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John Frink & Company, 1846-1854

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In 1846, the first time Iowa routes were let under the new postal law of 1845, the four-year mail contracts were largely won by Robert Stewart, a livery stable proprietor of Burlington. Stewart managed to gain control of the whole service from Bloomington south to Keokuk, as well as two interior lines, Burlington to Fairfield, and Bloomington to Iowa City. Thus, by virtue of his control of the best of the Iowa mail contracts, Stewart appeared in 1846 as the probable successor to the earlier would-be monopolists, William Wilson and Beers & St. John.¹

In the meantime, while Stewart was consolidating his hack lines up and down the river routes, other developments were taking place in Illinois which were of great importance to the stage history of Iowa.

In the spirited bidding on government mail routes in Illinois and Wisconsin in 1846, the pioneer Illinois stagecoach firm of Frink, Walker & Co. failed dismally to win its share of the awards. But though losing the anticipated four-year contracts, the firm, composed principally of John Frink, for-

¹ *Iowa City Standard*, June 24, 1846, quoting letter of A. C. Dodge to the *Burlington Gazette* containing post office contract awards; see *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, Feb. 4, 1846, for contract proposals. The Congressional Reports of this year were not published as per custom.

merly of Massachusetts, and Martin Otis Walker, formerly of New York, continued to run an "opposition" coach over most of their routes. The chief beneficiary in the new awards was Otho Hinton, the same individual who had won the Iowa Dubuque-Davenport stage-mail contract in 1842. As a former partner of William Neil, Henry Moore, W. S. Sullivant and other stockholders in the Ohio Stage Company, Hinton although usually in financial straits, offered serious competition to the Frink coaches. In the battle that was joined between these potential staging giants, neither group of partners asked or gave quarter. As the ruthless fight continued, through the summer and autumn and into the winter months, both firms felt the strain of competition; injuries increased, equipment broke more frequently under the pressure, expenses mounted, while revenues declined. But even though his back was pushed close to the wall, John Frink remained as hard, as unyielding and as stubborn as the New England soil from whence he sprang, although Martin Walker is said to have had his moments of doubt as to the wisdom of the contest. Frink and Walker sent their used-up stage horses and broken equipment from down-state Illinois to the Chicago barns and stables by night, in order to retain the favorable impression held by the public of the superior safety and security of their lines.²

Finally in January, 1847, Otho Hinton and his two partners entered into a conditional sales agreement with Frink, Walker & Co. to purchase all the stage stock of the latter firm for \$10,000 in cash or negotiable instruments. This agreement did not settle the war, but brought the stage battle to a climax.³

When Hinton failed to deposit acceptable funds with the

² M. M. Quaife, *Chicago's Highways Old and New, From Indian Trail to Motor Road*, (D. F. Keller & Co., Chicago 1923), pp. 157-161, gives a colored popular account of the ensuing clash between the two powerful companies.

³ This version in brief based on the *Chicago Daily Journal*, Feb. 3, 10, 20, March 31, 1847; Court Records, Marion County (Columbus), Ohio, 1846 (*Corcoran & Riggs vs. Benj. Powers et al*); Congressional Reports, House Documents, Serial 423, 27th Congress, 3d Session, No. 180, *passim*; Hecox Scrapbook, newspaper acct., presumed to be Peoria, Ill., May 28, 1858. See also *Wabash (Indiana) Express*, Feb. 17, March 3, April 28, 1847. The story of "Gen." O. Hinton is a long and interesting one, and offers an extremely curious link between the Frink and the Ohio Stage Co. interests.

Frink partners by the time stipulated in the agreement, John Frink and M. O. Walker seized the opportunity presented and rushed into the public prints to air the whole controversy; they repudiated the agreement, branded Hinton a bankrupt, and inferred him something less than an honorable gentleman. The Frink allegations were given some substance in Hinton's complete failure on all his contracts by the end of the month. The agreement in the first place, therefore, may have been but a gambit in the Frink effort to drive Hinton off the stage routes of Illinois.

Although John Frink and his partners did not succeed to all the defaulted contracts, their dominance in northern and western Illinois was made even more secure by the collapse of the colorful Hinton.⁴

Frink, Walker & Co. almost immediately took important steps to consolidate their power. Between April 1 and July 1 negotiations were completed with a number of smaller proprietors whereby a powerful staging combination was effected under the style and name of John Frink & Co. C. D. Davis and David S. More, stage and livery proprietors of Milwaukee, Bissell Humphrey of Michigan, Lorenzo P. Sanger of Galena, and Granville Kimball of Missouri were among the best known of the new associates who united with the older Frink concern.⁵

The new company was hardly formed, however, before its representatives met with those of the Ohio Stage Company in a little publicized meeting held at the time of the widely heralded water highway improvement convention in Chicago July 7-9, 1847. An agreement between the two companies was worked out whereby each was to accept and sell through fares on the other's lines, also the two behemoths of middle western staging apparently agreed to a rough division of their spheres of operation.⁶

The John Frink & Co. with the veteran Frink as president and the seasoned E. C. Stowel as secretary—later succeeded

⁴ *Chicago Daily Journal*, March 8, 1847.

⁵ See court records, *John Frink & Co. vs. Stephen Wicher*, Scott County Dist. Court, 1851-53; Frink Mss.; 18 Illinois Reports, p. 416.

⁶ *Chicago Daily Democrat*, July 14, 1847.

by William Vernon—and composed of men all experienced in that fiercely competitive field, hard, rough, vitriolic, yet withal shrewd servants of the public wants, without question now bestrode the staging business of the upper Old Northwest in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois like a veritable Colossus. By the end of August the company was ready to invade Iowa. Five years before John Frink had won his first contract there in a horse-mail out of Dubuque.⁷

In September, 1847, the firm announced at Burlington that in addition to important lines connecting with main roads in Illinois, it was ready and prepared to run coaches over four Iowa routes: the Keokuk to Burlington, the Burlington to Bloomington routes, and two inland lines, Bloomington to Iowa City, and Burlington to Fairfield. On the latter line its coaches were running by the thirtieth of the month, where previously only the Stewart stages served. A fifth Iowa stage line was begun at about the same time, connecting Dubuque with Davenport, and continuing on down the river to Bloomington.⁸

How the Frink service compared with staging as it was then known in Iowa is suggested in the Burlington editor's proud assertion that "the Fairfield folks will stare when it (the Frink stage) comes among them." Managed over the Burlington sections by the well-known and competent William Holcomb, the Frink company set out to control if not to destroy all Iowa opposition; its competition was vigorous, ruthless, and quickly applied.⁹

Frink's Burlington announcement was a clear challenge to Robert Stewart. Only that spring the latter had removed his one competitor over the Bloomington-Keokuk lines by reaching an agreement with a Mr. Perry, whereby he was to have uncontested service over the whole route. Just a month before the Frink announcement he had begun operating a daily stage over the river line. Stewart was not easily driven, he fought back, meeting cut rate with cut rate in an effort to retain both

⁷ *Ibid.*; Frink Mss.; *Burlington Hawkeye*, Sept. 9, 1847; *Keokuk Register*, Sept. 9, 1847.

⁸ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Sept. 23, 30, Oct. 14, 1847.

⁹ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Sept. 9, 30, 1847.

his profitable passenger business and his mail contracts.¹⁰ Almost at once, by the first week in September, 1847, the fare over the forty miles from Burlington to Keokuk was driven down to a ridiculous fifty cents, and may have gone yet lower. In 1848 the charge on the Bloomington-Iowa City route touched a \$1.00 figure, indicating that the Frink and Stewart coaches were waging a long and fierce fight on all the other lines as well.¹¹

Robert Stewart was one of the most stubborn of the stage foes Frink had to tangle with in Iowa. Not only did he hold on to his lines in 1847, but he continued to operate as an independent as late as 1849-50, at which date he was in partnership with a certain Haddock. By the ensuing year, however, he had accepted the inevitable, and had become one of the growing number of Frink partners.¹²

Notwithstanding the advent of the Frink combine in 1847, however, the striking feature of the stagecoach services in Iowa at the close of the following year, 1848, was that nowhere beyond the beaten paths already established before the period began were additional stagecoach lines operating. But in 1849, however, Frink & Co. began steadily reaching inland to new areas. By May of that year the firm had established their brick-red Troy coaches on a tri-weekly line over the ninety-odd miles between Dubuque and Iowa City. And in all probability theirs were the stages that continued the tri-weekly line south through Washington and Fairfield to Keokuk. Besides accomplishing these important extensions, the company is credited with having pushed their stage hacks up the Des Moines River Valley that year to Fort Des Moines at the "forks" of the Raccoon, where settlers and land speculators were beginning to gather in numbers.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, April 29, Aug. 12, Sept. 9, 1847; *Keokuk Register*, Sept. 2, Nov. 16, 1847.

¹¹ *Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), May 31, 1848.

¹² House Executive Doc., serial 580, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 88, p. 940; *Fort Des Moines Star*, Sept. 14, 1849; cf. Frink Mss.

¹³ Tacitus Hussey, *Beginnings: Reminiscences of Early Des Moines*, (Des Moines, 1919), p. 67. Not a reliable record, however, cf. Mrs. N. Sanford, *Early Sketches of Polk County*, (Newton, Iowa, 1874); *Fort Des Moines Star*, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, 1849, quoting the *Frontier Guardian*, Council Bluffs; *Des Moines Register & Leader*, Dec. 31, 1905.

But neither in 1849-1850, nor at any time in the Frink period, could the whole story of staging be told in the simple record of the extensions of that company alone. Suggestive of the growing importance and settlement of central Iowa, not alone was Frink & Co. attracted to Fort Des Moines in 1849, but Stewart & Co. also operated tri-weekly stages, for a time at least, between the Fort and Oskaloosa to the south. Swearington operated once-a-week stages which plied their lumbering way along the ridges of the 'Coon and the Nishnabotna river between Fort Des Moines and Council Bluffs (Kanesville) on the Missouri River, where Orson Hyde mustered flocks of the Mormon faithful for a crossing of the perilous plains. Fort Des Moines was also reputed to have had a semi-weekly stage that year to Iowa City, the state capital; but this was only semi-occasional at best, and for long was over-anxious publicity rather than accomplished fact. Regularity was not among its virtues. In September "the badness of the roads" prevented the proprietors, not Frink & Co., from beginning operations. And even though in October the *Iowa Star* gave a definite announcement of a hack in operation between the two towns, nevertheless, private conveyance and "Cobbler's Horse" remained the most dependable modes of transit.¹⁴

The effectiveness and continuance of these local and opposition stages was problematical and presumably of short duration. Though the tri-weekly stage connections from Fort Des Moines south to Keokuk via Oskaloosa and Fairfield appeared in other than J. Fink & Co. hands in 1849, it was not long before they too were swallowed up in the monopolistic control of that company.¹⁵

Meanwhile, an index and a key to future stage extensions was the increase in travel over all the state roads, though still most noticeable on southern highways, on the river boats and on the river stage routes. Even the stage extensions of 1849 appear to have been due in part to the influx of emigrants who in a never-ending flood continued to pour into Iowa following the discovery of gold in California. Young men from

¹⁴ Congressional Report, 88, *op. cit.*; *Fort Des Moines Star*, Sept. 14, Oct. 5, 1849.

¹⁵ Congressional Report, 88, *ibid.*

the east, bent on acquiring a fortune and returning to their homes in settled ease; hardy young sons of hard-struggling farmers on "government land"; clerks and small shop keepers who advertised their whole stock and business for sale under such signs as "Ho! for California!"; men and families tired of the marginal existence that went with starting a new home with small capital on the lonely prairies, all of these, hopeful of sudden wealth in some faintly understood El Dorado, in their varied combinations blackened the main east-west highways across Iowa. The stagecoach business was quickly benefited, even though many of the travelers came in their own wagons. Those specially eager to reach the Missouri River jumping-off places where they could buy outfits and set out for California offered that specialized form of population so helpful to staging business. Even those families which decided to mine for blacker gold in the rich soil of a middle western Iowa farm, in creating new demands for mail, for supplies, for social intercourse with town and country, made significant contributions to the forces of population which were at last making staging profitable in Iowa.

This push of the east westward created demands in the opposite direction as well. In September, 1849, young Wesley Redhead called himself fortunate to obtain an outside seat in a stage loaded with twelve passengers for the thirty miles between Iowa City and Muscatine. Early in the spring Hiram C. Pierce of Dubuque thought it possible to make regular trips into Chicago and to carry passengers as well as freight, even though Frink & Co. ran regularly over the road. The latter company began to put daily stages over their Mississippi River lines in August; and though the federal government was parsimonious in paying for extra mail services beyond that originally contracted for, the importance of the Burlington-Peoria route was recognized in the establishment of a daily mail over that line.¹⁶

But, regardless of the service on the best routes, most of the traveling in the interior, and frequently even on the more heavily traveled eastern roads, was still performed by the

¹⁶ Wesley Redhead Diary, Mss. Division, Iowa Dept. of History and Archives; Dubuque *Miners Express*, April 3, 1849; Congressional Report, *op. cit.*

grace of facilities maintained by hotel proprietors or local livery stable operators for the benefit of their patrons. Uncertain and with limited means at best, these were such as that offered by J. Bowman of the Eagle Hotel, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, in 1847, who announced in the *Burlington Hawkeye* that "the subscriber is also prepared to carry passengers to any point, when or where the Stage is not running."¹⁷ Other facilities for vehicular transportation were occasionally available on certain horseback mail routes where the contractor infrequently was forced to use a horse-drawn carriage when the mails accumulated, or would do so when a traveler going in the same direction was willing to pay sufficiently for the added expense.

Although it was an indisputable fact that by the close of 1849 the swaying coaches and the cracking whips of the J. Frink & Co. dominated the best routes in the state, 1849 was only the shadow of what was to come.

Already operating on the routes which offered the most in passenger profits in addition to the mails, John Frink and his co-partners easily dominated the quadrennial mail awards in 1850. The company's holdings in Iowa after receiving the 1850 contracts may roughly be compared to a triangle, with Dubuque at the northern end and Keokuk at the southern end of the base, with Iowa City and Fort Des Moines serving as two variable tops of an incomplete isosceles triangle. The company retained the Dubuque to Davenport stages; won an additional contract down the western banks of the Mississippi River from Davenport to Muscatine; held the Muscatine to Iowa City line; and the Iowa City to Fairfield award, over which their stages had doubtless been running the year before; the Fairfield to Keokuk, the Keokuk to Burlington, Burlington to Fairfield triangle was also theirs; further the firm held the Oskaloosa to Fort Des Moines contracts as well.¹⁸

Not only did the Frink partners win control of the Iowa territory, but they also "obtained the contracts for carrying

¹⁷ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Feb. 24, 1847.

¹⁸ *Western Democrat* (Andrew), May 24, 1850; cf. *Dubuque Miners Express*, Feb. 13, May 29, 1850; *Western Democrat*, May 17, June 7, 1850; *Des Moines Courier* (Ottumwa), Aug. 16, 30, 1850; *Iowa Star* (Des Moines), Nov. 7, 1850; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 15, 1850.

the mails on most of the routes" leading from Galena, Illinois. In addition the company was well represented in western Wisconsin, and held strong lines in Missouri. It was a powerful company, cherishing little sentiment when engaged in competition, and a tough competitor to fight. Its only possible rival to the title of Stage Tzar of the middle west was the more distant Ohio Stage Company of Ohio and Indiana.¹⁹

Yet battles royal between Frink or other competing stage lines did not always ensure better mail arrangements. One disgruntled Burlington editor remarked in 1849-50 that the eastern mail left before the connecting mails arrived, thus depriving the people of an opportunity of answering and dispatching their letters in the same post. Such arrangements as existed, he growled, "accommodated none but the Stage proprietors that we can see." During the months when Robert Stewart still controlled the government contracts on the stage mails out of Burlington it was with some pointed reference that the editor endorsed a Missouri paper's suggestion that the newspapers publish the time the mails arrived, together with the number of hours they were overdue.²⁰

The advantages to a community in being served by a strong combine, even though possessed of monopolistic features, was well indicated in the pleasure with which the Ottumwa *Des Moines Courier* recorded on June 7, 1850, that "on Tuesday last our citizens were delighted to see a splendid new four-horse coach rolled into town by four fine bays, bearing the name of the present indefatigable Second Assistant Postmaster General F. H. Warren, formerly of this State." The editor further asserted, "This coach belongs to those prompt, obliging and gentlemanly men, Frink, Walker & Co., to whom this part of the country are so much indebted for the promptness and regularity of the mails and kindness and attention to passengers."²¹ Similar waves of pleasure and praise must have swelled in other editorial breasts as other four-horse post coaches rocked into town and drew rein before the local two-story clapboard hotel or post office, and disgorged a motley

¹⁹ *Western Democrat*, June 7, 1850; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, *ibid.*

²⁰ See *Dubuque Miners Express*, March 27, 1849.

²¹ *History of Wapello County*, (Western Historical Company, 1878), p. 474.

collection of land speculators, political figures, claim agents, men and women, all carefully and hopefully observed by local residents gathered to watch the "Mail come in."

Spite its dominance, however, Frink & Co. did not have an easy conquest of Iowa. For three years, 1850-52, the company was to be subjected to a constant stream of hostile criticism from harping editors, whose quills, dipped in the acid of fancied wrongs, were ever ready to find their mark. The volume of these complaints was due not only to the fact that the company was the largest operator in the state, but also because staging in Iowa had reached a transition point unrecognized by either the residents or the proprietors of the most extensive stage system in the west. The people were beginning to look to stages for transportation as well as for mails. The principal cause for this transition was the marked growth of population.

But even with its far-reaching and profitable stage passenger business east of the Mississippi, and spite the rapid and large increase in Iowa population, Frink & Co. in that state was still first and foremost contractors of the government mails. From that business came their primary profits, and to that business they devoted their primary care. But recognized or not, in Iowa as elsewhere, it was fast becoming true that the same rough, crude equipment sufficient to maintain a minimum of service in all kinds of weather, bad as well as good, was no longer sufficient to please a traveling public more and more dependent upon the stagecoach. While the Frink company continued to operate through these years essentially a mail-stage, the public was beginning to expect something better, a stage-mail. Underneath the continued complaints of delinquent mails, therefore, is now heard for the first time a growing criticism of the physical comforts and conveniences in the stage service available.²²

Another reason for the outburst of petulant and complaining criticism was also related to the growth of population, but was aside from Frink's pre-occupation with the mails. In the large demands for extra staging, and staging of a higher quality than hitherto acceptable, that the growth of popula-

²² See *Western Democrat*, January-September, 1850, scattered nos.; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Sept. 11, 1850; *Democratic Enquirer* (Muscatine), Oct. 12, 1850.

tion produced, the company's facilities were over-extended to meet the requirements of the new contracts of 1850, a strain made worse by what may have been financial difficulties. But for whatever reasons, the Frink service in these years was quite susceptible to criticism. Such instances as the complaints of the Ottumwa editor were soon to become rare.²³

At Muscatine the *Democratic Enquirer* complained of the "negligence and apparent indifference of Frink & Co. and of the "mud wagons" and "oxcarts" operated especially between that place and Iowa City. On one occasion the editor recounted with an apparent straight face the story of a passenger who had a "fine pair of new \$6 boots destroyed by the pegs and tacks being shaken out of the soles." At Andrew, where the Frink stages had been familiar visitants since their first appearance on the Davenport route some three years before, the Frink & Co. was greeted at the opening of 1850 with the sarcastic jibe:

Hurrah for the Lightning Line! Oh, tell it not in Old Virginia nor Texas, that Frink & Walker have put one new carriage (old one fixed over) on the Dubuque and Davenport route. Glory Hallelujah! Wonder if they couldn't find paint enough to stain the sacking which covers it?

Dubuque also decried the delays and slowness of passage, the frequently wet mails it asserted were characteristics of that firm. The Dubuque *Miners Express* soon to take up an almost personal feud with John Frink, entered the fray of criticism early.²⁴

The angry editor of the Andrew *Western Democrat* foamed that "the Frink & Co. carts in the first place are so ugly that those on the route have no need of scarecrows to keep off the varmints—and in the next so limited in dimensions, that it is hardly possible to take a chew of tobacco." In the rainy spring of 1851, because of swollen streams and bad roads, the public was offered on the line west of the Cedar River between Muscatine and Iowa City a square-box mud wagon, which,

²³ Dubuque, Andrew, and Muscatine papers were especially severe in their criticism of coaching and mail facilities in 1850. Keokuk was another town on the whole unfriendly to the Frink system.

²⁴ *Democratic Enquirer*, Oct. 12, 1850; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Jan. 16, Sept. 11, Oct. 9, 16, 23, Nov. 4, 1850; Jan. 23, Feb. 20, May 29, June 19; *Western Democrat*, Jan. 23, Feb. 22.

although equipped with thorough-braces, had no brake save a club with a rope attached, and this soon broke; the tongue was too short and the body of the wagon, therefore, constantly pressed upon the flanks of the team, and but for the roads might have caused a runaway; the canvas cover was largely worked over patches. In a fit of irritation one passenger, Stephen Wicher, deliberately cut and slashed holes in the sides and top of the covering "for air and his own health." At Fort Des Moines the Frink hacks were feelingly described as "lumber wagons." Similar complaints or observations were to be heard from travelers at Dubuque, Iowa City, Keokuk and Muscatine.²⁵

Not only were the Frink stages apparently inferior, but the horse flesh set to the task of drawing the coaches appeared no better. In one scathing notice taken of the company the Muscatine *Democratic Enquirer* swore that not only were the Frink coaches the best medicine for indigestion he knew of but that "the horses have one excellent peculiarity—their bodies afford no impediment to the sunshine, and offer the traveler a good opportunity to study the osseous structure of the animal." Yet no matter how much the people might protest that Frink & Co.'s equipment was designed to perform only the service required by the mail contracts, with only a second thought for the convenience of the public, by the law of 1845 the Post Office Department could exact no more.

One can scarcely wonder that some editors verily believed travelers would go an additional sixty miles out of their way rather than risk themselves in such coaches and with such horses. The Andrew editor quoted above was driven to such a pitch of indignation that he warned all his readers to take the river steamboats for passage up and down the eastern border of Iowa rather than patronize the inland Frink stages. Even if he never "saw another stranger's face in Andrew and if grass were to grow in the streets," he cried, he would rather see that come to pass than have the company continue to receive public patronage—strong language for an editor

²⁵ *Iowa Star*, July 24, 1851; *Western Democrat*, Aug. 9, 1850; *John Frink vs. Stephen Wicher*, depositions Scott County District Court, 1851-53.

who was first and foremost a town promoter in the public eye.²⁶

Yet, nevertheless, the fact remains that although the town boosters and self-appointed managers of matters concerning the commonweal cried out bitterly for redress—they were unable to get rid of the Frink stages or any others complained of. This is but further proof that with a government mail contract a strong company such as John Frink & Co. was still all but immune to competition.

That not all the angry, bitter denunciations and charges of neglect were deserved by Frink & Co. is indicated by the fact that the tri-weekly stage from Keokuk to Fairfield was increased to a daily service in August, 1850; that soon a daily coach was rumbling over the state roads from Keokuk as far north as Oskaloosa; that there was talk of Fort Des Moines gaining such a service before the year was out. A tri-weekly Andrew-Galena stage mail begun that year was probably a Frink line too.²⁷

And spite the public criticism Frink & Co. continued pushing their mud-bespattered hacks, coaches, wagons, carriages, vehicles of all kinds and descriptions, some open, some covered, some with springs, some without, across sloughs, through dusty roads, over the stubbly forest paths through prairies waving with grass waist high where wagons one hundred yards ahead could be lost to view. Through and spite all these obstacles the company continued to carry the United States mail and to convey those passengers who trusted in them to reach a destination.

Nevertheless, the barrage of complaints continued against the Frink services. Eventually these adverse criticisms reached Washington and the postal authorities there. Prompted perhaps by that, and by a rising threat of competition in the

²⁶ *Democratic Enquirer*, Aug. 21, 1850; *Western Democrat*, Sept. 6, 1850. The editor of the latter paper was especially bitter against the local Frink agent, a Mr. Reed. It is quite possible that some of the editor's extreme prejudice was prompted by his feelings relative to the agent. Again and again that spring and summer and fall Frink & Co. was urged to dismiss Mr. Reed.

²⁷ House Executive Docs., Serial 360, 32nd Congress, 2d Session, Report No. 62; *Iowa Star*, Jan. 2, March 20, 1851, Nov. 20, Dec. 4, 1851; *Des Moines Courier*, Feb. 14, 1851; House Executive Docs., Serial 644, 32d Congress, 2d Session, Report No. 101, p. 96.

continued agitation, on behalf of the company John Frink published a personal card, to "All Whom It May Concern," which first appeared in the Burlington *Telegraph* January 11, 1850. The numerous quotations and "notices" of this card by other papers throughout the state indicated the deep interest all sections had in the operation of Frink & Co.'s stages.²⁸

In this carefully composed and shrewdly offered confession, John Frink

hoped that by renewed energy and zeal on our part we shall be enabled to bring to our aid the good feelings and patronage of many who have, perhaps for good cause, shunned our lines of stages (and some for no good cause I am quite sure) and sought other modes of conveyance. With this fair promise to do our best, we hope to remove all old prejudices; and it is further promised to give all the speed and comfort to the travelling public that is in our power, and to put the rates of stage fare so low that they can afford nor wish to travel in any other way than by our regular line of coaches.

Frink continued with the penitent assertion that it is distinctly understood that all our Agents, and Drivers have been fully instructed to use all the means in their power to make those who favor us with custom perfectly comfortable in all respects, and to leave no room whatsoever for complaint as to the mode of conveyance, or the civilities and attentions always due to passengers.

Having thus taken notice of some of the widespread criticisms of his stages, Frink proceeded to neatly flay the tender skins of

those editors who have felt it their duty to publish in their prints many articles which were not calculated to benefit the public, as it could hardly be expected that they would induce action on the part of those whom they seemed designed to injure . . .

While asking that these desist, Frink again pledged the company's prompt attention to honest complaints which were fair to the firm as well as just in their demands.

It was a well turned "card," and one obviously designed to win the good will of the press and the public of Iowa. When the *Western Democrat* at Andrew growled, "Well, let Mr. John Frink think as he pleases; we presume no one cares,"

²⁸ *Iowa Star*, Feb. 2, 1851, dated Burlington, Jan. 11, 1850 [sic]. Quite obviously the latter date should have been 1851, cf. *Western Democrat*, Jan. 29, 1851.

it may be doubted if he had company, but when he added that "if the promises are kept, the people will be satisfied," a host of others surely agreed.²⁹

That Frink earnestly sought to redeem his given word is manifest. The important river routes were the first to receive improved equipment and stock, some arriving as early as the fall before his card appeared. Elsewhere in the state, on the first of May, 1851, the Frink partners began sending tri-weekly four-horse post coaches—a signal of a well paying route—over the Fort Des Moines and Council Bluffs line, by way of Winterset, Wah-ta-ha, Indiantown and Kanessville. Early that same month the company voluntarily began carrying a daily mail to accompany daily coaches on the Oskaloosa-Fort Des Moines line—the Post Office Department did not order or approve this extra service until October. Sooner or later the whole of the company's lines in Iowa showed a similar improvement.³⁰

With the threatened close of the Mississippi navigation that fall Frink & Co. announced that they were completing their "winter arrangements, and will, on the 25th inst. November stock up the roads from Keokuk to Muscatine, with good four-horse Post Coaches, which will complete a good and expeditious Stage Line from Keokuk to Dubuque and Galena." These four-horse post coaches were probably to replace the small two-horse hacks commonly used on river routes during good navigation seasons when the bulk of the river traffic traveled by boat. Readers were reminded in the same announcement that "passengers travelling north or south cannot do better than to take the river line either for Wapello, Muscatine, Iowa City, Davenport, Rock Island, Dubuque, Galena, or any part of Northern Illinois or Wisconsin."³¹

The partners did not rest with the mere improvement of

²⁹ *Op. cit.*

³⁰ *Iowa Star*, March 20, 1851; Congressional Report No. 101, *op. cit.*, p. 96. This was irregular, apparently, for the *Iowa Star* complains of the need for a "good coach on . . . line from Oskaloosa west" Nov. 20, 1851. Cf. *George Hunt vs. John Frink & Co.*, Clerk's Office, Muscatine County District Court, 1851. Frink had a regular "general agent" whose responsibilities included the Council Bluffs terminus.

³¹ *Iowa Star*, Dec. 4, 1851. The announcement originated in Burlington, bearing date of Nov. 23.

service, stock, or equipment either. In October 1851 the firm further extended its stage system by acquiring through transfer the stage mail contract from John Hettrick to serve Burlington thrice weekly from Rushville by way of Macomb. Another addition to the important Iowa-Illinois stage links controlled by J. Frink & Co. was the stage service between Fort Madison and La Harpe, Illinois, begun that year. Other inter-state lines operated by the Frink associates continued as before, with stages crossing the Mississippi at Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington and at Keokuk, connecting in Illinois with Galena, Dixon, Peoria and Quincy. In addition to these out-of-state connections the Burlington-Keokuk stage was a part of the important St. Louis route on the west side of the Missouri.³²

Yet complaints were never completely absent. As late as August 28, the editor of the Fort Des Moines *Iowa Star* grumbled, "when are those coaches and four-legged horses which were promised on the mail route from here to Keokuk, by Frink & Co., to make their appearance?" The editor noted that the roads were good and the people impatient. Not until November was the *Star* able to announce their arrival. "The stock and coaches are very materially improved," he agreed, and "they have very attentive agents, good drivers, and first rate stands." There was an admonition to the company, however, to "just put a good coach on your line from Oskaloosa west then all will be right."³³

While it was inevitable that the red and yellow stages and mail hacks of the Frink combine should dominate the main lines, independent proprietors continued to appear and offer their services on important subsidiary cross routes. Swetland and Long obtained a mail contract in 1850 which sent a two-horse stage once-a-week between Dubuque and Muscatine by an inland route touching at Andrew, Maquoketa and Tipton. Irregular service was also offered by independents on the Dubuque, Anamosa, Marion, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City line before the Frink interests dominated that service in 1849. In 1851 Iowa City was joined to New London by way of Craw-

³² House Executive Document, Serial 680, 32d Congress, 2d Session, Report 62, p. 733.

³³ *Iowa Star*, Nov. 20, 1851.

fordsville with a once-weekly stage run by D. and A. McCully. T. J. Pierce of Andrew was but another of these local livery proprietors who were announcing by "cards" in the local press that "The undersigned is prepared to take loads of passengers and freight to any part of the country on reasonable terms." A hopeful opposition line was begun between Muscatine and Tipton to Marion, tapping the longer southern Iowa route from Dubuque through Iowa City to Keokuk. This same opposition line sought to take Frink's custom on his Iowa City-Muscatine route, and by tapping the Frink river line at Andrew, recruit additional patronage there.³⁴

But these new competitors rarely offered an improvement over the quality of the Frink service. Northern Iowa's two-horse stage mail between Dubuque and Delhi let in 1850, for instance, proved more often than not to be but a plain springless wagon.³⁵

Yet spite all this staging activity as 1852 opened there were a number of surprising gaps in Iowa's stage system. Fort Des Moines and Iowa City still lacked a regular stage connection as the southern connections retained their traditionally higher importance. West and north of Dubuque had but the haphazard Delhi stage, and other regions were without regular staging or other means of public transportation save the line which ran southwesterly through Anamosa and Cedar Rapids to Iowa City. All the region north and west of Fort Des Moines was without the service of a stage and did not need one for that country was still unsettled. And on many of the existing mail-stage lines in the east and southern portions of Iowa, the quality was still the inferior two-horse mail hack rather than the four-horse post coach, the ultimate in stage accommodation.

Several of these deficiencies were filled in 1852. Fort Des Moines, a slow, sleepy looking village to many a traveler from the east that year, convinced of her right to a regular connection with the state capital at Iowa City, succeeded in

³⁴ *Western Democrat*, Dec. 3, 17, 1851; House Executive Documents, Serial 580, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 88, pp. 27, 715; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Feb. 20, March 27, 1849; *Democratic Enquirer*, Oct. 12, 1850; Congressional Report 101, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 178 (644).

³⁵ *Dubuque Miners Express*, Feb. 20, 1850.

gaining that service. In January, 1852, the *Iowa Star* bitterly complained of the delay in instituting regular hack service between the two towns although the post office had called for special bids on that route in September. Delayed by a failure to find a reliable low bidder and the necessity of waiting until the roads were freed from ice and snow in order to stock the road, March brought the good news. In that month James Huff, general agent for John Frink & Co., announced that the Iowa City-Fort Des Moines line had been added to that company's Iowa chain. A twice weekly schedule between the two towns, with stages starting simultaneously from both ends on Mondays and Tuesdays of each week, was news well received in all parts of eastern and central Iowa.³⁶

Early the same year Davenport and Iowa City were also joined by direct tri-weekly stages, probably a Frink controlled line too. Mail stages from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, ran on a once-weekly schedule through Garnavillo, Delhi and Anamosa to Tipton. From Tipton one could proceed by regular stage to Iowa City and connect from thence over two routes to Council Bluffs. In the south Keokuk added a weekly stage to Farmington.³⁷

But complaints increased. Although 1852 did not have the prolonged rainy spells the previous year had had to contend with the volume of protests and criticisms fully equalled the record of 1851.

For various reasons Dubuque was especially vocal in her complaints and protests. Sensitive to her rights in a mail connection with Chicago on the east, Dubuque was vastly jealous of Galena, Illinois, her leading rival as the metropolis of the upper Mississippi. Fear was added to jealousy when in 1849 the North West Distributing Office of the United States Mails was located in the Illinois town. Inevitably every delay or irregularity in the mails at Dubuque was seized upon by its residents as proof of malicious discrimination. Inevit-

³⁶ *Iowa Star*, Jan. 29, March 4, 1852; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Mar. 3, 1852; *Davenport Democratic Banner*, Mar. 5, 1852.

³⁷ Congressional Report No. 62, *op. cit.*, pp. 280; 277; *Davenport Democratic Banner*, Mar. 5, Apr. 28, 1852.

ably also, the Post Office Department and the mail-stage contractors became involved.³⁸

The long simmering discontent burst into a flame when Dubuque's Democratic organ, the weekly *Miners Express*, published a long, possibly "inspired," epistle by "Public Good" in December, 1851.³⁹ Admitting that

It cannot be denied that Mr. Fitz Henry Warren, in his capacity as Second Assistant Post Master General, has done a great deal for Iowa in the way of mail facilities, by accommodating the interior and thinly settled portions of the State with new Post Offices and new mail lines,

"Public Good" nevertheless asserted that it was no less true that Fitz Warren was

blind to the "short comings" of John Frink & Co. who monopolize the carrying of the mails not only in Iowa, but throughout the whole Northwest.

It was an easy transition for the writer to proceed to claim a fraud in the failures of the Frink company to bring the Chicago mails to Dubuque as per the contract schedules of July, 1850. The writer further claimed collusion between the hotel proprietors of Galena and John Frink; the former stood to gain \$1.50 on every stage passenger not carried on to Dubuque during the night, and Frink & Co. evaded the added expense in conveying the mails to Dubuque at night instead of lying over at Galena and bringing the mail sacks in on the morning passenger stage.

Proof positive of the "deal" to the writer's mind was the slow speed made by Frink's excellent four-horse stages over the route from the advancing Illinois Central Railroad to Galena. Three miles per hour on the good fall roads of northern Illinois was indeed slow. That the Post Office Department

³⁸ There was a fierce contest for the Distributing Office for the Northwestern mails as early as 1848-49, see Dubuque *Miners Express*, Oct. 23, 1850. Minnesota papers reported each town having agents trying to stir up support in the country districts for rival claims. In 1849 Galena was made a distributing office, and a year later the matter was rumoured again up for question. Dubuque was made the distributing office in 1853. See *Minnesota Pioneer*, Dec. 29, 1853; Dubuque *Miners Express*, June 15, 1853.

³⁹ Co-editor of the Dubuque *Miners Express* was George C. Green who was appointed justice of the Iowa State Supreme Court in 1852. The other editor was Wm. H. Merritt, long a staunch champion of the "Democracy" in Dubuque, and George W. Jones in particular. See the files of this paper through March, 1852.

was also culpable "Public Good" asserted; its alleged refusal to correct the evil was cited as further evidence of John Frink's overweening influence with its officials.

The charges made of John Frink's influence with the postal authorities in Washington were partially admitted by the *Dubuque Tribune*, Dubuque's Whig paper which came to Frink's defense. That paper accused the *Miners Express* in turn of being motivated by political considerations, in view of the coming presidential election and the uncertain chances of reelection to the United States Senate in 1852 of the darling of Dubuque's democracy, George W. Jones. Since the days of Andrew Jackson the patronage of the Post Office Department in appointing postmasters, the extension of mail services and other kindred duties had become a well-known weapon of political warfare. Though the immediate target of attack was John Frink the control of the Post Office Department may well indeed have been the objective.⁴⁰

Senator George Wallace Jones, an ambitious and popular leader of the Democratic party, promptly laid the communication of "Public Good" before the postal authorities in an effort to obtain a shorter time between Chicago and Dubuque for west-bound mail. When Fitz Henry Warren's promises of improvement failed to satisfy him, Jones published a series of letters accusing Frink of disregarding the postal laws and of being sustained in that attitude by Warren himself. Charging that "Col. Frink's influence with the Dept. is omnipotent," Jones predicted for the benefit of his readers, "you may expect relief when the present P.M.G. and his assistant Fitz Warren go out of the Dept. and not before." When that event occurred, Jones implied Frink would not find the public servants so amenable to his slightest wish. Mr. W. Merritt, who occupied the editorial tripod at the *Miners Express*, vehemently concurred in these sentiments.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The patronage of the Post Office Department at this time was in the hands of Fitz Henry Warren so far as Iowa was concerned, and the parties were too evenly matched in Iowa for one or the other to be indifferent to paid party workers.

⁴¹ The Frink main office in Iowa was located in Burlington, where were the outstanding Whig leaders of Iowa, James W. Grimes, Fitz Henry Warren, who was appointed by Zachary Taylor to the Post Office Department and James Morgan, editor of the Whiggish *Burlington Telegraph*. For Frink's political influence, cf. Quaife, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-

Never one to hesitate in expressing his opinions, the publication of the attacks by "Public Good" and the Jones letters roused John Frink to a furious rage. In a published reply directed particularly at Jones, Frink asserted that the \$5000 in fines against his company on the books of the Post Office Department was irrefutable proof of the falseness of the charges of his omnipotence with the department. These fines, he further claimed, were a complete refutation of the insinuating accusation that those same department officials had been less than faithful in their duties.

Turning to Jones, Frink sardonically suggested that,

Whether it be derogatory or not in point of fact that an unpretending old stage driver like myself should have a larger influence at the national capitol than one enjoying the privileges of a Senator in Congress, the people, it occurs to me, will be somewhat surprised that the most presumptuous of all their servants at Washington should let himself down to such a confession.

Warming to his task, Frink denounced Jones as a dandified profane reporter of cheap gossip and concluded his furious broadside with the sarcastic promise that

having been accustomed all my life to curry horses, I shall not at this later period seek to vary my destiny by raking down a jackass.

Though Frink retired from the public controversy with the publication of his letter, for a number of weeks thereafter, the Dubuque *Express* made frequent allusions to "that venerable Knight of the Curry Comb," to "Father Frink," "Old Frink," and other equally choice appellations.⁴²

That the political element in the Frink-Jones-*Miners Express* controversy was no mere idle speculation is confirmed by the chiding reminders of other Democratic organs in the state that the *Miners Express* was in danger of leaving the Democratic party for that of Jones. And it may be mentioned that after George W. Jones secured his renomination and election

⁴² Frink's letter was dated "Washington, Feb. 3, 1852."

161. Quaife does not analyze the changing nature of the administrations, but it appears that Frink was a staunch New England Whig. N.B. Frink bought his Burlington property from J. W. Grmes. Cf. Dubuque *Miners Express*, Mar. 10, 1852; *Fairfield Weekly Ledger*, July 1, 1852.

to the U.S. Senate, the *Miners Express* attacks upon Frink subsided.⁴³

While this controversy may easily be magnified out of proportion to its true significance, it is an excellent illustration of the political considerations involved in staging business for a large contractor. With the formation of the John Frink & Co. co-partnership, based primarily upon the business of contracting government mails, Frink like others found it necessary to spend considerable time in Washington.

The importance of such a personal lobby, maintained by all the larger stage contractors, lay not in its influence in the award of contracts in the first instance, which was governed by law and postal regulations. Rather it lay in the power of the department to increase payments for increased services, in the authorization of new routes in the interval between regular contract dates, in the discretion of the department in assessing fines, cancelling services and in passing upon the validity of sub-contracts.

John Frink made no bones about his Whig sympathies. And while it may very well have been true that his political preferences did him no harm at Washington, where he was personally acquainted with Fitz Henry Warren, the charge of "undue" influence appears utterly false. Yet this controversy need not be dismissed too casually. Spite all that Warren and other workers in the Whig party could do in that divided political year of 1852, in March 1853 the control of the national administration returned to the hands of the Democrats under Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. This change may have been a minor but contributing factor in the history of John Frink & Co. in 1854.

Regardless of criticism, however, Dubuque was always eager to have the assistance of the Frink enterprise whenever she thought to discover advantage of it. Almost before the end of the bitter controversy of 1851-52 businessmen of the "Key City," as Dubuque proudly described itself, sought to underwrite a private steamboat service to Galena. Frink & Co. was approached and did consider such a service. In the spring of 1852 the company was announced as prepared to place

⁴³ Cf. editorial news in Dubuque *Miners Express*, July 7, 1852.

the steamer "Governor Briggs" on the water between the two towns, transferring the boat from the run operated by the company between Alton, Illinois, and Keokuk. But the plan was eventually abandoned, a decision not calculated to bring joy to Dubuqueland.⁴⁴

In 1853 the most significant stagecoach developments occurred in northern Iowa. Local livery stablemen began running "stages" between Elkader and Dubuque, Guttenburg, and Garnavillo, between Garnavillo and Decorah. This appearance of hacks and coaches as far inland and as far north as Decorah, in a district hitherto without, was an encouraging sign of progress and a hint that soon the monopolists would appear. It also was a sign of the growing need felt for a regular land communication between northern Iowa settlements and particularly the need of connections with Minnesota's booming territorial capital, St. Paul, winterlocked between four and five months of the year.

As early as the winter of 1851 an enterprising resident of St. Paul had offered to carry passengers from that place to Dubuque, but this was only the same irritating, semi-regular, undependable form of transportation with which the frontier was too well acquainted. Public meetings and public petitions for laying out a territorial or federally subsidized road linking the two important river towns, and for the establishment of stage mails held in 1852 and 1853 were of no avail. Even officially appointed delegations from the two towns meeting to spur on private construction of an adequate road had produced no better results. When finally in 1854 a territorial and a federal project had produced a semblance of a passable road, hopes ran high, especially when Dr. Andros arrived at the northern town from Dubuque in March of that year, having driven a buggy over the two hundred and thirty miles. This may have been the proof the Post Office Department

⁴⁴ *Western Democrat* (now located at Bellevue), March 21, 1852; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Mar. 24, 1852. As early as 1848 Frink was in partnership with (Frink) Lamothe, Brown & Co. to operate packets between Alton and St. Louis in connection with Galena, Chicago, Springfield, Lafayette stages. Two years later Frink & Walker purchased the "Luella" and "Gov. Briggs" of Capt. W. P. LaMothe (sic), the same year the partnership of Frink & Walker obtained a packet mail contract between Alton and St. Louis. See *Alton Telegraph*, Feb. 4, 1848, Jan. 25, 1850; *Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review*, May 24, 1850.

was waiting for, at any rate, J. Frink & Co. won a weekly stage contract joining the two towns in the spring lettings of the government mails.⁴⁵

But other routes besides the northeast were strengthened in 1853. New short stage lines appeared, such as the non-Frink line from Burlington to Washington. Important routes such as the Frink Quincy-Keokuk line gained increased service and smaller communities, such as Keosauqua and its once-a-week buggy "stage" to Burlington, received similar conveniences. Of special interest to southwestern Iowa settlers was the announcement that year of a Frink line of weekly stages from Oregon, Missouri to Council Bluffs. By its connections in Missouri this route offered a direct trip to St. Louis, of value when the Missouri River steamboat services were unavailable.⁴⁶

In the first half of the following year, even before the new government contracts were in operation, Frink & Co. further increased their stage services on Iowa routes. A tri-weekly, then later a daily stage, was put on the Davenport-Cedar Rapids route; the Iowa City-Dubuque line was increased; and stages as far inland as Independence and Cedar Falls were contemplated. These improvements as well as others were but added testimony that the surging tide of emigration continued unchecked, that in the swarms of land-hungry farmers, eager factory workers from the east, speculators, carpet bag in hand, and traveling merchants making seasonal and yearly purchases of stocks and supplies, passenger business for stages did not suffer.⁴⁷

Potent factors in the steady stream of this westward migration were the railroads, nibbling voraciously at the flat Illinois prairie-distances which separated them from the Mississippi

⁴⁵ House Documents, Serial 735, 33d Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 125, pp. 700, 776, 794, 796; *Clayton County Herald*, Aug. 12, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, 1853.

⁴⁶ *Minnesota Pioneer*, Dec. 11, 1851, advert. dated St. Paul, Nov. 30, 1851; Mar. 4, 1852; Arthur J. Larsen, "Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle," *Minnesota Historical Bulletin*, Vol. XI (December, 1930), pp. 393, 394; *Minnesota Pioneer*, Aug. 11, 1853; Jan. 4, 5, 1854; *Clayton County Herald*, Jan. 6, 1854; *Dubuque Miners Express*, Mar. 1, May 31, 1854; *Minnesota Democrat*, Sept. 28, Mar. 15, 1854; *Muscatine Tri-weekly Journal*, July 31, 1854.

⁴⁷ Congressional Report no. 125, *op. cit.*

River goals. Between 1851 and 1854 the Chicago Rock Island Railroad had completed laying its track 170 miles from Lake Michigan to Rock Island, eliminating one mile of a state route with each mile of track laid. In February, 1854, when the cars and steaming engines arrived at Rock Island to be met by a cheering reception, the long retreat of the Frink stages from Joliet, Ottawa and Peru was accomplished, and the signal given for its stages to retreat once more, across the river to Davenport.⁴⁸

To the north the Illinois Central was pushing its track along the western end of the old Galena-Chicago stage route, continuing at Freeport the line west to Warren and the river. With the old Cherry Valley routes already surrendered as 1854 matured into summer, the cars had passed Warren and were approaching Galena just fifteen miles from Dubuque.⁴⁹

By the end of the year the Galena and Chicago Union Railway which operated the northern Cherry Valley route as far as Freeport, had completed construction on the direct line from Junction to Fulton City as far as Dixon, only 45 miles from its goal. And Clinton, Iowa, was but across the river.⁵⁰

Over all these routes along which the railroads were building in 1854 the Frink stages had long been familiar vehicles. Although the advance of construction crews meant a steady retreat for the Frink coaches, so great was the magnet of the west, so powerful a carrier of traffic were the railroads, that even though stage routes were constantly shortened the bulk of their patronage more than compensated for the loss.

But with the continued and growing flood of travel came new problems for stage proprietor, newspaper editor and postmaster alike. When the editor at Savannah, Illinois, a town not on a prospective railroad line, could boastfully proclaim, "More Stages wanted.—Between sixty and seventy passengers arrived here on Tuesday last from the railroad," a

⁴⁸ Davenport *Democratic Banner*, June 3, 10, Sept. 23, 1853; Austin Corbin to Laurel Summers, June 24, 1853, Laurel Summers Mss., Iowa Dept. of History and Archives; *Muscatine Journal*, Jan. 13, Mar. 10, 1854; George Greene to John Weare Jr., Mar. 9, 1854; Dubuque *Daily Miners Tribune*, Mar. 1, 1854.

⁴⁹ William J. Petersen, "The Illinois Central Comes," *Palimpsest*, Vol. XIV (October, 1933), p. 376.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14, 327; the Dubuque *Miners Express* between 1850 and 1855 is full of accounts of the road, with figures of freight, etc.

measure of the traffic at the Iowa river towns can be had. Frink & Co. had instituted a double daily mail stage on the Dubuque-railroad line in mid 1852. As the rails crept closer and closer, extras were pressed into regular service, four and six extra coaches being not uncommon at Dubuque. When the cars reached Warren, Illinois, in January, 1854, the pressure yet increased. A dozen coaches left that town on the arrival of the cars in one night that spring, loaded with passengers west. A rival line to Frink & Co. was able to maintain itself with no harm to the monopolist as the early spring and summer advanced. In similar proportion it was doubtless true that the same flood imposed a similar burden on stage facilities at Davenport and other Iowa river towns facing an approaching railroad across the Mississippi.⁵¹

This growing demand for stage facilities by the traveling public was at last forcing the stage proprietors on the main eastern lines to decide whether their primary business was carrying the mails or passengers. Since there was no comparison between the profits of the two, the frequent decisions of the proprietors and drivers added new problems too, and drew fresh complaints from both the newspaper editor and the postmaster.

It was hinted that in many a stage barn strange "sacks of cats" could be found carefully hidden, sacks which would prove highly interesting to postmasters and settlers farther down the line. That editors had their suspicions of the contents of some of these "sacks" is the plaintive evidence of the Davenport editor who took a Frink driver to task for "refusing to take the newspaper bags from this office, because he had a load of passengers." Other complaints against the service were heard in Oskaloosa and Indianola.⁵²

Moreover, new complaints inevitably arose with the near approach of the cars when the matter of prompt and exact connections between the ever advancing railroads and the stagecoach for the quick relay of the western mails became of seemingly greater importance. Some, like Dubuque, fumed

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 332.

⁵² Dubuque *Daily Miners Express*, Jan. 25, Feb. 3, Mar. 31, Apr. 8, 12, 1854; Dubuque *Miners Express*, weekly, May 31, 1854; *Clayton County Herald*, Oct. 7, 1853.

and sputtered. Others uttered dark threats, like the exasperated editor of the Democratic Burlington *Gazette* who charged that if "Frink, Fairweather, and all other 'corn fed' operators don't attend to these things a little better in the future, why we will just 'draw our linen' and go into the lard oil business at once," remarks heartily concurred in by the Keokuk *Des Moines Valley Whig*. Still others, although bitter, were resigned, like the editor of the Alton, Illinois, *Telegraph*, who believed that "as long as Frink's mail line is equipped by the lean lazy 'ghosts of horse flesh,' which at present are employed, no change for the better can be expected." Such a change would come most quickly and effectively, the Davenport *Democratic Banner* thought, with a change in the national administration and in the Post Office Department.⁵³

Another element adding to the general dissatisfaction so obvious among the river towns was the enlarged idea of traveling comfort and speed the Illinois railroads were giving Iowa settlers. Writing to the *Miners Express* of Dubuque, a long time foe of Frink & Co., "A Traveler" on the route to the rail terminal in Illinois in describing his travels lamented the slow snail-like speed of the coaches, complaining that "among those items which made an impression on my mind was the humbug practiced on the traveling community by Frink & Walker."⁵⁴

But Frink could disregard such threats when his stages were reaping the golden harvests of 1853 and 1854. While Dubuque reported "Stages, Hacks, and vehicles of every description are running full to every part of the county," the same was described far inland too. Oskaloosa noted in May, 1854, that "nearly every evening of late brings in with the eastern mail two coach loads of passengers," adding that "travel by other conveyance is also largely on the increase."⁵⁵

Nevertheless, although with apparently a most profitable year ahead of it, by July 1, 1854, John Frink & Co. had

⁵³ Davenport *Democratic Banner*, Jan. 30, 1852.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Des Moines Valley Whig* (Keokuk), Aug. 18, 1853; Dubuque *Miners Express*, Aug. 17, 1853; Davenport *Democratic Banner*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Dubuque *Miners Express*, Aug. 30, 1854; *Oskaloosa Herald*, May 5, 1854.

abandoned their stagecoach enterprises in all four states of Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa and Missouri.

Reasons for this sudden almost unexpected event are not clearly known. There are, however, several plausible explanations. The most compelling argument explaining the retirement of the veteran Frink co-partnership was the award of the four-year mail contracts let by the government when bids were opened in April, 1854. Of the 155 bids filed on routes in five midwestern states by William Vernon, secretary for John Frink & Co., the latter won a mere pitiful 24, scattered over an area which made continuous and unified staging impossible. This stunning result fulfilled fourfold the dire predictions of the Iowa press in the previous two years. Its failure in the contract awards spelled disaster to such a widely extended system as Frink & Co. and its disaster emphasized once more the importance of the mail contract to middle western stagecoach operation.⁵⁶

Though the two years 1853 and 1854 had brought a golden harvest, signs indicating only a brief season for staging left in the middle west had not been unobserved. The railroads had already placed the clammy hand of death upon large scale staging in Ohio; in Indiana plank road projects were giving way to schemes for railroads. In Illinois the three long railroad lines, the Illinois Central, the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad and the Chicago Rock Island, were but three of many which were making a shambles of profitable staging in that state. In Iowa the same future threatened; Congress even then had before it several land aid bills for numerous rail enterprises. In Minnesota, a thinly populated northern territory, people were already dreaming expensive dreams of iron rails and the glorious "cars"; Wisconsin, likewise thinly settled, was also be-deviled by visions of an Iron Horse. Some of the longer heads among the Frink partners may well have considered themselves fortunate to be rid of further responsibilities for a staging empire.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Dubuque *Daily Miners Express*, Mar. 31, Apr. 8, 12, 1854; T. W. Hecox to Warren T. Hecox, Apr. 19, 1854.

⁵⁷ House Documents, Serial 789, 34th Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 1, pp. 350-378, *Fairfield Weekly Ledger*, June 1, 1854; 34th Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 122, pp. 322-23.

With the growing importance of passenger traffic, without a doubt the company might have continued in the field by running opposition coaches over the lines and have fought another bloody stage war for supremacy in the manner of Frink, Walker & Co. in 1846-47. But a cogent reason for not attempting such a costly step in 1854 was the fact that the best paying of the more important Iowa stage routes were won in that year by the re-organized Ohio Stage Company operating under the name of the Western Stage Co. This firm, under Sullivant, Alvord, Kimball and Hooker, was no Otho Hinton of uncertain antecedents and of dubious strength. It was a fearful, experienced rival, a foeman worthy of respect, and this Frink & Co. well knew. It would have been a costly struggle to oppose them and a fight the success of which could not be assured.

The government bids had been opened April 29, 1854. Just 4 weeks later, on May 26, M. O. Walker and J. Y. Sanger signed an agreement with the Western Stage Company for Frink & Co. for the sale of all the Frink Iowa stage properties and forswore any stage competition to the Western in Iowa during the next four years in any shape or form. The full agreement reads as follows:⁵⁸

This article of agreement made and entered into at Columbus O this Twenty sixth day of May 1854 between John Frink & Co of Chicago of the first part and the Western Stage Co of the 2d part

Witnesseth

That the parties of the first part for and in Consideration of the sum hereafter mentioned agree to Sell and deliver on the first day of July next to the parties of the Second part all the Stage Stock which said party of the first part have this day in the State of Iowa Consisting of Horses Coaches Waggons & Harness at an appraisment to be made by O. C. Parmely and Owen Tuller and in case of any disagreement with them as to the value of any article they Shall agree upon the third man to Settle Such difERENCE.

It is also agreed that Said party of the first part are to withdraw all the remaining Stock unsold or rejected as hereafter mentioned entirely from the State of Iowa and not be engaged either directly or indirectly in the trans-

⁵⁸ *Western Stage Co. vs. M. O. Walker*, Des Moines County District Court 1854-1855, trial records.

portation of any passengers in said State for the next four years for & after the 1st day of July next

It is further agreed that s^d Party of the 1st part shall cause to be transferd to E. S. Alvord for the Western Stage Co any and all mail routes accepted to W. Vernon or any other person for the benefit of s^d J. Frink & Co by the P. M. General in the State of Iowa which are to take effect on the first day of July next

And the parties of the second part agree to pay for the Stock when apprais^d and deliver^d as above stated the amount of the appraisalment & a Bonus of (\$5000) Five Thousand Dollars over and above the appraisal which is to be added to it as follows one fifty in Cash which is to be added to it as follows one fifth in Cash the ballance in four equal payments of 6-12-18 & 24 Months from 1 July next with 6 pr cent interest payable at the Exchange Bank of H. A. Tucker & Co. in Chicago.

It is also agreed that the party of the second part Shall Cause to be transfer^d to W. Vernon for J. Frink & Co any all routes in Missouri accepted to E. S. Alvord or any other person for the benefit of the Western Stage Co by the P.M. General which are to take effect from & after the 1st day of July next and that the Western Stage Co. shall not be engaged either directly or indirectly in the transportation of passengers in the State of Missouri during the next four years from the first day of July next

Possession of the above property to be given on the 1st day of July next at Chicago when the money is to be paid and the notes executed by the Western Stage Co W. S. Sullivant K. Porter P. Campbell E. F. Hooker D. Talmadge W. S. Davison & E. S. Alvord

It is further agreed that the Western Stage Co have the privilege of rejecting Such of the property to be appraised as aforesaid as the said appraisers may decide is unfit for service and to return the same to J Frink & Co at a reduction of 25 pr cent from Said appraisalment to be deducted therefrom

For the faithful performance of the above Contract the parties of each party do respectifely bind themselves their heirs and assigns each unto the other in the sum of Twenty five thousand dollars as liquidated damages

J. Frink & Co.
M. O. Walker
J. Y. Sanger
Western Stage Comp y
by W. S. Sullivant Presdt
K. Porter

Wm. S. Sullivant
E. S. Alvord
P. Campbell
E. F. Hooker

Since the Sullivant-Alvord interests possessed little stage properties in Missouri beyond the important route from Terre Haute, Indiana, to St. Louis not affected by this agreement, Frink & Co. actually abandoned all competition to the new Western Stage Company west of the Mississippi.

By the first week in June representatives of the two companies were at work appraising and listing the Frink stock in Iowa. Starting at Dubuque and proceeding down the river before going west, the crew was at Davenport by June 6, and a week later, Kimball Porter, William H. McChesney and Owen Tuller for the Western Stage Company and O. C. Parmelee for Frink & Co., stopped at the Marvin House, Des Moines, before continuing on to Council Bluffs. The last of the checking was made at Burlington toward the end of the month.⁵⁹

The days of Frink & Co. were fast running out. The legal life of the limited co-partnership expired July 1 with no attempt made to prolong its name or existence. On the last day, June 30, Martin O. Walker purchased the firm's Illinois stage properties for \$65,000, and may possibly have bought Frink Missouri stock as well.⁶⁰

Three days later, July 3, 1854, after a delay caused by disagreement among the Frink partners, a second disputed bill of sale was signed which transferred to the Western Stage Company all the Frink stage stock in Iowa for \$71,555.50 plus the small bonus of \$5,000. If any deductions were made for inferior stage equipment such a record was not preserved.⁶¹

The John Frink & Co. was no more. Besides Martin O. Walker, who was to reappear in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota and Wisconsin as a stageman, the only other Frink

⁵⁹ *Western Stage Co. vs. M. O. Walker*, Clerk of the Court, Des Moines County District Court, trial record, 1854, copy of original agreement.

⁶⁰ Thomas W. Hecox to Warren T. Hecox, June 12, 1854; Marvin House Register, Mss. Division, Iowa Dept. of History and Archives.

⁶¹ *Western Stage Co. vs. M. O. Walker*, *op. cit.*

partners to remain in staging were C. D. Davis and David S. More, the Milwaukee liverymen and stagers, who continued to operate coaches in Wisconsin as the Wisconsin Stage Company. But whether or not they purchased or received as their share in the company's assets the stage stock used in Wisconsin is not known. O. C. Parmelee died shortly afterwards. Frink, who appears to have been in ill health for some time, turned to his real estate interests, contracting the supply of horses and mules for the army until his death May 28, 1858.⁶²

The seven year Iowa career of the Frink firm had seen much of stage-pioneering, much of hard ruthless fighting, of bad roads, makeshift schedules; it had been years of little public praise, yet of much in service given. Spite its abuse at the hands of the press and a querulous public, Frink & Co.'s seven years saw much extension in stage facilities. When it first appeared to contest the supremacy of the Iowa field with Robert Stewart in 1847, stages were unknown off the narrow river routes from Keokuk to Dubuque and the short inland lines to Iowa City and Fairfield. Under the stimulus of the Frink system stage services by 1854 were scattered over all the inhabited parts of the state. The Frink coaches had stabilized the service over the busy Dubuque-Iowa City and Iowa City-Keokuk lines; its coaches had struggled up the Des Moines River Valley to Fort Des Moines in 1849, had established regular schedules on the Iowa City-Des Moines line in 1852; and over the abundant wild game regions west of the latter village, across rolling vacant prairies and past thinly wooded groves; its coaches had likewise brought staging to Council Bluffs on the Missouri. Though with many admitted deficiencies, what staging Iowa knew over most of this area in 1854 was largely to the credit of John Frink & Co.

The successor to the Frink partners in July, 1854, the Western Stage Company, was itself a successor to the Ohio Stage Company and a co-partnership. With William S. Sullivant of Columbus as president and Elijah Smead Alvord of Indianapolis as original superintendent, with Kimball Porter of Wooster, Peter Campbell also of Columbus, W. S. Davison, Darius Talmadge, and Edmund F. M. Hooker, the company,

⁶² *Ibid.*

composed entirely of men who had gained their experience with the Ohio Company, were all experienced and competent stagemen. The main change in the new firm over the old Ohio company was the disappearance of the veteran William Neil as an active and eminently successful stage manager. In many ways "Billy" Neil had been the Ohio Stage Company.

The new company did more than inherit partners from the Ohio Stage Company. Much of the stock and employees who came to Iowa with the long train of coaches and wagons in July, 1854, were former employees and equipment of the older company. Thus, with the same skillful management, coupled with sound stage experience and combined with the same insistence upon good equipment excellently served, the Western Stage Company was well equipped to dominate the stagecoach business in Iowa as thoroughly and as completely as ever John Frink & Co. had in the seven years before.⁶³

Like the Frink company the Western's reach was long and hard. Although concentrating principally upon its Iowa contracts the company also held important heavy mail contracts across southern Illinois from Terre Haute, Indiana, to St. Louis. In the years to come its stages were to penetrate to Kansas on the south and to Denver on the far west.⁶⁴

As the Frink period closed in July, 1854, staging in Iowa after seventeen years, first as an infant then as an apprentice, was ready to enter into its inheritance.

⁶³ Frink Mss., Parmelee appears to have served a short time at least with the Western Stage Co. as a general agent in Iowa.

⁶⁴ *Ohio State Journal* (Columbus), June 13, 1854.

Onions in Iowa

It is said that the man who first raised onions by the acre in Iowa was Captain Hawley, of Pleasant Valley, who was engaged in that business in 1847. He used to raise from 100 to 200 acres annually, and got from 300 to 400 bushels per acre from broadcast sowing of 3 pounds of seed per acre. The variety sown was red Whetersfield, as none others were grown there at that time. The Captain generally . . . would boat down the river . . . to dispose of the load . . . *Fontanelle Observer*, June 19, 1884.

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