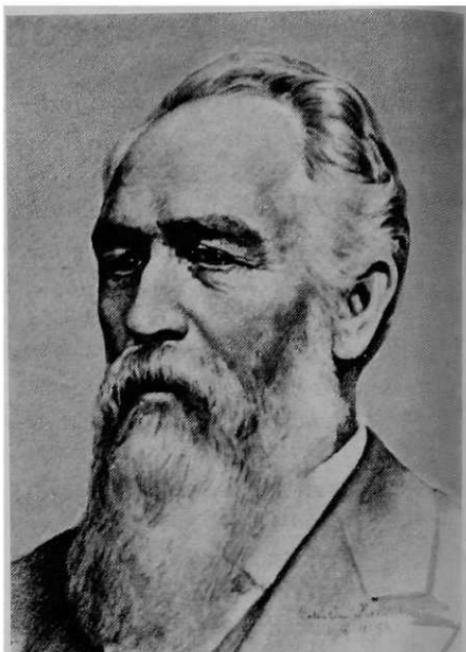
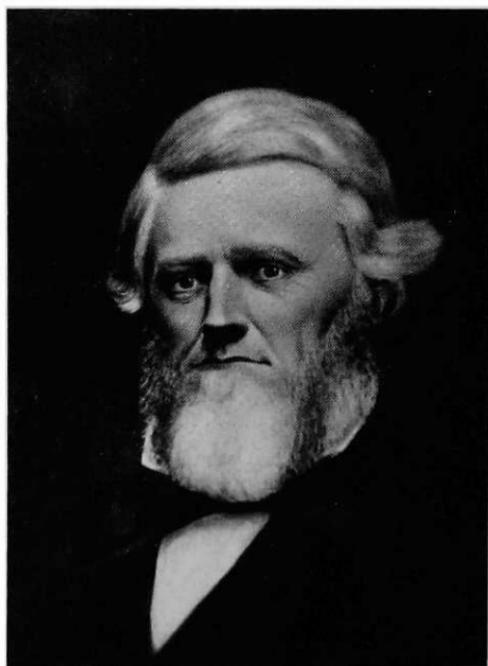




WILLIAM H. RUSSELL (1812-1872)



ALEXANDER MAJORS (1814-1900)



WILLIAM BRADFORD WADDELL (1807-1872)

Russell, a volatile New Englander, engaged in many successful and unsuccessful business ventures before he joined R.M. & W. It was he who insisted upon proving the practicability of the Central Route for the Pony Express, and at one time was hailed in the nation as the "Napoleon of the West."

Majors, born in Kentucky, engaged early in the freighting business. As a partner in R.M. & W. firm, he took responsibility for all the business on the road. He believed that orderly, sober, God-fearing men made the most efficient employees and would tolerate no other kind.

Waddell, born in Virginia, engaged in farming in his early years, operated a dry goods store in Kentucky, later moved to Lexington, Missouri, operated a store and engaged in other successful businesses before finally joining Russell and Majors.

1857 Russell, Majors and Waddell had the government contract to carry supplies for the Army for Utah, which enterprise, as it turned out, proved to be a financial debacle for all parties concerned.

THE PONY EXPRESS HEROIC EFFORT—TRAGIC END

*By Raymond W. Settle**

Everyone connected with the Pony Express knew, from the very beginning, that it would operate only temporarily. On April 3, 1860, in a celebration commemorating the start of the first rider from St. Joseph, Missouri, Alexander Majors, partner in the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell, which founded, operated, and owned the Express, said in a speech that it was but the forerunner of "a more important and greater enterprise, which must soon reach its culmination, viz., the construction of a road upon which a tireless iron horse will start his overland journey."¹

Mayor M. Jeff Thompson grew prophetic on the same occasion, and said, "Hardly will the cloud of dust which envelops the rider die away before the puff of steam will be seen upon the horizon."

That a railroad from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast, which both speakers had in mind, would make the Pony Express unnecessary and terminate its service was both logical and inevitable. William H. Russell, another partner in the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell and president of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, who had helped promote several short railroads in Missouri

* Mr. Settle is the author of several articles and books on the Pony Express era, among them *Empire on Wheels* published in 1949 and *Saddles and Spurs* in 1955. Illustrations for this article not otherwise indicated are reproduced through the courtesy of Mr. Waddell F. Smith and the Pony Express History and Art Gallery, San Rafael, California.

¹ Arthur Chapman, *The Pony Express* (New York, 1932), 105.

a few years before, also knew this,² and so did William B. Waddell, the third partner.

Public interest in a transcontinental railroad across the plains and mountains was keen, and mounting year by year. Mayor Thompson and the people of St. Joseph had been dreaming dreams and seeing visions about the proposition for a long time. The recent completion of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad, the first to be built across the state, and plans to push the Roseport & Palmetto line across the plains of Kansas to Denver, with the expectation of later extending it all the way to the Pacific Coast, made them believe their little city of St. Joseph was destined to be the gateway to the boundless West.³

Since the Pony Express constitutes an important segment of the story of transporting United States mail to the Pacific Coast, it is necessary to outline that broader narrative here. It all began with the discovery of gold at Sutter's mill in California on January 24, 1848. During the following year 100,000 people rushed into that region seeking riches. In 1850 the population was estimated to be about 300,000. By the time the Pony Express was started it numbered almost 400,000.⁴

The first agitation for mail service to the Pacific Coast was promoted by immigrants to Oregon. In March, 1847, a bill to provide this service, which included the building of five steamships under the supervision of the secretary of the navy, was passed by Congress. While the ships were being constructed, contracts for transporting the mail to Oregon via the Isthmus of Panama were let. The one for the Atlantic end of the line went to A. G. Sloo, of Ohio, and that for the Pacific to Arnold Harris, of Arkansas. In April, 1848, William Aspinwall formed the Pacific Steamship Company. Sloo transferred his contract to George Law, and that of Harris went to Aspinwall.⁵ The service was to be once a month, with a stop at the infant town of San Francisco. While the first steamer, the *California*, was en route to the Pacific around Cape Horn, gold was discovered at Sutter's mill. When the ship reached San Francisco she was left stranded in the bay by her entire crew, who stampeded off to the gold diggings.

From the beginning the once a month arrangement was unsatisfactory to the people of Oregon and California. The majority in both terri-

² *Lexington Weekly Express*, October 2, December 22, 1852; April 6, 1853.

³ Contract Between Citizens of St. Joseph, Missouri, and William H. Russell and W. B. Waddell, representing the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, March 2, 1860. Record Book X, Buchanan County, Missouri, 508-11.

⁴ Chapman, *op. cit.*, 30.

⁵ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (2 vols., San Francisco, 1886-88), II, 187.

tories, having come overland from the Missouri River, were convinced that a mail line over the same road would render far better service than a sea route via Panama.

Thus, the stage was set for a long, bitter, sectional controversy between the advocates of the Central and Southern routes to the Pacific Coast. The dispute continued for about a dozen years but was abruptly terminated by the outbreak of the Civil War.⁶

The people of the west coast not only wanted more frequent, regular service, but also a speedier one. After several unsatisfactory attempts to establish a line on the Central Route by way of Salt Lake City, Congress, in 1857, authorized a semiweekly overland mail to California on a twenty-five day schedule, with pay of \$600,000.00 per year.

The route, chosen by the postmaster general, ran from St. Louis through Little Rock, Arkansas, El Paso and Preston, Texas, Forts Fillmore and Yuma, Arizona, to San Diego and San Francisco — a distance of approximately 2,800 miles. In the East it became known as the "Horse-shoe" or "Ox-bow Route."

The contract to carry the mail over this long route was given to the Overland Mail Company, whose president, John Butterfield, was also one of the organizers of the American Express Company. This concern, which had much to do with the Pony Express during the last four months of its existence, was organized and financed by representatives of the four principal express companies in the country, the American, Adams, National, and Wells Fargo.

Before service on this line began, a storm of protest over its length was raised in California and the East. In spite of complaints, however, Butterfield laid out his route, built stations, bought equipment, and stocked it with good horses. Service began on September 16, 1858. The criticisms continued in spite of the fact that the coaches ran with amazing regularity and on schedule time.

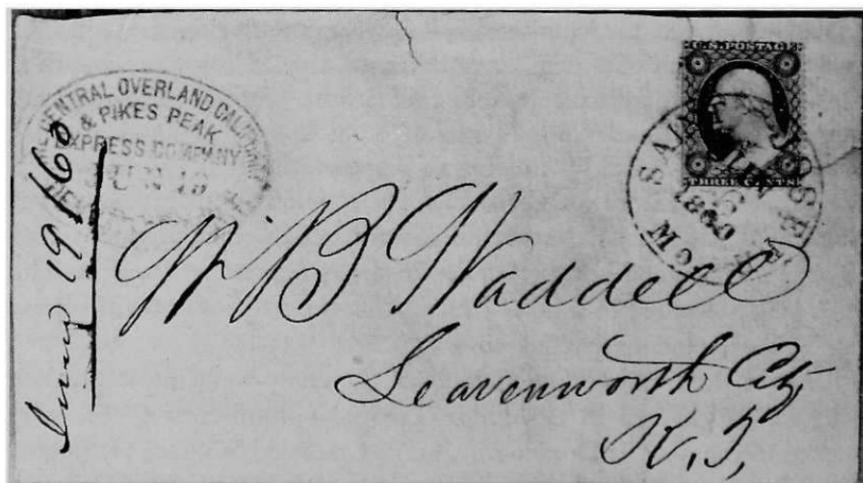
About the time the Overland Mail Company went into operation, gold was discovered in Colorado. The great number of people who flocked to the new El Dorado on Cherry Creek led William H. Russell and John S. Jones to organize the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company and run a line of stages from Leavenworth, Kansas, to the infant town of Denver.⁷ The organization of this company introduced

⁶ Raymond W. and Mary Lund Settle, *Empire on Wheels* (Stanford, California, 1949), 123; Roscoe P. and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail 1857-1869* (3 vols., Glendale, 1947), II, 325 ff.

⁷ Settle, *op. cit.*, 33.



The above letter written by General Mariano Vallejo, last Mexican military commandante in northern California, to his son Plato Vallejo in New York was posted in San Francisco, carried by boat to Sacramento, and from there was carried by Pony Express to St. Joseph, Missouri, a distance of 1,966 miles.



This letter, mailed in Denver on June 19, 1860, was canceled at St. Joseph, Missouri, seven days and approximately seven hundred miles later. At the time it was carried, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company operated a daily stage from the Missouri River to Denver, K. T. (then Kansas Territory), a semiweekly stage to Salt Lake City, and a semi-monthly stage to California, in addition to running a semiweekly Pony Express from the Missouri River to California.

Russell to the stagecoach and express business and opened to him the possibilities of transporting the mail to California over the Central Route. About a week before the line went into actual operation he bought J. M. Hockaday & Company's contract to carry mail from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City.⁸

The Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company was destined for only a brief existence. Because of the firm's inability to pay running expenses and notes owing for equipment and stock, Russell, Majors & Waddell were compelled to take over the line on October 28, 1859. Instead of discontinuing the former, a new concern, the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, was organized to absorb it.⁹

Without a doubt competition with the Overland Mail Company for the business of carrying the mail to the west coast was one of the primary reasons for organizing the new company. On May 11, 1860, the postmaster general annulled George Chorpenning's contract for carrying the mail from Salt Lake City to the west coast, and awarded it to the Central Overland California Pike's Peak Express Company. This put the company into the stagecoach, express, and mail business for the territory from the Missouri River to California over the Central Route and in a position to compete with the Overland Mail Company.

Although the Central Overland now had two mail contracts on that route, the combined pay was only \$260,000.00 per year, less than half the amount the Overland Mail Company received. That, as experience quickly demonstrated, was not even enough to pay the actual expenses of operation. It did, however, encourage the friends and advocates of the Central Route to hope that a contract to carry all of the mail might be eventually secured.

In normal circumstances and with the Pony Express to dramatize and keep that route in the public mind, both in the East and West, the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell and their new company might have wrested the great mail contract away from its rival, the Overland Mail Company. The struggle between the giants, however, never progressed beyond the preliminary stage of jockeying for position. The probabilities are that had the threat of civil war been abated in 1860 there would have been two lines with profitable mail contracts covering them. The one could have served southern California, and the other the central and northern portion and the Northwest. Under this arrangement good

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

service could have been provided and the sectional controversy over the routes satisfactorily compromised.

The situation in the nation as a whole, however, in the year 1860 was not normal. Following the nomination of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency of the United States in June of that year, the bitterest campaign in American history got under way. While it was in progress, Governor Gist, of South Carolina, sent a circular letter to the chief executives of the other cotton states inquiring whether they were ready to secede from the Union in the event Lincoln was elected.

Although the response, as a whole, was not reassuring, the legislature of that state convened on November 5, 1860, to choose presidential electors as usual. Instead of doing so it issued a call for a secession convention. This body assembled, adopted a "Declaration of Independence," and on December 20 voted unanimously to secede from the Union. During the next six months or so nine other states followed South Carolina's lead.¹⁰

When Congress convened in December, 1860, the hoary "battle of the routes" was resumed. In spite of the fact that Southern influence and power declined daily by the secession of states and the resignation of members of both Houses, the struggle promised to be almost as bitter as ever.

On February 2, 1861, the annual Post Route bill, which provided for a daily mail from the Missouri River to California with pay of \$800,000.00 per year, was introduced. This did not designate the Central Route, but apparently its backers had it in mind. Senator William M. Gwin, of California, thought the pay should be \$1,000,000.00 and that the contract should go to Russell, Majors & Waddell and their Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company.¹¹

William H. Russell and William B. Dinsmore, president of Adams Express Company and also John Butterfield's successor as president of the Overland Mail Company, were both in Washington at this time. Moreover, they were without doubt carrying on negotiations relative to the consolidation of the two routes. That this was so is indicated by the fact the Post Office and Roads Committee of the Senate was debating this very thing. What happened later regarding those routes and the plan adopted by the rival companies is further evidence of it. Therefore, it is plain that with the decline of Southern power in Congress a move to

¹⁰ Henry William Elston, *History of the United States of America* (New York, 1914), XXVI, 628-29.

¹¹ Settle, *op. cit.*, 121-22.

settle the issue and at the same time conserve the interests of both great companies was being organized.

Unfortunately a common sense plan did not mature. While the Post Route bill was being debated in the Senate, and before the Post Office and Roads Committee of the same body had made a report, word reached Washington that the Overland Mail line had been "cut up by the roots" by the Confederates in Texas and all its stages stopped. This was all too true. The mail had been halted at Fort Smith, Arkansas, in the east and Tucson, Arizona, in the west. The stage station at Syracuse, Missouri, and the principal railroad bridges on the Missouri Pacific Railroad west of St. Louis had been burned. Service on the Southern Route was never resumed. For a period of approximately three months the only mail service the people of the west coast had was carried to them by Pony Express and the Russell, Majors & Waddell Company or by sea.

If this company ever received any extra pay for the added burden and expense it cheerfully bore during that interim, no record of it exists. The Overland Mail Company, however, received full pay during the time its line was out of commission and \$50,000.00 besides for losses in stock and equipment.¹²

With Texas out of the Union and Confederate forces being rapidly mobilized in Arkansas and Missouri, it was obviously impossible to continue the transportation of mail to California over the Southern Route. For the time being the Overland Mail Company was out of business, a casualty of the war.

The breaking up of that company's line and the stopping of mail to California over it presented the government with as pretty a dilemma as one could hope to find. The Overland Mail Company had faithfully discharged its obligations under its contract, and the stoppage of the mail to California could in no manner be charged to it. The case was so simple and plain that everybody's sympathy was aroused, and no one thought of attempting to find grounds for annulling the contract and awarding it to the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company. Neither was there any complaint against the Central Overland's handling of the mail on the Central Route; nor was there any reason for annulling its two contracts and awarding them to the Overland Mail Company. To further complicate the situation, the financial condition of both companies, plus the shattered economic structure of the whole country, made it almost impossible for either of them to secure

¹² Settle, *op. cit.*, 121-22; Conkling, *op. cit.*, II, 325-26.

large loans which would be necessary if one company were to attempt to carry the whole burden alone.

The truth of the matter was there was no simple, easy way out of the dilemma. The Overland Mail Company had the main contract for transporting mail to California, but no line over which to travel. The Russell, Majors & Waddell Company had two minor contracts and the only open, unexposed route. What to do? Solution of the dilemma by the process of annulment and the certain ruin of one of the contractors was not considered.

And something had to be done, for the regular flow of mail to and from California had to be maintained at any cost. A movement to carry that state out of the Union, or divide it North and South, was already being promoted with some promise of success. If California seceded, her gold would be denied the hard-pressed Union. Furthermore, if that catastrophe occurred, the position of Oregon and Washington would be jeopardized.

Without a doubt the dilemma was solved by an understanding between William H. Russell, William B. Dinsmore, and Congressional leaders as to what could and should be done in the crisis. Five days after the news of the disaster to the Overland Mail Company reached Washington, the Senate Finance Committee reported the Post Office appropriation bill. This provided for the bodily removal of the Overland Mail Company from the Southern to the Central Route, letter mail on a twenty-day schedule eight months of the year and twenty-three days for the remaining time, and the continuation of the Pony Express semi-weekly until the transcontinental telegraph line was completed. The pay was \$1,000,000.00 per year.¹³

The swift, smooth progress of the bill through both branches of Congress, together with what happened immediately afterward, indicates previously considered plans, harmony, and understanding between all parties concerned.

The bill was approved by President Buchanan on March 2, 1861, and became the law of the land immediately. On March 12, E. S. Childs, acting second assistant postmaster-general, officially notified Dinsmore that the postmaster-general had ordered service discontinued on the Southern Route by the Overland Mail Company and that a like service was to be performed on the Central Route.¹⁴ This service was to begin July 1, 1861.

¹³ Settle, *op. cit.*, 122; Conkling, *op. cit.*, II, 336-38.

¹⁴ Letter of E. S. Childs to W. B. Dinsmore and E. S. Alvord, March 12, 1861, MS. Copy in library of author.

Four days later, March 16, Russell and Dinsmore signed a contract in New York, under which the Central Route was divided into two sections with each assuming operation of one of them. Since it is of such vast importance it is given here in full.

This memorandum of contract—witnesseth—that whereas the last session of the 36th Congress a law was passed authorizing the Postmaster Gen'l to make certain modifications in the contract for mail service on route 12,518 — among others changing their route to what is known as the Central or Salt Lake Route — to be accepted by the contractors.

And whereas the Overland Mail Company now performing the service and the recognized contractors on said route have accepted said modifications, and entered into a contract with the Postmaster Gen'l for the performance of service under said act of Congress — a copy of which contract is hereto appended and made a part of this agreement. And whereas it has been agreed that "The Central Overland and Pike's Peak Express Company" shall perform a part of said service: now these presents witness — that the said Express Company acting by William H. Russell its president and duly authorized by its Board of Directors, party of the first part, and the said Overland Mail Company acting by William B. Dinsmore its president duly authorized by its Board of Directors, party of the second part, do mutually agree as follows.

1st — Said first party agree to perform the entire service between the eastern terminus and Salt Lake City and to furnish facilities to accomadate [*sic*] travel both "through" and "local." The second party to perform the balance of the service and to afford like facilities and to pay over to the first party quarterly as it shall be received from the government and no sooner mail pay at the rate of Four Hundred and Seventy Thousand dollars per annum, after deducting therefrom one half the amount of sea service.

2nd — The passenger business and Express business to be divided as follows — the local passenger and express business of the first party to be divided seventy per cent to the first party and thirty per cent to the second party. And the local business of the second party to be retained by them entire. Settlements are to be made quarterly and all accounts balanced. Business going only part way on both divisions charged as local and price to be fixed by the parties.

3rd — Each party is to pay all fines occasioned by failures on their respective divisions. The division of time to be as fol-

lows — on the 20 day schedule the first party has 12 days and the second party has 8 days. On the 23 day schedule the first party has 14 days and the second party 9 days — and a like ratio on the 35 day schedule.

4th — The receipts from Pony Express to be divided equally. Each party as in carrying the mail paying their own expenses on their divisions.

5th — A general superintendent, to be appointed by the second party and paid equally by the two parties, shall have general charge and supervision of the eastern line, as far as to see that the service is properly performed, but is not to interfere with the management and detail of the first party's division.

6th — The Superintendent or other authorized agent of the second party shall have the right to examine the books of the first party in which are kept the accounts for this division — and an agent shall be kept at Fort Kearny, paid equally by both parties who shall copy way bills and attend to the business of both parties.

7th — The second party reserves the right and privilege of making an exclusive contract for the Express business with Wells Fargo & Co., for all business going from the East to any point west of Salt Lake City and for all business originating west of Salt Lake City going east — at a fair compensation — said business shall be called through business and divided as such.

8th — In case any change or modification by Congress or the Postmaster General of the said contract was to deprive second party of the mail pay then the second party are not to be held liable or responsible to the first party.

9th — Whenever either party reaches the common point of Salt Lake City the other party shall proceed with the mail without waiting for the schedule time and it is understood that the whole trip is to be made as rapidly and promptly as possible.

10th — It is further stipulated and agreed that in case the first party should fail to perform their contract and a serious interruption should take place and it should become necessary for said second party to assume the performance of the entire service then second party shall have the right to at once take possession of the entire stock and equipments of the first party, and use same in performing the service and they shall have the right to and shall purchase said stock and equipment at an appraised value each party selecting an appraiser, and the two an umpire

(whose decision shall be final) if necessary. And it is further expressly stipulated that in case said first party shall pay the sum of one hundred thousand dollars to the second party, which sum shall be the liquidated damages and paid without deduction or offset.

In witness whereof the parties hereto have subscribed their names this 16th day of March, 1861, at New York.

Wm. H. Russell Pres. the C.O.C. & P.P. Ex. Co.
W. B. Dinsmore Pres. Overland Mail Co.

Interlineations on 2nd and 4th pages
made before signing in presence of Milton S. Latham.¹⁵

Post Office Department
Central Office
March 12, 1861

Gentlemen:

The Postmaster General has this day signed an order of which the following is a copy, viz.:

“Pursuant to act of Congress approved 2nd of March, 1861, and the acceptance of the terms thereof by the Overland Mail Company — modify the present contract with that company for route No. 12,518 executed the 16th of September, 1857, to take effect the 16th of September, 1858, so as to discontinue service on the present route and provide for the transportation of the entire letter mail six times a week on the Central Route; said letter mail to be carried through in twenty days time, eight months of the year, and in twenty-three days the remaining four months of the year from St. Joseph (or Atchison, Kansas) to Placerville, Cal., and also for the delivery of the entire mails three times a week, each way to Denver City, and Great Salt Lake City; and in case these mails do not amount to six hundred pounds per trip then other mail matter to make up that weight per trip to be conveyed. The contractors also to be required to convey the residue of all mail matter in a period not exceeding thirty-five days, with the privilege of sending the latter semi-monthly from New York to San Francisco in twenty-five days by sea, and the public documents in thirty-five days.

“And to be required also during the continuance of their contract, or until the completion of the Overland Telegraph, to run a Pony Express semi-weekly at a schedule time of ten days

¹⁵ Contract between William H. Russell, representing the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company and William B. Dinsmore, representing the Overland Mail Company March 16, 1861, MS. Copy in library of author.

eight months of the year and twelve days four months of the year, and to convey for the government free of charge five pounds of mail matter; with the privilege of charging the public for transportation of letters by said Express not exceeding one dollar per half ounce. The compensation for the whole service to be \$1,000,000.00 per annum to take effect on or before 1st July, 1861, and to expire 1st July, 1864.

"The number of the route to be changed to 10,773 and the service to be recorded in the route register for Missouri.

"Be pleased to state your acceptance of the terms of the foregoing and report the date of your commencement of the service on the Central Route.

Very Respectfully
Your obt. Servant
E. S. Childs
Acting Second Asst.
P.M. Gen'l."

Everybody concerned with this great contract was satisfied with its provisions. Russell wrote William B. Waddell that it was "all the Co. could ask, and as much as I ever encouraged them to hope for, and with all an A No. 1 contract, one that will pay big money if well managed, I am content. We should get the thing up right, work it with energy, and with its results entirely relieve R M and W."¹⁶

Russell's feeling of satisfaction with the contract was fully justified. In the first place, he and his partners, Majors and Waddell, would receive \$220,000.00 a year more for operating over approximately half the route from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City than they were then receiving for covering the whole line to Placerville, California. It is true that the cost would be greater, but with improved facilities an increase in passenger and express receipts was expected. Considering the precarious condition of the company, the new contract was a windfall indeed.

Dinsmore was also highly pleased with the contract. Hiram S. Rumfield, agent for the Overland Mail Company at St. Louis and later at Salt Lake City, said that after the service on the Southern Route was stopped the proposition of abandoning the business altogether was freely discussed by the officers of the company. He also said that the contract with Russell was "regarded as advantageous to the Overland Mail Company."¹⁷

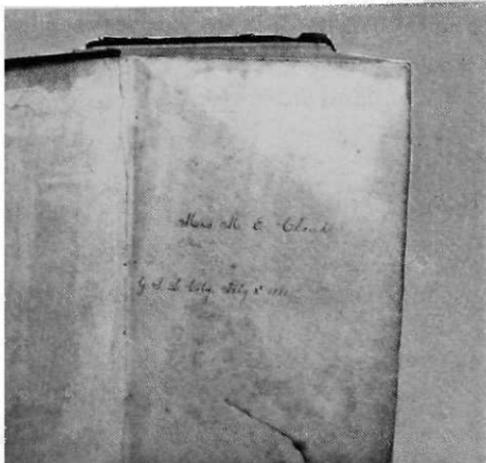
¹⁶ Letter of William H. Russell to William B. Waddell, March 20, 1861, MS. Copy in library of author.

¹⁷ Hiram Rumfield, *Letters of an Overland Mail Agent*, Archer Butler Hurlburt, (ed.) (Worcester, Mass., 1928).

Technically, and according to the provisions of the bill passed by Congress, the Overland Mail Company was the sole mail contractor on the Central Route. Not only that, orders for service upon that route were delivered only to that company. Under a strict interpretation of the bill the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company would be put entirely out of the business of carrying the mail and operating the Pony Express over the Central Route.

It was not so intended and did not turn out that way. Under his contract with Russell, Dinsmore surrendered the Eastern Division, the best and easiest managed half of the line from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City. For his own company he retained the more difficult, hazardous Western Division. This was the obvious thing to do since Russell's company, being familiar with the Eastern Division and already established upon it, could carry on as usual during the critical period of change and readjustment. In addition the western end of the old Overland Mail line on the Southern Route, not having been raided as was its eastern sections, still retained intact its stock, equipment, and personnel. Therefore the simplest, easiest, and cheapest way to put the new line on the

The open Bible is inscribed "Mrs. M. E. Cloud, Great Salt Lake City, February 3rd, 1860." Few such copies are now known to exist. The firm had a payroll of over five thousand men strung out between the Missouri River and California, and every new employee was required to take the following oath: "I _____, do hereby swear, before the great and Living God, that during my engagement, and while I am an employee of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I will, under no circumstances, use profane language; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employee of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence of my employers. So help me God." The new employee was then given a Bible imprinted in gold letters: "Presented by Russell, Majors & Waddell."



Central Route into operation was to move it all north from southern California to Placerville.¹⁸

Convenience and economy probably account for making Placerville the western terminus of the Overland Mail Company line instead of Sacramento. The situation regarding that short fifty mile stretch was practically identical with that on the Eastern Division. The Pioneer Stage Line was already successfully operating a line of daily stagecoaches between Virginia City and Sacramento. Arrangements were therefore made with that company whereby it assumed responsibility for the mail, express packages, and passengers from Placerville onward.¹⁹

Under the provisions of the bill passed by Congress, the Pony Express line also ended at Placerville. The arrangement with the Pioneer Stage Line and the fact that the telegraph line now extended eastward to Fort Churchill made it unnecessary, so far as the Overland Mail Company was concerned, for the Express to go farther.

In view of the oft-repeated statement that the Pony Express never had official government recognition or sanction, it is significant that the bill not only expressly stipulated that the Express should be operated, but also fixed the fee to be charged. After July 1, 1861, and as long as it operated, it was a government authorized service running on a schedule included in the law.

It has been claimed that Wells Fargo Express Company made the reductions in Pony Express rates in 1861 — from \$5.00 to \$2.00 an ounce in April and to \$1.00 on July 1. Wells Fargo had nothing whatever to do with these changes, although on April 15 William H. Russell appointed it temporary agent for the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company in San Francisco. Since the contract with Dinsmore was already signed, this appointment would expire on July 1. With these simple and relatively unimportant facts as a basis, the exaggerated claim has been made that Wells Fargo Express Company rendered a great public service by reducing Pony Express rates.²⁰

The plain truth is that Wells Fargo Express Company was merely acting temporarily as agent for the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company during the interim between the passage of the bill providing for the removal of the Overland Mail Company to the

¹⁸ Oscar Osburn Winther, *Via Western Express and Stagecoach* (Stanford University, 1945), 138-39.

¹⁹ LeRoy R. Hafen, *The Overland Mail* (Cincinnati, 1926), 211-12; Conkling, *op. cit.*, II, 338.

²⁰ See *Scott's Catalogue of United States Stamps, 1953*, p. 441; advertisement in *San Francisco Daily Bulletin*, April 15, 1861.

Central Route and the first of July, a period of a few weeks. During that period Wells Fargo's duties and responsibilities were identical with those of other agents elsewhere — in St. Louis and Chicago, for instance, where activities consisted of handling express and passenger business, Pony Express letters, and carrying out instructions as agent from the company. Among those instructions was the reduction of Pony Express rates from \$5.00 to \$2.00 per ounce. Thus whatever praise is due anyone for this reduction must go not to the agent but to the Russell, Majors and Waddell Company, who alone had exclusive authority to make it.

The second reduction, on July 1, was made by act of Congress, with which the Overland Mail Company and the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company were obliged to conform. No more need be said on this particular point. So far as the actual history of the Pony Express is concerned, and under normal historical circumstances, the reduction of rates in 1861 would be merely one of many minor points worthy of no more than brief mention. However, since the reduction has been made the basis for inflated claims and sweeping misstatements designed to elevate Wells Fargo to the detriment of the daring men, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William B. Waddell, who founded, financed, and operated the Pony Express, a detailed analysis of the rate reductions is necessary here.

vision was made in the Overland Mail bill, which transferred the Butterfield Overland Mail to the Central Route, to make the western terminus Placerville, California. That order also applied to the Pony Express. Accordingly, W. H. Russell, having no further need for the Sacramento office, appointed Wells Fargo & Company agents and ordered the local office turned over to them. The first third of this advertisement has in the past been published separately, with a following statement that "the original management had been ousted" and that Wells Fargo had taken over the Pony Express. Such a construction should be avoided and conceived when actually only a transfer of the agency office in Sacramento was made.

PONY EXPRESS NOTICE.

ORDERS HAVING BEEN RECEIVED from W. H. RUSSELL, President Pony Express Company, I hereby transfer the office and everything appertaining thereto to Messrs. WELLS, FARGO & CO. All letters to be forwarded by Pony Express must be delivered at their office, on Second Street, between J and K, Sacramento.
J. W. COLEMAN, Agent Pony Express Co.

PONY EXPRESS NOTICE.

REDUCED RATES !!



THE RATES FOR LETTERS, Per Pony Express, UNTIL FIRST JULY NEXT, —WILL BE—

For Half Ounce and under.....\$2
 For each additional Half Ounce or fraction thereof...\$2

Letters must be enclosed in Ten Cent Government Envelopes, and Pony Postage prepaid.
 The Express will be dispatched from our office **Wednesday and Saturday Nights, OF EACH WEEK, on the arrival of the Boat from San Francisco.**
 WELLS, FARGO & CO., Agents.
 ap18-1m

PONY EXPRESS AND MAIL.

LETTER rates by PONY are now reduced to **TWO DOLLARS** per half ounce each way.
 Pony Express leaves SAN FRANCISCO on Wednesdays and Saturdays, at 4 p.m., is due in Salt Lake City in four days, and St. Joseph in ten days.
 Leaves St. Joseph on Sundays and Thursdays at 8 a.m. arriving in Salt Lake City on Saturdays and Wednesdays, six day, and San Francisco in ten days.
MAIL COACHES leave Salt Lake City every Friday at 8 a.m. until 21st June, for St. Joseph, Mo. Passage \$175. After which Coaches will pass daily on new contract, and carry passengers at reduced rates.
 84 LIVINGSTON, BELL & Co., Agents.

PHOTO, COURTESY L.D.S. CHURCH

The above announcement appeared in the Deseret News, April 24, 1861. The oft-repeated claim that Wells Fargo reduced the rates cannot be substantiated. Local agents along the route made the announcements at the personal direction of William H. Russell. Mr. William R. Parker, philatelist, of Oroville, California, has a personal letter written by Mr. Russell to the agent of the Express at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, advising him of the reduction from \$5.00 to \$2.00.

The question of why in April, 1861, Wells Fargo Express Company issued its first two adhesive franks, the so-called "Pony Express Stamps" with the likeness of a pony express rider upon them, when it had nothing of that kind of its own, is a rather intriguing one. One answer could be for its use as agent, and the other that it was preparing to inaugurate a pony express on the fifty mile section between Sacramento and Placerville on July 1 when the Overland Mail Company would take over the Western Division of the Central Route.

Without a doubt the starting of that line figured in the negotiations between Russell and Dinsmore, as did the arrangement with the Pioneer Stage Line prior to the passage of the overland mail bill by Congress. On June 26, 1861, Wells Fargo Company advertised that beginning July 1 it would "run a pony express from San Francisco to Placerville on Wednesdays and Saturdays . . . connecting with the Overland Mail Company's Pony Express from Placerville to St. Joseph."²¹ The latter was, of course, the original Pony Express. In the meantime the Overland Mail Company appointed Wells Fargo its agent in San Francisco. Just here it should be borne in mind that the management and operation of these pony express lines were two separate, unrelated functions. Although the advertisements stated that the Wells Fargo line would run from San Francisco to Placerville, it was understood that letters from the former city would go to Sacramento by boat.

Philatelic journals indicate that on July 1 Wells Fargo Express Company issued three new adhesive franks. These consisted of a \$1.00 red, a \$2.00 green, and a \$4.00 black, which complied with the rate stipulated in the overland mail bill. These were followed by others of ten and twenty-five cent values in 1862. In addition to those bearing the likeness of a pony express rider, others of a different design were later issued.²²

The idea for these adhesive franks was neither new nor unique. Boyd's City Express, New York City, used them as early as 1844. The first of this type used in the United States, antedating the gummed postage stamp by about five years, was used by the City Dispatch Post, New York, in 1842.²³ Adams & Company, which started in the express business in California in 1849, put out two of them in 1854. These were the earliest issued west of the Mississippi River.²⁴ In 1861 scores of letter

²¹ *Ibid.*, June 26, 1861, and following issues; advertisement in the *San Francisco Alta California*, June 28, 1861, and following issues.

²² *Scott's Catalogue*, 441-42.

²³ *Ibid.*, 409-13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

and newspaper city delivery concerns, called by various names, were in operation all over the United States, including California, most of them using adhesive franks.²⁵

Neither the fact that Wells Fargo issued these franks nor that letters bearing them were carried over the original Pony Express line is to be taken as proof that this company had anything whatever to do with the management and operation of either the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company or the Overland Mail Company. There was, of course, an arrangement whereby letters bearing these franks were honored, first by the Russell, Majors & Waddell Company and after July 1 by the Overland Mail Company, and their share of the fee collected. They prove nothing except that Wells Fargo Express Company advertised that they would run a fifty mile pony express of their own.

The contracts between Russell and Dinsmore having been signed, steps looking toward the beginning of service on July 1 were taken. In the East the Overland Mail Company stock and equipment, whatever remained of it, was sold to Russell's company. This was possibly in exchange for similar property of the latter on the Western Division, and doubtless included Pony Express horses, stations, and other apparatus. E. S. Alvord was appointed general superintendent of the whole route, Hiram S. Rumfield was Overland Mail Company agent at Salt Lake City, and H. Montfort, agent for the Pioneer Stage Line at Sacramento, filled the same office there. Fred K. Cook, assistant treasurer of the company, had his headquarters at Salt Lake City.²⁶ In southern California William Bulkley, superintendent of the Coast Route from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and his assistant, James G. Beggs, moved horses, stage-coaches, and other equipment north to Placerville.²⁷ Some of the old Overland Mail Company employees went along, but most of the station keepers, stock tenders, and Pony Express riders in the employ of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company retained their jobs.

It is indeed unfortunate that after almost a century the personalities of William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William B. Waddell, the men who founded the Pony Express and heroically bore the disastrous expense of it, should be obscured, and the name of Wells Fargo Express

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 403-43.

²⁶ Contract between William H. Russell, William B. Dinsmore, and E. S. Alvord, March 16, 1861, MS. Copy in library of author. Rumfield, *op. cit.*; Conkling, *op. cit.*, II, 329n.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 261, 328-29.

Company, which was not responsible for it in any manner at anytime, be more prominently associated with it in the public mind. It is interesting to note that prior to the year 1930 there is nothing in documented history which even purports to connect Wells Fargo with the origin, management, or operation of the Pony Express. But following the lead of misinformed writers, publicity agents, and motion picture producers, vast numbers of Americans of all ages today believe this untruth.

On June 16, 1860, about ten weeks after the first Pony Express riders took off at both ends of the line, Congress authorized the enterprise that would terminate its career some eighteen months later. This was the passage of a bill instructing the secretary of the Treasury to subsidize the building of a transcontinental telegraph line to connect the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast, to an amount not to exceed \$40,000.00 per year for ten years.²⁸

The passage of the bill resulted in the incorporation of two companies to build the line—the Overland Telegraph Company, of California, and the Pacific Telegraph Company, of Nebraska. On July 4, 1861, Edward Creighton began building the latter company's line westward from Julesburg, Colorado, toward Salt Lake City. Twelve hundred miles to the west on the same day at Fort Churchill, James Gamble set the first pole in the Overland Telegraph Company's eastward reaching line, and a race to be the first to reach Salt Lake City was on.²⁹

While the lines were under construction the Pony Express operated as usual. Letters and newspapers were carried the entire length of the line from St. Joseph to Sacramento, but telegrams only between the rapidly advancing wire ends. The Pony Express riders, who knew that the meeting of the lines in Salt Lake City would terminate their occupation, took a deep interest in the progress of the work. They carried news and reports from one construction crew to another and were able to forecast, almost to a day, when the job would be completed.

Creighton won the race by setting his last pole in Salt Lake on October 20, 1861. Four days later Gamble's crew arrived. On the twenty-sixth the wires were joined, and San Francisco was in direct telegraphic connection with New York. On that day the Pony Express was officially terminated, but it was not until November that the last letters completed

²⁸ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming* (San Francisco, 1890), 230-31; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California* (7 vols., San Francisco, 1870), VII, 154.

²⁹ Herbert Hamlin, "Westward Ho Goes the Telegraph in 1861," *The Pony Express*, October, 1944; George A. Root and Russell Hickman, "Pike's Peak Express Companies," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XIV (February, 1946), 66-68.

their journey over the route. Thus the telegraph, and not the transcontinental railroad as prophesied by Alexander Majors and Mayor M. Jeff Thompson in St. Joseph on April 3, 1860, brought an end to the Pony Express.

As a final salute to the Pony Express the following editorial written by Mr. McClatchy of the Sacramento *Bee* appeared in his *Daily Bee*, Sacramento, California, October 26, 1861.

FAREWELL PONY: Our little friend, the Pony, is to run no more. "Stop it" is the order that has been issued by those in authority. Farewell and forever, thou staunch, wilderness-overcoming, swift-footed messenger. For the good thou hast done we praise thee; and, having run thy race, and accomplished all that was hoped for and expected, we can part with thy services without regret, because, and only because, in the progress of the age, in the advance of science and by the enterprise of capital, thou hast been superseded by a more subtle, active, but no more faithful, public servant. Thou wert the pioneer of a continent in the rapid transmission of intelligence between its peoples, and have dragged in your train the lightning itself, which, in good time, will be followed by steam communication by rail. Rest upon your honors; be satisfied with them, your destiny has been fulfilled—a new and higher power has superseded you. Nothing that has blood and sinews was able to overcome your energy and ardor; but a senseless, soulless thing that eats not, sleeps not, tires not—a thing that cannot distinguish space—that knows not the difference between a rod of ground and the circumference of the globe itself, has encompassed, overthrown and routed you. This is no disgrace, for flesh and blood cannot always war against the elements. Rest, then, in peace; for thou hast run thy race, thou hast followed thy course, thou hast done the work that was given thee to do.

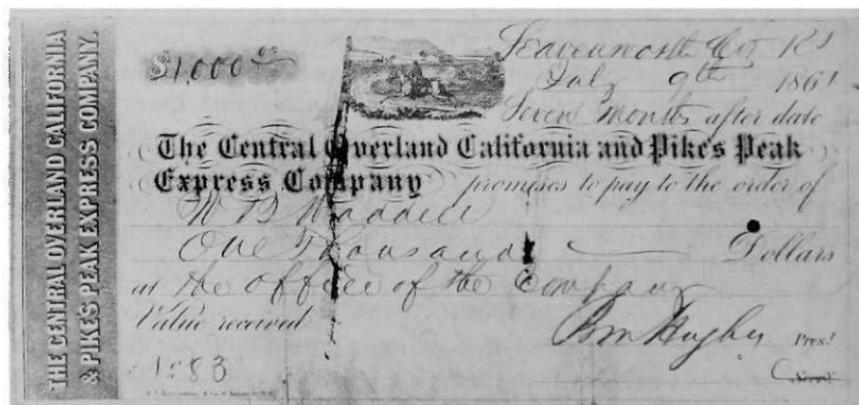
The following notice of discontinuance of the Pony Express appeared as an advertisement in the *Sacramento Union*, Sacramento, California, page 2, column 6, October 26, 1861.

Pony Express will be discontinued
from date. WELLS, FARGO & CO., Agents.
Sacramento, Oct. 25th, 1861 o26-2t

Through approximately eighteen months of variable weather, Indian disturbances, and almost insurmountable difficulties, the Express had faithfully discharged its responsibilities in such a manner as to win



The bill issued by the Kansas Valley Bank of Atchison, Kansas, bears the contemporary likeness of William Bradford Waddell who was its president. William H. Russell was the bank's cashier. The side wheeler steamer pictured bears the name, W. H. Russell, on pennant and stern. It was built for and owned by the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell and was used in the Mississippi and Missouri River freight and passenger traffic.



The promissory note was issued by the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company to W. B. Waddell. Six months prior to the close of the Pony Express, William H. Russell resigned as president and was succeeded by Bela M. Hughes, who signed the note. However, the company never ceased to be a "Russell, Majors and Waddell" company, and maintained control over the Pony Express until its end. The steel engraving pictures a Pony Express rider arriving in St. Joseph, with the terminal, the Missouri River, and the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad in the background.

unstinted, unanimous praise. During that time 308 runs were made, covering a total distance of 616,000 miles.³⁰ On those runs 34,753 letters were carried, with the loss of only one *mochila*. Of the total, 23,356 letters originated in California and 11,397 in the East. Estimated receipts were \$91,404.00, of which the West supplied about two-thirds, or \$60,844.00.³¹

From the very start it was evident that the people of California prized the Pony Express more highly than did their countrymen in the East. Everybody on the Pacific Coast wanted rapid communication with the rest of the country, but most of the people east of the Missouri River, being preoccupied with the daily unfolding tragedy of the Civil War, were unconcerned. If they wrote to anyone in California at all, and the vast majority of them did not, they were content to send the missive by stagecoach or by sea, even though it took ten or twelve days longer for it to reach its destination.

The people in the East, however, were no more backward in their use of the Pony Express than the United States government. Prior to July 1, 1861, the various departments in Washington, including the War Department, mostly ignored it, although there were military establishments at Camp Floyd, Utah, Fort Churchill, Nevada, and at various points on the Pacific Coast. After that date the Pony Express carried five pounds of mail per run, thirty-two pounds per month, for the government free of charge.

About the time Russell and Dinsmore signed their contract, an undated "Estimate of Receipts and Disbursements" from May 1, 1861, to July 1, 1862, by the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company was prepared and a copy sent to William B. Waddell. This shows an expected 500 letters per trip each way, or 2,000 per month, with total receipts of \$120,000.00 for the fourteen-month period.³²

This estimate, as proved by actual subsequent experience, was far too optimistic, as were most of the other items in it. Alexander Majors sadly remarked many years later that the Pony Express cost him and his partners \$100,000.00. This statement made without access to actual balance sheets is, without doubt, much too conservative. The probabilities are that it cost them approximately half a million dollars.

Early in the organizing of the Pony Express, Benjamin Holladay, an old friend and business associate of Russell, made loans and advanced

³⁰ Chapman, *op. cit.*, 303-4.

³¹ Julius Loeb, "The Pony Express," *The American Philatelist* (November, 1930), 118-19.

³² "Estimate of Receipts and Disbursements," May 1, 1861 to July 1, 1862, MS. Copy in library of author.

money to the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company.³³ By July 1, 1861, when the Overland Mail Company moved onto the Central Route, these loans amounted to \$200,000.00. On April 26 of that year at a meeting of the board of directors of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, Russell resigned as president, and Bela M. Hughes, his old friend and formerly agent for Russell, Majors & Waddell at St. Joseph, was elected to the office.³⁴ On the following July 5 in another meeting of the board, Hughes was instructed to give Holladay a note and deed of trust upon the entire personal property of the company. For some reason this was not done until four months later.³⁵

Since the financial status of the company showed no signs of improvement, Holladay asked for further protection of his loans and advances. Consequently, on November 22, 1861, almost a month after the Pony Express passed out of existence, Hughes and John W. Russell, secretary, were ordered to give him a bond in the amount of \$100,000.00 and a mortgage upon all of its real estate.³⁶ On the same day the deed of trust authorized the preceding July 5 was made to three trustees, with Holladay as beneficiary.

The progressive measures taken to protect Holladay constitute an index to the declining fortunes of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company. Three weeks after the bond and mortgage were given, Holladay declared the bond forfeit and asked the trustees to sell the company under the deed of trust. They complied with his request, and advertised that it would be sold at auction in Leavenworth, Kansas, on December 31, 1861. Other creditors, however, secured an injunction, the sale was not made, and the company went ahead as usual.

In spite of heroic measures to finance and rehabilitate the company it went from bad to worse. In derision its own employees dubbed it "Clean out of Cash and Poor Pay." After a hearing in court the injunction was dissolved, and on March 7, 1862, the company was again advertised for sale at auction. There being no interference this time, Holladay bid it in for \$100,000.00. He said it owed him \$208,000.00 and he would give it to anyone who would reimburse him for his bid and the loans he had made.

³³ Settle, *op. cit.*, 48; J. V. Frederick, *Ben Holladay The Stagecoach King* (Glendale, 1940), 63 ff.

³⁴ Settle, *op. cit.*, 124.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Frederick, *op. cit.*, 65.

Holladay has been accused of "freezing out" Russell, Majors & Waddell, but such was not the case. Since the company was hopelessly in debt, not making operating expenses, and was being crowded by other creditors, there was nothing else for him to do. Any other businessman would have done the same under the circumstances.

It has also been said that Holladay acquired the Pony Express and operated it for some time. This could not be true, for that institution ceased operating four and one-half months before Holladay came into possession of the Central Overland & Pike's Peak Express Company. The simple truth is that no one ever owned the Pony Express except the men who founded it. There is no record whatever that even the Overland Mail Company came into possession of the western half of it under the contract between Russell and Dinsmore. That company managed and operated the western section, but never owned it.

During those tragic closing days of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, apparently no help came from the Overland Mail Company. This was probably due to inability rather than to disinclination, for the latter company too was suffering from heavy expenses and lack of anticipated receipts.

Having taken over a nonproductive company with some 1,200 miles of stage lines, Holladay vigorously applied himself to a program of rehabilitating the line to Salt Lake City. He changed the lengthy name to Holladay Overland Mail and Express Company, added new coaches, built new stations, and made changes in the route. Within four years he had extended his lines from Salt Lake City into Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Oregon. As he reached out into new territories, he secured favorable contracts for transporting the United States mail.³⁷

In 1866 he bought David Butterfield's Overland Dispatch line running from the Missouri River to Denver. Neither this line nor the owner are to be confused with John Butterfield and the Overland Mail Company. By this transaction Holladay became supreme in the stagecoach business east of Salt Lake City and in the Northwest.

In order to meet the growing threat of Holladay's competition in the West, Wells Fargo Express Company inaugurated a program of expansion. Prior to 1864 it was engaged exclusively in the express and banking business. Not having any stagecoaches of its own, Wells Fargo relied upon the Pioneer Stage Line, the California Stage Company, and others for its California business. Shipments of express packages to the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-129; see also Edward Hungerford, *Wells Fargo* (New York, 1949), 85-112.

East went over the Overland Mail line, and gold was generally transported by sea.

In order to meet Holladay upon his own ground, the Wells Fargo people knew they had to expand eastward. The first step in this direction was taken in 1864 when they bought the Pioneer Stage Line from Charles and Louis McLane. Two years later they bought Holladay's empire, thus securing a monopoly upon the stagecoach, mail, and express business west of the Missouri River. Some two weeks later the Holladay lines, the Overland Mail Company, and the Pioneer Stage Line were all brought under the name of Wells, Fargo & Company.³⁸

In writing this summarized account of great and involved events, the author is animated by two motives—to give everyone concerned whatever credit is due him, and to correct certain widely believed errors and misstatements of fact. The story of Wells, Fargo Express Company is one of the most thrilling, most fascinating in the whole range of American history. Its contribution to the building of the West was incalculable, and the men who created and operated the business rank with the greatest organizers and promoters the country has produced. The measure of praise due them is exceedingly large.

On the other hand, to credit that company with important things someone else did and lavish unearned praise upon it to the detriment of the ones who actually did those things is not right. Nevertheless, that unworthy act has been committed by misinformed, careless, or selfish persons willing to profit by the misinterpretation or misstatement of thoroughly documented historical fact.

In 1960 the first Centennial of the Pony Express will be celebrated. Already plans for a nation-wide observance are in the making. Therefore, it is to be hoped that the spotlight of unstinted praise will be turned upon the men, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William B. Waddell, who conceived the Pony Express and possessed the daring to make it a reality.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.