

The Story of the Pony Express

keenly foresaw the great cost which a year around overland fast mail service would involve. They were unable to see any chance of the enterprise paying expenses, to say nothing of profits. But Russell, with cheerful optimism, contended that while the project might temporarily be a losing venture, it would pay out in time. He asserted that the opportunity of making good with a hard undertaking—one that had been held impossible of realization—would be a strong asset to the firm's reputation. He also declared that in his conversation with Gwin he had already committed their company to the undertaking, and he did not see how they could, with honor and propriety, evade the responsibility of attempting it. Knowledge of the last mentioned fact at once enlisted the support of his partners. Probably no firm has ever surpassed in integrity that of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, famous throughout the West in the freighting and mail business before the advent of railroads in that section of the men, the verbal promise of one of their number was a binding guarantee and as sacredly respected as a bonded obligation. Finding themselves thus committed, they at once began preparations with tremendous activity. All this happened early in the year 1860.

The first step was to form a corporation, the more adequately to conduct the enterprise; and to that end the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company was organized under a charter granted by the Territory of Kansas. Besides the three original members of the firm, the incorporators included General Superintendent B. F. Ficklin, together with F. A. Bee, W. W. Finney, and John S. Jones, all tried and trustworthy stage employees who were retained on account of their wide experience in the overland traffic business. The new concern then took over the old stage line from Atchison to Salt Lake City and purchased the mail route and outfit then operating between Salt Lake City and Sacramento. The latter, which had been running a monthly round trip stage between these terminals, was known as the West End Division of the Central Route, and was called the Chorpenning line.

Besides conducting the Pony Express, the corporation aimed to continue a large passenger and freighting business, so it next absorbed the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express Co., which had been organized a year previously and had maintained a daily stage between Leavenworth and Denver, on the Smoky Hill River Route.

By mutual agreement, Mr. Russell assumed managerial charge of the Eastern Division of the Pony Express line which lay between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City. Ficklin was stationed at Salt Lake City, the middle point, in a similar capacity. Finney was made

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Western manager with headquarters at San Francisco. These men now had to revise the route to be traversed, equip it with relay or relief stations which must be provisioned for men and horses, hire dependable men as station-keepers and riders, and buy high grade horses[1] or ponies for the entire course, nearly two thousand miles in extent. Between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City, the company had its old stage route which was already well supplied with stations. West of Salt Lake the old Chorpenning route had been poorly equipped, which made it necessary to erect new stations over much of this course of more than seven hundred miles. The entire line of travel had to be altered in many places, in some instances to shorten the distance, and in others, to avoid as much as possible, wild places where Indians might easily ambush the riders.

The management was fortunate in having the assistance of expert subordinates. A. B. Miller of Leavenworth, a noteworthy employe of the original firm, was invaluable in helping to formulate the general plans of organization. At Salt Lake City, Ficklin secured the services of J. C. Brumley, resident agent of the company, whose vast knowledge of the route and the country that it covered enabled him quickly to work out a schedule, and to ascertain with remarkable accuracy the number of relay and supply stations, their best location, and also the number of horses and men needed. At Carson City, Nevada, Bolivar Roberts, local superintendent of the Western Division, hired upwards of sixty riders, cool-headed nerry men, hardened by years of life in the open. Horses were purchased throughout the West. They were the best that money could buy and ranged from tough California cayuses or mustangs to thoroughbred stock from Iowa. They were bought at an average figure of \$200.00 each, a high price in those days. The men were the pick of the frontier; no more expressive description of their qualities can be given. They were hired at salaries varying from \$50.00 to \$150.00 per month, the riders receiving the highest pay of any below executive rank. When fully equipped, the line comprised 190 stations, about 420 horses, 400 station men and assistants and eighty riders. These are approximate figures, as they varied slightly from time to time.

Perfecting these plans and assembling this array of splendid equipment had been no easy task, yet so well had the organizers understood their business, and so persistently, yet quietly, had they worked, that they accomplished their purpose and made ready within two months after the project had been launched. The public was scarcely aware of what was going on until conspicuous advertisements announced the Pony Express. It was planned to open the line early in April.