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# The Missouri Historical Review

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*Published Quarterly by*  
THE STATE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF MISSOURI

VOL. 52

APRIL 1958

NO. 3

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THE COVER: Shortly after 6:00 p.m. on September 16, 1858, a bright new stagecoach carrying two mail pouches and John Butterfield, his son, the conductor, and six passengers whirled out of Tipton to inaugurate service on the

new Butterfield Overland Mail from St. Louis to San Francisco. This artist's conception of the departure first appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, October 23, 1858.

The Missouri Historical Review is published quarterly at 2601 Industrial Drive, Jefferson City, Missouri. Communications should be mailed to that address or to The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

The Review is sent free to all members of the State Historical Society of Missouri. Membership dues in the Society are \$1.00 a year or \$20 for a life membership. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors to the magazine.

Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Jefferson City, Missouri, under an act of August 24, 1912.

large bonfire to celebrate the occasion and "assured us that he would have fired a gun for us, but he could not get it to go off."<sup>10</sup> Supper was waiting and the relay of horses was harnessed, so the coach was delayed only 20 minutes. A quarter mile southwest of Shackelford's the stage struck the old Boonville road, following it closely to Springfield. After traveling 13 miles the coach stopped at James P. Munhollen's, where fresh horses were harnessed and waiting. Passing southwest from here the road cut the extreme southeast corner of Pettis County and through the outskirts of Cole Camp to Burns', 20 miles from the previous stop.

Another 15 miles brought the coach to Warsaw, where it arrived at 3:00 a.m. and ahead of schedule. From here, said Ormsby, "The road led through a ford of the Osage River and a dense forest, full of rocky hills, and the night was now dark as pitch. As we left Warsaw we had to be preceded by a man on horseback, with a light to show us the way through the ford, . . . I began to feel some fear of wet feet and mail bags when the water reached the hub, but we got over safely and pretty dry, as the water was not deeper than half the wheels."<sup>11</sup>

Crossing the Pomme de Terre River on a covered bridge near Fairfield, the coach rolled on to the next station, operated by E. K. Bailey, eleven miles south of Warsaw. After ten more miles the stage made a breakfast stop at Quincy. A few minutes later the coach rumbled on its way, passing through Wheatland and Elkton, to Yoast's station, 16 miles southwest of Quincy and nearly two miles south of Elkton.

Traveling due south for 16 miles, the coach clattered into Bolivar, where the station, located at the old Franklin Hotel, was owned and operated by Ahab Bowen. Stopping only for fresh horses, the stage continued on for eleven and one-half miles to the home of James H. M. Smith, two miles north of Brighton. Another eleven miles took the coach through Brighton to the next stop, Evans' station. From here a brief run of nine miles brought the mail to Springfield at 3:15 p. m., after having covered the 300 miles from St. Louis in 31 hours 15 minutes and the 143 miles from Tipton in only 21 hours. Here the travelers were cared for at Smith's Tavern, operated by Nicholas Smith.

The arrival of the coach was greeted with real enthusiasm at Springfield. A crowd gathered to see the first overland mail and

<sup>10</sup>Wright and Bynum, *Overland Mail*, 13.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

to congratulate the Butterfields. The passengers, baggage, and mails were transferred from the coach to a celerity wagon, and after a 45-minute halt the mail was again on its way.

Leaving Springfield, the stage traveled 13 miles southwest to John C. Ashmore's station, two miles inside Christian County. From here the road led in a southwesterly direction to the station operated by John I. Smith, 20 miles from Ashmore's and seven miles west of present Crane. Continuing southwest for 15 miles, the road passed through eastern McDowell and then followed Flat Creek to John D. Crouch's station. From here the road continued on through Cassville to John G. Harbin's, the last Missouri station, one mile southwest of Washburn and 16 miles from Crouch's. The mail entered Arkansas six miles southwest of this station.<sup>12</sup> From here the road led through Ft. Smith, El Paso, Tucson, and Los Angeles, to San Francisco, where the first Overland Mail arrived at 7:30 a. m. on October 10, only 23 days and 23 hours out of St. Louis.

Although Californians played an active role in securing the Overland Mail, seven eastbound stages had left the plaza in San Francisco without arousing great interest, probably because few had faith in the project. Hence, the unexpected arrival of the first mail took both the people and the press by surprise, and the letters were sorted and a St. Louis paper of September 16 circulated for a time before they realized that the impossible had been accomplished. The San Francisco *Bulletin* of October 11 apologized for the lackadaisical reception, and that evening the Monumental Fire Company fired a 32-gun salute to honor the mail, while Ormsby was called upon to describe his trip at a great mass meeting. The arrival of the second mail on October 15 brought a tremendous ovation.<sup>13</sup>

The first eastbound stage left San Francisco at 12:10 a. m. on September 15. After meeting the first westbound coach about 100 miles east of El Paso, it experienced an enthusiastic reception at Springfield, where it arrived at 3:00 p. m. on October 8, less than 24 days out of San Francisco. John Butterfield was awaiting the coach and, hoping to reach Tipton in time to catch the morning train for St. Louis, halted the progress only a few minutes while horses and vehicles were changed. That night, long after the departure of the stage, "a display of fireworks took place, witnessed by a large number of our citizens, nearly all of whom seemed to

<sup>12</sup>Conkling, *Overland Mail*, I, 191.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 316-21.