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BRINGING THE STAGE COACH TO IOWA 1837 - 1842

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Seldom does the tale of travel fail to stir the imagination of men, old and young. In every age an aura clings about those who visit far horizons which makes heroes of men who engage in travel as a business, be he the captain of an East Indian Merchantman, the driver of the United States Mail Stage, or, in these later days, the pilot of an airliner. But for the America of the middle years of the last century, there was no one who could rival in fascination and attraction the lordly "knight of the ribbons," the driver of the stage. Seen by all the country side on his regular runs, his skillful control and physical mastery over the horses and coach in his charge had an appeal which the inert handling of a wheel, a lever, or a switch could not meet. He was the personification of that rugged, self-reliant individualism of which we sometimes vainly boast today, but the virtues of which the nineteenth century knew well.

All too easily forgotten, however, behind the colorful driver and his well groomed stage horses was a business, and an organization, which, while romantic to the sentimentalist who dreams nostalgically of yesterday, dealt as much in profit and loss—too frequently in the latter the stager would say—as any occupation or profession. Another error into which we frequently fall is that in our glib generalities about this era of travel we confuse the hey day of the stage with the years when it was actually a struggling enterprise.

The present sketch is an attempt to sift a few rumors and to contribute a few facts to the journal of the first days of the stage coach in Iowa, before these records are too completely lost.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The course of stage coach operation in Iowa was materially influenced by certain conditions and events which should properly be noted before sketching those years. The first of these was that when Iowa was opened to settlement in the second third of the nineteenth century, she enjoyed the incalculable advantage of having neighbors in the states on the east and south who some years before had passed the raw frontier period. The second was really a series of events, the appearance in the middle and later portions of the century of a host of mechanical inventions affecting the transportation and communication systems of the world.

One result of having older settlements near by when the territory was thrown open in 1833 was that the pioneer period for much of Iowa was sharply abbreviated. With the latest developments in manufactured goods, services, and ideas available from communities across the Mississippi and south of the Des Moines River, true frontier life on Iowa soil was naturally brief in duration. For the stage coach this meant that the period of time from the introduction of the first stage into Iowa to the successful operation of a fleet of Concord and Troy coaches was much shorter than would ordinarily have been the case in a frontier region. The very introduction and the later spread of stage systems in Iowa, owed much to the relatively easy access the settlers had to information and experience with stages in Illinois and Missouri.

Of greater general importance than the first, the second factor had a special effect on Iowa, because the flood of developments and improvements in communication reached Iowa while it was still a comparative stripling, and hastened that much the more the transition from frontier settlement to a stable community. Although the impact of new ways and modes of doing things upon the customs of the past is well illustrated to us in the example of Japan, we fail to fully realize the tremendous force of this impact upon communities so young that they have no well established past to change. It is hard, for instance, for a social historian to gauge the effect the early appearance of the railroad in the west had upon the future course of Iowa history. Though involved in the eco-

nomics of transportation, it intertangles also with the whole social, cultural, agricultural, and political life of the state; the degree of its influence, though uncertain, was undeniably great. But this much is certain, it had a tremendous influence on the direction of stage coach history in Iowa. In the first place, its early appearance obviously shortened the period of stage operation. And in shortening it, it likewise concentrated the development of the Iowa systems in a span of years even shorter than its normally brief period would have been if affected only by the close proximity to districts where relatively advanced systems of staging were successfully operating.

The farther west one went, the shorter was the period of time between the appearance of the first stage and that of the first railroad train. The east had had stages in commercial operation since about 1732, a century before the steam railway cars appeared.¹ Stages had entered Ohio well before the turn of the nineteenth century, but they were not in regular operation in Kentucky until the 1820's, they did not reach Illinois until 1831, while Wisconsin had its first stage line operating in 1836.² If the railroad is a symbol of modernity, then indeed Iowa's pioneer period was remarkably short. In contrast to the years of gradual development in the East, Iowa had only eighteen brief years between the introduction of the first stage coach line in the territory and 1855, when the first railroad began puffing along the rails and rolling down the grade west of Davenport, just twenty-two years after Iowa was first opened to settlers. Though staging continued a prosperous and vigorous business after 1855 for many years, its days were numbered, its death already tolled.

The early coming of the railroad had another effect on the stage coach less readily recognized. The early entrance of the Iron Horse into Iowa was largely responsible for the dearth of information concerning the later days of the stage. The eager absorption of every Iowa town in the contests to locate railroads through their community, and the delirious excite-

¹Seymour Dunbar, *A History of Travel in America*, new edition, (Tudor Publishing Co., New York, 1937), p. 180.

²John W. Coleman, *Stage Coaches in the Blue Grass Country*, p. 67; *Journal Illinois Historical Society*, XIII, 197; *Wisconsin Historical Magazine*, III, 199.

ment with which the latest news of the progress of the surveys and construction work was greeted, buried all notice of the every day activities of the stage under the avalanche of railroad hysteria. To those invaluable chroniclers of contemporary history, the editors of the weekly newspapers, the coming railroads quickly eclipsed the stage coach in news value. Their judgment of news has cost us much in a record of this era.

While from the vantage point of a hundred years the development of stage lines between 1833 and 1842 appear to have been both satisfactory and in full proportion to the needs of the territory, we may be sure it did not meet the wants of the settlers in Iowa. To them the extension of stage service unquestionably appeared slow and inadequate, but, unfortunately, the stage was a business proposition and not a philanthropy. It had to be assured of a profit from operation which the frontiers of Iowa could not always guarantee.

A community must be able to pay for the transportation service it enjoys, the higher the form of service, the greater the investments involved, and the larger the profit demanded by the proprietor for risking the enterprise. All pioneer communities suffer from the limits this imposes upon the extension of transportation services to their settlements. First and foremost, the stage, like any other form of transportation service, from the lowly foot messenger to the modern air fleets, had to be able to look forward to a steady predictable demand for its services. This meant that the problem of the extension of stage coach routes into Iowa was intertwined with the problems of population, for population was a rough index of the amount of passenger traffic and business demands that could be expected. On the frontier the matter of population resolved itself into a question of pay loads, and more specifically, of *a* pay load, the return trip. Now the incoming stage with its cargo of passengers jammed inside, and in the "boot" newspaper stock for the pioneer editor, plus calico, muslin, bonnets, hardware, etc., likewise stuffed in the rear boot or tied on top, all this usually paid for the incoming service. But on the return trip few passengers could be relied upon, and with little or no industry or commercial life beyond their villages, there

was little freight to send out, consequently the load was often far from sufficient to maintain such an advanced service as the stage. The pioneer communities never liked to recognize this limitation, and would vehemently deny its truth if such a statement was made. But the Post Office Department, which had to keep a close check on such things, believed otherwise with distressing frequency. It must be recognized that for many years Iowa territory was unable to meet the necessary minimum conditions which would permit successful and profitable stage coach operation.

There is another aspect of the relationship between population and the stage coach which might well be mentioned. In general the higher forms of transportation systems follow the streams of population, rather than lead them, for reasons similar to those indicated in the paragraph above. On rare occasions transportation services do lead the stream of population, however, as, for instance, the case of the Great Northern Railroad of the late seventies, and the boom-dream railroads of the trans-Missouri west of the same period. But even in such instances, either a federal subsidy was in hand, or the speculators were desperately trying to protect investments sunk in the ventures. In any case, a profit was eventually expected. The stage coach in Iowa falls in both classifications: it was both a follower and a leader of the waves of settlement.

The stage could play this dual role only by reason of the substantial subsidy it enjoyed from the government in form of a contract for transporting the United States mail. Assured by his contract of a dependable sum, which in most cases would meet the larger overhead costs of operation, the proprietor could then look forward to a profit from the extra passengers and freight carried. This mail contract was of almost supreme importance on frontier settlements, for it overcame to a considerable measure the absence of a pay load in the returning stage coach. In Iowa the stage lines followed the mail routes very closely, both because of the needed subsidy, and because where mail demands were heaviest there the centers of population usually were also.

By means of the extension of stage service made possible by this mail subsidation, the marginal districts for the operation

of stages were pushed still farther west, and by virtue of this, the influx of settlers and farmers into areas was hastened as it could not have been otherwise. Small wonder that communities became frenzied in their eagerness to obtain a stage mail. If only a two-horse hack, that was glory enough.

This characteristic of stage routes—that they followed population—was true in most pioneer communities, except, perhaps, in the flood periods of immigration, such as the 1850's, when the number of onrushing emigrants made it possible to extract a profit from the one trip almost to suffice for the two.

MAIL—AND THE PIONEER

The above indicates how important the mails were to the stage proprietor, but important as they were to him, they were of even greater importance to the settlers. When we stop to realize that the impoverished mill worker from New England had relatives or friends anxiously waiting word from him, and that the land poor farmer from the hilly steps of West Virginia, North Carolina, and the mountainous east likewise had acquaintances and relation eager to learn if he had found his El Dorado in Iowa territory, and that the land speculator too had business associates who wanted to know how fast the proposition was selling, then we can understand in a small measure the occasion for the continuous pressure upon the Post Office Department and members of Congress for new post offices, post roads, and improvements of all kinds which would hasten the arrival of the news, as well as speed it on its way.

When for six cents we can dispatch a letter across the continent in one day by airmail, and at half that cost if sent by ordinary mail, the heavy postage bills our grandfathers had to foot, for the slow service received seems really high. Based upon a single sheet, which, of course, could be folded, one paid the following rates: on all mail to be delivered within a radius of thirty miles, six cents, between 30 and 80 miles, 10 cents, between 80 and 100 miles, 12½ cents, and between 150 and 400 miles, 18¾ cents; all mail sent over 400 miles was charged 25 cents.² Because the vast majority of the Iowans

² *U. S. Statutes at Large*, 105, 18th Congress, 2d Session, March 25, 1825.

had left homes in New England or other distant points in the east, and the majority of the remainder had come from the "middle east" of Kentucky and Ohio, or Pennsylvania, it was only rarely that the customary fee demanded by the postmaster was less than 25 cents.

The fractional prices indicated in the postal regulations presents another sidelight on pioneer life a hundred years ago. The United States minted few fractional half-cent coins, and none in quarter-cent denominations; its total of metallic coins was far insufficient for the business needs of the country. The $12\frac{1}{2}$ cent and $18\frac{3}{4}$ cent charges were a recognition on the part of the government that the commercial business of the nation depended upon the wide circulation of foreign coins. Generally, but especially for the Mississippi Valley area, the settlers used the Spanish real, worth about $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents, for their business transactions. There was also a smaller piece called a half real, worth $6\frac{1}{4}$ cents, all based upon the Spanish "Pieces O' Eight," which actually was the Spanish dollar, worth eight reals. Since the real was also termed a "bit," the origin of our "two bits" phrase is apparent. It was with these Spanish reals and half reals that the settler usually settled his post office accounts.

The postal rates indicated above were in effect during the first years of Iowa's settlement, until the postal law of 1845 changed these 1825 rates and began the downward trend which has given us the present three cent stamp.

Because the gummed postage stamp was not yet in use, the Post Master General had to adopt certain procedures to insure the collection of postage which may strike us as strange today, but were the only practical solution of unstamped mail service. To insure payment, letters had to come collect. This was a C.O.D. proposition, either the letter was paid for in cash, or else the postmaster could not deliver the mail, for he was accountable for the sums due on the letters received by him. To the settler who was hard put to save enough to make the \$1.25 per acre cash payment for his claim at the next bidding at the Land Office, it not infrequently happened that he was obliged to wait days and even weeks before he could procure the cash necessary to pay for a letter he knew was

lying all this while in the postoffice. Cash was necessary for another reason, the postmaster's pay was usually a percentage of the receipts of his office, ranging from eight per cent on receipts over \$2400 to thirty per cent on sums less than \$100 received over a year's time. It may be assumed, however, that on occasions the postmaster would stretch a point and accept payment "in kind," but for self-protection could do so only sparingly.⁴

Letters, however, were less frequently sent than now, and cost or no cost, we can appreciate the value these pioneer settlers, farmers, lawyers, merchants, and all attached to each letter; it was well worth the price.

In the first years on a frontier the mails were most frequently carried on horseback, usually on a twice-a-week schedule, though almost as often on only a once-a-week route. Obviously such meagre service could not be long satisfactory to a growing frontier town. The impossibility of carrying more than a moderate amount of mail made the life of the horse-mail contractor a hard one, always the butt of bitter denunciation when heavy rains or deep snows prevented his trip, he was unmercifully berated if it so happened that the mail was so heavy that it could not all be carried in the first trip. The first service in Iowa was, of course, the horseback mails. These routes could be established by the Post Master General whenever in his judgment the need was clearly demonstrated. It is not strange, therefore, that the most frequent petition received by the Post Master General and the members of Congress were those praying for new or increased mail service.

The power to grant is also the power to destroy, so say students of constitutional history. And the power of the Post Master General certainly included the power to delay, if not to withhold a service which might well destroy the hopes of any ambitious town. This charge was even occasionally hurled at the Post Master General. The discretionary power lodged with the head of the Post Office Department, to establish or increase the service of mail to a given community, and to okay the appointment of postmasters, made him and his department one of the most potent of all in the then federal government.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 106.

The extent of this power is easily recognized when we remember that hundreds, if not thousands, of new communities were springing up yearly in the districts of Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, and we must add to these the later areas of Minnesota and the whole territory west of the Missouri which likewise wanted post offices and post routes. The means for building and feeding a huge political machine afforded by such opportunities were not lost on the alert men schooled under Andrew Jackson or upon those who believed they had to fight fire with fire. It was no accident that the custom developed within both political parties to appoint an active political head to the cabinet post of Post Master General; of no recent origin, it stems straight from the time of Old Hickory and the volcanic politics of his day.

Although glad to get any kind of mail service, the residents of ambitious and boastful towns on the fringes of settlement were never satisfied long. In the days of the first settlers, 1833-42, this expressed itself in a demand for first the horse-mails, then the stage: the "stage-wagon," the two-horse coach, or hack, and the highest type of stage luxury of all, the post coach, drawn by a four-horse team.

The settlers of Iowa, moreover, were long familiar with the stage coach, having known and experienced it many years before they first rolled over the rutty roads of this territory. If they had never experienced them before, the emigrants over any one of the three main arteries of emigrant travel westward were almost sure to have encountered the stage at one time or another. Those who traveled from Buffalo by lake steamer to Chicago may either have come to Buffalo by stage, or by the Hudson River and the Erie Canal. But if they sought to cut across the Michigan peninsula by stopping at Niles, Michigan, or Michigan City, instead of rounding that jutting land by water, they almost had to take the stage to continue their westward journey. This overland journey was the customary practice of those who came without too much "impedimenta." The traveler over the southern route usually boarded a steamer at Pittsburgh for the Ohio River to St. Louis portion of the journey, and continued by steamer, perhaps, on the northern leg of the trip to Iowa lands. He who traveled this most

popular of all the routes during the first years, may well have taken a stage to reach Pittsburgh, the jumping off place for the river journey, or else he undoubtedly saw stages at the landings of many a town at which the steamer stopped on the way. The third road was the overland route from Ohio through central Indiana and southern Illinois, with branches which led to St. Louis and also towards southern Iowa. This was the route generally patronized by those who came in their own ox wagons or carts, particularly those living in the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois who were restlessly continuing a trek to Iowa or beyond. If one didn't go in the family wagons, the journey then, of course, had to be made by stage, a service with which this district was exceptionally well provided.

It should be remembered that by this time the stage coach was reaching a high level of excellence in the east, both in construction and in operation. The Abbott-Downing company of Concord, New Hampshire, had produced the first American leather spring stage in 1827.⁵ By the middle of the eighteenthirties the fame of this design was rapidly spreading to all parts of the world. Soon standardized, by the time the Concord stage appeared in Iowa it had achieved a pattern from which it little varied for the next forty years. At about the same time the Eaton & Gilbert Company of Troy, New York, began to manufacture a similar type coach, which as the "Troy" was to become almost, if not quite, as famous as the Concord.⁶ When the settlers asked for stage coach service,

⁵Milo M. Quaife, *Chicago's Highways Old and New*, (D. F. Keller & Co., Chicago, Ill., 1923), p. 154-6; *Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, XXIII, 4.

The leather spring coach was in use in Europe and England long before Abbott and Downing made Concord synonymous with that type of construction. In an English dictionary published in London about 1810, a coach is defined as "a commodious vehicle for travelling, suspended on leathers, and moved on wheels. Their invention was owing to the French, about the reign of Francis I. They have, like other things, been brought to their present perfection by degrees: at present they seem to want nothing, either with regard to ease or magnificence. Louis XIV of France made divers sumptuary laws for restraining the excessive richness of coaches, prohibiting the use of gold and silver therein; but they have been neglected.

"In England, and most parts of Europe, the coaches are drawn by horse; except in Spain, where they use mules. . . ."

"The coachman is ordinarily placed on a seat raised before the body of the coach; but the Spanish policy has displaced him in that country by a royal ordinance on occasion of the duke of Olivarez, who learned that a very important secret had been discovered and revealed by his coachman: since which time, the place of the Spanish coachman is the same with that of the French stage-coachman, and our postillion," in the rear.

New Royal Encyclopaedia, and Cyclopaedia; Complete and Modern and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, I, 540.

⁶Archer Butler Hulbert, *The Old National Road, a Chapter of American Expansion*, (Columbus, 1901), p. 83; Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

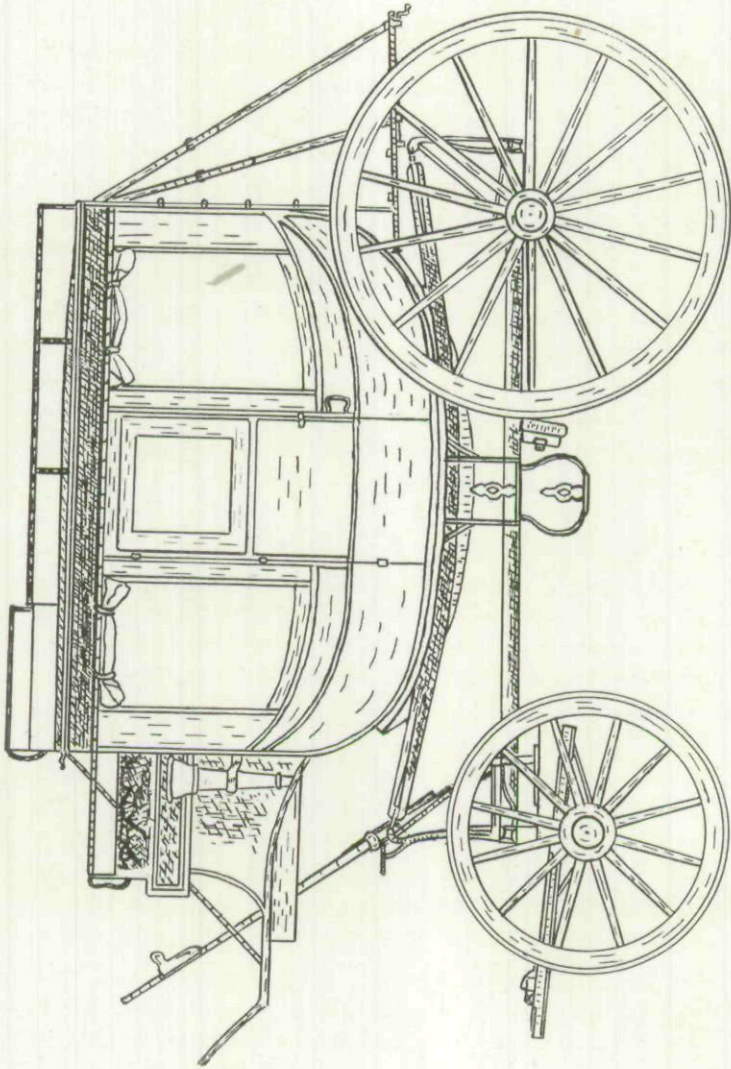
therefore, they were demanding a service which had long since passed its infancy, and with which they were well acquainted.

FIRST ARRIVAL OF STAGE COACHES

Naturally the place the stage would first appear in Iowa would be near one of the larger populated towns. In 1836 there were but two towns in Iowa which could justifiably claim both the population and the importance to induce a venturesome stage to risk an appearance; Du Buque and Burlington. From all the writer has discovered, the first stage coach came into Iowa at Dubuque, due to the then superiority of the lead mines as an attraction to settlers and speculators.

Though the lead mines of Galena and vicinity had been discovered and were actively exploited from the 1820's on, every Iowan knows that Julien Du Buque had worked many years before in the lead mines of the place to which he later gave his name. The relationship between the two towns had always been considerable, both socially and commercially; it was more than just that of business rivals. It was the lead miners from Galena who gave the first boom of settlement at Dubuque when the Iowa lands were opened to white settlement, June 1, 1833. This relationship between the two, and the speculative nature of all mining in those days, probably explains why Dubuque was the focus for early settlement in northern Iowa. This also may explain why an occasional stage may have appeared at Timothy Jordan's Ferry, on the east shore of the Mississippi, as early as 1835. This is only a conjecture, based solely upon the information that in the fall of 1835 "J. D. Carson and Jonathan Haines built an open sleigh . . . designed to run between Galena and Dubuque." More than an open sleigh, it was covered, and equipped with doors, windows, seats, and was said to be as "comfortable as the saloon on a steamboat." The engine was too small, however, and this sleigh seems never to have inaugurated a service.⁷ From the fact that it was to be a steam sleigh, the inference is that it was not a stage sleigh so much as a modified steamboat for traveling over the river ice. Only on the assumption that the stage coach could not be far away if such a special service was

⁷*History of Jo Daviess County*, (H. F. Kett, 1878), p. 477.



CONCORD STAGE COACH

From the Abbott-Downing Co. coach books and a photograph.

contemplated for the dull winter season can a stage coach be awarded to Dubuque in 1835.

The records for a stage in Iowa in 1836 have much better grounds to rest upon, though this year also failed to witness a regularly scheduled service in operation. The stimulus to staging in 1836 arose from the establishment of the Territory of Wisconsin in April of that year. When news of this event reached the towns in that new territory, which included the Iowa District on the west side of the Mississippi, they immediately began laying eager claims to the location of the first capitol site. Dubuque vigorously pushed her claims, but while boastful, she was also exceedingly anxious for a stage service connection, this would both substantiate her claims to importance and likewise bring fresh settlers to her side of the river. This petulant anxiety may have produced the following from the editor of the *Dubuque Visitor*, though it surely is not in accord with the records of the Post Office Department:⁸

From official [sic] documents in our possession, we discover the mail contractor is bound to convey the mail between Galena, Du Buque, and Peru, "three times a week in stages"; and the Postmaster at Galena instructed to regulate the days to suit the interests and convenience of the citizens concerned. Are the citizens of Du Buque concerned in this matter? The mail has been irregular in its arrivals and departure from the beginning. . . . The mail that was due on Wednesday last came the next day, and the carrier, fatigued with his extraordinary exertion, leaving his mail bag in town, took a small jaunt into the country by way of recreation, and did not return until the next day. . . . The mail was due again on Sunday, but the carrier being probably conscientiously opposed to travelling on that day, it did not come until brought by a steamboat on Monday.

The noteworthy part of this complaint was the editor's disgusted remark that

The variety of *times* in which the mail makes its trips is only equalled by the variety of *means* used in its conveyances. It comes on horseback, in wagons, big and little, in carriages, occasionally in stages, and not infrequently . . . [by] steamboat. . . .

That the editor's reference to stage service was not made up out of whole cloth is indicated in another item in the *Visitor*

⁸*Dubuque Visitor*, May 18, 1836.

on, October 19, 1836, in which editorial fun is poked at a number of the town's residents:

A goodly number of 'Visitors' left Du Buque on the 14th of Sept., destined for Chillicothe, Ohio, but after travelling as far as Indianapolis, Ia., became so much *worn out*, and being destitute of covering, returned to Du Buque. We . . . put them into an *old worn out two* horse stage, (we like uniformity,) and cautioned them to keep the driver from using them as a seat (which is the common practice,) and they would probably see their friends in Chillicothe in time to receive their new-year's gift.⁹

While the above offers good circumstantial evidence, more concrete testimony that a stage rumbled over the streets of Dubuque in 1836 was offered in the *Visitor* of the same date. On the 25th of November of 1836, the first legislature of the Territory of Wisconsin assembled at Belmont, Wisconsin, then a small town, hastily built to accommodate the legislature. As close as Dubuque got to a regular stage seems to have been during the session of the legislature, a cause and effect fact which Dubuque was to experience several times later in the years to come. At any event, on October 19 a daily stage line was announced as operating between Belmont, Wisconsin, and Jordan's Ferry on the eastern shore of the Mississippi.¹⁰ Even though the legislature was in session, a daily stage was an exceedingly advanced service for the small town of Dubuque, one which she alone could hardly have sustained to the profit of the proprietor. The profit motive, however, may have had little to do with it. Since Dubuque was zealously seeking by every means possible to obtain the location of the second capitol of Wisconsin territory, the extra service may have been maintained to afford all possible communication with the legislature. Even so, it was a losing gamble all the way around. The service apparently did not survive the adjournment of the law makers at Belmont.

These first stages, except possibly the Belmont line, probably all came by way of Galena, which had eastern and southern stage connections. The actual stages themselves may have come from these stage lines or from the stock of the hotel or

⁹"Ia." a hundred years ago was the accepted abbreviation of Indiana, not Iowa, which in 1836 was hardly a name.

¹⁰*Dubuque Visitor*, October 19, 1836.

livery stable men of the lead metropolis, who were beginning to keep a number of carriages on hand for the use of private parties and for those who were too impatient to await the departure of the regular stage.

Although Dubuque had to be satisfied with a stage service which stopped just short of her side of the river in 1836, she had high hopes for obtaining in 1837 a stage either to the east or to the south. With the change of the territorial capitol from Belmont, east of the Mississippi, to Burlington, naturally enough Dubuque's interests in 1837 were directed mostly south.

The southern once-a-week horseback mail had never been very satisfactory even when first established in 1836, and as each month brought new settlers to Iowa, it became even less so. The postmaster of Fort Madison, at the southern end of the route, was empowered to employ an additional service to cover the route once a month, but even that was not sufficient. The editor of the *Iowa News* bitterly remarked on at least one occasion that "the post master here has been compelled to furnish additional mail bags, and the carrier other means of transportation than on horseback." Whether this was a stage service the editor does not enlighten us. He, however, does not miss an opportunity to inform his complaining subscribers in the south that they could not expect prompt delivery of their newspaper until "our mails [are] carried in a stage."¹¹

The disproportionate amount of stage service the eastern part of the territory enjoyed, Wisconsin proper, was likewise compared with that of the Iowa District:¹²

In the Iowa District, which numbers near, if not equal with the east in population, there is not one hundred miles of stage lines in operation, while on the east, stages are run in almost every direction.

Evidence indicates that in 1837 the Iowa District was beginning to find the Mississippi River not an unmixed blessing. The residents along the Iowa shore certainly had ample opportunity to witness the obstacle this mighty river presented to

¹¹*History of Dubuque County*, W. A. and K. C. Goodspeed (Goodspeed Historical Association, Chicago, n. d.), p. 59; *Iowa News*, September 30, 1837; *Dubuque Visitor*, January 18, 1837.

¹²*Iowa News*, August 26, 1837.

would-be settlers, though sometimes they missed the point. The *Dubuque Visitor* complained that¹³

On the north, east, and south of us, there are stage routes leading to this part of the territory, consequently our having none is a great public inconvenience, because the traveller may proceed until he comes to our border, then as we do not afford him the means of conveyance, he must turn his course. This operates as a total prohibition to travelling through this country . . . in the midst of the *lead mines*, yet we have not a single stage route.

The editor failed, obviously, to see that the river barred any easy extension of the stage lines in Illinois and Wisconsin, and also that the river hindered the easy and steady westward sweep of the oncoming emigrant. He, of course, did not see that the stages not only bring population to an area, but must depend upon the population of that area for bringing its coaches there.

Despite these mingled complaints and hopes, and the promising appearance of the inspector for the Post Office Department in the territory in September, all hopes of northern Iowa for stages in 1837 were in vain.¹⁴ Defeated in the struggle for the territorial capitol, Dubuque likewise lost the distinction of having the first stage route in Iowa. The Dubuque-Galena line was neither the first nor the second, being no better than the fifth established, and as for the southern route, it was five years before a regularly operating stage covered the gap between Dubuque and the southern towns.

Dubuque failed to be the first Iowa terminus for a regular stage for several reasons. When the Wisconsin territorial legislature decided in early December, 1836, that the future capitol of Wisconsin territory should be Burlington, that center immediately enjoyed an advantage which Dubuque could not match. In addition, the southern part of Iowa was filling with settlers more rapidly than the northern half, aided by closer proximity to the settled areas of Illinois and Missouri, and being more easily reached by steamboats for longer periods in the year. To Burlington, therefore, went the distinction of being the first Iowa town to have a stage route operating on regular schedules.

¹³*Dubuque Visitor*, January 18, 1837.

¹⁴*Iowa News*, September 9, 1837.

1837—FIRST STAGE ROUTE

On November 1, 1837, a semi-weekly line of two-horse stages began running south from Burlington to St. Francisville, Missouri, where it connected with the larger and more important St. Louis-Galena route which traveled up the eastern side of the river, along the Illinois shore line. That the first Iowa line should extend south and should connect Iowa's largest southern town with the nearest available route touching at St. Louis was to be expected in view of the greater importance of the Ohio River—St. Louis emigrant water route. This was one of four stage-mail routes to Iowa towns advertised by the Post Office Department in the spring of 1837, and awarded in October. All the routes were nominally to begin on January 1, 1838, but due to certain qualifications in the St. Francisville contract, or perhaps convinced of a greater need, the Post Master General ordered operations on this route to begin at the earlier date indicated.¹⁵

Not a great deal is known of this first route. According to schedule it left Burlington on Sundays and Thursdays at 4 A. M., and passed through Gibson's Ferry, Fort Madison, Fort Des Moines, and Montrose before reaching St. Francisville at 10 the evening of the same day, covering the 45 miles in an elapsed time of 18 hours! Successfully standing off the competition of Dr. Addison Philleo, the horse-mail contractor, and that of Morton M. McCarver—one of the first three men to settle at Burlington—and Jonathan W. Parker, the winners of the contract, Richard Land and Samuel Hearn, were permitted to carry the mail three months on horseback. This may have had a reference to summer season, when the river steamers were able to carry all the on-coming emigrants, though frequently such arrangements referred to the winter season when the rush of western bound emigrants slackened.

Richard Land continued to operate stages for a number of years in southern Iowa, at least until 1842, when he was an unsuccessful competitor not only to retain this route, but on several others as well. Of Samuel Hearn even less is known, though it is recorded that "Doc" drove his own stages, at least

¹⁵25th Congress, 3d Sess., *Executive Docs.*, No. 254, p. 126, Serial Vol. 341; Letter from the Post Office Department to writer, dated December 9, 1938.

occasionally, over the Fort Madison run of this route.¹⁶

1838—STAGE MAILS INTRODUCED

In 1838 three other stage routes joined the one to St. Francisville to give Burlington four stage lines radiating north, east, west, and—to include the one established in November—a line south. Two of the lines begun in 1838 had the distinction of operating from terminus to terminus on Iowa soil. These, however, should be considered not as new routes so much as “extensions” out of Burlington, the territorial capitol.

From the point of view of Iowa alone, the most important of the three new routes was the Burlington to Davenport line. This schedule left Burlington on Sundays and Thursdays at 5 A. M. and made the eighty mile trip to Davenport by way of Jacksonville (Yellow Springs), Florence, Black Hawk (later Toolsborough), Wapello, Harrison, Grandview, Mouth of Pine, Bloomington, Muscatine, Geneva, Wyoming, Iowa (Montpelier), Clark's ferry (Glendale, later still, West Buffalo), Rockingham, at last pulling up in front of the store where D. C. Eldridge likewise held forth as postmaster, the stage delivered its mail and discharged its cramped load of passengers at 6 P. M.—on Mondays and Fridays, 37 hours after the stage had left Burlington! The trip was probably made without overnight stops, as the condition of the road was such that, as numerous complaints would testify, the stage would need all 37 hours on the road to make the distance within the required amount of time.¹⁷

The successful bidder for this stage-mail was Morton M. McCarver of Burlington. For some years past he had been a successful bidder on a number of government mail contracts in western Illinois in the vicinity of Burlington, holding mostly horse-mail contracts, though also a few stage lines. McCarver's successful bid was \$2500, five hundred under his nearest competitor, and just half that of Dr. Addison Philleo, the well known horse-mail contractor who had served Dubuque and other Iowa towns.

¹⁶27th Congress, 3d Sess., *Executive Docs.*, No. 180, pp. 231-45, Vol. 423; *Story of Lee County, Iowa*, N. C. Roberts and S. W. Moorhead, I, 129.

¹⁷25th Cong., *Exec. Docs.*, No. 254, pp. 125-6; Letter of the Post Office Department, *op. cit.*

The importance of this stage line lay not alone in the fact that it connected two Iowa towns and lay wholly within the borders of what is now Iowa, but, if you had inquired at any of the twelve post offices on the route, it was the facilities given to the numerous communities through which it passed; this stage meant that they in reality had a stage link with St. Louis and southern Illinois.

At the time it was established, the second new stage coach route—the line from Burlington to Macomb, Illinois, by way of Sho-ko-kon—was of equal, if not greater importance than the Burlington-Davenport route. Since Macomb was a center of several well equipped cross stage lines at this time, it was of considerable importance to Burlington to gain connections with it. Like the other stage lines already operating in Iowa, this was a semi-weekly two-horse stage route, and covered the forty miles between destination points in 13 hours. Leaving Burlington at the same early hour as did the Davenport stage, 5 o'clock, the eastern stage reached Macomb the same day at six, Sundays and Wednesdays. The holder of the former horse-mail contract between the two towns, Morton M. McCarver, was also the winner of the mail contract.¹⁸

This route was important because in conjunction with the St. Francisville route and the Davenport line, this route brought Burlington in touch with all three main routes of emigration to the west. The St. Francisville line tapped the Ohio River-St. Louis line, the Davenport connection linked Burlington with the Buffalo-Chicago lake route, and the Macomb stages made Burlington the eventual terminus of an overland emigrant route. To some extent, of course, these lines overlapped, but in 1838 this was negligible. All this sounds quite imposing, but when we recall that the Davenport route was but semi-weekly, and frequently failed to make schedules because of bad roads, rains, mud, and snow, and that the St. Francisville route was carried three months a year on horseback, the actual picture is seen in better perspective.

The third stage route to begin operating in 1838 is especially noteworthy because it was the first route serving exclusively

¹⁸*Exec. Docs.*, No. 254, pp. 99-100; letter of Post Office Dept.

Iowa towns to leave the Mississippi River behind and to strike inland. This route struck west from Burlington and followed a course through Hartford, New London, and Richland to stop at Mt. Pleasant, a distance of thirty miles. Our first reaction is that the interior areas back of Burlington could hardly support a stage, so one is not surprised to learn that it was served by the lowest standard of stage mail contract let in Iowa, the once-a-week two-horse stage. There was a surprise for the government, too, however. After the Post Office Department had advertised the western end of the route at Richland, twelve miles west of Burlington, they were informed by all the bidders for the contract that no post office existed there, consequently the route was extended eighteen miles to Mt. Pleasant. This mistake may explain the unusual and apparently unearned service to Mr. Pleasant. Samuel Newland won the contract at the almost impossibly low figure of \$120 per year. Whether he did not know the distance, or figured to use horses is uncertain, in any event, he failed to make good, for on June 15, 1838, the contract was transferred to William S. Viney, whose bid was almost two and a half times that of Newland, \$312. If an added inducement to western travelers was needed, it might be that according to schedule the stages did not leave the Burlington post office until seven in the morning, and arrived at Mt. Pleasant, therefore, at the seasonable hour of six the same evening.¹⁹

These three regularly scheduled stages in addition to the earlier one established in 1837, were all let on contracts filed by mid-summer, 1837, and awarded in October that fall. Since the Post Office Department had first to survey the needs of service before they could place their newspaper advertisements of the contracts to be let, a decision on what kinds of mail service were to be allowed for the next four and a half years was made some seven to nine months before service was to begin on January 1, 1838. This lapse in time was of vital importance on a frontier where ferry boats were busily engaged all day in carrying loaded wagons and land hungry emigrants across to Iowa, whose numbers could change the

¹⁹26th Cong., 1st Sess., *House Docs.*, No. 220, p. 154, Vol. 368; *Exec. Docs.*, No. 254, p. 127.

mail needs of the country rapidly. Although the department undoubtedly tried to guess with the tide of settlement, mistakes were inevitable, and the settlers were given just enough grounds for complaint to make a vigorous campaign of petitions and memorials to the department head and their delegate in Congress of some hopeful value.

All the regularly operating routes thus far had been in southern Iowa. The northern portions of the territory, without a single stage line, were unquestionably very earnest in their attempts to forge a stage coach link with the southern sections, and, of course, the only route really considered was the Dubuque to Davenport line. The constant agitation culminated at year's end in a temporary stage coach service being put over this route. Like the one in 1836, this too, owed its existence to the special demands of a legislative session which met in the late fall of that year at Burlington.

The citizens of Dubuque, however, did not wait for the legislature. Convinced of the utter righteousness of their demands for a stage connection east and south, early in 1838 they determined to give full voice to these demands, being probably helped to this decision by George Wallace Jones, Delegate in Congress from Wisconsin Territory. Believing that a new postal law would be enacted that year, Jones wrote his friends at Dubuque in January urging them to send petitions to both him and the Post Office Department favoring the routes and services wanted. Doubtless in response to this suggestion, a meeting was called for February 19, to be held at the Methodist Church at 7 o'clock. The meeting was held on Monday as planned, with T. R. Lurton as chairman and John Plumbe, Jr., secretary. John Plumbe was the same man who in 1839 authored a plan for a transcontinental railway linking the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, obviously a man interested in transportation problems. Perhaps he had the "whereases" and "therefors" already written and in his pocket when the meeting was called to order, at any rate Plumbe reported to the meeting the following resolutions which were unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That a Committee of three persons be appointed by the chair, to draft a petition to Congress, and circulate it amongst

our citizens for signature; praying for the establishment of the following post routes, viz:

1st. A tri-weekly four horse post coach route from Du Buque, W. T. to Milwaukee, W. T., upon the line of the territorial road.

2nd. A weekly horse route from Du Buque to the centre of Delaware Co. W. T., upon the line of the territorial road.

3rd. A weekly horse mail from Du Buque to the Cedar river settlement.

Resolved, that the committee be further instructed to draft a petition to the Hon. Amos Kendall, Postmaster General, respectfully praying him so to increase the transportation of the mails from Du Buque and Chicago, Ill., and between Du Buque and St. Louis, Mo. via the west side of the Mississippi river, as to afford us upon the former line a *daily*, and upon the latter a tri-weekly four horse post coach conveyance.

Resolved, That we earnestly solicit the co-operation of all our fellow citizens in the territory, and in Ill. interested in any of the foregoing contemplated improvements, by joining us in petitioning for such as they may be respectively affected by.

Mr. Lurton appointed Judge Lockwood, J. T. Fales, and John Plumbe, Jr., as the committee of three.

By the Chicago route the meeting plainly meant the Galena route, as in later years this was the route over which the Frink & Walker stages carried their Chicago passengers, and was the direction taken by the railroad later still.²⁰

With hopes raised high and expectant of success, Dubuque was little prepared for the disappointing news received a month later from Delegate Jones, that the Post Master General declined establishing any of the stage lines asked for, due to the expense involved. Little wonder the editor of the *Iowa News* was mad. It was bad enough to be refused, but when it was a widely known fact that the Post Office Department had a comfortable surplus to its credit at the end of 1837, the Post Master General's action was sure to be interpreted as prejudiced, to say the least. If a surplus existed in the postal department, to what better purpose could it be spent, Dubuque people reasoned, than to extend needed mail facilities to growing settlements on the outposts of the frontier? But Dubuque had to be content with a once-a-week horse-mail to Davenport and the lack of all stage connections for another year. The

²⁰*Iowa News*, February 3, 17, 24, 1838.

southern mail service unquestionably sorely tried the patience of the northern town as the delays and sometimes total absence of mails continued throughout the year.²¹

But if Dubuque despaired of a southern stage connection to other Iowa towns, they reckoned without their friends in the territorial legislature of Iowa. Whether the first territorial legislature of Iowa, which assembled at Burlington on November 12, 1838, felt that their official dignity required that their latest actions be made known to the farthest corner of the territory at the quickest of possible speeds, or whether they felt that the extra burden of mails to Burlington occasioned by the convening of the legislature and the attendance at its sessions of those who found it to their interests to do so was such as to warrant increased mail facilities, or whether the closing of the river by the ice may have influenced their actions is problematical, for whichever reason, legitimate or otherwise, the solons in their infinite wisdom attempted to remedy Dubuque's lack of stage connections south. Because Burlington had stage service as far north as Davenport, it sufficed merely to provide connections between Dubuque and Davenport to offer the former town direct stage connections with the territorial capitol.

On December 3, 1838, Thomas Cox, from Jackson County, a to-be-benefited district, introduced in the House of Representatives a resolution which authorized the postmaster of Davenport to supply Dubuque with a semi-weekly two-horse stage mail service during the remainder of the session of the legislature. With typical generosity, the resolution also provided that the Post Master General be memorialized to pay the expense of the extra service rendered out of the federal department's funds. The resolution sailed through the House the same day it was introduced, and was promptly passed in the Council on the following day. In a week's time, on December 11, the special committee appointed to draft the memorial to the Post Master General was ready to report. On behalf of the committee Thomas Cox offered the following memorial for adoption:²²

²¹*Ibid.*, April 21, 1838.

²²*Journal of the House of Representatives of the First Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa*, 1839, pp. 61, 92; *Journal of the Council*, pp. 65-6.

To the Hon. Amos Kendall, Post Master General,

Whereas, the mail from Davenport to Du Buque, in the Territory of Iowa, is carried once a week on horseback, under the existing contract with the Post Master General,

And whereas, many of the letters, public documents, and newspapers, from members of the Territorial Assembly, now in session at Burlington, to their constituents in the northern district, cannot in this manner be conveyed in due time, but remain at the Davenport Post Office from week to week, to the great inconvenience of the people in the northern section of the Territory.

And whereas, in order to remedy this inconvenience, authority has been given by the said Territorial Assembly to the Post Master at Davenport, to carry the mail between that place and Du Buque twice a week, in two horse coaches, during the time the members of the said Assembly may be engaged in the discharge of their legislative duties.

Your memorialists, therefore, the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa, most respectfully request that this arrangement may be sanctioned by the department, and that the extra expenses which may be incurred in conveying the mail between Davenport and Du Buque, in the manner and for the period herein before mentioned, may be paid out of the funds of the General Post Office.

This bit of legislative interference with the functions of the federal government received the endorsement of the House on the 12th, and of the upper house on the 13th. From the subsequent record of this incident it appears that stages began the northern run after the Christmas recess of the legislators.²³

Amos Kendall apparently did not heed the prayers of the legislative memorialists, for D. C. Eldridge was still unpaid when Isaac Leffler presented the postmaster's claim to the House a year later, on the twentieth of December, 1839. As embodied in form of H. R. File 115, and directed to W. W. Chapman, Delegate in Congress, it was stated:²⁴

That the said Eldridge, in conformity to the said resolution [of December 4, 1838] contracted with A. C. Donaldson esq of Davenport to carry the mail between the said points according to the provisions of the said resolution. The said Donaldson was to receive for such services the sum of thirty dollars per trip, and that the said Donaldson performed in pursuance of such contract nine extra trips

²³*Journal of the House of Representatives of the First Legislative Assembly*, pp. 120, 150; *Journal of the Council, First Legislative Assembly*, p. 88.

²⁴Public Archives of the State of Iowa, S-IX, 11, 12, State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines.

during the sitting of the Legislative Assembly in the year 1838-39.

Your memorialists therefore request that your honorable bodies will appropriate the sum of \$270.00 to remunerate the said Donaldson for the services aforesaid, believing that he is justly entitled to such compensation.

It will be noted that the postal department is again asked to pay for the services inaugurated at the direction of the territorial legislature.

Interesting to the student of government is the fate of the claim in the Council. Received from the House on January 2, Council File No. 18 was substituted for the House bill on January 11, and provided for quite a different financial settlement. Either the Council feared that Donaldson would never get his pay from the Post Office Department, or else they recognized that the legislature may have overstepped its bounds, and that in reality they had no more than hired a special legislative messenger at expensive stage rates. In any event the substitute measure, C. F. 18, provided that Donaldson be paid out of the proverbially impoverished territorial treasury instead of from the federal funds. The substitute bill passed the Council on the 11th and the House on the 13th. While there is no record of actual payment being made, it is presumed that in due time Donaldson received his \$270 from the territorial treasury.²⁵

The withdrawal of the semi-weekly stages from the Davenport-Dubuque route after the adjournment of the legislature throws a revealing shaft of light upon the readiness of Iowa for a more extensive stage coach service. When such a moderate service could not be supported by the second and third largest towns in the territory, it is safe to assume the other communities could expect less.

1838, therefore, ended with but four regularly operating stages and one temporary one. Very probably there were other periodic occasional "stages" between various points in the territory than the Donaldson line mentioned. One of these stages quite likely was to be seen operating from time to time between Dubuque and Galena. Most of such temporary services in 1838, however, and for several years to come, were not

²⁵*ibid.*; *Council Journal of First Territorial Assembly*, pp. 116, 148.

stages as often as the springless wagons of the pioneer farmer or settler, used on special occasions. An example of what may have been the type of this "extra" service might be Ebenezer Cook, who toward the close of the first Iowa territorial legislature wrote from Rockingham to his good friend in the House of Representatives, Laurel Summers:²⁶

I design coming down previous to the adjournment and probably about that time—Should I come down with a team Could I probably get a load of passengers back?

Although other instances might be cited to indicate an occasional stage or wagon serving towns as yet denied regular staging, it should be noted that those who might have ridden with Ebenezer Cook could also have taken the regular Burlington-Davenport stage.

Small as these beginnings in 1838 may seem, it was three years before a like number of new stage lines began operation in one year. This long interval of slow growth was conditioned by two forces, one the slower rate of population growth in Iowa than is generally held by romanticists of frontier history, and secondly, by the fact that these first stage lines in Iowa were dependent for their existence upon a United States mail contract. Some argument could be produced showing that the second force acted detrimentally to the first.

And it may be argued that both population and stage coach lines stood thwarted by the Mississippi River, and what was equally important, the difficulty of getting inland. Though water highways are of tremendous importance in the development of pioneer communities, they may also be serious barriers. In one direction, north and south, the Mississippi River was a splendid boon to the settlement of Iowa, but in an east and west direction, it offered an obstacle to easy infiltration of emigrants which loomed larger and larger as the years went by and the development of land systems of communication made the northern and overland routes of western migration of increasing importance. Not until the spanning of the Mississippi by foot bridges in the last half of the century was this barrier successfully overcome. But more than that, at least some settlers had to stake claims in the interior before the

²⁶*Laurel Summers Mss.*, State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines.

stages could afford to offer their coach service. Despite the boastings of town site proprietors, one of the greatest obstacles to this inland settlement was the lack of adequate water systems which favored inland travel. These Iowa did not have; contrast the effect of the Ohio River flowing westward into the unsettled and unknown trans-mountainous west with the Iowa rivers, which all, without exception, flowed *from* or *away* from the unsettled interior *to* the more settled areas. Add to this the fact that, the claims of most pioneers to the contrary, these rivers were hardly navigable, even up stream. Thus the settlement of Iowa depended upon efficient facilities for land travel as much as it did upon her water highways, and for the interior areas, Iowa was almost entirely dependent upon land systems. In the 1830's and 40's this meant stage coach accommodations, and at the close of 1838 Iowa could claim no more than a beggarly 191 miles of stage coach lines!

The territory of Iowa was as yet too young to boast of a commerce, an industry, or even an agriculture on anything like a parity with the areas to the east. Naturally, therefore, this youthful country could not boast of an extensive system of public conveyances. In 1838, as for several years, Iowa's efforts were directed towards a *system* of any sort. In these first years as a territory its means of transportation were not much beyond the sturdy ox carts in whose lumbering forms had come the great proportion of Iowa's first citizens. There were, in all probability, a few laden conestogas which had made their burdened overland trip across southern Indiana, Illinois, and sought to sell the contents of loaded barrels and crated boxes at Burlington or other river towns. It is doubtful, however, if the conestoga appeared much in Iowa before the California exodus in the late forties and early fifties. This type of transport was extremely expensive, even in the east where roads were much better and where markets were more certain.²⁷ The use of this peculiarly American vehicle as a family transport was rare at this time.

A country that saw mostly heavy ox carts and springless wagons could hardly support the expense of such advanced modes of travel as the swift rolling leather-spring Concord,

²⁷Hulbert, *Old National Road*, pp. 86-7fn; Dunbar, *History of Travel*, p. 752-3.

the cost of the horses, the way stations, the repair shops, and the pay rolls necessary to maintain efficient staging service. But the men who settled Iowa were ambitious, and although this territory could not yet support a private enterprise of transport, the settlers firmly believed that if given the extra boost of a United States mail contract they could. This was their hope.

Depending upon the mail contract, or the rare award of extra service by the Post Master General in between the regular four year periods at which the general mail contracts were let, it is little to be wondered that the years between 1838 and 1842 were lean ones for the lurching stages and their hardy, thirsty drivers.

It would be a mistake to believe, however, that during this interval of time, the staging interests in Iowa did not advance. While the development of staging lines in Iowa marked time, its eventual success was being guaranteed by the extension, consolidation, and perfection of stage coach operation in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. During this period of time more and more stage routes were crossing the level prairies of Illinois and establishing terminals on the eastern banks of the Mississippi. At Prairie du Chien, at New Boston, at Oquawka, at Stephenson, and numerous other places, stage connections with the ever growing settlements eastward were presaging the future profit and glory of stage business in Iowa. In Wisconsin, where staging did not begin until almost the same time as it appeared in Iowa, similar developments were taking place, and on our southern border the state of Missouri likewise witnessed a kindred perfection of organization and operation.

While Iowa waited as patiently as it might during these years, signs were not lacking of her probable expansion. One of these signs was the gradual elimination of the old time horse-mail contractors who were making unsuccessful attempts to compete with the recent advent of the stage proprietor. In the 1838 Post Office Department lettings, Dr. Addison Philleo won only one out of thirty horse and stage contracts upon which he submitted bids, and even this one was a pyrrhic victory, for the service was not put into operation. Then too,

there was Morton M. McCarver. Despite his two Iowa stage contracts, McCarver won only one bid more while losing fifteen others of assorted stage and horse service. He was one of eight contractors whose several horse-mail contracts were not renewed in the new Illinois awards of 1838, because, the Post Master General reported, they were being "covered by new service." Certainly, success is not built on stones like these. Since these contracts largely centered around Chicago and linking routes, it is probable that the new service meant the staging contracts awarded in that year to the increasingly powerful John Frink. This may have been the beginning of the end for McCarver, for in 1840 his Burlington-Macomb contract was transferred to William H. Holcomb, and a year later his Burlington-Davenport stage contract likewise went to the same man. As is well known, McCarver later sought his fortunes in Oregon in the later forties.²⁸

1839—SLOW GROWTH

Much as they aided her, Iowa did not have to depend entirely upon her sister states to write her staging record in 1839. In that year Iowa added two more stage lines to the four already established. At the close of 1839 these six lines could boast of 310 route miles. The two new routes gave Dubuque her long sought stage connection with Galena, from whence had come the first stage to Iowa some three years earlier, and the second joined Peoria and Burlington. Both of these routes, it will be noted, tapped well traveled emigrant routes to the west, the northern Great Lakes-Chicago route, and the less frequently traveled overland route across Indiana and Illinois.

1839 added a fifth stage route to the four already having terminals in Burlington. Although its Burlington-Macomb route tapped the overland trade in part, the Burlington-Peoria route, begun on July 1, 1839, served this route more directly. The route originally was awarded to William H. Holcomb on a once-a-week service to Burlington from Peoria by way of Middle Grove, St. Augustine, Ellison's Grove, then Burlington. It was shortly made a twice-a-week route, and by the time the Iowa territorial legislature was in session, they had

²⁸*House Docs.*, 26th Cong., No. 220; *Exec. Docs.* 254, p. 180; Letter from the Post Office Dept., dated Dec. 9, 1938.

taken it in hand so that a tri-weekly service by four-horse post coaches was obtained in a direct service between Peoria and Burlington.²⁹

Six months before the Burlington-Peoria stages began operating, George Ord. Karrick began a tri-weekly four-horse stage service carrying United States mails between Dubuque and Galena by way of Sinsinawa Mounds. This fifteen mile route Karrick was required to cover in four hours, leaving the Dubuque post office at one in the afternoon. For this service Karrick was paid \$800 by the government.³⁰

Because Karrick was the proprietor of a stage route between Prairie du Chien and Galena, which began operations July 1, 1838, a route which must surely have followed the river banks most of the way, and since Karrick received the government contract for the Dubuque route in the 'off' year of 1839, it is quite probable that during the last half of 1838 at frequent, if at unpredictable intervals, stages appeared at Dubuque with loads of passengers from Galena. This is confirmed by the fact that the initial service asked for was a tri-weekly one, whereas the customary service first granted was semi-weekly.

The regular schedules of the Galena stage gave Dubuque and Iowa in reality a third route, for by linking Dubuque with Galena the former city at long last gained staging connections with St. Louis, an outlet long desired by northern Iowa, especially since the stage gave them a service after the ice closed the river during the winter months.

Satisfied as they must have been to gain this southern outlet, their pleasure was considerably lessened by the fact that it was by the much longer route along the eastern shore of the Mississippi, and that they, Dubuque, were still without a stage connection with a southern Iowa town, a connection which

²⁹That the Iowa legislators found it exceedingly difficult not to administer Amos Kendall's Post Office Department for him is again made evident from the confession of the Leffler memorial informing the Post Master General what had been done: ". . . the territorial officers and citizens of Burlington believing that the Post Master General would sanction the change after [sic] understanding the great advantage it would confer . . . prevailed upon the contractor to combine this route, with route No. 2788 . . ."

Leffler was anxious lest the other post offices shut out by the legislated service would complain, and cause Burlington to lose this service of a tri-weekly stage. *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 2d territorial assembly, pp. 263-4.

³⁰26th Congress, *House Docs.*, No. 85, p. 307 vol. 384; *House*, 26th Congr., No. 220, p. 428.

would, in the case of Davenport, immediately establish the last remaining link in a St. Louis route on the western bank.

While obvious that Dubuque should favor a St. Louis stage via Davenport, that city also adopted the proposal in 1839 and urged such a service. To Davenport it would give a more direct connection with Dubuque than she now had by way of Stephenson and Galena, and would put her on what promised to be an important cross-roads of stage coach routes. In addition, Davenport began to urge the route because Dubuque was by this time trying to establish a stage route anywhere she could get it, just so long as it took her southward on the western bank; business men of Davenport for commercial reasons as well as for civic pride sought to thwart these tentative proposals Dubuque was making by establishing the route through Davenport, instead of Iowa City, for instance, or Burlington.²¹

Either for reasons of civic pride or for more altruistic motives, Davenport appeared the more aggressive supporter of the proposed service in 1839. On December 18, the editor of the *Iowa Sun and Davenport and Rock Island News* announced a meeting to be held at the Davenport Hotel on the following Saturday, "to co-operate with our Illinois friends on the suggestion of a mail coach route from St. Louis via this place to Du Buque." Davenport's counter proposal to Dubuque's philanderings was a St. Louis route to pass through "Lower Alton, Carrolton, Jacksonville, Beardstown, Rushville, Macomb, Monmouth, Stephenson," on the east side of the river, then to cross over to complete the route on the west side by way of "Davenport, Quinn's ferry on the Wabsepinacon, Richfield on the Maekoketa, to Dubuque, making the distance something less than 3000 miles."

The call for the meeting, however, either fell on deaf ears or else went unheeded in the Christmas season distractions, for on Christmas day the editor of the same Davenport paper lamented that scarcely a half dozen had attended the meeting. Undaunted, the editor issued a call for a second meeting to be held on January 14, 1840. Whether the second meeting was

²¹*Iowa Sun and Davenport and Rock Island News*, Dec. 25, 1839.

better attended than the first is uncertain, but it was no more successful in gaining the service sought.

This same Dubuque-Davenport stage route once again received the attention of the legislature in 1839, but with somewhat different attack made upon it than in 1838. This time merely a memorial was sent to W. W. Chapman, Delegate in Congress from the territory of Iowa, urging him to use all efforts to obtain a semi-weekly two-horse service on the route in question. From this memorial it is evident that the legislature did not attempt to repeat the 1838 performance and "authorize" the establishment of a stage between the two cities by legislative fiat. Undoubtedly the unpaid claim of Alexander C. Donaldson had a sobering effect upon any ideas of venturing a second time on that path.³²

But even with the aid of a legislative memorial and the Delegate in Congress, the agitation for stage mail service between Dubuque and Davenport had until 1842 to wait.

1840—STAGE EXPANSION HALTED

Among other tokens of a brightening future for stage coaches in Iowa was the beginning of an agitation by towns and villages for an even closer tie with the eastern cities. The Davenport editor who had urged the Dubuque-St. Louis route also advocated a Chicago-Stephenson-Davenport-Iowa City line. In prospect too appeared a Peoria-Davenport route at some not too distant day, as Peoria tried to lure Davenport from its preoccupation with the St. Louis route with such a proposal, which, of course, Davenport rejected. Soundings too were taken in Bloomington for a Chicago-Iowa City stage line to pass through that town. All of these tokens, however, were but intimations of the future, a future that was not to be fulfilled in 1840.³³

1840, so far as this writer has been able to discover, was the most barren of any of the first five years of staging in Iowa. No new permanent stage route operating on regular schedules to Iowa towns appears to have begun this year. The suggestion that a tri-weekly two-horse hack began a rumbling jolting

³²*Journal of the House of Representatives*, 2d territorial assembly, pp. 138, 148, 153, 261; *Journal of the Council*, 2d assembly, pp. 111, 125.

³³*Iowa Sun*, *op. cit.*

schedule between Iowa City and Bloomington in 1840^{32a} must be rejected on the evidence of the editor of the *Bloomington Herald*, who complained in his issue of November 6, that Iowa City

has only a weekly mail from this place under contract for service on horse back, while the proceeds of the Post Office amount to about \$800 per annum.

The business of that office well warrants an increase of service at least equal to a two-horse coach twice-a-week, and we hope the people of Johnson will take immediate steps to obtain more efficient service on this route, and that promptly.

The real contribution of 1840 lay in the rising chorus from a widening group of towns for the institution of stage coach service. And since this hope was usually vain unless the government lent its aid in the form of a stage mail contract, we find most evidence of this chorus of demands in petitions to the government. The southern part of the state took the lead in this, as might be expected, since it was filling up more rapidly with settlers and mail service needs were more readily apparent to them.

In the legislature which met at Burlington in November, Council File No. 3, which passed the lower House on November 11, urged A. C. Dodge, the new Delegate in Congress from Iowa, to "use his influence to have a line of semi-weekly post coaches put on the mail route from Fort Madison in Lee County to Bentons Port in Van Buren." Another evidence of the growing population centering in southern counties, and their complaints for mail service is another Council File, No. 7, which rehearsed these grievances, complaining that due to the

existence of a multiplicity of Special Routes and Special Contracts within said County . . . under the present state of things the mail in being transmitted from Farmington to Iowa Ville a distance of about thirty miles passes through the hands of three different contractors, and is in consequence of the delay at the end of each contract from three to five days in going from one point to the other.

^{32a}C. R. Aurner in *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa History* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1912), p. 205, states that Frink & Walker began a tri-weekly stage service in 1840. Benj. F. Shambaugh in his *Old Capitol Remembers* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1939), p. 216, repeats the story. The accuracy is to be doubted in view of the fact that Iowa City was not yet the seat of the legislative sessions, that Frink & Walker are nowhere mentioned in connection with this route in the Post Office Department's records, and the Bloomington newspapers make no mention of the firm in these years. See also *Bloomington Herald*, May 28, 1841.

The resolution urged that the three separate contracts be joined in one continuous route, and that a special route be established from St. Francisville to Bentonsport, in addition to a route from Fort Madison to the same village. Though not explicitly stated, doubtless the petitioners had stage coach service in mind on the last two routes.³⁴

Suggestive of some of the conditions faced by travelers over even the more heavily traveled routes is the complaint of the legislature again that on the Burlington to Davenport stage road³⁵

the mail as well as travel on said road is frequently interrupted and at times the mail is stopped entirely for several days together for the want of bridges on some of the streams over which it passes.

The absence of new stage lines beginning in 1840 is largely explained by the fact that it was still two years before the U. S. mail contracts were again to be let for the northwestern section, in which Iowa was classed. That, plus the beginning of a customary deficiency in the Post Office Department's operating budget, made special awards of contracts rare, and spelled, therefore, stage limitations in Iowa.

In addition to these reasons, the barren record may have been due in part to the fact that in 1840 Iowa was adjusting herself to a change from a river colony to an inland territory, taking the westward step of opening its next legislature in the new capitol city on the western edge of settlement, near the Indian border line. The *Bloomington Herald* estimated that there were 1500 settlers living in Johnson County in November, 1840, and that of these, seven hundred lived in Iowa City. Seven hundred people situated in a thinly populated country is hardly an inducement to bring stage coaches to a town. But Iowa City had more than seven hundred inhabitants to offer—she was the capitol of the territory, and as such claimed an importance far out of proportion to her numbers. Prompt and regular communications with the capitol were everywhere a matter of general concern. It may be said, therefore, that the suggestions made in Davenport and Bloomington for a Chicago-Iowa City route had not the Chi-

³⁴Public Archives of the State of Iowa, S-IX, 16, 17.

³⁵*Ibid.*; passed the House on November 24, 1840.

eago connection in mind so much as the other half, the suggestion being an attempt to guide to their city the stage routes which must sooner or later link the capitol to the east.³⁶

The fulfillment of these petitions and dreams lay in the future, for throughout 1840 Iowa City was without regularly operating stage service, and for that matter lacking in mail service of almost any description.

Doubtless the year ended with much the same kind of news as with which it began, that George Karrick's stage had broken through the ice in crossing the Mississippi early in February. His two horses were nearly drowned, and the eastern mail all but lost.³⁷

1841—FAVORABLE SIGNS

1841 was less than three months old before the seventh stage line serving an Iowa town was put in operation. By direction of the Post Master General, on March 24, the Illinois mail stages which for the past 20 months had been stopping at Carthage, Illinois, began a semi-weekly service to Fort Madison. This line began at Rushville, Illinois, and reached the Iowa town by way of Farmersville, Camden, Huntsville, Pulaski, Augusta, Plymouth, St. Mary's, DeKalb, then Carthage, Appanoos, Commerce (now Nauvoo), and finally Fort Madison. As frequently happens, many of these villages, then important, are but small communities now. Abraham Tolles, the proprietor of the original route, and who served Fort Madison on the extended line, held also several other stage contracts centering in Rushville.³⁸

The second regular stage line to begin in 1841 started operating six months later, and like the one above, it too, owed its establishment to an order of the Post Master General. Beginning at New Boston, Illinois, the route reached its western end at Harrison, Iowa, by the way of Toolsborough and Wapello. The fifteen mile run was let to William L. Toole, an active member of the early Iowa territorial legislatures; Toole began putting a semi-weekly two-horse stage over the route on September 30, 1841. This route offered good connections to the patrons along the Iowa route, for by transferring at New

³⁶*Bloomington Herald*, November 6, 1840.

³⁷*Iowa News*, February 22, 1840.

³⁸Letter from the Post Office Dept., Dec. 9, 1938; *House Docs.*, No. 254.

Boston to the stages of George Miers, they could reach Monmouth, Illinois, from whence it was an easy matter to join any of the great eastern stage lines.³⁹

Both of these contracts were for short terms, running only until the next general mail contracts for the northwest section—which included Iowa—were let in 1842.

Just when the third route begun in this year first ran its stages over the road between Bloomington and Iowa City is uncertain. Perhaps like three other stages lines which began in the late fall of 1841, it too placed stages on the route to coincide with the increase of business attendant upon the opening of the Fifth Territorial Assembly of Iowa in Iowa City on December 6—the first assembly to sit in the new capitol city. This conclusion is suggested by the first notice of this line in the *Bloomington Herald* of December 24, in which John Russell states that

The contractor, in order to keep up with the increase of business, has at his own expense, carried the mail in two horse carriages, for which he is sure of no additional compensation. This improvement has been made necessary because of the heavy mails to and from that city, and it is inadequate, the mail making almost a full load for the team.

While the other stage routes generally withdrew following the adjournment of the legislature, this one was able to find sufficient patronage to continue stage service on the same twice-a-week basis even with the lawmakers gone. Doubtless the influx of immigration in the spring months was stimulating to business, as the *Bloomington Herald* notes on May 27, 1842, that

It is no unusual occurrence to see two or three hacks loaded with passengers for that city, [Iowa City], notwithstanding the stage runs through twice-a-week.

These extra hacks probably came from either William St. John's livery stables, or from Parvin's Hotel, both of which boasted that they were equipped to offer such services "anywhere in the territory."

With respect to the stage record for the remainder of the year, a question arises whether all three of the other stage

³⁹27th Congr., 3d Sess., *House Docs.*, No. 180, p. 627, Vol. 423.

routes which began operations during the late fall were temporary, or whether one of these was the beginning of a permanent service. Two were definitely temporary, clearly owing their origin and continuance to the fact that the fourth territorial legislature was to convene in Iowa City in November of that year. Their hope was to profit from the extra coming and going of personages attending the sessions of the legislature, and from the extra official correspondence, wants, and demands of the legislative body itself. The third stage line probably began with the same confident assurances of profit, and a hope that it would meet with a patronage sufficient to warrant a longer life. As much could be said for the proprietors of the other two routes.

The existence of these routes was in part due to the fact that when the legislators met in Iowa City in 1841 they found themselves no better served with mails than was the town in 1840. It had to face the same problem that had confronted the first legislature in Burlington in 1838: how to secure adequate transportation and mail communications with the other towns in the territory, a connection of special importance during the law making and amending activities of the legislature. The first legislature meeting at Burlington in 1838 was much better off than its 1841 successor, for the then capitol of the territory was served by four stage routes, from the north, east, south, and west. The 1841 legislature meeting in Iowa City, on the other hand, was without a single solitary stage line on a regular schedule! That this situation was met in 1841 by private initiative and not by legislative decree, as in 1838, is the best single indication we have of the growing maturity of the territory, and that the day would soon arrive when staging would cease to be a risky gamble, and become a well ordered profitable enterprise.

Naturally the most important lines of communication for the capitol would be to the older river towns, and logically enough, the former capitol town of Burlington established the first of these short term stage lines. The *Iowa City Standard* announced in its columns of November 12, 1841,

A line of stages to be run regularly, twice a week, between Iowa City and Burlington, has been started by Mr. Downing of the latter

place. The want of communication to this place from different parts has been severely felt, and hope the undertaking will prove successful.⁴⁰

Especially significant is the next sentence:

Application should be made to the proper source for establishing a mail route from this place direct to Burlington.

Not to be outdone by Burlington, Davenport also quickly established a stage connection with the new capitol:⁴¹

Mr. Robert Gower, an enterprising citizen of Washington Ferry, Cedar County, came to this city, on Thursday evening last [November 18,] with a two-horse stage, containing the mail from Davenport, Rock Island, &c. Mr. Gower has issued proposals for carrying the mail, by private subscription, from Davenport to this city, touching at Rochester, and all the intermediate Post Offices, for thirteen weeks (during the session of the Legislature,) provided he can receive sufficient encouragement. We have but little doubt, that, if Mr. Gower receives a compensation adequate to the importance of the object, he will be more than able to prosecute this laudable undertaking. . . .

This thirteen weeks service was presumably in stages, and was apparently successfully performed.

Aside from the announcement of stage service, the notice above is specially interesting because of the reference to carrying mail by private subscription. From this we may conclude that Iowa City and Davenport were without even a horseback mail service, the same as Burlington and the new capitol, for Gower would hardly have publicly flouted the 1825 postal laws, still in force, which forbade the transport of mail for private profit between centers served by a government contract for mail service. Iowa City was obviously isolated so far as mail service was concerned, no mail route existing to Dubuque either. This condition is specially noteworthy because in 1841 the capitol city was fully two years old.

It is not probable that either of these lines remained in operation after the legislature adjourned in January. Significantly neither of these routes were advertised for stage mail service by the Post Office Department in 1842. If a stage had continued in operation on either route, transportation of

⁴⁰A week later the editor enthusiastically claimed a tri-weekly service. This probably was a mistake. He did rejoice with good reason, however, that the stages operated without "any of Uncle Samuel's purse."

⁴¹*Iowa City Standard*, November 19, 1841.

the mails by stage would surely have been provided for, since the department's custom was to let the contract to the fastest service in operation between given communities.

The third route, however, unlike the others, did not directly connect the new capitol city with one of the larger towns on the river, but sought to close a yawning gap in Iowa's staging service by putting a line on the route between Davenport and Dubuque. Stages were in operation over this route at least by the 27th of November, when John Grace advertised that, having procured good carriages, he was prepared to carry passengers from Davenport to Dubuque once a week, leaving Davenport on Mondays, and Dubuque on Thursdays. Since his stages did not reach either Dubuque or Davenport until the second day after departure, his schedule may have provided for an overnight stop. On the other hand, and this is more likely, if the conditions of the roads reduced the speed to two to three miles an hour, then it simply meant a weary night journey over rutted roads in an uncomfortable two-horse vehicle, not without reason called a "jerky."

Traveling farther inland than the route taken by the horse-mails, the Grace stages were advertised to pass

through one of the very best and finest agricultural regions of Iowa, offering great inducements to the enterprising farmer—passing through Vandenburg, Clinton county seat and Adrew [sic] the county seat[sic] of Jackson county, thence to Dubuque, a distance of 75 miles.

From the fact that the advertisement appeared in the *Iowa Sun* on March 5, 1842, several weeks after the legislature adjourned, and from the tone of the ad, offering special notice to emigrants, John Grace quite likely intended to continue his line as a permanent service. While there is no proof that he did so, some credence is given this belief by the fact that in the mail contracts awarded in 1842, Grace was listed as an unsuccessful competitor for the Davenport-Dubuque route. If Grace did continue his stages after the adjournment of the legislature, even if only up to the first of July when the government contract began, he then deserves special mention as the first stage coach proprietor in Iowa who operated on a regular permanent schedule without the subsidy of a mail bag

under the driver's seat or tied in the boot at the rear. With the loss of the bid for the mail contract, it is quite certain that Grace retired his line of stages from the route, for it was impossible at this time to compete against a rival who could boast of carrying the United States Mail.⁴²

Other signs than these that the "climate of opinion" for this type of service was growing were not lacking. A particularly interesting bit of evidence of this spread of staging "climate" is to be found in the resolution introduced in the House of Representatives by Asbury Porter, of Henry County, on December 7, 1841. The resolution asked that the postmaster of Iowa City be authorized to employ someone to carry a weekly mail from Iowa City to Keosauqua, via Washington, Trenton, Mt. Pleasant, and Salem, also a weekly mail from Iowa City to Dubuque, on the national road. The Post Master General, in keeping with human nature, was to be memorialized to pay for the extra service. What makes this attempt to repeat the experiment of 1838 worthy of notice is that while the original of the Porter resolution asked only for a horseback mail service, the clerk who prepared the minutes of the House Journal recorded the action taken on the resolution later that same day, December 7, as follows:

A motion was made by Mr. Briggs to take from the table the resolution authorizing the Post Master of this city to establish a weekly line of stages leading from this place to Keosauqua, &c.

Nothing in the journal or in the records of that session remaining in the public archives could have given the clerk cause to misinterpret the wording or the intent of the resolution. Although a psychologist might construct a whole series of causal relationships, it will suffice merely to record it.⁴³

Because the legislature was frequently petitioned by citizens of various districts for various types of mail services needed, the annals of the legislature offer fine supplementary infor-

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴³*Journal of the House of Representatives*, 4th territorial legislature, pp. 7, 9, 18, 20-5, 27, 29; Public Archives of Iowa, S-IX, 21, 22, 23.

An interesting sequel to this third attempt to help the Post Master General maintain the service of the mails was that after the Porter resolution was passed by both houses in form of a joint resolution, Governor John Chambers vetoed it (H. R. File No. 2) on grounds that it asked the postmaster to perform a duty which he had no authority to execute. In other words, Gov. Chambers told the legislature that they were trespassing upon the domain of the federal government. The veto was sustained.

mation with respect to the spread of staging in Iowa. The 1841 legislature should have been particularly informative, since it was the first time an Iowa legislature was in session prior to the next big letting of mail contracts in the northwestern section. Petitions for mail services, therefore, assumed extra significance. Perhaps that is why the debates over the numerous proposals were unusually prolonged and apparently bitter, and why much of the record appears susceptible to a pork barrel interpretation—it was at last becoming profitable to debate such items.

Each house established special committees to frame joint resolutions to be sent Congress, petitioning for “an appropriation to improve roads and Mail routes in this territory,” and to gather information “relative to establishing new mail routes,” vacating some, and “increasing [the] facilities of others.”⁴⁴

No reference to stage coach service appears in the House report, H. R. File No. 39, although twenty-two different routes were mentioned as in want of either added or original service. In the Council, however, four different stage routes were proposed for consideration. Two of these were subsequently adopted. S. C. Hastings of Bloomington was responsible for two suggestions, asking the special committee to study the “expediency” of establishing a semi-weekly four-horse post coach service between Millersburgh, Illinois, and Bloomington, and a weekly four-horse post coach service from Bloomington to Iowa City. In addition, Hastings asked the committee to consider a route from Bloomington by way of Moscow and Rochester to Tipton, Iowa. His first suggestion was adopted, but the second route, to Tipton, was rejected. The Council did, however, incorporate into the bill another proposal to establish a two-horse stage mail between Bentonsport and Fort Madison. But after first adopting the fourth stage resolution, to strike the word “weekly” from a description of the route between Burlington and Keosauqua and to insert “semi-weekly post coach route,” the Council apparently turned it down, for it does not appear on the bill preserved

⁴⁴*Journal of the House of Rep.*, 4th territorial legislature, pp. 54, 93, 103.

in the public archives of that session of the legislature.⁴⁵

But after all the debating and jockeying for position involved in the six weeks study of this proposition in the Council, these efforts for a stage service went for naught. By the time the Council was prepared for final action on the Council File, No. 30, the House had finished with H. R. 39. When the latter was received in the Council, the Council File was immediately killed by indefinite postponement and H. R. 39 taken up for consideration. And as has been indicated, the preserved copy of H. R. 39 nowhere mentions the staging services asked for in the Council bill. Perhaps their failure to be included may in part account for the failure of successive committees from the two houses to reach an agreement over conflicting amendments. The bill died a languishing death at the hands of obstinately disagreeing legislators.⁴⁶

The significance of these lost stage resolutions lies in that if there was a universally recognized need for stage mail service between the points included in the Council File, little objection would have been made to their inclusion in the House bill. More important is the fact that so few proposals were made in this session, an omission particularly important because the petitions would reach the Post Office Department before the advertisements for the 1842 mail services were made up. Consequently, despite the growing evidence of the need of this "modern" type of service, the need for stage coaches could not have been imperative; the suspicion is held that their need was still more emotional than physical.

The lack of a population to warrant the demand for higher service was still the main obstacle. The more alert leaders in Iowa in 1841-42 were well aware of the lack of adequate means to carry travelers and emigrants into the interior regions of Iowa. That the Mississippi was considered even by them to be one of their greatest handicaps to settlement is implied in the memorial to Congress introduced by James Robertson in 1842.⁴⁷

⁴⁵*Journal of the Council, ibid.*, pp. 42, 62; Public Archives. *op. cit.*; *Bloomington Herald*, Nov. 12, 1841. The Millersburgh route was designed to give Bloomington a stage connection with Peoria.

⁴⁶*Journal of the House of Rep.*, 4th territorial assembly, pp. 156, 161, 166-7, 180, 278; *Journal of the Council*, pp. 33, 36, 44, 56, 62-3, 71, 80, 110, 115; Public Archives, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷Public Archives, *op. cit.*

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled

Your Memorialists the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa Respectfully sheweth

That there is a great want of mail facilities for the Territory of Iowa—Notorisly [sic] are some important districts comparatively destitute, but the Country at large suffers for the want of leading routes—more particularly those which should bring into the Territory as directly as possible the great mails from the East—The distance between Burlington and Dubuque (both in Iowa) is estimated to be by the river about two hundred miles and for the whole of that distance there is no regular mail route crossing the Mississippi River. The delay attendant upon the transmission of their most important mails to the people residing on the west side of the Mississippi is a source of much vexation and in convenience.

The memorialists very probably were thinking in terms of stage coach routes when they came to suggested remedies:

To remedy this state of things in part Your Memorialists would respectfully ask the establishment of the following described mail route—viz- To leave the great mail route from Chicago to Galena at Dixon, Ills., thence running down the south side of Rock River by the Rapids, Prophets Town, Portland, and Brandenburg to the mouth of the Rock River, crossing the Mississippi at Rockingham (Iowa) thence by Hickory Grove, Tipton and Washington Ferry to Iowa City- This route besides accomplishing the end of crossing the Mississippi nearly midway between Burlington and Dubuque would on both sides of the River accommodate . . . densely populated districts. . . .

This resolution too appears to have died in the House.

The year should be ended with the notation of a five dollar fine being imposed upon George Karrick for a delay in his Dubuque-Galena mail, and the news of the more serious loss of the mail bags when the stage crashed through the ice in crossing the Iowa River between Bloomington and Burlington, an accident in which the two horses were drowned. Such news, though still rare in 1841, were soon to become headaches to stage proprietors and public patrons alike.⁴⁸

1842—HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Though there was a notable increase in staging in 1842, it was concentrated largely in those communities where it had

⁴⁸26th Congr., 1st Sess., *House Doc.*, No. 84, p. 40, vol. 384; *Bloomington Herald*, Feb. 26, 1841.

been previously known, rather than extended to new localities. The actual extension of service only amounted to two new routes, and over one of these, temporary stage coach service had been intermittently known, and possibly over the other route as well. This dismal showing would have been severely disappointing to the settlers if it were not for encouraging signs on the older routes: for the first time Iowa witnessed routes operating without mail contract subsidies, and what is even more noteworthy, stage lines competing with one another over four different routes.

The favorable stage coach signs offered by 1842 were almost exclusively due to the activities of a new firm of stage proprietors who entered the Iowa field for the first time in that year, Beers & St. John. The firm was composed of William St. John of Bloomington, who for a number of years had maintained a livery stable in that booming town, and Peter Beers, a veteran stager from the east central states, who entered the Iowa stage competition for the first time in this year. The partnership was probably formed some time after the government mail contracts were let in April, and before the middle of September.⁴⁹ They had combined their forces as Beers & St. John at least by the 16th of September, as an advertisement of that date announced the operation by the firm of an extensive line of opposition stages over the whole distance from Keokuk to Dubuque. The line was divided into four sections; Keokuk to Burlington, Burlington to Bloomington, Bloomington to Davenport, and Davenport to Dubuque. In addition there was a fifth line from Bloomington to Iowa City. From the prices charged passengers, and from certain services offered, it seems evident that the two men hoped to drive all competition off the five lines over which their stages ran, and to establish themselves as the dominant stage company in this potentially valuable area.⁵⁰

One of the three new routes extending staging to communities hitherto without the coach was the Davenport-

⁴⁹Contract bids were due at the Post Office Department no later than April 14, awards were made April 30. *House Docs.* No. 180₂ p. 1.

⁵⁰*Bloomington Herald*, October 28, 1842, the ad carried the date of September 16, when originally inserted. By 1844 Beers and St. John had largely achieved this ambition. They held contracts for stage-mail over the Davenport-Dubuque, Bloomington-Burlington, Bloomington-Davenport, and the Burlington-St. Francisville routes.

Dubuque line. After several temporary periods of stage service, this long delayed regular stage filled a gap which had existed from the first days of the territory. Even at that, Dubuque was fortunate to gain a mail stage in 1842, for the original advertisements of the Post Office Department failed to specify stages over the route. The service was ordered, it seems, because Otho Hinton's stage bid was only slightly higher than most of the bids for just horse-mail service; John Grace, for instance, filed a horse-mail bid for exactly the same figure for which Hinton agreed to provide a semi-weekly two-horse stage, \$1000. The route to be followed was from Dubuque through Silsbee, Springfield, and Point Pleasant, a distance of 74 miles. In addition to the stage mails, Davenport and Dubuque were granted a semi-weekly horse-mail. Since this followed a different route than that taken by the stage, the two towns at last had a mail service of which they could little complain.⁵¹

Over the Dubuque-Davenport route Hinton had the Beers & St. John stages for competition. The fare asked by the latter was four dollars, which indicates their intention not to share the route with Hinton, but to drive him out of business. Four dollars was less than the usual fare charged for passenger transportation, which was generally ten cents per mile.⁵²

The second of the new routes begun in this year, the Keokuk-Burlington stage, was entirely independent of a stage mail contract, in contra-distinction to the other two. The route enjoyed the added distinction of being the first Iowa route to boast of a daily line. The ambitious Beers and St. John were proprietors of this daily four-horse stage line, the only division of their entire 'system' upon which they did not have to face opposition. Their passenger rates reflected this fact, as the three dollars charged was more in line with the regular prevailing standards.

How long this service was maintained is not known, but it unquestionably depended upon their success in gaining a sufficient business on the four other lines. Though the records

⁵¹*House Doc.* No. 180, pp. 232, 235-6.

⁵²See C. R. Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa History*, Cedar Rapids, 1912, p. 205. In later years the charges dropped to about half, see Quaife, *Chicago's Highways Old and New*, p. 162.

are barren as to the outcome of this project, the fact that John Frink and Martin O. Walker were the dominant stage figures in the next ten years of Iowa, indicates their eventual failure.

Two stage lines operated this year on a regular schedule over the Bloomington-West Liberty-Iowa City route. One owed acknowledgements to a government mail contract, the other was a Beers and St. John opposition stage. Only over the keen competition of thirty-eight others, including such men as Hinton, Beers, St. John, and the former proprietor of the temporary route the preceding winter, Robert Gower, was the contract finally awarded to William Wilson, a comparative stranger to stage coach operation in Iowa. Wilson's contract stipulated that he be allowed to operate "one month on horse, if roads are bad and water high." Since his bid was accepted out of thirty-nine offered, the conclusion is that such conditions were expected to prevail.⁵²

Peter Beers and William St. John, though losing their separately filed bids for the contract, appeared determined to gain control of the route anyway, for in the same advertisement referred to, they advertised a tri-weekly stage from Bloomington to Iowa City. This was even better than that offered by Wilson's contract. Since the fares asked for passengers on this 28-to-30 mile route were again at about half the customary rate, \$1.50 only being charged, it seems that Beers and St. John were determined to drive Wilson's opposition stages off this line too. Bloomington was the home residence of William St. John, so perhaps this was not an idle threat, for the livery shops of St. John's were right on the scene of battle.

The legislative session of 1842 appears to have been responsible for temporary stage service during the succeeding winter months. C. Teeple advertised in November that he intended "running a line of Stages from Dubuque to Iowa City (upon the Mail Route now established) once a week in good two horse coaches," with "no traveling after eight."^{53a} Teeple was not the regular contractor for the horse-mail route let in April,

⁵²*House Docs., op. cit.*, pp. 238-9.

^{53a}Benj. F. Shambaugh, *The Old Capitol Remembers*, p. 217.

and the probabilities are that he ceased operation following the adjournment of the fifth territorial assembly on February 18, 1842.

The remainder of the staging record of 1842 is the story of the re-letting of the routes previously under contract, most without any changes whatsoever. The alterations noted in some were doubtless designed to improve the service of the mails over the routes.⁶⁴

The Burlington to Macomb, Illinois, route, for instance, was extended to include Rushville, Illinois. Though this did not increase the stage mail service at all, since Macomb and Rushville had had stage connections for some time, by placing the whole line under one contract, the service might have been expected to improve. Just the reverse of this procedure was followed in the case of the former Burlington to Davenport line, which was split in two, the southern section of 45 miles, the northern of 35 miles, with Bloomington the dividing point. George Miers won the contract for the northern half, Bloomington to Davenport, while Otho Hinton won the southern contract, terminating at Burlington, his contract being either carefully or shrewdly fixed at \$898. Although divided, the service on the points between Burlington and Davenport remained at a two-horse, semi-weekly stage level.

Possibly the service on the Burlington-Peoria stage mail route was increased in 1842 from a semi-weekly to a tri-weekly service. But this route, which passed through Osage, Illinois, Robin's Nest, Charleston, French Creek, Trenton, Knox County Court House (Galesburg), Cold Brook, Oquawka, and finally Burlington, although originally a once-a-week service, was shortly on a semi-weekly plane, and at least during the legislative session of 1839-40 on a tri-weekly level. Whether this 97 mile route maintained that frequency after 1840 is not known, though probable, despite no record of it in the Post Office Department records.

In view of the optimistic notes injected into 1842 by the activities of Beers & St. Johns, it will be well to remember that the permanency of these operations is not known. Also, that even after four years and a half, the Burlington to St. Francis-

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 231-45.

ville route remained on a semi-weekly basis, still contracted for by a two-horse stage service, and still granted the option of using a horse for three months per year. The Burlington to Mt. Pleasant stage likewise failed to furnish the department with sufficient proofs to warrant anything other than its lowly once-a-week stage. The only change made was that a horse mail was extended from Mt. Pleasant to Fairfield. And as for the others, William L. Toole was granted a four year contract for the New Boston to Harrison route, same rate of service at the same rate of pay, \$176; at Dubuque the Galena stage mail award stipulated a tri-weekly service as before.

One of the most unorthodox modes of conveying mail known to Iowa was the "Wheelbarrow Mail," as the editor of the Davenport *Iowa Sun* called it. This doubtless referred to the usual method used by John Wilson in transporting the mail from his ferry to the Davenport postoffice. Wilson was awarded a contract in 1842 for carrying the mails back and forth from Stephenson to Davenport, semi-weekly, for \$100 per year. This was an unusual contract, as most of the other stage lines in Iowa touching the Mississippi provided for the termination of the route on the other side of the river, e.g., Dubuque and Galena, New Boston and Harrison, Burlington and Peoria, and Burlington and Rushville.⁵⁵

While the routes and schedules, and the amount of service authorized by the contracts of 1842 little changed the previous arrangements, there were marked changes in the personnel of Iowa stage coach proprietors. Of those who held contracts for furnishing Iowa towns with stage mail prior to 1842, only two of the eight won their contracts in the last bidding. William S. Viney won the Burlington to Mt. Pleasant route which he already had, and William L. Toole won the Harrison to New Boston service he was awarded in 1841. But others fared very poorly. William H. Holcomb who had succeeded to both of the McCarver routes, Burlington to Davenport, and the Burlington to Macomb route, filed losing bids on each, as well as on the Burlington to Peoria line which he first put in operation in 1839. This was an extremely poor year for Holcomb,

⁵⁵*Iowa Sun*, August 6, 1842.

as he suffered losses in Illinois as well as in Iowa; his defeats in Iowa removed him, temporarily, from the Iowa scene of stage operation. Holcomb's successors on the Burlington to Davenport lines have been mentioned, George Miers and Otho Hinton, Alexander R. Dunn succeeded Holcomb over the Burlington to Rushville line, while William C. Butler and James Means won the Peoria route. Holcomb had a numerous company, however, for Richard Land failed to retain the St. Francisville service, it passing to J. Waugh, and George Ord. Karrick lost the Dubuque route to Galena to Gilbraith, Hackelton & Co. Even Abraham Tolles did not hold his lone Iowa contract, the Rushville to Fort Madison line, losing out to Thomas Burnett.

This change in faces was significant. It but marked a step beyond that of 1838. 1838 pushed the local horse contractor to one side, 1842 pushed the local man out of the picture, and introduced the large-scale operator.

RETROSPECT

While a cheerful picture may be made out of the developments of 1842, one can not make a stage coach boom out of two new stage routes and the opposition lines of Beers & St. John.

There was, to be sure, other encouraging evidence. Twenty-five to thirty-nine bids filed for each of the twelve stage mail routes serving Iowa towns, stood in sharp contrast to the six, eight, ten of previous years. Likewise the appearance among contesting proprietors of widely known large-scale stage operators was another omen that at last the Iowa field was profitable for stage coach exploitation. When an Otho Hinton, a former partner in the powerful Ohio Stage Company, contested all twelve of the stage bids, and twelve out of the thirteen horse-mail contracts, the strength of the hopeful signs can not be denied. In addition to Hinton, the abstracts of the 1842 bids shows Peter Beers' name on almost every bid, and in this year the famed John Frink entered the Iowa competitions for the first time, filing for the Dubuque to Galena stage route, which he lost, and the horse-mail from Dubuque to La Porte, which he won. In addition to these well known stage names

there were others, such as David McAlister, who was expanding in Illinois and Missouri at this time, also George Miers, and many others who had been active in Illinois and sought extensions into Iowa. From such evidence as this one might well conclude that the noviate or trial period for staging in Iowa was at an end, that at last she had come of staging age.

But there was a sober side to the 1842 picture equally impressive, which suggested that the day of fulfillment was yet years ahead. There were but twelve stage routes and fifteen proprietors operating in Iowa; four routes had only their western terminus in an Iowa river town, while the by far major proportion of the route extended into Wisconsin and Illinois;⁵⁶ two other stage lines had their eastern or southern destination points in other states;⁵⁷ only six of the twelve stage routes operated entirely between Iowa points. Of these six remaining lines, just two served interior points, one but recently created, and the other offered but a once-a-week service, neither penetrated more than thirty miles inland from the river.⁵⁸ Even the cheerful tones in the 1842 picture take a deeper hue when it is remembered that one of the two new routes had had temporary staging service before, one four years earlier, and possibly the second route had likewise watched an occasional stage rattle by. Furthermore, it is revealing of Iowa's general preparedness for extension of staging service that not a one of the nine older routes were re-let in 1842 with an increased stage service beyond that originally granted them or enjoyed at least a year earlier.

Back of all these dismal facts looms the Reason. In 1842 Iowa stage coach operation was confronted with the same problem which faced the territory when Dubuque began lustily to call for stage coach service in 1836. Iowa lacked population. In the first four years of the 1840's the territory grew at a rate of less than 10,000 a year. Large frontiers are not mushroomed into centers of culture nor are the amenities of established living obtained at such rates of growth. The causes for this slackening growth may be attributed among other things to the barrier of the Mississippi River, the handi-

⁵⁶The Dubuque-Galena, Burlington-Peoria, Burlington-Rushville, Fort Madison-Rushville routes.

⁵⁷The Harrison, Iowa-New Boston, and the Burlington-St. Francisville routes.

⁵⁸Bloomington-Iowa City and the Burlington-Mt. Pleasant routes.

cap of no river systems which flowed *into* the interior, and the presence on the western borders of the Red Man. Before the romanticist pictures stage coaches operating between every town and village of any size in the territory, let him also remember that in 1842 and for years to come, only a fraction of the future area of the state was open to the white settler. This meant that Iowa was to have a retreating frontier in the west while at the same time she had in the east centers which had long passed that period. For the stage coach proprietor this meant well established business lines in the east, and risky gambles in the thinly settled western sections of the territory and state.

A comparison of the amount of stage coach service supported by a government contract in Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and Iowa is given below. For Wisconsin and Iowa this will represent almost the total amount of stage miles covered, but for Illinois and Missouri competing lines not carrying U. S. Mail do not show in these tables. A significant figure below is the density of population per square mile.⁵⁹

State	Population 1840	Density per sq. mile	Population 1850	Density per sq. mile
Iowa	43,112	0.8	192,214	3.5
Wisconsin	30,945	0.6	305,391	5.6
Illinois	476,183	8.5	851,470	15.2
Missouri	383,702	5.6	682,044	9.9

STAGE COACH—MILES RUN PER YEAR

State	1837-8	1838-9	1839-40	1840-1	1841-2
Iowa	31,408	95,160	29,224	No	31,720
Wisconsin			64,896		
Illinois	677,040	991,877	1,107,392	Report	1,067,456
Missouri	97,552	303,810	308,360	Made	276,080

While the picture of 1842 was neither all rosy nor all dark, it was evident that the future extension of a net work of stage coach lines in Iowa was not far distant.

⁵⁹*Census of Iowa for 1880 . . . with other Historical and Statistical Data, 1883*, pp. 4-5, 11, 12, 168; Annual Report of the Post Master General, found in House and Executive Documents for each of the years above except 1840-1, for which no detailed report was submitted, serial volumes 321, 363, 375, 416.

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