

4-1-1957

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Recommended Citation

Winther, Oscar Osburn. "The Southern Overland Mail and Stagecoach Line, 1857-1861." *New Mexico Historical Review* 32, 2 (1957). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol32/iss2/3>

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PORTSMOUTH SQUARE, SAN FRANCISCO
Departure of the first Butterfield Overland Mail

NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL XXXII

APRIL, 1957

No. 2

THE SOUTHERN OVERLAND MAIL AND STAGECOACH LINE, 1857-1861.

By OSCAR OSBURN WINTHER

THE MASSIVE westward migration following the discovery of gold in California and the Mexican Cession in 1848 produced, in its wake, a crying demand for adequate communication between the old East and the new West. There were high hopes that a railroad would someday span the continent, but meanwhile the West demanded regular mail and stagecoach services between the then existing rail terminals on the banks of the Mississippi River and the distant shores of the Pacific Ocean. Prior to 1848 only the most limited, casual, and cumbersome of transportational facilities existed in this area, and these were deemed hopelessly inadequate in meeting the requirements, not only of pivotal California but of other western communities as well.

The trans-Mississippi West could not, as a region, prescribe national policy. Nevertheless, its inhabitants enjoyed a position of strength from which they might, and did, exert significant influences upon American business interests and at the nation's capital with regard to matters concerned with the region's welfare. "California is far distant," wrote Congressman R. H. Stanton in a report on post offices and post roads in 1850, "and it appears to me, that I am stating a self-evident proposition when I say that government itself must either open a way to that distant land, or encourage its citizens so to do. . . ."¹ By pursuance of a policy whereby United

1. *Reports of Committees*, House of Representatives, 81 Cong., 2 sess., no. 95, p. 1.

States contracts for overland mail services were to be awarded to private entrepreneurs, the Federal government adopted, in effect, both of the objectives voiced by Congressman Stanton. During the succeeding six years several federally organized mail routes were established in the trans-Mississippi West to augment the fragmentary ones begun prior to mid-century. But since none of these far western services operating prior to 1856 provided for either regular or rapid passenger and mail services between the settled East and the Pacific coast, it is not surprising to observe that vehement demands for such arose. Popular petitions and entreaties unfortunately became enmeshed with sectional politics, and delays were inevitable orders of the day.

Plans by the Federal government calling for the establishment of regular transcontinental stagecoach mail service were first considered in the wake of an 1852-53 act of Congress providing for a survey of a proposed Pacific railroad. It was generally realized at this time that construction of such a railroad would be several years in the building and that measures should be taken to improve and extend existing mail and general transportational facilities serving the trans-Mississippi West.² A diversity of plans was proposed. At first many of these were directed toward augmenting existing services provided by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, often referred to as the [W. H.] "Aspinwall Contract," whereby mails were carried by steamers to and from New York City and Chagres, overland across the Isthmus, and again by steamers between Panama and ports in Oregon and California. For instance, on February 15, 1853, Postmaster General James Campbell let a contract whereby mails would be conveyed twice weekly between New York and San Francisco by combined steamer and overland services involving use of the historic Mexican land route connecting Vera Cruz and Acapulco.³ And on next October 20, Campbell, in his reports to President Millard Fillmore, proposed, but did not

2. LeRoy R. Hafen, *The Overland Mail, 1849-1869* (Cleveland, 1926), ch. 3. See also Curtis Nettels, "The Overland Mail Issue During the Fifties," *The Missouri Historical Review*, XVIII (July, 1924), pp. 521-24.

3. Report of the Postmaster General, *Sen. Docs.*, 33 Cong., special sess., no. 1, pp. 1-5.

officially recommend, the transport of mail between New York and San Francisco via New Orleans and Nicaragua on a twenty-seven day schedule.⁴ Also during 1853 and for three years following, the Postmaster General's annual reports bespeak a greatly increased activity centering upon extension of mail services by means of horse-drawn vehicles in several but scattered portions of the trans-Mississippi West.

Meanwhile, resolutions from the state of California continued to descend upon the Washington lawmakers. A joint resolution of the California State Legislature, approved March 18, 1854, asked that its Senators be "instructed" and its Representatives "requested" to advocate passage of a law by Congress authorizing augmented weekly mail services between the two oceans, by routes considered "most expeditious and practical."⁵ In another joint resolution by the California Legislature (not dated but received by the Senate December 17, 1853) it is interesting to observe a specific request for improved military and post roads across the Plains. These were deemed "absolutely necessary for the preservation of the lives and the property of the emigrants who wish to settle within our borders."⁶

No less perturbed by the lack of adequate communication with the East were the people of New Mexico who in 1850 registered a population of 61,547 exclusive of Indians.⁷ New Mexico had been organized as a Territory at mid-century and five years later its Legislature likewise pleaded with officials in Washington for more adequate communication services. "Your memorialists, the council and house of representatives of the Territory of New Mexico," reads a Memorial dated December 29, 1855, addressed to Postmaster General Campbell, "would respectfully request, that the people of this Territory have suffered for many years for want of a semi-monthly mail between this Territory and the United States.

4. Report of the Postmaster General, *op. cit.*, 1 sess., vol. III, pp. 768-70.

5. "Resolutions of the Legislature of California," *Sen. Misc. Docs.*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., no. 49.

6. *Ibid.*, 34 Cong., 1 and 2 sess., no. 2. See also "Resolution of the Legislature of California" favoring construction of overland mail and wagon routes which would include "good roads protected by military stations . . .," *ibid.*, no. 57, pp. 1-2.

7. The Seventh Census: *Report of the Superintendent of the Census . . .* (Washington, D. C., 1853), p. 134.

Our geographical position, being in the centre of the American continent without navigable rivers or means of communication by rail-road, renders our situation as remote from the federal capital in communications through mail facilities as the Sandwich Islands." This Memorial then went on to assert that "The least time in which a reply can be had to any communication from this Territory, is three months, and only then by prompt attention being given to it, and we seldom get a reply from the eastern cities under four months. . . . We think that we deserve, and know that we need, the boon asked for in this memorial. We would, therefore, call your attention to this subject."⁸

The problem facing Congress was, therefore, not so much one of being unmindful of the need for extending regular overland mail services to the trans-Mississippi West; rather it was one of reaching an agreement on specific routes to be established. Intense sectional controversy clearly thwarted agreement on numerous practical proposals. For example, during the months from February through April, 1856, no less than four separate bills, and one again during the following August, were introduced in Congress designed to extend overland mail service to San Francisco.⁹ But none of these were enacted into law.

Finally, out of this succession of unsuccessful attempts to arrive at an accord on an overland mail bill, an agreeable, if not truly acceptable, formula was approved by both houses of Congress, namely, leave the matter of the exact course or route for the contractors to decide upon so long as the eastern terminus would be on the Mississippi River and the western one at San Francisco.¹⁰

With this formula agreed upon one of several attempts to push a measure through Congress was destined to succeed. This final achievement was due in part to careful planning and procedural operations by the sponsors, chief of whom were John S. Phelps of Missouri in the House and William

8. *Laws of the Territory of New Mexico . . . 1855-56* (Santa Fé, 1856), pp. 142, 144.

9. Nettels, "The Overland Mail Issue in the Fifties," *op. cit.*, pp. 523-25.

10. Rupert N. Richardson and Carl Coke Rister, *The Greater Southwest* (Glendale, Calif., 1935), pp. 232-33; see also Hafen, *The Overland Mail*, p. 83.

M. Gwin of California in the Senate.¹¹ Provisions for the service actually took the form of an amendment to a Post Office appropriation bill drafted by a senatorial committee on which both Senators Gwin and Thomas Jefferson Rusk of Texas played a leading part. Both these Senators were staunch advocates of an overland mail system which would include California and, so far as Rusk was concerned, the Lone Star State.

In formulating its proposal the Committee clearly profited from past failures in Congress. Moreover, its proposal reflected knowledge gleaned from the *Reports of Explorations and Surveys . . . 1853-4* relative to a proposed railroad to the Pacific, from holders of previous mail contracts within the trans-Mississippi West area, and from firsthand experiences of overland mail operators. Accordingly the Committee, in recognizing the problem of sectional interests, chose not to prescribe a precise route. The Amendment simply stated that the Postmaster General be authorized to contract for trans-Mississippi mail service "from such point on the Mississippi river as contractors may select."¹² Moreover, the Committee made a realistic proposal on the matter of remuneration to contract holders, a sum intended to attract responsible bidders.

The proposed Amendment first reached the Senate floor where Senator John B. Weller of California introduced it on August 16, 1856, shortly before adjournment of the first session of the Thirty-fourth Congress. In this first round the Amendment received smooth but indecisive treatment. In defense of the measure, Senator Weller expressed with telling effect his desire to have the United States mails (those not earmarked for delivery abroad) carried over all-American territory rather than, as was then the situation, be dependent upon "foreign Governments [referring to the Aspinwall contract] for their permission to pass our mail from one State to another." And with telling sarcasm Senator Weller reminded his colleagues that while Congress had pro-

11. F. P. Rose, "Butterfield Overland Mail Company," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring, 1956), p. 62.

12. *The Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 3 sess., Appendix, p. 321. See also Hafen, *The Overland Mail*, p. 84.

vided for two military roads for the Far West, it would appear that there were those for whom the "liberties of the country" were endangered by the establishment of an overland mail service.¹³ In retort Senator James M. Mason of Virginia recognized the hazards to persons as well as to the mails in crossing the Isthmus, but asked how soon it would be before "an armed force, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars," would be needed "to protect this mail to California across the continent?"¹⁴ Senator Alfred Iverson, Georgia, implied that in pushing this measure the California Senators were perhaps more interested in personal political credit with their constituents. Senator Iverson was reminded of constituents who raised their price for votes and about whom the officeseeker had said: "'My dear friends, always dear, but now dearer than ever.'"¹⁵ The Amendment reached a vote and passed in the Senate before adjournment, but it failed passage in the Conference Committee.¹⁶

The problem of an overland mail service was thereby back on the lap of the Senate Committee where numerous new proposals were soon to be submitted. During February of 1857 when the Thirty-fourth Congress was again in session there came from this Committee a renewed amendment, the text of which was not greatly unlike the one rejected during the previous August. Again the proposal took the form of an Amendment to a Post Office Appropriations Bill. This time, February 27, 1857, the debate on the proposal became more protracted than had been the case in the previous session. On this occasion Senator Gwin participated actively in debate on the Senate floor in behalf of the overland mail measure. The California Senator pointed out, among other things, that his State was in the grips of a gigantic steamship monopoly (the Pacific Steamship Company) and that the only way to break this stranglehold was to establish overland mail service. The Senate, he said, had passed a bill

13. *The Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 sess., pt. 3, p. 2202.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 2203.

16. Hafen, *The Overland Mail*, p. 84. The Conference Committee refers to one representing both Houses of Congress and one which acts upon bills such as the above where differences between a House version and the Senate version of a measure exist.

providing telegraph service; "Now give us a mail [service]." He went on to say that the government has provided for military wagon roads; now let it make use of these roads. Moreover, should a war come, it would place ocean service at the mercy of an enemy; whereas, by implication, an overland mail service through all-American territory would be relatively safe.¹⁷

The objections to the bill appear not to have been to the establishment of a service such as was proposed but to the discretionary powers given the Postmaster General and the contractors in matters pertaining to the route to be adopted. What assurances were there, asked Senator John Bell of Tennessee, that the most practical route would be followed? The Tennessee Senator alluded to the obstacles presented by the Rocky and Sierra Madre ranges, and dangers of Indian attacks. What assurances were there that once the route was established, the operators would not plead for military protection of their facilities and operations?¹⁸ Senator John J. Crittenden, Kentucky, likewise used these arguments as a basis for opposing the amendment. "Wait," he said, "until your line can go a little further towards supporting itself — wait until safety, at least, shall attend your mails and the passengers on board your stage-coaches, before you undertake to establish this sort of system."¹⁹ Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia advanced the same line of reasoning, and he stated further that by providing ocean mail service for the Pacific coast the government had "done no injustice to California."²⁰ Finally, after protracted debate, a "yeas" and "nays" vote was asked on the Amendment which would provide the trans-Mississippi service. There were twenty-four Senators who voted in favor of the measure; ten were opposed. In view of sectional interests and sentiments prevailing during this eve of the Civil War, the alignment or distribution of these votes forms an unexpected pattern with the exception that all senators representing states to be directly benefited by the service voted for the Amendment. All

17. *The Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 3 sess., Appendix, pp. 307, 308.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 309, 310.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 312-13.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

ten of the opposition votes, including one from the border state of Kentucky, came from the South. And the North, least expected to favor an all-Southern route, gave its solid support.²¹

So with this vote cast the original Bill as amended was again sent to the Conference Committee where it was approved and returned to both Houses; with the full Post Office measure it was given final approval. On March 3, 1857, the Bill, including the amendment, became "An Act making Appropriations for the Service of the Post-Office Department during the fiscal Year ending the thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and fifty eight." Sections 10-13 inclusive contained the Amendment, and this reads as follows:²²

SEC. 10. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster-General be, and he is hereby, authorized to contract for the conveyance of the entire letter mail from such point on the Mississippi River, as the contractors may select, to San Francisco, in the State of California, for six years, at a cost not exceeding three hundred thousand dollars per annum for semi-monthly, four hundred and fifty thousand dollars for weekly, or six hundred thousand dollars for semi-weekly service; to be performed semi-monthly, weekly, or semi-weekly, at the option of the Postmaster-General.

SEC. 11. *And be it further enacted*, That the contract shall require the service to be performed with good four-horse

21. Voting for the Amendment were:

Judah P. Benjamin, Louisiana
William Bigler, Pennsylvania
Jacob Collamer, Vermont
Stephen A. Douglas, Illinois
Charles Durkee, Wisconsin
Hamilton Fish, New York
Graham N. Fitch, Indiana
Solomon Foot, Vermont
Lafayette S. Foster, Connecticut
William M. Gwin, California
James S. Green, Missouri
James Harlan, Iowa

Those opposed were:

Asa Biggs, North Carolina
Clement C. Clay, Jr., Alabama
John J. Crittenden, Kentucky
Robert M. T. Hunter, Virginia
James C. Jones, Tennessee

Sam Houston, Texas
Robert W. Johnson, Arkansas
George W. Jones, Iowa
Amos Nourse, Maine
Thomas G. Pratt, Maryland
Thomas J. Rusk, Texas
William H. Seward, New York
John Slidell, Louisiana
Charles E. Stuart, Michigan
John R. Thomson, New Jersey
John B. Weller, California
Henry Wilson, Massachusetts

James M. Mason, Virginia
David S. Reid, North Carolina
John B. Thompson, Kentucky
Robert Toombs, Georgia
David Levy Yulee, Florida

See *ibid.*, p. 321; also *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927* (Washington, 1928).

22. United States, *Statutes at Large*, 34-35 Cong., vol. XI, p. 190.

coaches, or spring wagons, suitable for the conveyance of passengers, as well as the safety and security of the mails.

SEC. 12. *And be it further enacted*, That the contractors shall have the right of preëmption to three hundred and twenty acres of any land not then disposed of or reserved, at each point necessary for a station, not to be nearer than ten miles from each other; and provided, that no mineral land shall be thus preëmpted.

SEC. 13. *And be it further enacted*, That the said service shall be performed within twenty-five days for each trip; and that before entering into such contract, the Postmaster-General shall be satisfied of the ability and disposition of the parties *bona fide* and in good faith to perform the said contract, and shall require good and sufficient security for the performance of the same; the service to commence within twelve months after the signing of the contract.

Developments pertaining to the selection of a route failed to materialize as envisaged by many supporters of the Act. The Postmaster General whose duty it was to implement this enactment was Aaron Venable Brown. He was a Virginian by birth but he had been a Tennessean of long standing and of high political rank before 1857 at which time President James Buchanan appointed Brown to head the United States Post Office Department.

Bearing in mind the latitude allowed the bidders and the freedom granted the Postmaster General under the terms of the above quoted Act, it is of interest to observe subsequent happenings. Postmaster General Brown has, in effect, related these developments in his official report to the President in 1859, the end of Brown's first two-year stewardship. In all, eight legitimate bids were received. A ninth failed to meet the specifications and was therefore held invalid. Three of the eight were submitted by John Butterfield and associates; the others by James E. Birch; James Glover; S. Howell and A. E. Pace; David D. Mitchell, Samuel B. Churchill, William Gilpin, and others; and finally, James Johnson Jr. and Joseph Clark. Out of these eight bidders, the three by Butterfield proposed southern routes passing through New Mexico Territory. Only one offered a central route, and two indicated no specific route at all.²³

23. *Report of the Postmaster General*, December 1, 1859, in *Sen. Ex. Docs.*, 35

Diverse as these proposed routes were, none were wholly acceptable to Brown. After what he referred to as "full and mature consideration," the Postmaster General prescribed (contrary to Section 10 which states that "the contractors may select") a route which had not been wholly designated in any one of the eight legitimate bids submitted. The route designated by Brown (he referred to this as an "order") was to have two, rather than one, eastern termini — Memphis, Tennessee, and St. Louis, Missouri. Lines from these two places were to converge at Fort Smith, Arkansas; thence on to Preston, Texas; cross the Rio Grande above El Paso; then go on to Fort Yuma, Los Angeles, and finally San Francisco. "The foregoing route is selected," reported Brown, "for the overland mail service to California, as combining, in my judgment, more advantages and fewer disadvantages than any other."²⁴ All bidders, some of whom had specified somewhat similar courses, consented to having their bids extended to apply to the above route.²⁵

Brown selected from among the bidders a firm representing very substantial financial backing, one offering the greatest background of experience in Western transport enterprises, and one whose individual members were best known at the time to the American public. Brown awarded the contract to John Butterfield of Utica, New York, and his associates who included William B. Dinsmore, New York City; William G. Fargo, Buffalo; James V. P. Gardner, Utica; Marcus L. Kinyon, Rome, New York; Alexander Holland, New York City; and Hamilton Spencer, Bloomington, Illinois.²⁶

Together these seven joint-bidders represented not only stage-coach interests but, even to a greater extent, the interests of the leading express concerns in the United States.²⁷

Cong., 1 sess., pp. 987-88. The Report devotes a section, pp. 986-1011, to what is entitled "Overland Mail Service to California."

24. *Ibid.*, p. 988.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. A. L. Stimson, *History of the Express Companies* (New York, 1858), *passim*; Oscar Osburn Winther, *Express and Stagecoach Days in California* (Stanford, 1936), pp. 43, 54, 54n, 55, 55n; Grant Foreman, "The California Overland Mail Route through Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, IX (September, 1931), p. 302; *Harper's Magazine*, LI (1875), p. 322.

Strong a contender for the award as was James Birch, who represented the great California Stage Company, it is doubtful that even he could have matched the resources of the Butterfield group. The express enterprise, first created by W. F. Harnden at Boston in 1839, had enjoyed a growth and expansion matched only by the railroads. Among the pioneers and successful operators of the express business in New York and vicinity were Butterfield, Dinsmore, and Fargo. The first of these had been instrumental in forming Butterfield, Wasson and Company Express which became identified with the New York Central Railroad; the second, Dinsmore, had been a partner in Adams and Company Express; and the third was, as the general public well knew, a partner in the famed firm of Wells, Fargo and Company.²⁸

The terms of the contract, hereafter officially designated as number 12,578, specified that letter mail should be carried twice weekly each way over the prescribed route; not more than twenty-five days were to elapse for each trip. The mails were to be secured in a "boot," preferably under the driver's seat "free from wet or other injury," and should be delivered at post offices enroute. Furthermore, the contract called for use of "good four-horse post coaches or spring wagons," vehicles which could accommodate passengers as well as post. Finally, service was to begin within a period of twelve months. In return for these services the operators were to receive \$600,000 per annum for a period of six years. The contract bearing the above terms and numerous others pertaining to penalties and guarantees was duly signed on September 11, 1857.²⁹

In retrospect, the most challenging part of this remarkable document is the matter concerning roads, or the lack of them. The estimated distance of the prescribed route — constituting as it did a deep, arc-like dip into the South — was 2,795 miles.³⁰ In further justifying this far southern course,

28. *Ibid.*

29. The contract appears in full in Report of the Postmaster General, *op. cit.*, pp. 989-93.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 1003. For the exact mileage of the route as subsequently established, see tabulation in Roscoe P. Conkling and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* (Glendale, Calif., 1947), II, p. 365. Mileage figures vary slightly, depending on who has made calculations, but differences are unappreciable.

Postmaster General Brown commented at length upon its climatic and topographical advantages. He admitted that this route would pass over many mountain ranges; that it would go through country uninhabited, even untrodden, by white people; and that this region was in places inadequately supplied with water. But all these obstacles could be overcome. Here Brown drew upon a report by Captain Randolph B. Marcy³¹ who had long acquaintanceship with the arid Southwest. Marcy had described a terrain where "nature, in her wise economy, has adorned the entire face of the country with a luxuriant verdure of different kinds of grama grass, affording the most nutritious sustenance for animals."³² Brown also submitted the views of John R. Bartlett, Commissioner of the United States-Mexican boundary line, in support of a southern route. He drew upon a communication by Bartlett published in the *Providence* (Rhode Island) *Journal* (August 18, 1857) in which the Commissioner had written in generally favorable terms of the region's smooth terrain and suitability for wagon transit.³³

Brown's staunch defense of a southern route did not allay all criticism of his choice, either within or outside Congress. Many Northerners and Westerners freely and openly castigated Brown for his choice of what they called the "Ox Bow Route." It was, said the *Chicago Tribune*, "One of the greatest swindles ever perpetrated upon the country by the slaveholders."³⁴ But a decision had been made, and steps to provide regular overland mail service to California moved swiftly from the political and legal arena into the area of field preparations.

In anticipation of the contract award a company organization with requisite financial backing had been formed by the Butterfield group. The firm was known legally as "The Overland Mail Company." With John Butterfield as presi-

31. Randolph B. Marcy, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border* (New York, 1866).

32. Report of the Postmaster General, *op. cit.*, p. 998.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 1005-11. See also John R. Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations . . . Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, During the Years 1850, '51, '52, and '53* (New York, 1854), 2 vols.

34. Quoted in Ray A. Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (New York, 1956), p. 279.

dent, it had been organized as a joint-stock company under the statutes of New York State with a capital stock of two million dollars.³⁵ Thus with an effective business organization and with adequate capital, preparations for the overland service could, and did, move forward with impressive speed and on an equally impressive scale. Since, as previously stated, the contract allowed but twelve months during which all preparations for the service would have to be made, good planning and utmost speed were mandatory.

Even though the Postmaster General had designated specific places through which the line should pass, decision on the routes by which these official landmarks would be joined was left to the discretion of the company officials. So one of the first major tasks was to stake out the prescribed route in the field and to prepare the roadbed. That the Company moved swiftly to this task is clearly evident. Decisions in this important matter were dictated by many factors, chief of which were utility and practicality. Existing railroad and wagon-road facilities were utilized wherever this could be done with economy.

The first east to west portion was the Pacific Railroad (subsequently the Missouri Pacific) then extending westward from the terminal city of St. Louis to Tipton, Missouri. This was a distance of 160 miles. From Tipton the wagon road would wind southward through the Ozark Mountains and on to Fort Smith, Arkansas, on the Canadian River. There the mail line was to be joined by the 318-mile Memphis extension (via Little Rock) as prescribed by the contract. At Fort Smith the route followed a smooth southwesterly course, passing slightly east of Fort Washita, then into Texas by way of Forts Belknap and Chadbourne and on to the Rio Grande River; then up this stream for a distance of about 75 miles to El Paso, or Franklin. Fittingly enough, the old town of El Paso was to become the dividing point, administratively as well as in terms of distance, between the afore-mentioned eastern portion of the line and that which lay to the West.³⁶

35. Conkling and Conkling, *op. cit.*, I, p. 123; III, Plate 10. Other officers were: William B. Dinsmore, Vice-President; Johnson Livingston, Secretary; and William G. Fargo, on the Board of Directors.

36. Report of the Postmaster General, *Sen. Docs.*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., vol. IV,

From El Paso the Company was to blaze a westward course across water-scant, Indian-ridden New Mexico. It was to reach Tucson, Arizona, 360 miles west of the Rio Grande; then go to the Gila River and along this stream to its confluence with the Colorado at torrid Fort Yuma. Much of this portion of the proposed route was over previously unmarked trails. But as Captain Marcy had contended earlier, the terrain provided a natural roadbed with water at a premium. From this historic outpost of civilization, Fort Yuma, the route was to dip slightly below the Mexican border before pursuing its northwestward gyrations to its goal, San Francisco. The California portion was to pass across Imperial Valley, then wind its way over the Santa Rosa Mountains to Los Angeles. The final stretch north was to be over Tejón Pass and on through the San Joaquin Valley, finally cutting across Pacheco Pass, Santa Clara Valley, and along the San Francisco Peninsula to its Pacific coast terminus.³⁷

For better or for worse, this was to be the 2,795-mile route of the Overland Mail. The task facing Butterfield was one calling for unusual organizational ability and great resourcefulness. Butterfield appears to have offered both as he moved swiftly into the job, not only of laying out and preparing a road but in stocking it or organizing it for service.

Following delineations of the route, Butterfield divided operations between his eastern and his western sections. Into these two elongated divisions he sent his superintendents, construction crews, horses and mules, food supplies, and equipment. Some road grading was done, but this was kept to a minimum. Station sites were located and stations with animal corrals constructed; water was searched for and wells were dug; and if no water was to be found at desired places, arrangements for hauling it were made. Bridges, where fords would not suffice, were also built. Forage and grain for livestock for operational purposes were provided. All these, and countless other, arrangements were made before the service began. Approximately 800 men were employed to operate the

pp. 742-43. By far the most detailed descriptions of the entire route, accompanied by excellent maps, are to be found in Conkling and Conkling, *Butterfield Overland Mail*. The former are contained in vols. I-II; the maps are at end of vol. III.

37. *Ibid.*

line. Distributed and on hand were over 1,000 horses and 500 mules, approximately 250 stagecoaches and special mail wagons, scores of freight wagons and water wagons, harnesses, food, and other assorted equipment and supplies. On hand, too, were superintendents, station keepers, blacksmiths, herders, roustabouts, and, most important of all, stage drivers and conductors. In terms of monetary investment, this represented an expenditure of about a million dollars before receipts.³⁸

In keeping with contract specifications (Section 11) that service be performed with good rolling stock, "suitable for the conveyance of passengers as well as the safety and security of the mails,"³⁹ the Overland Mail Company arranged for the purchase and delivery of the best coaches American manufacturers were capable of producing. Among these were the famous "Concord" coaches manufactured by the Abbot-Downing Company of Concord, New Hampshire. These coaches were known throughout the nation as sturdy, but nevertheless comfortable, vehicles capable of withstanding the rigors of bumpy frontier roads. Their oval-shaped bodies rested on heavy thoroughbraces, or straps slung between the front and rear axles. This suspension enabled the coach bodies to roll rather than jerk or bounce when wheels hit obstructions or sank into depressions on nature's roads. A Concord coach, costing about one thousand dollars, would seat nine to twelve inside, two on the driver's seat, and as many on top as could find a place to sit down.⁴⁰ Less favored by Butterfield was the "Troy" coach manufactured by Eaton, Gilbert and Company at Troy, New York. The Troy coach, of an earlier vintage, was fast losing out in competition with the Concord by the time of the Overland Mail. It was a more lumbering vehicle, but, like the Concord, carried passengers inside and on top. Each type had a rear boot which housed luggage, and space under the driver's seat for the mail-

38. Foreman, "Overland Mail Route Through Oklahoma," *op. cit.*, p. 302.

39. Report of the Postmaster General, *op. cit.*, p. 990.

40. For an account of the history and description of the Concord coaches see Elmer M. Hunt, "Abbot-Downing and the Concord Coach," *Historical New Hampshire* (November 1945), pp. 1-20. See also Winther, *Express and Stagecoach Days in California*, pp. 97-98.

bags.⁴¹ Still a third type was the "Celerity" wagon, one subsequently known in popular parlance simply as the "mud-wagon." Manufactured by James Goold, Albany, New York, this coach was more elongated in appearance due in part to its low body and absence of top seats. It was less comfortable for day riding, but its unupholstered seats could be adjusted for night-time sleeping. It too had thoroughbraces; and due to comparative lightness and maneuverability was favored for mountain driving.⁴²

Four- to six-horse teams were used to pull these coaches which, in addition to the weight of the vehicles and passengers, included baggage (forty pounds allowed for each customer) and from five to six hundred pounds of mail.⁴³

Successful operation of this projected mail and passenger service depended also, as previously stated, on the erection, equipping, and staffing of way-stations. In towns through which the line passed, stations were provided in hotels or other business buildings much as bus lines provide ticket offices within small towns today. But since Butterfield found it necessary to establish stations averaging in distance about twenty miles apart, he found it necessary to build scores of them in open country. In doing this the Company used building materials closest at hand. Stone was used in barren mountainous regions; adobe was used in rockless desert; and of course rough logs and cut lumber were utilized in areas where wood was readily available. These stations varied in size and in scope of operation. But it was not uncommon for self-sustaining stations (those located in open, relatively uninhabited country) to be establishments of sufficient proportions to accommodate anywhere from four to ten employees and a few overnight guests who, due to travel fatigue, elected to make stopovers on their journey. Provision likewise had to be made for livestock, but for this purpose corrals usually sufficed.⁴⁴

41. William Banning and George H. Banning, *Six Horses* (New York, 1928), p. 148.

42. *Ibid.*; Conkling and Conkling, *op. cit.*, I, p. 133.

43. G. Bailey, "Great Overland Mail," Appendix to Report of the Postmaster General, *Sen. Docs.*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., vol. IV, p. 741.

44. Conkling and Conkling, *op. cit.*, I, p. 135; Banning and Banning, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Taken as a whole, these preparations were tremendous. But when on September 16, 1858, service was to commence, Butterfield and his associates and employees had met requirements. The line, as finally organized for operational purposes, was not only divided into an East and a West division with Franklin (El Paso) as the division point, but the line as a whole was organized into nine separate divisions. Within these divisions there were at first 141 stations, the number within each division varying considerably due to respective degree of settlement. Therefore Division One, San Francisco to Los Angeles, a total of 462 miles, had 35 stations, varying in distance apart from eight to twenty-four miles. Noticeably different was Division Four, Tucson to Franklin (El Paso). Over this 360-mile stretch which crossed all of the present state of New Mexico, there were only fourteen stations. These ranged in distances apart from fourteen to fifty-two miles. The latter distance was between Cook's Spring and Picacho (opposite Doña Ana) on the west bank of the Rio Grande, New Mexico. In charge of each station was an "agent"; in charge of one or more divisions was a "superintendent."⁴⁵

Postage rates were fixed by the Government at ten cents per letter; rates for packages would vary in accordance with further regulations. Senders of such letters were required to mark them "via overland," or "per overland mail." Passenger fares from St. Louis to San Francisco, or vice versa,

45. Report of the Postmaster General, *Sen. Docs.*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., vol. IV, pp. 742-43. This contains a complete list of the stations and distances between each. The following is a summary tabulation:

Division	Division Points	Distance in miles	Time Schedule by hours and minutes
One	San Francisco—Los Angeles	462	80
Two	Los Angeles—Fort Yuma	282	72:20
Three	Fort Yuma—Tucson	280	71:45
Four	Tucson—Franklin (El Paso)	360	82
Five	Franklin (El Paso)—Fort Chadbourne	458	126:30
Six	Fort Chadbourne—Colbert's Ferry (Red River)	282½	65:25
Seven	Colbert's Ferry—Fort Smith	192	38
Eight	Fort Smith—Tipton	318½	48:55
Nine	Tipton—St. Louis (Railroad)	160	11:40
	Totals	2,795	596:35

Total lapse of time: 24 days, 20 hours, 35 minutes.

were, after some experimentation, set at two hundred dollars. Passengers were given the choice of preparing their own meals or buying them at company stations.⁴⁶ So with these and countless other details taken care of, the Overland Mail Company was ready to begin its service on the last day of grace allowed under the contract — September 16, 1858.

For all the debate and widespread interest in the establishment of a regular overland mail, the actual inauguration of the service took place without much fanfare. The *Missouri Republican*, for example, reported on events at St. Louis in a most matter-of-fact manner, saying: "The first overland mail for San Francisco, Cal., . . . takes its departure this morning from the St. Louis Post Office, at 7 o'clock. It goes by the way of the Pacific Railroad to Tipton, from whence it will be conveyed in coaches and spring wagons the whole of the distance. Mr. J. Butterfield who has given his personal supervision to the work of getting this mail fairly under way in all its parts, goes out with it to Springfield." The *Republican* endorsed the undertaking and extended its special compliments to Postmaster General Brown for having "done more for the mail service in Missouri and the West, in his brief period of office, than any one of his predecessors for a whole term."⁴⁷

Alone in arranging for newspaper coverage of the first westward trek of the Overland Mail was the *New York Herald*, which dispatched a special correspondent to make this initial trip with instructions to make reports. This he did in the form of six articles to this newspaper, subsequently published in the *Herald*.⁴⁸ Given this unique assignment was the youthful (twenty-three-year-old) Waterman L. Ormsby who, as it turned out, became the one and only "through" west-bound passenger on this now historic journey taken a century

46. *Ibid.*, vol. X, doc. 48, p. 2. See also Rockwell D. Hunt and William S. Ament, *Oxcart to Airplane* (Los Angeles, 1929), pp. 92-94.

47. The (St. Louis) *Missouri Republican*, September 16, 1858.

48. The *New York Herald* articles by Ormsby, republished and edited, appear in Lyle H. Wright and Josephine M. Bynum, eds., *The Butterfield Overland Mail* by Waterman L. Ormsby (San Marino, California, 1942). Hereafter cited as Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail*. An article based solely on Ormsby's account is one by Hybernian Grace, "The First Trip West on the Butterfield Stage," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, VIII (June 1932), pp. 62-74.

ago. Over the first portion of the route Ormsby and John Butterfield were fellow passengers, and this fortunate situation provided the *Herald* reporter with a firsthand source for much of the background information sought for his articles.

The ten-hour train trip across Missouri farm country was made on schedule, and a mere nine-minute transfer from rail to four-horse stagecoach at Tipton⁴⁹ was apparently done without disruption of the Butterfield timetable.⁵⁰

Ormsby's second communication, sent from near the Red River, Indian Territory, reported his reactions to constant day-and-night coach travel. On this first lap of the stageline the correspondent's attention was alerted particularly to covered wagon migrations which appeared constantly in progress. "All along the wildest western roads these [covered wagon] hotels may be met in every direction," he reported, "enlivening the way by their camp fires at night. . . ." At first night driving bothered Ormsby as he recalled his reading of Indian-infested forests and plains and as stump and brush seemed to become transformed into "lurking foe." On and on they rolled as the coach "rocked to and fro on the rough road, like a vessel moving on the sea."⁵¹

Dispatch three covered the route from Fayetteville to Fort Smith through the Ozark Range over which the road was "steep, rugged, jagged, rough, and mountainous." At a place about a hundred miles east of El Paso, on September 28th, came the dramatic moment of meeting the first east-bound stage from San Francisco. Ormsby's fifth dispatch was written at Tucson and relates his reactions to travel across the uninhabited "wilds of Texas, along its lonely plains and barren hills and dangerous frontier to the Rio Grande." Here the new trail was barely in evidence, water was scarce, stations were farther apart than elsewhere, and teams of wild

49. One source reported that on this first trip the mails were transferred from train to coach at Jefferson City, but evidence indicates that the mailbags traveled, as scheduled, to Tipton before being reshipped by coach. See Monas N. Squires, "The Butterfield Overland Mail in Missouri," *The Missouri Historical Review*, XXVI (July 1932), p. 334.

50. Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, pp. 12, 16. The September 16, 1858, westbound timetable, the one followed by Ormsby, is reproduced in facsimile in *Frontispiece* of this book. On the reverse side of this timetable appears a list of nineteen special instructions issued by President Butterfield to his employees.

51. *Ibid.*

mules were at times substituted for tamed well-broken horses. Station facilities were of crudest types. At one of these (Conolly's) seats were "inverted pails or nature's chair." He reported the absence of plates and the use of four tin cups for their black, unsweetened coffee. Solid food at this station consisted of hardtack baked over hot coals, each man breaking off a piece as desired and buttering by use of a pocket knife. But even butter was a luxury in these parts.⁵²

Ormsby's final reports on his journey over the Butterfield Overland Mail line were written at San Francisco and were dated October 10th and 13th, following the conclusion of his near-twenty-five-day journey. These last letters offer a recapitulation of his travel experiences and make observations on the line as a whole. To say, as he did upon arrival at San Francisco, that "I feel almost fresh enough to undertake it [the trip] again" is perhaps an exaggeration. He deemed the southern plains and desert the most "dangerous part" of his journey but none the less exciting and interesting; he found a diet of hardtack, dried beef, raw onions, and black coffee a bit trying in places, the scarcity of water aggravating, the jolting of the stage rugged; but many of the difficulties encountered were capable of being removed. He did not belittle the danger from Indian attacks, and recommended "thorough military protection." He was fulsome in his praise of the Company employees. In summary he said: "To many Americans who travel for pleasure this route will be a favorite. Relieved from all danger of seasickness and the dull monotony of a sea voyage, they can travel by comfortable stages, stopping at such interesting points as they may choose for rest, and enjoying many opportunities for viewing the beautiful, the wonderful, and the sublime products of nature. . . . The overland mail is, at any rate, a fixed fact."⁵³

Ormsby's account of the first westward passage has been matched, fortunately, by a report on the first eastbound trip given by G. [?] Bailey, a special agent for the Post Office Department. Bailey's account differs from the former in two respects; it is an official report addressed to Postmaster Gen-

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 41 ff.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

eral Brown, and it is brief. The report, emanating from Washington, D. C., and dated October 18, 1858, was transmitted by Brown to President James Buchanan with the prophetic words: "It will be an important document, not less instructive at the present time than it may be interesting and curious to those who, in after times, may be desirous to know by what energy, skill, and perseverance the vast wilderness was first penetrated by the mail stages of the United States, and the two great oceans united by the longest and most important land route ever established in any country."⁵⁴

In writing his report Bailey related that he traveled from Washington out to San Francisco over the facilities of the Aspinwall and Panama concern. The initial eastbound stage departed from San Francisco's Plaza September 14th, two days ahead of the contract deadline. Even though "attended with many difficulties and embarrassments," according to Bailey, this trip was made within the prescribed time limit, the elapsed time being twenty-four days, eighteen hours, and twenty-six minutes.

Bailey reported that, in his opinion, the Company had complied with the essential conditions of the contract. He said the line was stocked with "substantially-built" Concord coaches, permanent stations had either been erected or were in the process of being built, water was being specially dispatched to stations where none was obtainable on the premises. "Thus far," he reported, "the experiment has proved successful." The Company, he said, had conquered the physical obstacles, but he warned that it had yet to demonstrate the ability to cope with possible Indian troubles.⁵⁵

The prompt and successful completion of these initial trips appears to have sparked public imagination concerning this gigantic staging venture for the first time. Upon receiving the news of the arrival of the eastbound coach at St. Louis, President Buchanan, from the nation's capital, telegraphed his congratulations to John Butterfield, saying in part: "It is a glorious triumph for civilization and the

54. Report of the Postmaster General, *Sen. Docs.*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., vol. IV, p. 718.

55. *Ibid.*, Appendix, pp. 739-41.

Union.”⁵⁶ At St. Louis where the first departure of the Butterfield coach passed without fanfare, the arrival at this city of the first eastbound mail- and passenger-bearing coach was greeted with public cheers. The coach was escorted through the streets leading to the post office by crowds of people led by a brass band. And at San Francisco, reported the San Francisco *Bulletin*, “a shout was raised, that ran with the rapidity of an electric flash along Montgomery street, which throughout its length was crowded by an excited populace.”⁵⁷ Nor did this enthusiasm necessarily abate with the first transits. J. M. Farwell, special correspondent for San Francisco’s *Alta California*, reported upon the termination at St. Louis of his first trip over the route, November 10, 1858: “I . . . find quite as much excitement existing among the people, upon the question of the overland communication, as there was in San Francisco; when I left there some weeks ago. I have been literally besieged with queries in regard to the route. . . .”⁵⁸

The goodwill expressed by the public at the inception of the service fortunately continued.⁵⁹ Salvaged reactions in the form of travelers’ accounts and newspaper commentary tend to convey a favorable reaction to the service offered by the Overland Mail even though many Northerners and Westerners never became reconciled to the location of the “Ox Bow” route as such. There exists, for example, the reminiscent account of H. D. Barrows. In 1896 Barrows recalled for members of the Southern California Historical Society a ride he and his wife took during December, 1860. They traveled via the “Overland” from Los Angeles to St. Louis in “thorough-brace mud wagons.” “Of course the journey was somewhat tedious,” he said, “but . . . the weariness of stage travel was less disagreeable, than sea-sickness.” He commented

56. Quoted in LeRoy R. Hafen, “Butterfield’s Overland Mail,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, II (October, 1923), p. 219. A summary of newspaper sentiment in Missouri is to be found in Squires, “The Butterfield Overland Mail in Missouri,” *op. cit.*, pp. 340-41.

57. Quoted in Hafen, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

58. [Walter Barnes Lang], comp., *The First Overland Mail: Butterfield Trail* (n. p., 1940), p. 127.

59. Criticism against the line was seldom if ever of the service on the Butterfield Overland Mail; such was directed against the use of the extreme southern, or “Ox Bow” route. See Squires, “The Butterfield Overland Mail in Missouri,” p. 341.

that at first sleeping aboard the coach was difficult but after a couple of days this could be done "without difficulty, either day or night." When at their journey's end the Barrows found accommodations at the Planters' House at St. Louis where after, and not before, a night's rest they took a warm bath and changed their apparel. After this, "somewhat the worse for wear and tear and dust," they felt "as good as new."⁶⁰

To the end the Company adhered to the charge that the mails must go through. Reports indicate that when passenger stages also carrying mail were delayed the mails would be rushed ahead by means of special light and fast coaches or by means of riders. William Tallack, an Englishman traveling eastbound over the line in 1860, relates such a special transfer of the mails in order that they might make scheduled connections with the Pacific Railroad at Tipton.⁶¹ It is also recorded how on one occasion, near Indian Wells, Arizona, the mail bags were forwarded by two riders. Subsequently these riders were to be caught in a dust storm in which they not only became separated from each other but from their horses as well. But the mail, somewhat delayed, went through to the next station. Mishaps, most often due to broken axles, were common, but somehow the mails and passengers moved forward. Loss of horses due to Indian thefts, especially by the Texas Comanches, were numbered in the hundreds. But these misfortunes did not disrupt overland service, which according to one contemporary writer never once failed to meet the scheduled delivery of the mails.⁶²

In spite of splendid service records there were individuals and groups, especially those with political associations, whose actions were ultimately to have a disruptive effect upon the Overland Mail. In Congress there were critical elements, namely those who because of sectional partisanship and those who on grounds of economy opposed this Southern line. Ul-

60. H. D. Barrows, "A Two Thousand Mile Stage Ride," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* (1896), pp. 40-41, 43.

61. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

62. Rupert N. Richardson, "Some Details of the Southern Overland Mail," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (July, 1925), pp. 1-18; Muriel H. Wright, "Historic Places on the Old Stage Line From Fort Smith to Red River," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XI (June, 1933), pp. 798-822.

timately the decisive disruptive force was the outbreak of the Civil War.

When, for example, the postal appropriations bill came up for debates in the Senate during May and June, 1860, attempts were made to interfere with the Butterfield contract. This took the form of the sponsorship by Senator Milton S. Latham of a central route, St. Louis to Placerville, California,⁶³ and by proposing a re-routing (subject to the Company's approval) of mail over the Butterfield line. Senator Trusten Polk of Missouri arose to object, for he was opposed to any interference with the Butterfield contract. Polk related that this contract had been in operation for two years and that the contractors had "never failed to perform their part." Georgia's Senator Iverson, much as Latham had done, favored modifications in the Butterfield contract. Iverson even went so far as to suggest a shift in the eastern terminus of this line from St. Louis to either Vicksburg or New Orleans. Senator William K. Sebastian of Arkansas, like Missouri's Senator Polk, came to the defense of the Butterfield line: "They have achieved a success that does honor to the enterprise and energy of our American citizens. . . . I propose to leave this line just as it is."⁶⁴ New Hampshire's Senator John P. Hale, while satisfied with the Company's performance, scored small returns in the form of postal receipts.⁶⁵ These receipts (totaling \$71,378.63) were considered a small return on an annual government investment of \$600,000 in the enterprise. Finally, on June 19, 1860, Senator Latham's bill to establish a central overland mail route was laid aside and the controversy ended.⁶⁶

63. *The Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., pt. 2, p. 2459. This action was at least in part prompted by a resolution passed by the California State Legislature and sent to its United States Senators asking for "daily" overland mail service. See *Hse. Misc. Docs.*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., vol. V, p. 1064.

64. *The Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., pt. 3, p. 3147.

65. The report on the volume of postal business, September, 1858, through March, 1860, indicates the following:

Letters received from the West,	244,764;	Amount of postages,	\$23,276.11
Letters sent to the West,	441,196;	" " "	48,102.52
Total received and sent,	685,960;	Total postages,	71,378.63

See *ibid.*, Appendix, p. 2461.

66. For Senate debates during May and June, 1860, referred to above, see *ibid.*, pp. 2458-61; pp. 2113-15, 2458-61, 3146-51. It was the opinion of J. S. Black, Attorney General, as expressed in a letter to Postmaster General Joseph Holt (Brown's successor),

Meanwhile the Butterfield mail and passenger coaches rolled on with amazing regularity. It was said of the Butterfield Overland Mail by the *Los Angeles Star*: "The arrival of the stages of the Overland Mail had been heretofore as regular as the index on the clock points to the hour, as true as the dial to the sun. During all seasons, in cold and heat, in winter and summer, the overland stage has kept its time. . . ." ⁶⁷

The record reveals that the average time of transit over this line, even during the worst seasons of the year, was twenty-one days and fifteen hours. This was comfortably below the mandatory twenty-five days.⁶⁸ By 1860 the volume of mail had increased perceptibly, and the passenger (mostly non-through) traffic had reached near-maximum capacity.⁶⁹ But forces beyond an individual man's powers to conquer spelled doom for the "Ox Bow" line. Secession and outbreak of the Civil War made disbandment of the line imperative. Early in 1861 secessionist elements in the South began either the confiscation or destruction of the Company's livestock, equipment, and road bridges, and thereby put an end, by March 6, to regular through service.

Even before this disruption occurred, the United States Senate had initiated action intended to put an end to the "Ox Bow" route, if not to the Butterfield Company itself. On

that it was doubtful that the Butterfield contract could legally be annulled or modified. Congress had empowered the Postmaster General to enter into a contract which he did without including in said contract the customary provisions allowing for subsequent change. "On the whole," said Black, "my opinion is, that you cannot change the service and reduce the pay of these contractors without violating the faith which the Government pledged to them by the agreement of your predecessor." This opinion Holt transmitted to the Senate Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads. Doubtless this opinion had a restraining influence on those Senators who sought to kill the Butterfield line through modification or annulment of the 1857 contract. See *Sen. Ex. Docs.*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., vol. IX, doc. 26, pp. 1-5; see also *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 2459-60.

67. *Los Angeles Star*, October 1, 1859, quotation from Foreman, "The California Overland Mail Route Through Oklahoma," *op. cit.*, p. 316.

68. *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., pt. 3, p. 2459.

69. Conkling and Conkling, *Butterfield Overland Mail*, II, p. 321. No complete record of passenger traffic exists. Rupert N. Richardson, in "Some Details of the Southern Overland Mail," *op. cit.*, pp. 6-9, arrives at passenger estimates for 1858-59 by means of close scrutiny of newspaper reports of arrivals and departures at St. Louis and San Francisco. He concludes that the total number of "through passengers" for 1858 numbered only about 150 each way. Volume came from selling transportation over sections of the route, in other words, serving local transportation needs. Ocean steamers retained the bulk of the coast-to-coast passenger trade.

February 22, 1861, a bill was again introduced in the Senate which would direct the Postmaster General to modify the contract by making arrangement for the establishment of a central overland route and for the transport of East-West mails on such a route. By acts of Congress, March 2 and 12, 1861, the end was decreed. Congress ordered the modification of the original contract calling for the transfer of the overland mail service from the southern to a central route.⁷⁰ A three-month period of disruption of overland mail service ensued, for it was July 18, 1861, before service over the central route to extend from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento was inaugurated. In making this shift the physical assets of the original Overland Mail Company were transferred to the new line and were put in service over a five-hundred-mile division between Salt Lake City and Virginia City, Nevada. Service over the other sections of the central route was, by government agreement, managed through sub-let arrangements by other concerns.⁷¹ In this manner the southern overland service ended. Thus came to a close a dramatic, picturesque, pioneer experiment in overland passenger and mail service across the wide stretches of the American Southwest on the eve of the Civil War.

70. *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 sess., pt. 2, pp. 1109 ff.

71. Conkling and Conkling, *Butterfield Overland Mail*, II, pp. 337-38.