vast American west fending off attacks by marauders, bandits, and wolves. She braved fierce thunderstorms, frigid temperatures, and almost impassable snow and ice to get the mail to its destination.

*[Accident clip]*

Mary was an intimidating figure, to say the least, but underneath it all, she was a gentle, kind, and generous person who was especially loved by children. The residents of her adopted home town, Cascade, Montana, loved Mary and made her feel quite welcome after she retired from the carrier route in 1903. She was so popular that she was offered free meals and drinks at local eateries and bars.

*[Theme up and under]*

Mary passed away in 1914. The people of Cascade, Montana, joined together and raised enough money so that Mary could be buried in a roadside cemetery that she used to race past on her buckboard to make her deliveries. She was no Doris Day “Calamity Jane,” but a real hero of the American west and the U.S. postal service.

I’m Joe Cuhaj and thank you for joining me for “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls,” a companion podcast to my latest Prometheus book of the same name that recalls long forgotten tales of American history, available at your favorite local and online book store.

My thanks go out to Allen Texas Public Library, actress Rosieleetta “Lee” Reed, researcher Becky Stone, and the Greenville County South Carolina Public Library and the Chautauqua Talk Series for the clips used in this episode. You can view these clips online at [joe-cuhaj.com/podcast](http://joe-cuhaj.com/podcast) (Cuhaj is spelled “C-U-H-A-J”) and click on the PIG WAR link.

Our theme song is called “Creative Minds” by Benjamin Tissot and is courtesy of BenSounds.Com.

If you liked this obscure tale of American history, then please, share it with a friend. I hope you’ll join me again next time for another forgotten tale from American history.

*[Theme out]*