

THE OVERLAND MAIL—THE START FROM THE EASTERN SIDE.

THE OVERLAND ROUTE TO CALIFORNIA.

ONE of the most important events since the conquest of our Pacific Empire was consummated on Saturday, the 9th of October. On that day the first mail sent overland from San Francisco reached St. Louis, Missouri, having accomplished the distance in twenty-three days and four hours, or one day and twenty hours in advance of the contract time! New York and California are now in direct communication with each other, by means of a line of travel exempt from the dangers and annoyances of the sea; the time of passage has been shortened by at least a week; and, more important than all, the *premier pas qui coute* has been taken towards the construction of that Pacific Railway which is to bring us the commerce of China, Australia, India, and all the East that lies behind our West, and to render the metropolis of the United States the commercial emporium of the world.

Compared with the achievement which has been thus successfully accomplished, the abortive Ocean Telegraph, even were it in full activity, must appear insignificant. The Atlantic wire will redound to the benefit of a few speculators in Wall street, and to a very few shipping merchants in each of the Atlantic cities; but its principal utility will accrue to our rival Great Britain, while this noble enterprise of the Pacific mail line is an advantage to the entire Union, in the approximation to us of our fellow-citizens in California, Oregon,

Washington, and the remaining Pacific coast, no less than in the fact of its having accomplished the pioneering work for the great railway which it must henceforth be the imperative duty of our

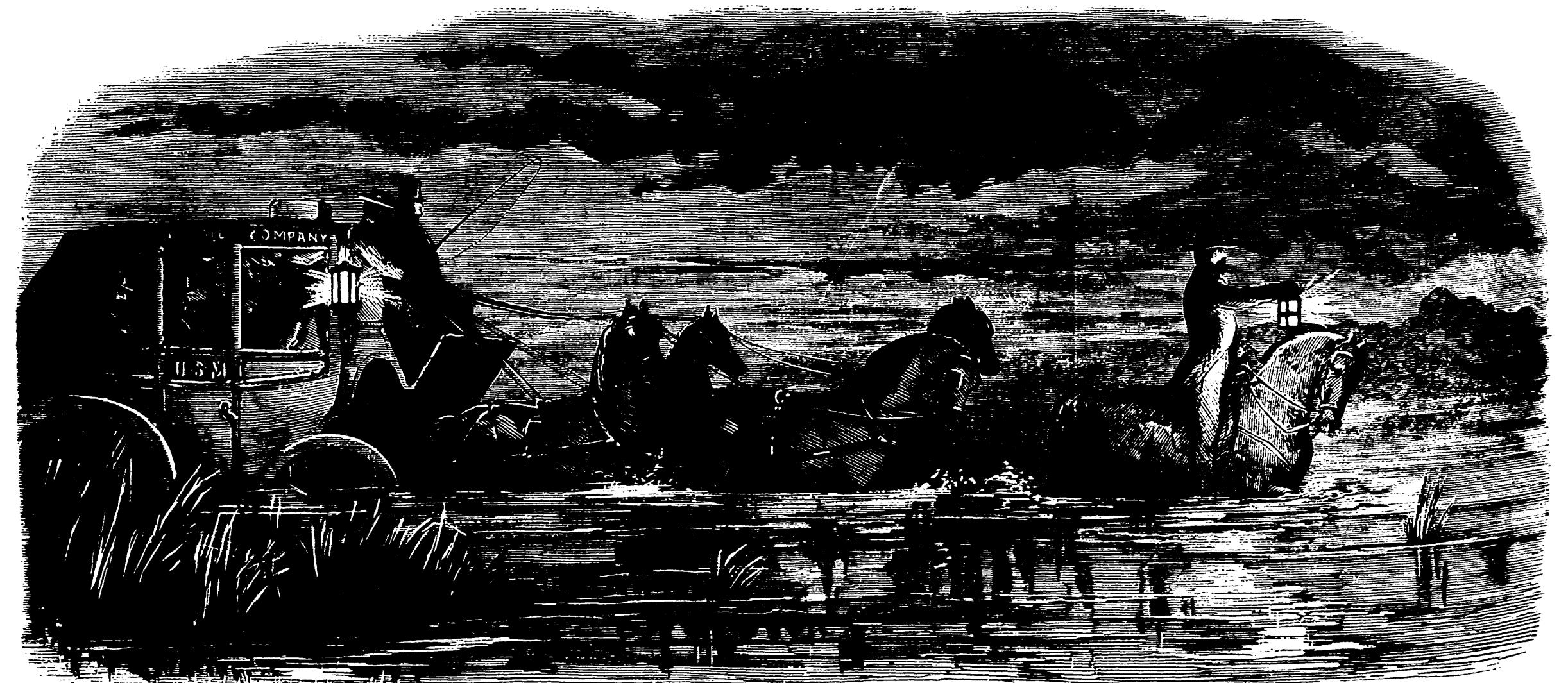
field, of the American Express Company, is the chief. The remaining members are Messrs. William B. Dinsmore, William G. Fargo, James V. P. Gardner, Marcus L. Kinyon, Alexander Holland and Hamilton Spencer.

With these seven individuals a contract was signed on the 16th of September, 1857, for the opening of the line, in accordance with the provision of the act of Congress of March 3d, in which the following are the principal clauses:

And the Postmaster General 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; that the contract shall require the service to be performed with good four horse coaches or spring wagons, suitable for the conveyance of passengers as well as the safety and security of the mails; that the contractor shall have the right of pre-emption 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—provided that no mineral land should be thus pre-empted; that the service shall be performed within twenty-five days for each trip, and that, before entering into the contract, the Postmaster General shall be satisfied of the ability and disposition of the parties, *bona fide* and in good



THE OVERLAND MAIL—PASSING A BIVOUAC OF EMIGRANTS IN WESTERN ARKANSAS.



THE OVERLAND MAIL—CROSSING A STREAM AT NIGHT.



THE OVERLAND MAIL—CHANGING STAGE-COACH FOR CELERITY WAGON.

with, 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.

The contract, which was signed in the following September, was for—

Transporting the entire letter mail, agreeably to the provisions of the 11th, 12th and 13th sections of an act of Congress, approved 3d March, 1857 (making appropriations for the service of the Post Office Department for the fiscal year ending 30th June, 1858), from the Mississippi river to San Francisco, California, as follows, viz.: From St. Louis, Mo., and from Memphis, Tenn., converging at Little Rock, Ark., thence via Preston, Texas, or as near so as may be found advisable, to the best point of crossing the Rio Grande above El Paso, and not far from Fort Fillmore; thence along the new road, being opened and constructed under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, or near to Fort Yuma, Cal.; thence through the best passes and along the best valleys for safe and expeditious staging, to San Francisco, Cal., and back, twice a week, in good four horse post-coaches or spring-wagons, suitable for the conveyance of passengers as well as the safety and security of the mails, at six hundred thousand dollars a year, for and during the term of six years, commencing the sixteenth day of September, in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-eight, and ending with the fifteenth day of September, in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four.

Precisely one year after the signature the line was opened by the simultaneous despatch of mails from San Francisco eastward, and westward from St. Louis, Mo., and Memphis, Tenn. The vehicles starting from the two latter points converge at Fort Smith, on the Arkansas river, instead of at Fort Smith, as arranged at first, and thence there is but a single line to the Pacific coast.

The success of the inaugural expedition has been beyond all expectation. It was never hoped that the first mail coach would make the passage within the schedule time, and it was scarcely hoped that

it would reach Fort Smith before the 13th inst.; nevertheless the journey was accomplished in forty-four hours less than the specified time, and the mail arrived at St. Louis in the evening of Saturday, October 9th.

Immense expenditure, combined with the extreme of energy and activity, have necessarily been required for the accomplishment of this successful result. No less than three hundred thousand dollars, we believe, were laid out by Mr. Butterfield and his associates in the preparatory expenses, in fitting up the stations, procuring the rolling and live stock, &c., but we have no doubt that their outlay will be commensurately rewarded. The course adopted for the route is that known as the El Paso and Fort Yuma line, carried along the 32d parallel of latitude. From St. Louis to Fort Smith, Ark.—a distance of four hundred and eighty-six miles—and from Memphis, Tenn., to the same spot—a distance of some four hundred miles—the road is carried in converging lines; and from Fort Smith, the western terminus, the distances are as given in the following table:

	Miles
From St. Louis to Syracuse, Mo.....	168
Syracuse to Springfield, Mo.....	143
Springfield to Fort Smith, Ark.....	175
Fort Smith to Colbert's Ferry, Red River.....	205
Colbert's Ferry (eighteen miles below Preston) to Fort Belknap.....	146½
Fort Belknap to Fort Chadbourne.....	136
Fort Chadbourne to Pecos River.....	165
Pecos River to Pope's Camp.....	66
Pope's Camp to Franklin (near El Paso).....	172½
Franklin (through Arizona) to Fort Yuma.....	610½
Fort Yuma, on the Colorado, to San Francisco.....	664
Total distance from St. Louis, via El Paso, to San Francisco.....	2,651½

The whole of this immense route, already partially surveyed by the United States Exploring Expeditions, has been organized into a post road. Stations have been constructed at distances of ten miles from each other, and each station, through the regions infested by Indians, is guarded by from twenty to twenty-five men. Mounted and armed parties will also convoy the stages through all the dangerous portions of the route. As seventy-five miles lie over the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plain—the wide and waterless expanse of level territory, which derives its name from the fact that long lines of stakes were formerly erected by the Mexicans, as guides to springs and water-courses on its borders—and as the Expedition sent out by Government, under Capt. Pope, for the purpose of boring artesian wells, has proved a failure, water-trains have been organized by the Overland Mail Company, which convey water to the different stations in this region by means of trains of mules. The wagons used for this purpose are constructed with large tin boilers, similar in shape to the boilers of a steamboat, and capable of holding as much water as a team of six mules can draw. These trains run regularly, conveying water to the different stations, whose large reservoirs are prepared to receive and preserve it for the use of passengers and the employes and stock of the Company. This is of course a very expensive method of supplying the indispensable element, but as, thus far, all efforts to obtain it by boring or otherwise have proved futile, the Company must submit to it for the present.

From Memphis and from St. Louis to Fort Smith regular stage coaches are used, similar in every respect to those employed in the Atlantic States; but from Fort Smith onwards the vehicles used are not unlike a Jersey wagon, they are of the description known



THE OVERLAND MAIL—VIEW OF FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS.

