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SOME DETAILS OF THE SOUTHERN OVERLAND MAIL

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The acquisition of California by the United States was quite naturally followed by a demand for some regularly established means of communication between that new territory and the rest of the country far away to the east. As early as 1849 the United States Government began to supply this need through the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which operated from New York to the Isthmus of Panama, and thence to San Francisco. Also, a little later, a stage line with a mail contract was started from Independence, Missouri, to Salt Lake City; and from Salt Lake City to California, a somewhat irregular line of communication was provided for. But these overland projects covering so great a distance were experimental, and the service secured was not at all satisfactory.¹

Therefore, California considered it a great victory for Western statesmanship, and Postmaster General A. V. Brown was greatly delighted when Congress by an act approved March 3, 1857, authorized the advertising for bids for a semi-weekly mail service from some point on the Mississippi to San Francisco.² The contract was awarded July 2, 1857, to John Butterfield and others, and on October 9, 1858, the first overland mail from San Francisco arrived at Saint Louis.

¹A brief review of the different overland mail routes is given by F. L. Paxson in *The Last American Frontier*, Ch. XI. See, also, the *Report of the Postmaster General for 1857*, pp. 30, ff.

²*Ibid.*, 26.

This "Great Overland Mail" service has been treated briefly by several historians, and the romance and adventure associated with the two years and a half of its history have not been overlooked by the writers of more popular works. Nevertheless, it seems that a more detailed study of this great pioneer enterprise looking into its significance as a passenger and news route to California, setting forth the various difficulties its promoters were obliged to overcome, and noting the bearing it had on the development of the frontier it traversed, may be of interest to students of the Southwest.

The law authorizing the service allowed the Postmaster General the widest discretion in selecting the route. The only substantial requirements were that the route connect some point on the Mississippi with San Francisco; that the mail be carried in four-horse stage coaches so as to give accommodation to passengers; and that the trip be made within twenty-five days. The service might be semi-monthly, weekly, or semi-weekly, and the maximum amount that might be paid for each was specified.³

Several bids were received, specifying nearly as many different routes. However, in defense of the choice of route Mr. Brown finally made, it may be said that two of the bidders prescribed substantially the one later selected. After he let it be known that he would consider none other than the southern route all bids were allowed to stand as applicable to this route. The contract was awarded to Messrs. John Butterfield of Utica, New York, G. Fargo and several others, all of New York state, except Hamilton Spencer, of Bloomington, Illinois.⁴ They were to furnish a semi-weekly service and were to receive \$600,000 per year for a period of four years. There was not much difference in the price set by the different parties bidding, and Brown said the award was made to Butterfield and others "after considering the amount proposed and the ability, qualifications, and experience of the bidders to carry out a great mail service like this."

The contract provided that there should be two eastern termini, Saint Louis and Memphis. The trails from these two points should converge at Little Rock, Arkansas; thence the line should

³*Ibid.*, 33.

⁴Others in the firm were: William B. Dinsmore, New York City; J. V. P. Gardner, Utica, New York; Marcus L. Kinyon, Rome, New York; Alex. Holland, New York City.

extend southwestward by or near Preston on the Red River to the best point for crossing the Rio Grande above El Paso and not far from Fort Filmore. From the Rio Grande it should follow the new road being opened and constructed under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, to Fort Yuma, California, "thence through the best passes, and along the best valleys for safe expeditious staging to San Francisco."⁵

To what extent political influence worked in helping Postmaster General Brown choose this southernmost of the three routes he considered is a matter that must be left largely to the individual conclusions of those who review the facts. Naturally the political enemies of the administration charged that it was but another example of the favoritism the Democratic party of that day was wont to show toward the South. The mail route would likely determine the route the proposed Pacific Railway would take, and that, they argued, had added to the temptation to yield to sectional interests where national welfare should have been the only consideration. Indeed, Mr. Brown felt this criticism so keenly that in his report to the President for 1857 he set forth at length his reasons for making the choice. The Platte and South Pass route

⁵*Ibid.*, 29.

As finally adopted by the stage company the route was divided into nine divisions as follows:

First Division: San Francisco to Los Angeles; 462 miles; time of journey, 80 hours.

Second Division: Los Angeles to Fort Yuma; 282 miles; time of journey, 72½ hours.

Third Division: Fort Yuma to Tucson; 280 miles; time of journey, 71¾ hours.

Fourth Division: Tucson to Franklin (near El Paso); 360 miles; time of journey, 82½ hours.

Fifth Division: Franklin to Fort Chadbourne, near the Colorado River of Texas; 458 miles; time of journey, 126½ hours.

Sixth Division: Fort Chadbourne to Colbert's Ferry, on Red River; 282½ miles; time of journey, 65 5-12 hours.

Seventh Division: Colbert's Ferry to Fort Smith; 192 miles; time of journey, 38 hours.

Eighth Division: Fort Smith to Tipton, the Pacific Railway Terminus; 318½ miles; time of journey, 49 hours.

Ninth Division: Tipton to Saint Louis, by rail; 160 miles; time of journey, 11¾ hours.

Total distance, 2795 miles.

As established the Memphis division joined the line at Fort Smith instead of Little Rock. The information given above was taken from the report of G. Bailey, special agent of the Post Office Department, who accompanied the first mail from San Francisco to Saint Louis. *Report of the Postmaster General for 1858*, pp. 30, ff.

The exact course of the route through Texas was as follows: From

as well as the Albuquerque, or Middle Route, was too cold, he said. In fact, the Platte and South Pass route had been tried for several years, and winter mails were often not received until spring. It is his arguments for the Southern route rather than his objections to the others that seem of most interest in our study.

Three sources of information seem to have been principally relied upon in his decision: First, the report of Captain Randolph B. Marcy, who made a reconnaissance across the Southern Plains in 1849 from Donna Anna, above El Paso, across the Pecos near the thirty-second parallel, down that stream for some distance and across in a northeastward direction to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Second, the report of various officers who accompanied the Pacific Railroad Survey over the Southern Route, 1853-'55. Third, Mr. John R. Bartlett, who was connected with the United States Boundary Commission, 1850-'53, and who operated near the thirty-second parallel both east and west of the Rio Grande, was quoted at length

the west it ran from Franklin (or El Paso) to Hueco Tanks, nearly due east 30 miles; thence a little north of east to the Pinery, 56 miles and 24 miles on to Delaware Springs; thence down Delaware Creek, crossing to the south of it a few miles before it enters the Pecos; thence across the Pecos to Pope's camp, a few miles east of the Pecos, near the thirty-second parallel, 40 miles; thence down the Pecos, 65 miles to Emigrant Crossing, and 55 miles on to Horse Head Crossing, keeping all the while east of the river. From Horse Head Crossing the trail struck out in a direction slightly north of east across the desert of the southern part of the Llano Estacado to the head waters of the "Middle" or "Main" Concho, 70 miles. From the Concho the route turned slightly more northward to a camp (later a station) on a tributary of the Concho, 30 miles; thence to Grape Creek, another tributary of the Concho, 22 miles; thence to Fort Chadbourne on a tributary of the Colorado and near what is now the line of Coke and Runnels Counties, 30 miles. From Fort Chadbourne the line turned still more to the north across Valley Creek, 12 miles, to Mountain Pass, 16 miles; thence on to Old Fort Phantom Hill, passing a few miles to the west of where Abilene now stands, 30 miles (Phantom Hill on the Clear Fork of the Brazos was not at that time and had not been since 1854 a military post); thence from Phantom Hill to Smith's Station, 12 miles; Clear Fork Station, 26 miles; Franz's Station, 13 miles; Fort Belknap on the Brazos in Young County, 22 miles. From Belknap the line turned more to the east to Murphy's, 16 miles; to Jacksboro, 19 miles; to Earheart's, 16 miles; to Davidson's, 24 miles; to Gainsville, 17 miles. Thence from Gainsville it extended to Diamond's, 15 miles; Sherman, 15 miles; and on out of Texas at Colbert's Ferry, a few miles down the Red River from old Preston, 13½ miles. *Ibid.*

At each of the points named there was a station. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, ff.

Other stations were later established. A "Middle Station" between the Concho and Horse Head Crossing on the Pecos was soon established according to a report of Mr. Woods and Mr. Miller, passengers. *Missouri Republican*, January 5, 1859.

No doubt it became essential to establish other stations from time to time.

in favor of this route. Added to the favorable reports of these officers was the fact that mail was already being carried from San Antonio to El Paso and from El Paso to Tucson, Arizona, and from Fort Yuma, California, to San Diego. This left only the gap between Fort Yuma and Tucson, 260 miles, as a territory in anywise doubtful; and this was said to have been traveled almost daily by emigrants. Also, the fact must not be overlooked that the Government had laid out a road to California, and that two hundred thousand dollars had been appropriated for the strip between the Rio Grande and Fort Yuma. Captain Marcy had explored both the Southern and the Albuquerque or middle route as far as the Rio Grande. Commissioners Emory and Bartlett and others connected with the Pacific Railroad Office of the Interior Department, who accompanied the railroad survey parties over both the Albuquerque and the El Paso routes, favored the Southern way.⁶ Indeed, the Postmaster General makes out a good case for the Southern way; and yet one may well doubt the wisdom of his choice. Captain Marcy, the first Anglo-American to lead a wagon train over the South Plains from the vicinity of El Paso to Fort Smith, happened to strike the desert region of West Texas in an especially favorable season. He did not suffer for water, and his map shows it in plentiful quantities at points fairly convenient for emigrant trains throughout the whole course of the route.⁷ But for all of that, scarcity of water was a difficulty the stage company never entirely overcame, and the drilling of wells cost them great sums of money. Bartlett and Captain Pope point out the scarcity of water along the route, both east and west of El Paso, but they predict that water can easily be procured by drilling wells.⁸

⁶*Report of the Postmaster General for 1857*, pp. 34 ff.

⁷Captain Marcy's Report to the Secretary of War was published in *Reconnaissances in New Mexico and Texas*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. No. 64, pp. 196 ff. His log of incidents of the journey makes fascinating reading. But anyone acquainted with Western Texas knows that the irregularity of the seasons is the most regular characteristic of the country. Bartlett, in 1850, followed Marcy's route from the Pecos nearly to El Paso. Stray oxen and mules, dead cattle, parts of wagons, etc., told a tale of havoc wrought by thirst and starvation. From a point near Guadalupe Peak on to El Paso, nearly a hundred miles, he found no water. See *Bartlett's Personal Narrative*, John R. Bartlett, London, 1854, Vol. 1, pp. 90 ff.

⁸*Report of the Postmaster General for 1857*, pp. 35 ff.

Bartlett also wrote and published an article complimenting the administration on its choice. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The contract was executed September 16, 1857, and provided that service should begin a year from that date. Notwithstanding the reports that the contractors had found unsurmountable difficulties and were asking the government to release them from their agreement,⁹ the stages were started on contract time; and the Postmaster General in his report for 1858 announced that the service was a "conclusive and triumphant success."

As we have noted, the law required the company to provide for passenger transportation along with the mail service. This the company endeavored to do, and to that end placed on the line an adequate number of Concord coaches roomy enough to transport five or six passengers in addition to the six hundred pounds of mail which might be carried if necessary.¹⁰

From the files of the Saint Louis and San Francisco papers, especially the Saint Louis *Missouri Republican* for 1858-1859, one may gather considerable information concerning the passengers that arrived at the two eastern termini, Saint Louis and Memphis, as well as those that reached San Francisco from the east. For the first year that the service was maintained there are unusually complete accounts as to the passengers that arrived at Saint Louis. The number of passengers and generally their names were reported. When they reached Saint Louis inquiring newspaper reporters generally met them and proceeded to gather from them all the information possible about their journey, the number of persons who left San Francisco, the number that joined the party or left it at the different way stations, the number that left the Saint Louis route at Fort Smith bound for Memphis, the destination of all parties, and their names and occupations. Thus it is that for the first year of the Southern Overland Mail we have in the files of the Saint Louis papers definite accounts of the

Captain John Pope's opinion of the route is set forth at length in the *Pacific Railroad Reports*, Vol. 2, Ch. XI, printed as *House Executive Document 91*, 33rd Cong., 3rd Sess. Bartlett's opinion is given in *Bartlett's Personal Narrative*, John R. Bartlett, London, 1854, 2 Vols.

⁹The *State Gazette*, Austin, Texas, for May 22, 1858, carried an editorial which indicated that the editor accepted this rumor for the truth. The article contained a bitter complaint, alleging that it was nothing but a ruse to get an entire change of the route and thus rob the Southwest of the proposed Pacific Railroad, which he thought would follow the mail line.

¹⁰*Report of the Postmaster General for 1858*, pp. 6 ff. The report contains a full account of the beginning of the service and indicates the enthusiasm Mr. Brown had for it.

arrival of forty-seven of the possible one hundred four stage passenger parties that may have arrived.¹¹

In these forty-seven stage parties there were eighty-five through passengers, who had come directly (or with short stop-overs at way stations to rest) from San Francisco or Los Angeles to Saint Louis or Memphis; and about the same number of way passengers who had joined the stage party at some point on the line. The number of passengers starting from San Francisco who completed their journey before reaching Saint Louis or Memphis is not considered in this count; but there were not many of this class. From a similar perusal of the files of the *San Francisco Herald* it seems that the number of west bound passengers at San Francisco did not greatly exceed, if, indeed, it equaled that of those going east.¹² Frequently there were no through passengers from the east, and the number did not generally exceed two. There appeared to be more way passengers than through passengers arriving at that point. It would, therefore, seem to be a safe conclusion that all through passengers did not amount to much more than one hundred fifty, each way, for the first year of the route, and that the way passengers arriving at Saint Louis and Memphis and those arriving at San Francisco did not greatly exceed this number. As for passengers who patronized the line in going from one way point to another, the number was, as we might expect, evidently decidedly greater. These people could not avail themselves of ocean or railroad transportation and the overland stage passing from their own to neighboring communities offered them a means of conveyance of incalculable benefit. Stages arriving at San Francisco or Saint Louis carrying few or no through passengers

¹¹It should be noted that the news columns of the papers featured the arrival of practically every mail during this period. But the forty-seven items referred to above have to do with those cases where special news about passengers and the incidents of the trip was given. In almost every case the reporter not only secured from an interview with passengers an account of the incidents of the trip, but secured the names of and various bits of information about the different passengers, and gave the name of his informant. Notwithstanding the many errors that must have crept in, this information surely ought to be of some value in a study of this frontier project; and because of his inability to find other better material, the writer of this article has drawn rather heavily upon it. It may be added that accounts of incidents along the frontier brought in by one stage were generally confirmed by those arriving later.

¹²The *San Francisco Herald* for January, June and August, 1859, and January and March, 1860.

often brought waybills showing that from twenty to thirty persons had used the stage on that trip.¹³

Compared with the thousands of persons who made the trip to or from California every year by the Isthmus of Panama or the Tehuantepec routes, or the thousands of others who followed the different overland routes by private conveyance the few hundred persons who availed themselves of the stage for their trans-continental journey represent an almost negligible number.¹⁴

As the service continued the number of through passengers seems to have diminished and that of the way passengers increased. Whether this decline was due to the disinclination of the public to attempt the journey after its hardships became known, or to the inability of the company to transport more passengers is difficult to determine. Perhaps both causes must be taken into account. It may be noted in this connection, however, that in June, 1859, a weekly "accommodation stage" was put on the route between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The officials were reported as saying that this service might be extended to Saint Louis, thus giving a tri-weekly overland service for all the route; but it does not appear that this was ever done. At first there was a sharp demand for seats at the San Francisco terminus, and one passenger reported that over one hundred persons were on the waiting list there when he left in November, 1858.¹⁵ But it seems that this rush did not continue.¹⁶

Notwithstanding the comparatively small number of persons the

¹³The waybill for the stage that arrived at San Francisco August 10, 1859, showed 29 passengers; that for January 7, 1860, showed 27, and that for January 10, 23.

¹⁴"Nearly 1200 passengers for the Atlantic coast left San Francisco by steamers which departed on the 12th inst." *Missouri Republican*, March 31, 1859. "Nineteen hundred passengers arrived by the steamer John L. Stephens." *San Francisco National*, quoted by the *Missouri Republican*, May 25, 1859.

¹⁵Account given by Mr. Hough, a passenger. He also tells of one passenger who was forced to remain at a way station because he had gotten off there to rest and had been unable to secure a seat on the following stages although he offered a liberal bonus. He had been thus marooned a month. *Missouri Republican* for December 12, 1858.

¹⁶This statement seems to be substantiated by the fact that way passengers increased after the route had been in operation for a while, and through passengers decreased somewhat proportionately. Since through passengers were given preference over way passengers, it was necessary for the number of the former to diminish before people along the route could use it at all.

company transported, the stage service was not without its value to the people of the nation. Army officers going to their posts or back to their homes took advantage of the service; politicians and lobbyists were frequently listed among the passengers; business men with pressing affairs frequently used it, for it offered a comparatively rapid means of transportation for various persons who needed to hurry. And, what is more, communities along the route, which would have been completely isolated without the stage, found it a convenient means of conveyance for those of their citizens who needed to travel.

The mail carried was letter material entirely. However, express was carried; and through the courtesy of the express companies a few leading newspapers were carried each way.

At first the mail was small, 1143 letters being the amount for December 10, 1859.¹⁷ Only a few of these were for way offices, and the bulk of them was for Saint Louis, Memphis and New York distribution. By July, 1859, one mail which arrived at San Francisco contained 2919 letters, and the next outbound mail contained 6020 letters, only 250 of which were destined for way offices.¹⁸ At first Little Rock seems to have been the only distribution office along the route,¹⁹ but in January or February, 1859, Sherman, Texas, was made a distribution point.²⁰ The postal receipts furnish us an index to the growth of the mail service. For 1859 these amounted to \$27,229.94;²¹ but for 1860 they had increased to \$119,766.77.²² Compared with the six hundred thousand dollars the route cost the government per year it is evident that this service was a considerable drain on the department. And yet receipts of this route made up a larger percentage of the outlay than those on any other of the long overland services.²³ This enormous ex-

¹⁷The *Alta California*, December 11, 1859; news item.

It should be noted that much of the trans-continental mail still went by steamer *via* the Isthmus of Tehuantepec semi-monthly service. In November, 1859, when the overland mail averaged about 5000 letters for the east-bound stages the steamer mails were averaging over 25,000 letters. *Missouri Republican*, November 13, 1859; news item.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, August 10, 1859.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, January 17, 1859.

²⁰*Ibid.*, February 10, 1859.

²¹*Report of the Postmaster General for 1859*, pp. 22 ff.

²²*Ibid.*, for 1860, p. 20.

²³*Ibid.* The St. Joseph, Missouri-Salt Lake City line cost the government \$125,000 and brought in \$4,305; and an expenditure of \$70,000 on the San Antonio-Camp Stockton, Texas, line showed \$593.41 return.

penditure caused Postmaster General J. Holt, who succeeded A. V. Brown in March, 1859, to endeavor to reduce the cost by cutting down the service from a semi-weekly to a weekly basis. The Attorney General informed him that this could not be done under the contract. If Holt's predecessor had made a bad bargain, Holt was bound by it just the same.²⁴ Naturally no group of business men would have risked such a great outlay of money and material on a contract that did not protect them from the maneuvers of a Federal department faced with the necessity of economizing.²⁵

The trip from San Francisco to Saint Louis generally took from twenty-three to twenty-five days. Occasionally a mail would come in several days late, but more frequently it came in two or three days ahead of the twenty-five days schedule. The officials and employees did everything within their power to keep the mails moving; and when passengers and stages were obliged to stop, the mails went on, carried on the backs of mules or even on the shoulders of the employees.²⁶

News from across the continent was transmitted by means of the mail route two or three days quicker than the time consumed in carrying the letters between San Francisco and Saint Louis. This was because the telegraph conveyed the news to the great papers as soon as the stage reached the terminus of the wire. By that means the news would arrive something like a week sooner by mail and telegraph than by the Tehuantepec route. It should be noted, also, that the Tehuantepec service was only semi-monthly. For this reason the line attracted considerable attention as a news

²⁴Letter from J. S. Black, Attorney General, in reply to an inquiry of Mr. Holt, the inquiry having been made April 18, 1859. *Sen. Ex. Doc. No. 26*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., 1859-1860.

²⁵Expenditures of the Post Office Department for the year ending June 30, 1859, were \$14,964,493.33, with receipts amounting to \$7,968,484. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, V, 576.

²⁶*Missouri Republican*, November 10, 1858. The following account of Mr. J. W. Farwell, editor of the *Alta California*, is typical of various stories of the heroism of the company employees. Two men in charge of the mails were carrying them on horseback to Indian Wells on the Yuma, the next station ahead of them. In a storm one lost his hat and when he got down to get it his horse ran away. The other lost his horse trying to recover his blankets which he had dropped. They continued on foot, but became separated by the blinding sand storm. One found the trail and made his way in with the mail on his shoulders; but the other was lost for three days, and would have starved for water but for the fact that he found a brokdown steer left on the trails by emigrants, killed it, and drank its blood.

carrying agency and the service and satisfaction it brought to the people of the nation in this respect represented its greatest value. "Overland Mail News" was featured by many of the great papers on both sides of the Rocky Mountains. However, New Orleans papers received at San Francisco *via* the Tehuantepec route, would sometimes, although not generally, be of later date than the Saint Louis papers sent overland. Ordinarily the difference was about four days in favor of the overland route.²⁷ Mail or passengers from New York could generally reach San Francisco about six days sooner by the overland than by the Isthmus of Tehuantepec route. Thomas James, of the Wells-Fargo Company, was reported to have bet Cornelius Vanderbilt \$5000 against Vanderbilt's fine team of horses that the overland mail leaving Saint Louis April 14, 1859, would arrive at San Francisco before the passengers of the *Northern Light*, which left New York harbor April 6.²⁸ How this interesting wager ever came out we cannot say, but the eight days start which the steamer passengers had was just about sufficient to make both of these gentlemen uncomfortable until the report of the outcome was received. Of course, between California and all points in the upper Mississippi valley, the overland service offered still greater advantages in the way of speed.

The original outlay of the Butterfield company must have approximated a million dollars. The surveying of the line, the purchase of about a hundred of the best Concord stage coaches, buying hundreds of horses and mules, the construction, purchasing or leasing of over a hundred stations with appurtenant barns, stables and corrals, the laying in and transporting of supplies for men and animals, and the equipping of employees and stations with firearms, all required an enormous outlay. Besides this, it was necessary to do an immense amount of work on the trail in places to make passage of vehicles at all possible.²⁹

The station buildings, barns and corrals were of various types and were built of many different materials. Logs were used where

²⁷Comments and news items in the *Missouri Republican*, November 4, 1858, and the *San Francisco Herald*, January 17, 1859.

²⁸The *San Francisco Herald*, April 7, 1859.

²⁹The account of W. W. Whitten, one of the first passengers, gives something of the nature of this road construction. *Saint Louis Democrat*, October 25, 1858.

timber grew, stones where they were available, and adobe brick was most commonly used throughout the arid sections.³⁰

The difficulties encountered were well nigh innumerable. Dependable employees were hard to secure, and it was more difficult still to retain them long in the service. Besides a number of drivers, which must have been in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty, a superintendent for each of the divisions of the line, and an agent for each station, it was necessary to have from four to a dozen supernumeraries at each station. Cooks, stock tenders, herders, water haulers, blacksmiths, guards along portions of the route, and laborers of various sorts also had to be provided.³¹

The district superintendents impressed the *New York Herald* correspondent as being straightforward men, courageous enough for their various tasks. But many of the employees in positions of lesser responsibility seem to have possessed most of the frontiersman's vices with few of his compensating virtues. A group working at Pope's Camp, on the Pecos, impressed him as being the "sorriest lot of fellows" he had ever seen. J. W. Farwell, editor of the *Alta California*, also thought some of the employees about the stations were not equal to their tasks. Such employees sometimes cost the company dearly. At Dragoon Springs station in Arizona some Mexican employees killed three of their Anglo-American fellow laborers, seriously wounded a fourth, and drove away part of the stock. All of the stock would have been taken but for the desperate fight made by the wounded man, who managed to fight off his assailants notwithstanding his hip had been cut deep into the bone and one arm had been practically severed at the elbow.³² Reports of "gold-diggings" frequently drew away scores of supernumeraries, whose loss threw extra labor and hardships on the shoulders of their more loyal companions.³³

For long stretches throughout its course the route was nothing more than a trail. To build a good road was out of the question. One passenger reported that his stage overturned three times on

³⁰*New York Herald*, October 24 and November 11, 1859; account of a reporter. Also, *Missouri Republican*, November 10, 1858; account of J. W. Farwell.

³¹*Ibid.* See, also, the report of Bailey, the special agent of the Post Office Department, *Report of the Postmaster General for 1858*, appendix.

³²Account of Mr. Beardsley, a passenger who passed the station soon after the tragedy. *Missouri Republican*, December 18, 1858.

³³Statement of "Dr. Jones," *Missouri Republican*, December 18, 1858.

a stretch of the trip east of Fort Belknap.³⁴ The heat was severe in summer, and bitter cold was sometimes experienced in winter in spite of the southern location of the greater portion of the route. One passenger had his feet frozen while walking twelve miles through the snow in Apache Canyon, after the stage had been forced to stop because of the snow drifts.³⁵

The mules used in the desert country were generally wild and intractable and were frequently exhausted before they were subdued by the severe choking with a lariat and the kicks and blows administered by the stock tenders. It seems that the company was unable to secure gentle mules and horses, and frequently before those purchased had been tamed, the Indians stole them, thus forcing the company to bring on others to take their places.

High water frequently caused delays. The company could not bridge the streams, and most of them were too shallow to ferry. But high water was not so great a problem as the scarcity of water. During early trips over the route no water was available for the stock for stretches as long as eighty miles.³⁶ Later water was provided at closer intervals, but it seems that it had to be hauled to many stations during dry seasons. Because of a scarcity of water the route from the Pecos to El Paso was changed and instead of running up the Pecos to Pope's Camp and thence to El Paso, the stages crossed that stream at Horse Head Crossing and went in a southwestward direction to the San Antonio-El Paso road, striking it at Camp Stockton (now Fort Stockton), Texas.³⁷ Along parts of the arid region, especially in Arizona, the company dug wells and got an abundance of water, but we are unable to find any evidence that they overcame the desert stretch from the Concho to the Pecos by this means.³⁸

³⁴Report of Mr. Beardsley, cited above.

³⁵Statement of "Dr. Jones."

³⁶*New York Herald*, November 11, 1858; account of a reporter.

³⁷The *New York Herald* reporter stated that the company might be forced to make the change. *Ibid.*

The change was made prior to September 20, 1859. Correspondent from El Paso to the *Missouri Republican*, October 4, 1859. Also, *Ibid.*, October 19, 1859, according to a letter from Camp Stockton of date, October 7, 1859.

³⁸Water had been discovered by Captain John Pope, who directed the efforts of the War Department to secure water on the plains by drilling, in 1855. A well was drilled at Pope's Camp near where the 32nd parallel crosses the Pecos, back a few miles from the river. The drill was extended 1140 feet in the hope of striking artesian water. A good water

But of all difficulties the greatest was the theft of horses by the Indians. The savages rarely ever attacked the stages, and passengers were comparatively safe from their depredation. But the Comanches in Texas, and later the Apaches in Arizona stole hundreds of horses and mules. The Apaches on the western end of the line were kept friendly for a while by a judicious distribution of presents; but this did not entirely prevent trouble from that source.³⁹ According to definite and confirmed reports of passengers who got their information from the agents along the line, the Comanches in Texas stole not less than two hundred and twenty-three head of horses and mules from the company during the winter of 1858-'59.⁴⁰ Not far from Fort Belknap, a military post on the Brazos in Texas, they stole eighty head out of a herd of two hundred which the company had purchased and was driving out to restock stations already depleted by the forays of these savage thieves.⁴¹ In order to avoid the heart of the Comanche country the company had diverted its route between Fort Belknap and El Paso more than a hundred miles south of the Marcy trail. It had been planned to follow the Marcy route from Fort Belknap to El Paso, but as actually laid out, the trail of the stages went by Fort Chadbourne, near the Colorado. But this seems to have been of little benefit in the matter of Indian protection. Most of the military organizations on the Texas frontier at that time were infantry, as helpless in chasing the Comanche horsemen as a present-day foot patrolman would be in running down a speed-

supply was struck at 244 feet, which stood for a while within 175 feet of the surface. But the well caved so badly that it had to be abandoned, after more than one hundred thousand dollars had been spent on it. An account of Pope's operation may be found in the *Report of the Secretary of War for 1855*, page 96, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., Sen. Doc. No. 1. The *New York Herald* reporter gave considerable detail about the final outcome of this project, *New York Herald*, November 11, 1858.

It would seem that the success attained would have encouraged the Butterfield people to drill wells back on the plains between the head of the Concho and the Pecos. This they may have done; but we hear of their hauling water to these stations during the winter of 1859. *Missouri Republican*, January 7, 1859.

The company drilled wells in Arizona. See below, note 50.

³⁹Account of R. Wilsey, a passenger, *Missouri Republican*, January 21, 1859.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, November 10, 1858; January 3, 5, 7, 12, February 1, 7, March 7, 10, 14, 1859.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, March 14, 1859.

law violator.⁴² The United States mounted force and the state rangers did what they could; but not until some eighteen years after the abandonment of the Butterfield route were the forays of the Comanches finally stopped.

Just what the receipts to the company from passenger fares were is difficult to determine from the information we have available. For the first quarter year that the service was maintained the way-bills for passenger from San Francisco amounted to \$12,000.⁴³ As we have noted, during this quarter the through passengers seemed to outnumber those who traveled from one way point to another. Even though we should estimate the receipts for way passengers equal to that from through passengers and assume that the west bound traffic was as great as the east bound we should have only about two hundred thousand dollars receipts per year. It seems that the receipts increased as the service continued, due to the ability of the company to carry more passengers after the road was improved and the equipment completed. Nevertheless, it is not probable that the receipts ever greatly exceeded two hundred thousand dollars for the reason that at the rate charged per passenger it would have been impossible to take in much more than that amount.⁴⁴ Even when added to the six hundred thousand dollars paid the company by the government for carrying the mail, it seems doubtful that the project proved profitable, or that it would have done so had the service continued for the four-year period of the contract. The salary of employees, the cost of feed, and the difficulty of hauling it to the desert stations, the difficulties in securing water, and the loss from Indian depredations were only some of the most important of the hundreds of expense items the company was obliged to meet month after month.

Notwithstanding the comparatively small amount of passenger traffic and the inconsiderable number of emigrants who followed the line except that part of it that ran along well established emi-

⁴²As to the garrisons at the Texas posts, see the *Report of the Secretary of War for 1858*, 35th Cong., 2nd Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 2, Vol. 2, Part II, 776.

⁴³*Missouri Republican*, December 29, 1858; news item.

⁴⁴According to their advertisement in the *San Francisco Herald* the company charged two hundred dollars per passenger from San Francisco to Fort Smith, or to the terminus of the Pacific Railroad. *San Francisco Herald*, February 12, 1859. Five passengers, or at most six, filled a coach.

grant routes,⁴⁵ the Southern Overland Mail line was not without its effect in the development of the country through which it ran. Fort Belknap, in Young County, the point at which the line left the thinly settled section of North Texas and entered a country practically unsettled, enjoyed a rapid growth and became a thriving frontier village.⁴⁶ The population of Grayson, Denton, Wise, Jack, and Young counties, through which the line ran, increased rapidly between 1858 and 1860,⁴⁷ and it seems probable that better stage and mail service was at least partly responsible for this. Farther east in Texas, Colbert, the half-breed proprietor of the ferry across Red River, thought enough of the probable benefits of the stage line to his business to transport the coaches across the river without charge.⁴⁸ Grayson County bridged her streams for the benefit of the company.⁴⁹ In Arizona the Butterfield people dug wells at not less than eight different stations, some to a depth of over two hundred feet, and secured an abundant supply of water for their own purposes as well as for the emigrants who traveled the same road. At places, however, they failed to find water by this method. Besides this the company spent thousands of dollars on ditches, carrying water long distances from streams

⁴⁵The significance of the mail route as an emigrant route has been overstated by persons writing on this subject. The only part of the line that did not follow a well known emigrant trail was that between Fort Belknap and El Paso, or later Fort Stockton, after the change was made to that station. And this part of the route as far as Fort Chadbourne was along the government military trail. Passengers frequently spoke of meeting emigrant parties along other parts of the route, especially that part west of El Paso. But these parties had followed the San Antonio trail to El Paso, and it is not probable that the mail and stage route had much to do in determining the course they took. On but one occasion do we hear of an emigrant party following the mail route across the South Plains from the Concho to the Pecos, thence to El Paso along the old Butterfield line. "Sheriff Jones" going from Kansas to Arizona attracted considerable attention by his boldness in following the route across the Comanche country with a small party. Passengers were impressed with meeting him on this part of the route, although they thought nothing of meeting emigrants on that part west of El Paso. Surely, on a route where emigrants were common, one would not have attracted so much attention. *Missouri Republican*, December 28, 30, 1858.

⁴⁶Paddock, Capt. B. B., "Northern and Western Texas," Vol. 1, p. 119, quoting a "correspondent" of a contemporary "Texas newspaper."

⁴⁷*Texas Almanac* for 1858, p. 208; for 1861, p. 244.

⁴⁸Account of the *New York Herald* correspondent, *New York Herald*, October 24, 1858.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

and springs, and thus making irrigation possible at stations in Arizona and Southwestern California.⁵⁰

It seems, however, that the line would have been more serviceable in the matter of developing the country if the Postoffice Department had specified that it keep closer to the frontier settlements wherever possible instead of requiring that it break away into a region void of settlement just after it left Fort Belknap. From that point to the California settlements, a distance of some thirteen hundred miles, the country was without habitation except for a few isolated villages like Franklin, Tucson, and Fort Yuma. In Texas some two hundred miles more of frontier settlement could have been served with little additional mileage if the line had been run more to the south after leaving Sherman. Instead, it skirted a thinly settled frontier to Fort Belknap, and there broke away into a desert. It was not to be supposed that the settlements would build to it for several years.

As a news carrying agency as well as a means for carrying urgent letters and valuable documents the overland route lost its significance with the launching of the "Pony Express" by the "Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company" in April, 1860. This company advertised that it would transport telegraphic dispatches within eight days, and letters within twelve days, San Francisco to New York.⁵¹ So badly did it beat the news service of the mail route that the newspapers on the Pacific Coast as well as those in Saint Louis, gave very little notice thereafter to news brought by the stage route; and the way news furnished them by passengers was not featured any longer. The *San Francisco Herald* offered five hundred dollars for the news dispatch carried by the express riders, and complained bitterly that two other papers had secured a monopoly on it.⁵²

The stormy period of the winter of secession, 1860-'61, saw the beginning of the end of the Southern Overland Mail. The reason for its discontinuance was set forth by a United States Senator in his agitation in March, 1861, for better connection with the Pacific Coast. "We have just received notice," he says, "that the Butterfield route is cut up by the roots, that it is cut right into at the

⁵⁰*San Francisco Herald*, correspondent, February 1, 1860.

⁵¹*San Francisco Herald*, April 16, 1860.

⁵²*Ibid.*, Editorial, April 23, 1860.

center. It is stopped in all its stages through the state of Texas some six or seven hundred miles."⁵³

While the policy of the state government seems to have been to leave the company alone until it should become necessary to stop all communication between the North and the South, certain parties of Texas citizens were evidently not so considerate of their rights. These persons seized the supplies of the company at certain stations, and seem to have taken some of the stock and coaches.⁵⁴

Thus it was that Congress, by an act approved March 2, 1861, gave authority to the Postmaster General to discontinue the route and to provide for the conveyance by the same parties of a six-times-a-week mail by the "Central" route. There was nothing left for the company to do but accept the terms offered them by the department, and after an agreement was reached an order of March 12, 1861, modified the contract and changed the service to the Central route, from Atchison, Kansas, to Placerville. The company also agreed to convey the mail three times a week from Denver to Salt Lake City and to run a pony express twice a week until the completion of the Overland Telegraph. For these services the company was to receive a million dollars annually for a period of three years. They commenced their transfer of stock to the new route about April 1, 1861.⁵⁵

Due to the short period of its existence and the great war that upset the calculations of men generally, the Southern Overland Mail naturally never accomplished what its promoters and friends hoped for. While it was not without its influence on national development, it cannot be said that it was an achievement of great national significance. But as a pioneer enterprise of unusual magnitude it is worthy of consideration among the annals of our national achievement. The courage and perseverance of its promoters and the daring of the intrepid men who made it a success may well furnish inspiration to all posterity.

⁵³*Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 19, March 29, 1861, p. 1112.

⁵⁴*Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas*, 1861, E. W. Winkler (Ed.), Austin, 1912, p. 381.

As the commander of the Northwestern Frontier of Texas, Henry E. McCulloch in his report to the convention was strong in his denunciation of this act of vandalism on the part of certain classes of the Texas citizens. See, also, Root and Connelley, "The Overland Stage to California," *Topeka*, 1901, p. 51, quoting a letter of September 16, 1901, from David Street, of Denver, who seems to have been acquainted with the affairs of the company in 1861.

⁵⁵*Report of the Postmaster General for 1861*, p. 560.