

Drawn according to Sept '58

September Celebrations Mark Centennial of Butterfield Mail



The 2500 mile Butterfield overland route, reaching from the Ozarks to California, with some 200 stations on it. (Only the major stops are shown).—Map by Winslow Kingman.

September is the centennial month of the Butterfield Overland Mail that traversed the Ozarks en route to San Francisco, starting at St. Louis, proceeding by rail to Tipton (Mo), and then by coach through Missouri, Arkansas, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, to California. The first west bound coach left Tipton on September 16, 1858, and its major station stops in the Ozarks were Warsaw, Bolivar, Springfield, Cassville, Rogers, Springdale, Fayetteville, Van Buren and Ft. Smith.

A centennial caravan will proceed over this route all the way to San Francisco, leaving at Tipton on September 16, overnight at Warsaw, lunch at Bolivar, overnight at Springfield, lunch at Cassville, overnight at Fayetteville, lunch at Van Buren and overnight at Ft. Smith. These communities, including others through which the line passed, are holding appropriate celebrations as the caravan arrives, thus commemorating the nation's major achievement of establishing the 2500 mile mail and coach line, the first to tie the east and the far west together.

THE MOUNTAINEER to some extent has paved the way for these celebrations because it has carried, beginning in February, 1955, some 30 feature articles about the Butterfield Mail, contributed principally by Staff Member, F. P. Rose. Several of those members are participating actively in the Centennial. W. J. Lemke, for instance, is acting for the entire state of Arkansas. Mr. Rose will make a final Butterfield contribution in the October issue, paying "final respects" to John Butterfield and emphasizing the development of the Ozarks a century ago, a land then fairly far advanced in human achievement, only to be devastated by the Civil War, from whose evil effects years were needed to recover.

Butterfield Route Through Arkansas

THE OZARKS MOUNTAIN

This is the second installment of an article describing the route of the Butterfield Overland Mail from St. Louis to San Francisco that traversed the Missouri and Arkansas Ozarks, beginning at Tipton and going through Warsaw, Bolivar, Springfield, Cassville, Rogers, Springdale, Fayetteville, Van Buren to Ft. Smith. The author is a grandson of John G. Harbin, who operated the last station stop in Missouri, just north of the Arkansas line, and was born and spent his boyhood at that place. In the July installment he carried the route through Missouri. He now proceeds through Arkansas and on to the Pacific Coast. The centennial of the Mail will be observed next September when a lengthy, colorful caravan will follow the schedule of the first coach that began its journey on September 15, 1858, at Tipton and ended it at San Francisco on October 10, 2391 miles distant. THE MOUNTAINEER's September issue will carry the details of the caravan and the many community celebrations that will be staged as it passes through. And, in it will be a concluding article by Staff Member, F. P. Rose, whose articles over the past several years have "prepared the ground" for the Centennial.

By Clyde C. Hammers

Fourteen hours out of Springfield brought it to Callahan's station in Arkansas, one mile northwest of what is now Rogers. "We greased our wagon," runs Ormsby's story, "changed horses and got some breakfast—all in an incredibly short time—after which we set out for Fayetteville."

Ormsby fails to mention Fitzgerald's station near the present-day town of Springdale. He was impressed with the rugged Ozark hills that surrounded this region and indicates three hours were spent on the drive from Callahan's to Fayetteville, which he describes as "located up among the hills in a most inaccessible spot." (The Washington County court house now occupies the site of Butterfield's station and stables. He also built a hotel on the property and spent much time in Fayetteville during the two and a half years the Overland Mail operated.)

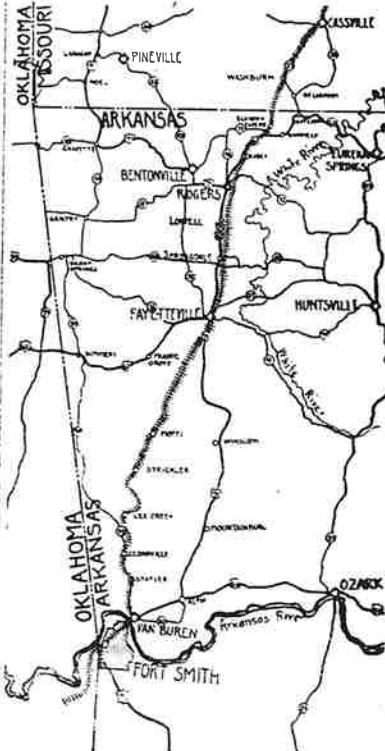
A recurring phrase of Ormsby's was "little prairies in the mountains," as he called the open spaces in the Ozarks. "Even among these hills you do not lose sight of the prairie nature of the West," was a comment at this point in Arkansas.

The departure from Fayetteville was made at 10 minutes before noon on Saturday, 22 hours and 17 minutes ahead of the schedule established by the Post Office Department. Ormsby credited this gain to the Butterfields for their acquisition of excellent horses and the perfect organization of relay stops. . . . "Mr. Butterfield is the most energetic president of a company I ever saw. He appears to know every foot of the ground and to be known by everybody, while his son John has been very active in

getting good stock on this end of the route."

Over the Boston Mountains

At Park's station 14 miles south of Fayetteville the change was to a team of four mules to cross the Ozark range and the dreaded



Butterfield stations in NW Ark.

Boston Mountains. Ormsby thought the rough roads he had just been over could not be equaled, but here he found "Arkansas fairly beats itself." But for the exceptional team of mules he doubted if the crossing could have been made in less than two days. Fifteen miles of the road wound among the mountains at a height of 2000 feet above sea level.

"The wiry, light, little animals tugged and pulled as if they would tear themselves to pieces," he wrote. "By hard tugging we got up, and with the aid of brakes

and drags we got down. . . . We had a clear day, and I can only say that our mountain views in the Highlands of the Hudson are but children's toys in comparison with these vast works of nature."

The mules brought the Overland Mail to Brodie's station, a distance of 19 miles. The trip on to Ft. Smith by way of Oosley's continued to be exciting as night fell. The Arkansas River was crossed in a flatboat at Van Buren, and a guide on horseback, with a lantern, aided the driver across the soft river flats where there was danger of the heavily loaded stage sinking in the quicksands. The arrival in Ft. Smith was at 2 A.M., the 65 miles from Fayetteville having been made in 14 hours and seven minutes.

From Ft. Smith Through Texas

Ft. Smith was the junction point of the main route of the Overland Mail Company with the Memphis branch. The Memphis stage had arrived in Ft. Smith just 15 minutes ahead of the mail from St. Louis. The town of 2500 inhabitants was wide awake and in great excitement for the unseasonable hour of 2 o'clock in the morning. "Horns were blown, houses were lit up, and many flocked to the hotel to have a look at the wagons and talk over the exciting topic, and have a peep at the first mail bags," Ormsby relates.

The stay in Ft. Smith lasted an hour and 45 minutes. The two mails from St. Louis and Memphis were joined and the Overland departed in a new stage with fresh horses at 3:30 A.M. on Sunday, September 19, exactly 24 hours ahead of time.

The route was across the southeast corner of Indian Territory, among friendly Choctaws, and entered Texas at Colbert's Ferry on the Red River. Through Sherman and Gainesville the stage continued to Ft. Belknap and Chadbourne where the going became extremely hard.

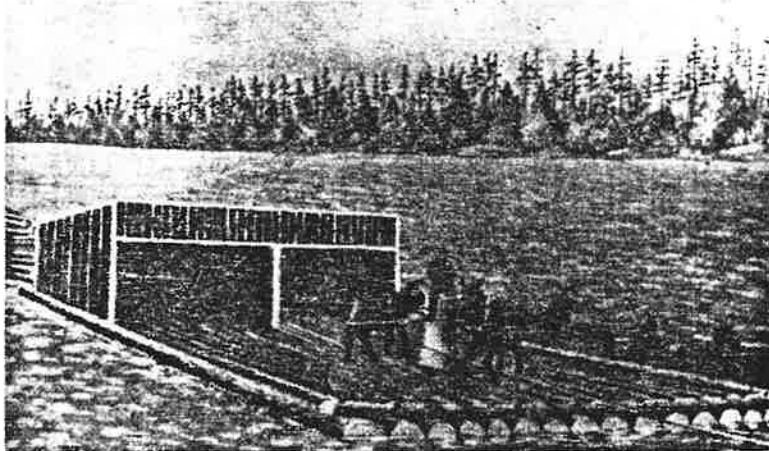
From Chadbourne to El Paso, a distance of over 400 miles, there was no sign of human habitation except the company stations, some of which were 35 to 75 miles apart. Butterfield's agent in this area had obtained and corralled "wild mules" at each station—that is, mules that had

Butterfield Crossing at Van Buren Village

By F. P. Rose

While Van Buren, Arkansas, was never listed as a relay station on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, yet it occupied a position of vital importance because here was the ferry across the Arkansas River.

Destiny undoubtedly guided the footsteps of Thomas Martin, who about 1828, "squatted" on a claim where the City of Van Buren now stands. During the next two years a few other settlers joined him, and in 1830 Thomas Phillips bought Martins' claim. The following March a post office was



Type of raft-ferry used by Butterfield stages crossing the Arkansas.

established at "Phillip's Landing," as it was then called, and Mr. Phillips was appointed postmaster.

In April, 1836, Thomas Phillips advertised lots in the Town of Van Buren for sale. This name was selected because Martin Van Buren was then a candidate for the Presidency, and Mr. Phillips was one of his ardent supporters. In a short time Van Buren became a leading riverport from which new settlers would start their trek northward over the Boston Mountains to the great fertile Ozarks plateau of Northwest Arkansas. This important road began at Van Buren, nearest point on the Arkansas River, and over it the first stage line was established from St. Louis to California.

Ormsby says: "We crossed the Arkansas, in a flatboat much resembling a raft at Van Buren, flourishing little town on the banks. Our course through the soft bed of the flats (which were not covered, owing to the low stage of the river) was somewhat hazardous, as our heavy load was liable to be sunk on the quick sands which abound here. But with the aid of a guide on horseback with a lantern (for it was night) we crossed the flats, and up the steep sandy bank in safety. Picking our way cautiously for five or six miles, we reached Fort Smith on the border of Arkansas and the Indian Territory, at five minutes after two o'clock A. M., having made the sixty-five miles from Fayetteville in fourteen hours and seven minutes, or three hours and seven minutes less than schedule time."

The Log Raft Ferry

The accompanying picture shows one of those old time log-raft ferries. A heavy cable was wound several times about the winch with an end securely anchored to the bank on either side of the river. To cross the river, from whichever side the ferry might come on, the horses would walk one way or the other, winding the cable on the winch, thus pulling the ferry in the desired direction. The ferry in use at Van Buren was similar to this, but did not have the shed on one end, and was used in part—for quarters for the crew and a stall for the horses.

There is much unwritten history involved in the methods used in persuading the balking horses (many of them without harness for the first time) to cross such a "wieldy contraption" as a log-raft, especially at night. I alone pull a stage-wagon and have had experience in breaking horses.—the effort it sometimes took to get an old gentle horse on a strange bridge.—can understand all the "tail-twisting" and persuasive loud language it took to handle such a situation. Miraculous feats of skillful horsemanship were constantly being done by these drivers.

This telegraph line was up to Brighton when Stage Line started.

Ozarks Mountaineer
Feb 1958.

First Telegraph Line Through The Ozarks Built in 1859

Almost everyone in the Ozarks has read of the "Old Wire Road" that extended through Springfield to Cassville, Fayetteville and Ft. Smith and received its name from the telegraph wires that were stretched along it shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. It far antedated the telegraph line and was a principal artery of pioneer travel. The following article is a brief account of the building of that line in 1859, taken from a letter of a lineman who actually worked on the job.

By F. P. Rose

In reliving the great moments of our history, the invention of the telegraph should not be overlooked. On January 6, 1838, Samuel F. B. Morse first demonstrated his electric telegraph to the general public. Messages were sent over three miles of wire stretched around the walls of the Speedwell Iron Works, Morristown, N. J., owned by Stephen Vail, whose funds made the experiments possible. His son, Alfred Vail, designed and manufactured the equipment used—a marked improvement over Morse's own crudely wrought apparatus. To young Vail's skill and unflagging enthusiasm Morse owed much of the credit for his final success.

The thrilling story of the growth and expansion of our American telegraph system is much too vast, to be covered in this short article, and I shall try to give only a brief account of the first line in the Ozarks built through Springfield, Fayetteville to Van Buren and Fort Smith. The road that it followed was called the "Old Wire Road," really no identification, because every road in the country, along which a telegraph line was built, was called a "wire road."

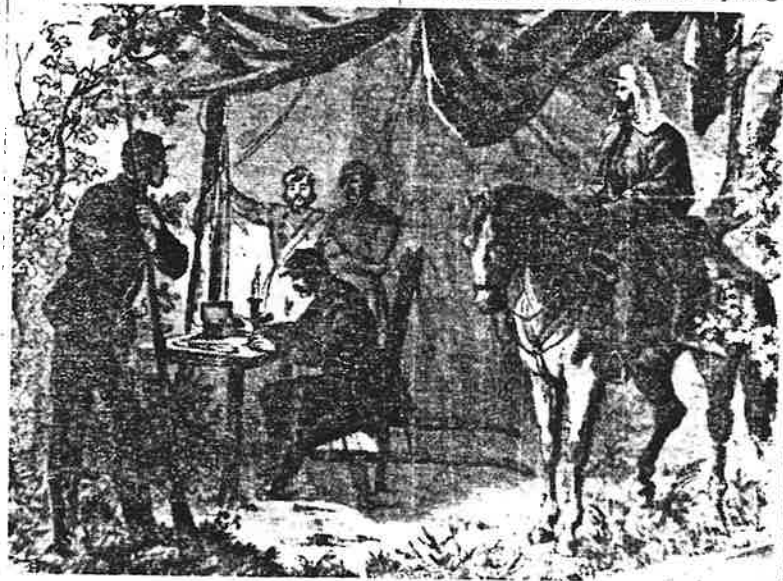
The Telegraph Comes to Missouri

The Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri tells: "... In 1846 the line was opened to New York and shortly afterwards it was built through the Southern States to New Orleans. It was pushed rapidly from Philadelphia through Pittsburgh, to Cincinnati and Louisville, and thence westward in the direction of St. Louis. When Congress met in December, 1847, the line had reached Vincennes, (Ind) and the President's message was sent over the wire for the St. Louis 'Missouri Republican'. Two weeks later the line reached the Mississippi River opposite St. Louis, and three days afterward, December 22, 1847, an instrument

on the bottom of the river and this connection has been maintained ever since. . . . In 1859 the Missouri & Western Telegraph Company, with \$1,000,000 capital, was chartered by the State of Missouri to build, buy and operate lines west of the Mississippi River, and soon had lines to Spring-

and consisted of one hand vise one connector, one file, and a pair of small blocks and rope.

"After reaching Jefferson City we met there J. J. Fry, W. R. Woodward and a man named Slocum. Part of the gang went to Springfield to commence work on the Fort Smith line. Another man and myself took the team. Mr. Porter left the previous fall, following the line from Syracuse to Jefferson City, doing repairing and trimming. We overtook the line gang in camp south of Spring-



An Ozarks Telegraph Station of Union Army during Civil War.

These and other lines subsequently built were absorbed afterward by the Western Union Telegraph Company. . . ."

* * *

From the Library of the Western Union Telegraph Company, we have a copy of a letter from a Mr. Rugger, who began his telegraph career as a lineman in 1859, on the first telegraph lines connecting St. Louis, Mo. with the West, which he prepared for publication a short time before his death.

The Wires Reach Springfield

"In the fall of 1859 I worked at digging holes on a line between Syracuse and Springfield, Mo. This was my first experience at construction work, and it was a tough proposition. The country was rough, hilly and full of rocks. We crossed the Osage River at Warsaw, using native poles of all kinds with what we called nigger-

field. The farmers delivered the poles to us, ten or fifteen at a time along the route. We had to shave them and help load them on teams, which was the only means of transportation in those pioneer days. We finished setting poles in June 1860.

Extension to Ft. Smith

"Mr. Porter then started with some teams and men to commence work on a line from Omaha to Fort Kearney, Neb. Five of us in charge of John Kessler and Mr. Williams went to Springfield to string a wire to Fort Smith. Mr. Williams and I did all the climbing on ladders. The weather was extremely hot in July in the Arkansas hills. Some days the thermometer registered 110 degrees in the shade. We opened the telegraph office at Fayetteville, Ark., and crossed the Arkansas River with one wire from a high bluff at Van Buren. We reached

Line Built 1859

1859

the Butterfield Overland Mail in Arkansas

By

W. J. Lemke and Ted R. Worley

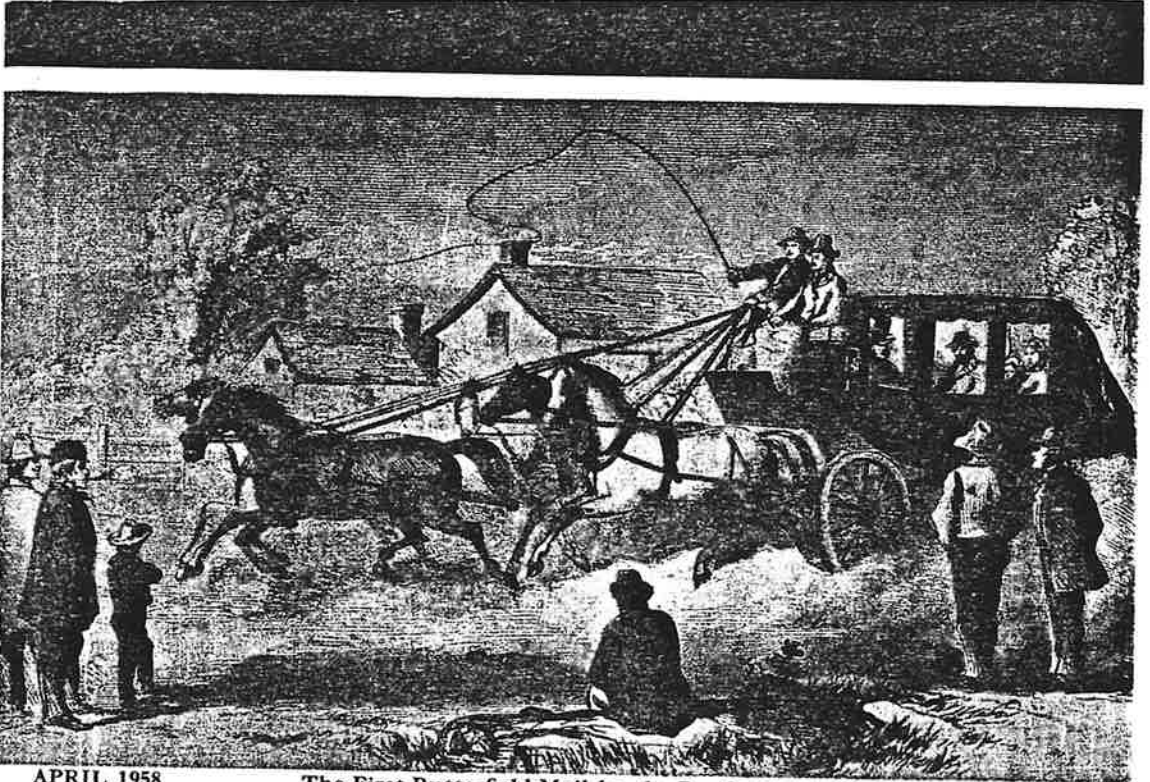


Arkansas History Commission

Old State House

Little Rock, Arkansas

1957



APRIL 1958

The First Butterfield Mail for the Pacific Leaves Tipton, Sept. 16, 1858